

The Corruption Sequence

Author: Beren (Beren@dtwins.co.uk) (beren_writes at LJ)

Website: <http://www.plotbunny.co.uk>

Pairing: Harry/Draco

Rating: NC-17

Disclaimer: This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoast Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

Corruption

Summary: Voldemort has captured Harry and for his own twisted reasons has chosen not to kill him outright. Revenge in the Dark Lord's mind requires a fate worse than death and Harry is about to find out what that is.

Author's Notes: Thanks to Soph for the beta. Don't ask me where this one came from, it was just one of those bunnies that was born, refused to let me sleep until it was written, and flowed on to the page over a matter of two days.

Harry opened his eyes slowly and could not stifle the groan that made its way out of his tormented body as the light in the room stabbed at his retinas. He hurt from head to toe; not one part of his body was free from pain; even his teeth hurt. However, at least this meant he was alive, which was something he had not expected at all.

"Potter?" a familiar, yet rather worried voice made it into his consciousness.

"Malfoy?" he replied in confusion.

His inter-house rival had failed to return to school at the beginning of their seventh year three months ago; Harry had not expected to come into contact with him again except on a battle field. Of course as far as Harry knew, he'd been given over to Malfoy to play with; it was the kind of thing the Death Eaters seemed to think was funny.

"Good, you're still your annoying self," Malfoy didn't sound so worried this time, "at least for now."

Harry was very confused; he was pretty sure he should be dead and yet he was somewhere having, what was for them, a polite conversation with Draco Malfoy. He blinked a few times and was rather surprised when his surroundings came into focus; there was definitely something odd about that, but his tired brain could only cope with so many thoughts and he was more interested in where he was and what was going on.

The last thing he remembered clearly was coming out of Honeydukes: there had been an explosion and then everything was a haze of images and sensations; most of them unpleasant. He'd been captured by Death Eaters; that much he knew, and he'd been dragged before Voldemort, but he had not been killed. It had shocked him at the time, he remembered that much, and then he recalled some sort of ceremony, but they had made him drink something and it caused any memories to be horribly distorted.

"Where am I?" he asked as he realised that his surroundings were actually quite pleasant.

"My bedroom at home," Malfoy replied and suddenly came into Harry's field of vision.

His school rival had changed somewhat; longer hair, less of an obvious attitude, and Malfoy was only wearing a pair of trousers, which really should have sent unsettling thoughts through Harry, but instead caused rather peculiar sensations to run the length of his body.

"Before you ask," Malfoy said shortly, "your being here has nothing to do with me and I'm as much of a prisoner as you are."

It was difficult to gain any proper feel for his surrounding looking at everything sideways, so Harry decided to try and sit up. It was not the wisest idea he had ever come up with. Every cell in his body screamed at him and he only managed to move a few inches before he fell back gasping.

"Lie still," the surprisingly gentle tone from Malfoy shocked him, but not as much as when a cool cloth was placed on his forehead; "they've been working on you for two days and you're in quite a state."

That he was not in perfect health was quite obvious to Harry, but that fact brought with it the burning question, which had been bothering him since he realised it, to the front of his mind again.

"Why am I still alive?" he asked with honest confusion.

Malfoy did not reply, but Harry felt the blanket on top of him being gently rearranged. His companion was avoiding his eyes and he reached out and took hold of Malfoy's wrist, demanding attention. The expression in his rival's eyes as grey irises finally met his gaze rather shocked him; he saw sympathy and anger.

"Because death is too good for those who defy the Dark Lord," Malfoy said quietly; "he wants you to suffer."

For a moment they remained staring at each other as Harry let the reality sink in. This was not the Malfoy he knew; the spiteful child was almost gone completely and Harry realised that possibly the Slytherin had finally grown up.

"What did they do to me?" he asked, knowing from the look in Malfoy's eyes that his companion had a good idea of the truth.

Silence descended and for a while Harry did not think Malfoy would answer, but eventually the Slytherin moved. Harry did not try and stop his companion as Malfoy pulled the blanket he had just so carefully arranged off of Harry's chest; the first thing he noticed were dark shapes on his body.

"They have corrupted you," Malfoy said with absolutely no emotion in his voice. Pointing as the symbol on Harry's left shoulder the Slytherin spoke: "werewolf," then he pointed to just above Harry's heart; "vampire," his finger moved again as Harry watched in horrified fascination; "incubus," another move; "banshee," a different spot; "Dementor," yet another; "boggart."

Harry couldn't take any more and he caught Malfoy's hand before he could move again.

"I don't understand," he said, unable to keep the fear from his voice.

"It's Voldemort's idea of revenge," Malfoy said bluntly; "he had them force the essence of everything dark they could into you. Over time the corruption will spread and you will become a dark creature; something twisted and at war with itself; if you are lucky the clash of magic will kill you."

Harry's mind reeled with the horror as he instinctively felt for the magic moving through his body; it made his mind shut down with the sheer terror the ideas caused in him, and he slowly curled onto his side, regardless of how his body complained, pulling the blanket up over the evidence of his doom.

He had no idea how long he lay there, just staring straight ahead as thoughts swirled around his mind, but Malfoy left him alone and for the first time in his life he found himself wishing Voldemort had killed him. Eventually, however, the shock began to recede and he could no longer ignore his surroundings. His mind did not want to come back and face what was true, but he had been trained too well and he could not hold his thoughts frozen for long.

"Why have they put me here with you?" he found himself asking, desperate for something else to think about.

When he looked over at where Malfoy was sitting at an ornate desk, he finally saw an expression on his rival's face that he recognised; Malfoy was sneering, although he appeared to be doing so at himself rather than Harry.

"I think the Dark Lord finally ran out of patience with me," the Slytherin said with a self-deprecating laugh. "You're his revenge on me. Most of the things in you either eat or otherwise consume human beings; I suspect I'm an experiment."

"He expects me to eat you?" Harry was incredulous.

"Or otherwise consume," Malfoy replied as if he was speaking about the weather; "if he just wanted me eaten he would have fed me to his pets by now. I suspect he hopes that you will do all sorts of nasty things to me before you actually kill me."

It was all so horrible.

"What did you do?" it was the only question that Harry could find which did not make his thoughts spiral even further down.

"I refused him," Malfoy said plainly.

"You wouldn't take the Dark Mark?" Harry did not quite understand.

"Oh no," his companion said and held up his arm to demonstrate, "I took that like the good little Slytherin I am. No, Potter, I refused him; I would not go to his bed."

That rather shook Harry out of his despair for a moment as he realised what Malfoy was telling him.

"Voldemort wanted ..." the mental image made his skin crawl, "that's disgusting; he's vile."

"I noticed that," Malfoy replied with his usual sarcasm in place. "Something one can excuse in a leader, but not in a lover. He wanted me as a toy, and there are many things I may be, but I am no one's toy. I was quite surprised he didn't just compel me to obey, but it seems that the Dark Lord likes his play things cowed and willing. He shut me in here until I agree to crawl into his bed; I suppose he must have found someone more pliable and my time has run out."

To his growing surprise Harry found that he actually had respect for his companion as he realised that Malfoy had a backbone. He had not imagined that the Slytherin would be brave enough to defy Voldemort, even in something so distasteful. Harry had no problem with men sleeping with men, but the idea of Voldemort with anyone made him shudder. Some nasty ideas began to occur to him.

"Oh, Merlin," he said as some of the traits of the dark magic forced into him flowed through his head, "he thinks that I'll ... before ... no ... that's ..."

The thoughts were so disturbing that he could not voice them.

"And you probably will," Malfoy said perfectly seriously, "but Malfoy honour will still be intact."

Harry curled up again; he just couldn't take this.

Food arrived at some point, but it was only at Malfoy's insistence that Harry tried to eat anything. He managed to keep it down for about ten minutes before he had to roll over and hang over the side of the bed to be messily sick all over the floor. He noted absently that there was dark blood in with the undigested food as Malfoy pulled him back onto the bed before he could fall into his own waste, and a house elf appeared to clear everything up. Shivering violently he allowed Malfoy to wrap him back in his blanket.

"It's starting," his companion said matter-of-factly.

The shivering lasted for about half an hour before the pain really began and Harry soon lost all sense of his surroundings as he felt his body changing and dark magic warred with dark magic to shape him in its image. He tried to fight it, desperately tried to stop the corruption taking him over, but he was simply not strong enough.

At times he knew that Malfoy was there, pouring liquid down his throat or placing cool cloths on his fevered skin. He could not understand why his rival was helping him, but he welcomed the glimpses of human kindness that, for just moments, broke him out of the hell he was in. Time had no meaning and he had no idea how long it was before the battle took all his strength and he finally slipped back into blissful blackness.

=====

The next time Harry woke it was like casting Lumos; he went from sleeping to waking in a heartbeat, and as his eyes flicked open he took in everything with total clarity. The room was dark except for the light from the fire, but he could see everything clearly, and smells and sounds seemed incredibly sharp in the darkness as well. He could also feel the life of a human being close by; the essence of another life that sang to his soul the same way the human heartbeat chorused in his ears. The presence so close by called to him and slowly he sat up and turned.

Malfoy was lying on the other side of the bed and from the looks of him he had been asleep, but as Harry swept his gaze over the relaxed form he came back to Malfoy's face to find grey eyes looking at him.

"It's over then," the Slytherin said calmly as Harry found himself becoming intoxicated by the sight of his companion.

Malfoy was lying under a single sheet and the way the soft cotton moulded to his form, the Slytherin was naked. It was almost as if Malfoy was a willing sacrifice as Harry took in every detail and his companion did not even shift.

"I don't think you are quite what the Dark Lord was expecting," Malfoy commented as Harry just sat there; "you actually make quite a beautiful dark creature."

Desire and hunger flooded through Harry like a single wave and he closed his eyes, drawing in the smell and essence of the wizard before him. There was no hesitation in his movements as he came back to himself and moved onto all fours, letting his blanket fall off his naked frame. He placed himself above Malfoy, one arm either side of his victim's chest, and looked down at the resigned and slightly afraid features of the Slytherin.

In an abstract way he knew who he was looking at; he even knew who he was, but it was all secondary to the needs he felt coursing through his body.

"So are you going to eat me or have sex with me?"

The quip came out without a trace of a tremor, but Harry could feel the fear in the body below him and it made him smile; part of him revelled in the reaction. Almost casually he reached over and picked up the edge of the sheet, slowly drawing it back, millimetre by millimetre to reveal pale, prefect flesh. He could see Malfoy's pulse beating fast under the delicate curve of the Slytherin's throat, and, as his protection was removed, Harry saw tension slipping into Malfoy's revealed muscles, but his victim did not move to resist.

There was still a section of his nature that allowed Harry to appreciate how much courage it must have taken to just lie there, and as some of his baser instincts told him to hurt this pale helpless creature they were quelled by the quiet surrender. No doubt arose in Harry's mind to counter the notion that Malfoy was now his, but the violence lurking just below the surface was not freed either.

He ran one talon tipped finger down the centre of the hairless chest and paused just above the nest of pale blond hair surrounding Malfoy's flaccid cock. Something in him was not happy about this particular vision of surrender and he moved his hand down slowly, letting his sharp nails slip through the silky hair until he curled them round the unresponsive organ. The only reaction from Malfoy was a sharp intake of air.

"I think," Harry said quietly; his voice sounding strange even in his own ears, "that you should be enjoying this more," and then he pushed magic down his arm and through his occupied fingers.

Now Malfoy arched off the bed into his touch with an unstoppable groan of arousal as Harry flooded his victim with sensation, and lust overcame fear. It was not exactly a subtle seduction even though he knew he could have made it such, but he had no patience for that at the moment. Malfoy was becoming hard under

his hand as the Slytherin sank back towards the bed, breathing in short gasps and biting his lip. There was resentment in the eyes that looked at him now; Malfoy had obviously not expected to react like that, or possibly to even still be alive.

"You did not want to be a toy," Harry said, running one nail over Malfoy's sensitive balls, "but I could make you do anything."

The resentment flared into open anger then, although Malfoy did not move; Harry smiled as he recognised the fire of the rivalry he remembered from school. He was torn by enjoying the subjugation of his victim and wanting that spark back; it seemed that different aspects of whatever he was now did not agree.

"I will have you," he said, bringing his face to no more than an inch from Malfoy's, "and I may be dark, but I do not have to be cruel."

The hunger was growing as he held off on his instincts, both to feel this human writhe beneath him and to taste his victim.

"Give yourself to me," Harry said with a growl in his voice that he could not control, "participate, and I promise it will not be play."

Malfoy appeared surprised by that and unsure of how to react; the Slytherin had clearly believed this was completely beyond his control and all he could do was let it happen, yet Harry was offering him a role.

"You are not a passive thing," Harry said, tightening his grip ever so slightly on his victim's cock, "there is fight in you; there is passion: I can feel it," he lowered his face even more so that their noses were almost touching, "I can smell it."

Very tentatively a hand came up to touch the side of his face and Harry released his hold to run his fingers back up Malfoy's chest. As soon as he was free the Slytherin moved and Harry found himself being pushed over on to his back. He could have stopped the move quite easily, but it was the most life Malfoy had shown since Harry woke, so he let his victim have his way and they came to a stop with the Slytherin straddling him on the bed. Harry laughed as the torrent of emotion running though Malfoy fed something deep inside him.

"Are you going to kill me?" the white-blond haired vision of lust asked, leaning on his chest, seemingly desperate for an answer.

"I don't know," Harry replied honestly; he really didn't know what he was going to do from one moment to the next and although he had no desire to rend and destroy his victim now, he had no idea if that instinct would rise to the surface eventually or not, "but I can guarantee you will enjoy it if I do."

He sat up leisurely, Malfoy's weight trying to pin him down being nothing to his changed body. The Slytherin sat back on his legs and Harry ran his arms around Malfoy's sides and up over his back, pulling his victim into his lap with a sudden tug that there was no chance of resisting. Malfoy had no time to react as Harry pulled his head down and crushed their mouths together in a fierce kiss. When he ran his tongue over the Slytherin's closed lips there was no response and so he forced a little power through his hands and, with a moan, Malfoy opened his mouth and accepted Harry's probing tongue.

Resistance melted out of his victim as the kiss progressed and when Harry moved his hand down to cup one firm cheek of Malfoy's behind he needed no extra

encouragement to move in to the caress. When Harry moved on to nipping and sucking the Slytherin's neck the young man put his head back and groaned his approval. Running his tongue over the softly pulsing artery, Harry had the urge to bite, but instinct told him that this would be over too quickly if he did that, and other primal urges forced him away from his current prize. He moved on to Malfoy's chest, well aware that he would not be able to resist long if he didn't. The noises coming from his victim were very gratifying as he turned Malfoy's pale, unmarked chest into a map of little pink lines and marks.

When he finally shifted and began to move Malfoy back down onto the bed, the Slytherin did not resist; with his fingers wrapped in Harry's hair and his eyes firmly closed, there was not a lot Malfoy could have done anyway. As it was, as Harry continued his ministration down his victim's body Malfoy sprawled on the bed and let him have anything he wanted. This was the surrender Harry wanted; this was the sustenance he needed: not a cold, weak, fear-based lack of resistance, but a passion filled total inability to stop this.

"By all that has magic," Malfoy exclaimed as Harry descended on the Slytherin's cock with a mouth that had been dying to taste his victim properly since he had woken.

The salty, earthy flavour filled his senses and he swallowed Malfoy whole, wanting more. He felt his body responding in ways he had never experienced before as parts of him came alive that he had not known existed. His tongue swirled around the cock in his mouth as he drew back slightly and then split either side of the turgid erection, gripping and sliding up and down firmly. Malfoy thrust into his mouth, completely at his mercy and Harry felt his whole body pulse with sensation, sending tingling all over his torso, centring on his groin. Now he was moaning as well and he was desperate to drive Malfoy over the edge.

He knew it would not take long to bring the Slytherin to orgasm with nothing more than his adaptive tongue, but it was too long for the part of him dominant at the moment. Laying his hands flat on Malfoy's stomach he pushed the power rushing through his veins into his lover and with something between a scream and a cry of ecstasy the Slytherin thrust upwards and came hard into his mouth. Harry drank it all down, milking Malfoy for everything he had, and by the time he drew back his victim was shuddering beneath him in over sensitised delirium.

He felt powerful and renewed as sexual energy surged through his nerves, but it wasn't quite enough and before Malfoy had even begun to recover Harry found himself moving again. He flipped the unresisting Slytherin on to his front and pushed Malfoy's legs apart. His victim whimpered a Harry picked up a pillow and placed it under the Slytherin's midriff, but Malfoy was too far gone to do anything to slow this down.

Harry might have lost control and taken his victim there and then without preparing him at all, if it had not been for one thing; he looked down at himself and realised that he had changed more than he realised. The reason for the prickling over his torso became obvious as he saw two rows of little spines running from each shoulder blade, down a line around each nipple to finish just above his groin area. However, most of his attention was caught by his very healthy erection, which was bigger than he remembered before he had gone down on his victim and was also glistening from root to tip. It appeared that he came equipped with lubrication even if his partner didn't.

The base, primal part of him wanted to thrust into Malfoy, damage be dammed, but there was also a percentage of him that was still Harry and although he

needed this he did not need to be destructive in the process. Malfoy had surrendered and given in and something in him wanted his victim to be writhing in ecstasy not pain.

Running his hand over his own erection his coated his fingers and then spread the cheeks of his lover's arse with his other hand. Malfoy moaned into the mattress as Harry caressed his entrance and then slowly worked a finger inside. The talon like nails on his hands withdrew when he caressed his lover and he worked to prepare Malfoy for what had to come. The moans and small movements he drew out of the Slytherin excited him and his need to take his lover almost overcame his desire not to hurt him several times. Eventually, by the time he had slipped in three fingers, it was too much and he moved himself in to position, needing to possess what was his.

Pushing in slowly at first, Malfoy grunted partially in pain and partially in arousal as Harry breached him and the Slytherin pushed himself off the bed onto his elbows.

"Please," the impaled young man begged breathlessly, "just a moment."

Harry managed to hold still for a few seconds as he felt the tight ring begin to relax around him, but he could not remain frozen for long. Now the need to possess was stronger than anything else and he pushed in further, seating himself in Malfoy to his full length. This time his victim did cry out and tried to pull away, but Harry held him and forced more magic into the Slytherin, causing the cry to morph from pain to delirium mid way through.

All coherent ability to move seemed to have left Malfoy with the cry and he collapsed under Harry, completely limp on the mattress. It also relaxed the muscles surrounding Harry that had tensed up at the pain, and he found himself free to move. A continuous stream of small sounds were coming from Malfoy's mouth as Harry thrust into him, slowly at first, but building a momentum he could not stop. Slick and hard he drove into his victim, his own grunts and growls growing with every movement as any ability to think was overcome by the primal need in charge of his body.

He came with a roar that reverberated around the room and he flooded Malfoy with power, unable to stop himself, as his body surrendered to orgasm. The Slytherin cried out long and loud in response, coming a second time, all over the pillow below him and if anyone heard him they probably thought he was dying. The cry did not end until Malfoy passed out, and it was some time after that when Harry regained enough mental capacity to move off of his victim.

He fell on to the bed next to the sprawled and unconscious Malfoy and dragged air into his lungs in gasps. He had never experienced anything like it in his entire life and he felt sated and content as he watched the slow breathing of his senseless companion. The feeling lasted quite some time, but slowly it began to wear off. Now that the sexual predator in him had been satisfied, other desires began to make themselves known and his attention moved from the soft breathing to the steady pulse he could see and hear.

His tongue had returned to its usual size and shape and he ran it over his lips as he felt fangs slowly descend in his mouth. Reaching out he pulled Malfoy on to his side so that the unconscious Slytherin was leaning against him and with one hand he stroked the hair from the fragile neck. Savouring the moment he lowered his head slowly and opened his mouth; when he bit into the pulsing vein it was almost gentle.

Blood spurted onto his tongue and he drank greedily as the warm liquid ignited entirely different passions within him. As the flavour washed over him so did the essence of his lover and he drank of him as deeply as of his blood. It forged a connection between them and Harry became as intoxicated by the blood and energy of Malfoy as he had been by the sex. He felt like he could drink forever and he wanted the moment to last for eternity, but a sudden knowledge stopped him.

As he drank, his awareness of Malfoy increased in a single moment and a slight flutter in his victim's heartbeat made itself known. Instantly he knew that if he continued to drink the Slytherin would die, but if he stopped Malfoy would recover. Part of him wanted to continue and feel the exquisite moment when that heartbeat stopped all together, but another part of him wanted revenge, and it was not against Malfoy. Voldemort expected him to kill this helpless human and then become part of his dark army; well Voldemort was in for a surprise.

Withdrawing his fangs he placed his fingers on the wounds and let a little healing magic flow from them, then he gently rolled Malfoy back on to his front and made him comfortable, before climbing off the bed. It was difficult; a large part of him wanted to kill and destroy, but he stumbled into the bathroom, out of sight of his victim to gather his mind together. Shaking in his effort to curb his baser instincts he ran cold water into the sink and splashed it all over himself. His skin felt like it was on fire as he tried to deny the urges of his body and he stared at himself in the mirror, trying to find the part of him that was still human.

The spines had faded back to pale, almost iridescent skin and he could not help but recognise that Malfoy had been right; there was something almost beautiful about him. His eyes were still bright green, but now that almost glowed against his black eye lashes and white flesh, contrasting sharply with his deep red lips. His hair was as unruly as ever and yet now it seemed less what could be called messy and more wild. Even to his eyes he appeared ethereal. The marks on his chest where he had been branded with the power forced into his body were still there, but they were faint memories on his skin rather than the black designs he had seen when he had first awoken.

He had been taken and changed into something he did not understand and could only feel, and it made him angry. He let the fury build as he snarled at his own reflection and he curled his, once again, talon tipped hands into tight fists. Voldemort was going to pay and it would cost him his life.

Turning from the image of himself that he no longer recognised, he growled low in his throat and embraced yet another aspect of his darkness. While trotting towards the door he flowed into the shape of a very large wolf and, snarling, he leapt at the barrier between himself and the rest of the world. Reaching down into the dark magic that lived within him now he found another talent and his body shimmered, passing straight through the door as if it wasn't there and re-solidifying on the other side.

A Death Eater in a silver mask and black cloak rounded on him as he landed, but the wizard never had a chance as Harry launched himself straight at his throat. Strong, teeth-laden jaws closed on soft, pliant skin and blood flowed as enamel won over sinew. Shaking his head Harry ripped the crushed larynx from the dying man and a gurgle was the only sound that made it into the corridor.

There was no doubt in Harry's mind that Voldemort was still at the ancestral home of the Malfoys', waiting to see his victory, and all Harry had to do was find

him. His senses let him feel the dark magic inherent in the walls of the manor and they also drew him towards the concentration of evil he could feel below. Without any hesitation he began to run towards his goal.

He was completely unchallenged as he made his way down the main stairs until he came face to face with someone he had never expected to see; Narcissa Malfoy was coming out of what Harry thought was the library from the smell of books following the woman and she froze the moment she saw him. Harry snarled at her and his hackles came up as his instincts told him to attack and destroy the threat and the weak human. Hunching down, ready to strike he growled.

"Did you kill him?" Draco's mother suddenly spoke and Harry paused before he jumped. "Has my little boy been sacrificed to this madness?"

That touched the part of him which was still human and he looked into the woman's eyes, seeing suddenly not a threat, but a mother in despair. Fighting his instincts and really not caring what he looked like, he flowed back into the closest to human he could be now. The fact that he was naked really didn't matter to him as he clawed on to what was left of his humanity.

"No," he said, his voice resonating with barely controlled power, "and the guard is dead. Take him and leave; death walks here tonight."

Narcissa appeared totally shocked, but Harry shifted back into his wolf form, the woman no longer important to him. He wanted Voldemort and he cared about little else; nothing else existed for him now, his enemy had seen to that.

Following his nose and other senses he trotted through the hallways, completely sure of where he was going. He moved through the kitchens towards an unremarkable door, which he jumped at using the same ability he had used to leave the bedroom, passing through it and onto the stairs beyond. The stone steps were worn and he could feel the dark wards which hid this old place as he descended to a lower level of the manor.

At the bottom was a small chamber with two very large oak doors, and to his surprise they opened as he approached. Magic whispered at him and he knew that the obstacle had been removed with a powerful charm and he could sense Voldemort very close by.

"Come in, Harry," the familiar, rasping yet sibilant voice called to him from within, "we have been waiting for you."

The fact that he was discovered meant very little to Harry since he had had no plan of sneaking in, in the first place, and, letting his supernatural senses seek around the large room beyond the doors, he loped in casually. Voldemort was expecting a dark creature at the mercy of his inestimable power, but Harry felt absolutely nothing towards his enemy except hatred.

Inside was an almost empty chamber that Harry vaguely remembered; this was where they had done this to him and the rage stirred in his chest. His instincts told him to attack and to kill, but he was not an animal and he had no intention of being prevented from reaching Voldemort. The Dark Lord was sitting in a large throne like chair, surrounded by his masked Death Eaters and Harry trotted across the stone floor, his claws clicking on the hard surface. He turned his head to growl at one Death Eater who dared to move as he approached and the mysterious man froze.

There were two figures close to Voldemort; one female and one male and Harry had no doubt that one was Bellatrix Lestrange and the other Lucius Malfoy, lately freed from Azkaban by his master. Harry was sure both would defend their Lord, but he was also confident he could kill before he was killed no matter what they were to throw at him.

The whole room was full of nervous tension and Harry knew that no one could fail to see the blood still on his muzzle; what they would infer by that he really didn't care. Most of his attention was on Voldemort and the others were only in his awareness for any signs of danger.

"Welcome, Harry," his enemy greeted with a nasty smile, "I see you have eaten already."

A nervous titter of laughter ran round the group at that pronouncement and Harry came to a halt in front of Voldemort; he met the Dark Lord's red eyes calmly, brushing off the probing thoughts Voldemort sent at him as if they did not exist. A Legilimens the Dark Lord might be, but there was so much darkness in Harry's mind now that it was like a blanket of night that Voldemort could not see through.

Caring little about anything but the revenge that sang in his blood, Harry changed back to his humanoid form and he saw Bellatrix shift in appreciation of what she saw. He could sense her interest and he looked at her, letting a smile play at the corners of his mouth as if he appreciated the attention.

"Twice," he said as he turned his eyes back to Voldemort; "you should keep better control of your dogs, the one upstairs tried to obstruct me."

He felt someone move behind him and he twisted and snarled, letting his vampire fangs drop and allowing everyone to know that even when he was not looking he was aware.

"Ah, Mulciber never was particularly bright," Voldemort said without any sign of regret. "Did you enjoy my little gift?"

Harry looked to the masked man he was sure was Lucius Malfoy and smiled, pleased to see the wizard fidget uncomfortably under his scrutiny; that a father would abandon his son to such a fate sickened him even though dark magic flowed through him like a river.

"He screamed well," Harry said casually, biding his time and enjoying the anticipation.

"A very pretty young man," Voldemort said and this time he did sound slightly remorseful, "a shame he chose to defy me. Are you going to defy me, Harry?"

Harry just grinned at the Dark Lord, tipping his head to the side rather coyly.

"What do you think, Tom?" he asked noncommittally.

He did not want to outright lie because it was likely Voldemort would sense that and he was enjoying the game. Letting this end too soon did not appeal to the darkness curling around Harry's soul.

"Harry," Voldemort responded in a warning tone as if speaking to a child, "are you trying to upset me?"

That drew a laugh from the creature that had once been Harry Potter; he was enjoying this more than he cared to admit. The rage was curling around his insides and the violence in him waited just below the surface for him to let it go.

"Would I ever do that?" he asked, moving just a little closer and letting his eyes flick over the wand in Voldemort's hand. "If you don't mind me asking, what did you do with my wand?"

"It is in a safe place," the Dark Lord replied. "Why, did you want it back?"

With a shrug, Harry glanced around casually.

"I'm not sure if it will suit me anymore," he said as if he did not really mean it.

Voldemort would never see him as harmless, but Harry watched as his ruse worked; his enemy now thought he believed that he needed his wand. That the Dark Lord would underestimate him now was clear and Harry tried to appear annoyed, as if he had just realised he had revealed too much; for good measure he hissed at Voldemort.

"Now, now, Harry," his enemy lightly chastised, "I will return it when I believe you are ready, but you must learn patience. You are one of us now, and it will take time to adjust. Wormtail!"

A cowering figure appeared from behind the throne and Harry could not stop the snarl that escaped him as he saw his parents' betrayer.

"Ah yes," Voldemort said at his reaction, "I had forgotten the animosity between the pair of you. I am sorry, Harry, but you cannot have him; I find him far too useful. Wormtail, fetch a robe for our newest member."

At the sight of the man who had caused him so much grief, Harry found that he was tiring of the game. He shifted his weight to his toes as Wormtail scurried off to do his master's bidding. It was time to end this; time to kill and be killed.

"You took my blood," Harry said slowly as if he was thinking something through, "and I find that now I see that in an entirely different light."

He smiled at Voldemort as if he was over his fit of pique; the wizard smiled back at him in his own twisted way.

"I imagined you would," the Dark Lord said as if it was obvious to him.

Harry let the rage free, and he sprang at Voldemort, shocking everyone in the room. He had timed his attack perfectly and there was nothing anyone could do.

"I want it back," he snarled before sinking his fangs into the old wizard's neck.

The blood that hit his throat tasted stale and bad, but it was full of power and it flared into and out of Harry as if he was a conduit. He heard spells being fired off as Voldemort struggled against him, but nothing hit him as power repelled power. The Dark Lord was strong in his new body, but he had given Harry a far greater strength in his attempt to make a weapon and Harry would not let go. Drinking deeply he took Voldemort's strength and pulling back one hand he did what he

had been dreaming of in his darkest thoughts all night; he thrust his talons through Voldemort's robes and into his chest, closing around the twisted creation's shrivelled heart.

"Now you die," he hissed as he finally took his mouth away from the bloody neck, and then he pulled, ripping Voldemort's heart from his chest.

As soon as he stopped drinking his protection faltered, but he waited, watching the light die in the Dark Lord's eyes. Two curses hit him, but he barely noticed, and only as he allowed Voldemort's bloody corpse to fall to the ground did he turn to look at the rest of the room. Some were fleeing, others were firing spells at him, but Harry caught one pair of eyes in particular.

"Your turn," he said pointedly as Bellatrix Lestrange looked at him in horror.

The Death Eaters had created a monster, and a monster he would be.

=====

Everything melded into one bloody haze; in the end Harry had no idea how many he killed or how many spells hit home as they tried to get away, all he knew was that he came back to himself hunched in the corner of the smaller outer chamber, covered in gore with no idea how he ended up there. His hunger was sated in all ways and he felt strangely empty inside.

For the second time in as many days he found himself surprised to be alive and this time it filled him with a kind of terror. He had thought of nothing beyond his revenge and yet he was not dead and his vengeance was complete. Voldemort's inner circle had not been able to destroy him and that thought scared him.

Unable to comprehend quite what this meant, he put his head on his knees and he began to cry. A high keening sound issued from his mouth filled with his despair and disgust; he was a monster with a human soul and he had survived. His very existence was a crime against everything that was Light and yet whatever power had created him had seen fit to make sure he had not crossed to where he could find peace. He let out all the pain and anger this realisation brought to him and he did not care who heard; he could not stop the sound of his grief.

He lost himself in his desolation, letting go of what was real as his mind spiralled into the darkness within. Why was the universe so cruel that it could not even let him die?

His cry had changed to a shuddering sobbing when he felt the presence of a wizard close by; he knew it was a magical person and he knew this interloper was male because he could sense it, but he shied away from looking deeper. He fought his survival instincts as he hoped that it was one of Voldemort's lackeys come back to try and finish the job; just one quick Avada Kedavra when he had no defences up at all and maybe it would be over.

However, instead of a green flash of light, what touched him was something soft and warm. Not really sure what was happening he lifted his head slightly to see a blanket being gently wrapped around his shoulders by pale hands. He followed the nearest limb back to its owner and found himself looking into the face of Draco Malfoy; for a moment confusion replaced despair.

"I don't understand," he said in little more than a whisper as his sobs died away.

"Neither do I," Malfoy replied with a stark honesty that surprised Harry; "we were halfway to London when I made Mother turn back. I could not just leave you."

There was nothing Harry could say to that, he did not know how to respond and he just sat there and stared.

"Come on," Malfoy coaxed, standing up and gently urging Harry to follow him, "the Aurors will be here soon, and I don't think they should see you like this."

"Aurors?" Harry's mind could not quite grasp what was happening.

He stood slowly, his body strong even though his thoughts were anything but stable, and his companion wrapped the blanket around him firmly as if dealing with a child incapable of taking care of itself.

"When we came back and found everyone dead or gone," Malfoy explained as the Slytherin slowly steered Harry towards the stairs, "I contacted Dumbledore. He is contacting the Ministry and then he is coming here."

That caused Harry to shy away and back towards his corner shaking his head.

"No," he said in desperation, "no, he'll bring the others and they'll see ... I can't ... I'm despicable ... I should be dead."

Surprisingly strong arms wrapped around him firmly and stopped his backwards progress, bringing with them an unexpected break in the panic that threatened to take away his mind completely.

"Listen to me," Malfoy's very firm voice demanded attention, "you are not what Voldemort tried to make. He tried to create a creature from everything that is dark, but he forgot about you. He wanted a killing machine with no conscience that he could bend to his will, but he did not expect the essence of Harry Potter to survive."

Harry looked into his companion's face then, terrified that he would see falsehoods and platitudes in the truth of Malfoy's eyes, but he was startled from his fear as he realised that the Slytherin meant every word.

"Potter," his lifeline said resolutely, "there is darkness in you, but it is not all that you are ... believe me I know first hand."

The offhand tone with which the Slytherin finished made Harry blink at him; it seemed like such a bizarre time for a joke and it bemused him. That Malfoy was showing him kindness after what he had done to him was confusing, that his one time enemy was making light of everything that had happened was just beyond his comprehension.

"You didn't kill me," Malfoy said pointedly as if explaining to a moron, "and you didn't toy with me. If that had been anyone but your honourable, Gryffindor self I would have been in pieces all over that room."

The Slytherin looked at him as Harry stared back and he did not know how to react.

"You really don't understand do you?" Malfoy said eventually as if amazed by this fact. "He took everything that is dark and put it in to you; he leeched the power out of things that kill and destroy for survival and pleasure and forced it into your body; and what did you do with it?"

Harry gazed at his companion blankly.

"You shagged me into the mattress," the Slytherin said bluntly, "had a little taste and then went and carried out the task the Light has been preparing you for since you were eleven years old. You killed Voldemort, Potter; you took some of the darkest powers known to wizards and instead of going on a random killing spree you destroyed the Dark Lord. Does that not tell you something about yourself?"

"Revenge," Harry whispered quietly, "all I wanted was revenge."

Malfoy growled in frustration and began to lead him to the stairs again.

"If it was only revenge," his companion said in a tone that suggested he had given up trying to convince Harry of anything, "then I would be dead a thousand times over and so would my mother. Dark creatures do not curl into a corner and sob their remorse into their hands, Potter, and neither do dark wizards."

Harry didn't really believe it, he could feel the darkness shifting inside him, but he let himself be led up the stairs and then onto the first floor. He let himself be bathed and clothed and the hands that cared for him were a strange comfort. He even let those hands put him to bed and when Malfoy told him to sleep he curled on his side and closed his eyes; but he didn't really believe ... did he?

The End

Distortion

Summary: Voldemort died at Harry's hand, just like the Prophecy said, but is there a life for Harry after what the Dark Lord has done to him?

Author's Notes: Thanks to Soph for the beta. The pieces that were floating around in my head after the end of Corruption finally made some sense, so here's the sequel.

Harry's first thought as he woke was surprise that he had actually slept, which for a moment stopped his mind informing him what had caused him to wake. Lying perfectly still, he was frozen trying to work out what had so suddenly pulled him from what had been a dreamless rest.

"I wouldn't do that," Malfoy's familiar voice said in a warning tone, "he'll..."

Something touched Harry's arm and he knew what was troubling him as his senses became suddenly very clear and he reacted without even thinking. He twisted where he was lying, his hand coming up to snatch what he knew was a wand pointing at his shoulder and then he dragged his legs up towards himself, coming onto his feet on the bed. It did not occur to him to use the wand and he faced the very startled looking wizard, snarling his displeasure at the unfortunate individual.

"...see it as a threat," Malfoy finished with a definite 'I told you so' implied on the end.

Harry's instincts screamed at him to attack and he only just held on to himself as his conscious thoughts tried to make sense of what was happening.

"Harry, you are perfectly safe," the sound of one voice confirmed what his magical senses were telling him, and grabbing on to the headboard with his free arm Harry looked across the room at Albus Dumbledore.

So many emotions hit him at the same time that he began to shake and he slowly slid down the wooden support, still clutching the wand he had taken by the wrong end. Part of him was insisting very loudly that he was in danger and he needed to rectify that, but he focused on Dumbledore's calm words and gasping at the effort, put the genie back in the bottle. His eyes flicked between the three people in the room: Dumbledore, Malfoy and the unknown wizard.

"Who are you?" he demanded of the stranger, needing something more to bring back the very sensitive balance in his impulse-saturated psyche.

"Auror Caveo," the man said slowly as Dumbledore nodded at him.

That didn't do a lot to settle Harry's nerves since he did not exactly trust the Ministry or any Aurors he did not know, but it gave his more logical aspect something to use. Before he could talk himself out of it, he threw the wand back at its owner and then hunched down further against the head of the bed, instinctively making himself a smaller target.

"Leave," he said shortly.

It was too soon for his control to be tested so blatantly. What a fully trained Auror had thought he was doing waking any dark creature at wand point, Harry had no

idea; if Caveo made a habit of it the Ministry was likely to be down one employee in the near future.

"I don't think you are in any position to ..." the Auror tried to protest as he retrieved his wand.

Harry snarled and growled, showing the wizard a mouth full of very sharp teeth. He wasn't really aware if any other changes occurred in his physical form, but the man took a step back.

"Perhaps is would be best for you to wait outside for a moment, Auror Caveo," Dumbledore interposed smoothly before the disagreement could go any further; "Harry has been through a terrible ordeal and we would not want anything untoward to occur because of the duress of the situation."

The Auror appeared very uncertain about that idea, and the way Caveo gripped his wand in a tighter fashion, Harry was not sure the headmaster was going to win this discussion. Then he felt it; a calm, serene feeling emanating from Dumbledore and he saw the Auror begin to relax. The revelation, rather than the actual influence caused him to sit down in shock.

"Harry and I will have a little chat," Dumbledore said pleasantly, "and then I am sure we will be able to clear up what happened here."

"Mr Malfoy is in custody," Auror Caveo said with a nod, "I will have to take him with me."

For the first time this really focused Harry's attention on Malfoy and he did not like it one little bit when the Ministry employee reached out and took hold of the Slytherin's arm. Malfoy appeared tired and resigned and Harry could not prevent the low growl in the back of his throat as a rather startling, possessive and protective feeling rose in his chest.

"Mr Malfoy is also perfectly safe," Dumbledore said smoothly as the Auror looked perturbed and ready to do something stupid, "he is in custody for his own protection."

Harry did not believe that for a second, but he felt the calming influence coming his way and, fighting the instinct to swat it away, he let it through his defences. It was a remarkably good feeling and he was grateful for it even though he knew he was being manipulated.

"I will notify you when Harry is calmer," Dumbledore said pleasantly and the Auror nodded and led Malfoy out of the room.

As the two wizards disappeared behind the closing door, one source of danger disappeared off his radar, but that rather focused all of Harry's attention on the headmaster instead. This caused some very conflicting emotions to try and take precedence in his brain all at the same time: shame; hope; fear; anger and more. He wanted to scream and shout, to demand of his mentor why he had let this happen to him; and he wanted to throw himself into the wizard's arms and beg him to make it go away; all at the same time.

"Oh, My Poor Child," Dumbledore said as soon as they were alone, sitting himself down on the side of the bed no more than a foot from Harry, "what did that monster do to you?"

Then he opened his arms and Harry went to him instantly. There was no fear in Dumbledore at all as he wrapped Harry in a paternal embrace and it meant more to Harry than any words could possibly express. He sobbed as he was held tightly and for a moment he was nothing but human.

The calm did not last long, however, as reality made itself known. Something in him informed him quite how much magic was flowing through Dumbledore and what a feast it would make, and the slow thudding of the wizard's heartbeat called to him in a most alluring way. He pushed himself away as soon as these ideas entered his head; he was not hungry and they were easy to cast aside, but that they were there at all frightened him.

"Don't trust me," he said shortly, wiping the tears from his face with one sleeve and moving away from his source of comfort.

Dumbledore folded his hands into his lap and just looked at Harry for a few moments.

"I would trust you with my life, Young Man," the headmaster said calmly, "no matter what magic resides within you."

"It might not be your life I decide to take," Harry shot back, suddenly annoyed.

Dumbledore's unwavering faith in him was suddenly irritating and he had to take a deep breath to stop himself acting on the emotion. He was dangerous; he'd shown that to Voldemort very distinctly and he needed Dumbledore to understand quite how lethal he was.

"How often do you influence people like you did to Caveo?" he asked bluntly, it was the least offensive way he could think of to illustrate how different he was.

Surprisingly the headmaster did not react with shock or anger, Dumbledore simply nodded.

"Ah, yes," the old wizard said calmly, "I was led to believe you may have sensed that by your reaction. It is a talent I inherited from Grindelwald after our encounter, and one which I use sparingly. It can be unproductive when used inappropriately, but I have found that it can be most useful in diffusing volatile situations until alternatives may be found."

For a moment Harry's curiosity overcame his annoyance.

"You inherited power from Grindelwald?" he asked, shocked by the revelation.

"When two powerful wizards meet in combat to the death it is inevitable," Dumbledore explained patiently, "although it is not a fact many like to accept. Magic is energy, Harry, and it cannot be destroyed, only changed and redistributed; when a magical person dies their power has to go somewhere and with someone as powerful as Grindelwald or Voldemort a particular talent can often remain intact to be passed to another. As Voldemort passed some of his magical ability to you as a baby due to the effects of the Killing curse, so Grindelwald passed certain powers to me when we fought and he died."

It was quite a radical piece of information to take in and something nasty occurred to Harry.

"I killed Voldemort," he said slowly and could not contain the glare he send Dumbledore, "does that mean on top of everything else I'm dealing with him as well?"

"You, My Dear Boy," the headmaster replied, "are a unique case, since Voldemort had already passed a significant part of his abilities to you. However, it may be that you have picked up some other talents along the way. But, please try to remember that it is not Voldemort himself who may have been passed along, but his magical abilities; nothing to be afraid of."

Harry laughed at that; a humourless, cold laugh.

"The Ministry must be terrified," he said blackly; "an unclassifiable Dark creature with the power of the Dark Lord. If I was them I'd have tried to kill me while I was asleep."

That produced the first frown from his companion and Dumbledore actually appeared mildly upset by Harry's pronouncement. Distressingly, Harry found that part of him enjoyed the headmaster's discomfort.

"Harry," Dumbledore said firmly, "I do not pretend to understand what you must be going through, but I promise you this: you will not be going through it alone and you will not be abandoned to the Ministry. Several members of the Order are already here and, shall we say, arrangements had been made to make sure that your involvement with Voldemort's demise cannot be down played."

"I stuck my fingers into his chest and pulled out his heart," Harry responded snidely. "How's that for dying at the hand of the other; fulfil the prophecy okay? Don't know what the unknown power was; Voldemort knew exactly what he put into me."

Dumbledore looked him directly in the eye then.

"I think perhaps it may have been referring to your strength of character," the headmaster said evenly.

Harry really didn't know what to say to that and silence descended as he looked away, unable to deal with his own reaction.

"What about Malfoy?" he asked eventually, changing the subject in an effort to continue the conversation.

"His situation is somewhat complicated," Dumbledore admitted honestly, "due to his Dark Mark. He has also been less than forthcoming about what exactly occurred last night. If you do not mind me observing the fact; I was somewhat surprised to find Mr Malfoy on our side."

That caused Harry to smile rather coldly.

"He wasn't exactly," he observed, "he is on his own side and that hasn't been Voldemort's for some time. I saw his mother after ... when I went down to find Voldemort and I almost killed her, but she wanted to know if he was still alive. I told her to take him and leave and not come back. I don't know why they didn't."

It was difficult to admit what he had done even though the darkness in him revelled in the memory and wanted to do it again. That a part of him felt as if Malfoy somehow belonged to him was unsettling to say the least.

"What happened, Harry?" Dumbledore asked gently.

Harry looked at his hands; the memory brought with it excitement and shame in such equal parts that he had to take long seconds to gather himself.

"Did he tell you he was a prisoner?" The headmaster nodded. "Did he explain why?"

"Mr Malfoy seemed reticent to explain that particular happenstance," Dumbledore replied.

"He took the Dark Mark willingly," Harry said quietly, "but I don't think he understood what it meant. Once Voldemort had him he wanted all of him, body and soul; Malfoy refused to be made a play thing. Voldemort imprisoned him until he complied. He never did and so Voldemort decided to feed him to his new creation; me."

He paused, taking a deep breath and fighting down the desire to destroy something that accompanied the confusion he was feeling.

"When I woke up, Malfoy explained what had happened," Harry began again, "and he looked after me when the magic started to change me. He was just lying there when I woke up, like he knew there was nothing he could do."

He had to stop again.

"The hunger," he tried to explain, "it changes everything. He was mine, the prey, and I didn't even think about stopping. I could have killed him."

"But you did not," Dumbledore said firmly.

Harry laughed derisively.

"No," he agreed, "but that didn't stop me doing other things. I did what he wouldn't let Voldemort do and then I drank his blood as well. I left him unconscious on the bed and yet he came back for me. Why did he come back?"

"Perhaps because you did not do exactly what Voldemort would have done," the headmaster said calmly. "You were under the influence of very strong magic, Harry, that you did not kill"

"You don't understand," Harry almost shouted, "I still am under that influence; it's never going away."

He heard his voice change as dark power flowed around him body and resonated through his chest.

"He's mine," he said before he could pull himself back under control.

Breathing hard he wrapped his arms around his chest. He could not look at Dumbledore, afraid to see the effect his loss of control would have had on his mentor.

"I can't stop it," he whispered dejectedly.

A hand on his shoulder caused him to jump, and he looked up at the now standing headmaster accusingly.

"There are ways we can help you, My Boy," Dumbledore told him in a tone which begged no argument. "Trust me, Harry; we will bring you through this."

=====

Harry was sitting on the edge of the bed staring straight ahead when he felt the wards on the room change. The Occlumency training he had been through over the entirety of the previous year was helping somewhat, but he could not find the calm centre that he needed to make it completely effective. Without the hunger driving him, the instincts running through his body were easier to keep in check, but they were disturbing and he was uncomfortably aware that sooner or later the hunger would return.

Dumbledore had remained with him for over an hour and they had talked, but Harry had found many of the reassurances hollow and had had to curb his tongue several times. There had been a few instances where he hadn't managed it and sitting on the desire to make Dumbledore more and more uncomfortable had been difficult. The fact that the headmaster always appeared calm was a great feat in self control as far as Harry could tell, because he had not been able to ignore some of the stronger emotions coming from his mentor. Since Dumbledore had left, Harry had been trying to simply not think anymore.

He turned to look at the door just as it opened; Professor Snape walked in.

"Good afternoon, Mr Potter," the dour man greeted shortly, "I have been sent to fetch a blood sample."

That was another thing Dumbledore had mentioned; he had told Harry that finding out which of Voldemort's additions had taken and which had not was an unavoidable top priority; the Ministry was insisting on it. That he was going to be a lab rat was something that annoyed him, but was also inevitable. He was a thing never seen before; the Ministry was never going to just let him walk away. Dumbledore had insisted that the information was required so they could help him; Harry was pretty sure it was more likely the Ministry wanted to find out his weaknesses.

He could not help the bitter amusement this caused in him and Snape's turn of phrase made him smile menacingly.

"Going to trade?" he asked, baring his teeth for good measure.

That earned him an unimpressed, raised eyebrow from the Potions' Master. Over the previous year it could not be said that they had become friends, but they had made peace. Harry had returned for his sixth year a much more serious student, completely dedicated to preparing for his confrontation with Voldemort. This new attitude had not initially made much impact on Snape; but after they had had a very loud, very long argument after one of his Occlumency lessons they had reached an understanding. A truce had been called.

"I taste of dank dungeons and unpleasant potions' ingredients, Mr Potter," Snape replied coolly, "I doubt you would find me palatable."

Harry gave a rather self depreciating laugh at that.

"That wouldn't stop me if I was hungry, Professor," he said plainly.

"Ah yes, but, Mr Potter," Snape returned, putting down the equipment he had brought with him; "I am a Slytherin and as such would not be stupid enough to come in here if you were hungry."

The retort that came to mind involved pointing out to Snape how one Slytherin had already had the misfortune of finding out about his new nature personally, but that brought enough conflict with it into his mind that he managed to keep his mouth shut.

"So what is the latest consensus of opinion, Professor," Harry asked, distracting himself from his thoughts; "do the Ministry want to dispose of me as quickly as possible, or preserve me for future study?"

"I think the factions are equally matched," Snape replied in complete seriousness as he picked up a container and checked it carefully. "If you would roll up your sleeve, Mr Potter."

There was definitely a big part of Harry that felt like refusing and telling the man to go and do interesting things to himself, but he bit his tongue and took hold of the sleeve of the silk pyjamas he was wearing. If there was one thing he knew, it was that with Snape on the job it would be done properly; the Potions' Master was nothing if not methodical.

Snape walked over and calmly tied an inch wide rubbery type material covered in some interesting patterns, around the crook of Harry's arm; then the Potions' Master touched the material with his wand and muttered something. Harry felt a slight shift in the magic of the device, it tightened so that it was flush with his skin and then there was a prickling sensation. The vessel in Snape's other hand began to fill.

Harry could not help staring as the small bottle began to fill; his blood was as red as normal, but in it swirled black and silver stripes of colour.

"Professor," he asked quietly as the sight took away most of his ability to speak, "can you help me?"

"I will try, Mr Potter," Snape said evenly, "I will try."

Dragging his eyes away from the bottle Harry waited in silence for it to fill; it didn't hurt, but the sensation was unpleasant and quite a percentage of him was not comfortable with the procedure. The knowledge that his blood might be used against him did not help either and he stared at the wall trying to ignore what was going on.

"How are you coping?" the question from Snape sounded awkward and caught Harry off guard.

He looked back at the head of Slytherin without trying to hide his surprise.

"Any information may be useful in assisting my efforts," Snape clarified, but his tone of voice had been anything but clinically professional.

"I have no control," Harry replied bitterly and glared back at the jar, "even the Occlumency isn't working properly. I can't shut it all down."

Snape did not reply for some time and eventually Harry looked up at his companion.

"There are many different aspects to your person now," the Potions' Master said thoughtfully, "it may be productive to attempt to calm each one individually."

That was an idea that had not occurred to Harry and it made a kind of twisted sense. Rather than dwelling on what he could not do he let his mind churn over that possibility and for a while he forgot that Snape was there at all.

"We are done, Mr Potter," the warning brought Harry back to the present and he looked up to find Snape waiting to be acknowledged.

Only when he nodded at the wizard did Snape move forward and tap the band on his arm once more. Typically cautious, typically Slytherin and for once Harry appreciated the trait: he already knew he was not good when startled.

"I will give half the sample to the Ministry," Snape told him calmly as the Potions' Master packed away his equipment, "and I shall return to Hogwarts with the other. Should I make any progress I will deliver the information personally."

Yet again Harry was surprised; they were no longer antagonists, but that did not mean that they spoke if they did not have to and Snape's reassurances were uncharacteristic. Not being good at keeping his mouth shut at the best of times, Harry could not help himself now.

"Are you trying to be nice to me?" he really wasn't quite sure, and he almost felt like the condemned man being given anything he wanted as a last meal.

Snape looked at him coolly for a moment and then inclined his head slightly.

"It is not a role I fit well, Mr Potter," the man admitted, "I shall desist if it bothers you."

Harry laughed at that; Snape was such a peculiar man.

"Why?" he asked pointedly.

"I feel I have underestimated you, I wished to rectify the situation," his companion said evenly. "I have always known you are stubborn, Mr Potter, but I mistook obstinacy for strength of character. The whole Wizarding world owes you more than they will ever be able to repay for ridding us of Voldemort," Harry was quite surprised when the ex-Death Eater spoke his one time master's name without hesitation, "some of us more than others. I do not believe the Ministry will treat you fairly; they are fools. I simply wished you to know that I will not be one of those who wish to sweep your position or your contribution under the carpet."

For a moment Harry looked Snape directly in the eye and then he finally blinked.

"Thank you," he said genuinely.

Then the Potions' Master picked up his equipment, turned in a flurry of robes, and was gone. Harry watched him leave and found himself strangely comforted by Snape's plain and simple words.

=====

Lunch arrived shortly after Snape left and a house elf walked in carrying a large tray. Harry really was not very hungry even in the human sense, but he accepted the offering from the eager to please elf and placed it on the bed beside him. Uncovering it, he found a veritable feast of delights, although nothing really appealed to him.

Eventually he picked up a fork and tentatively poked at a moist-looking portion of steak and kidney pie. Putting a small piece of the suet pastry into his mouth he chewed hesitantly, remembering his last encounter with food. He almost managed to swallow it, but in the end he spat it out, unable to stop the nausea that threatened as he tried to eat it.

It took him a few more seconds to pluck up the courage to try again; his stomach was not happy about the idea of real food for some reason, even though he knew for a fact that some of the dark creatures forced upon him had no problem with playing at being human. This time he tried the meat rather than the casing and this worked a little better; the flavour was definitely inviting and he found that after chewing it into a complete pulp he could actually swallow it. When it hit his stomach there was a moment he thought it might come back again, but it stayed down.

It was a ridiculously small victory, but he found himself smiling anyway and set about eating what he could. In the end it was quite a bizarre divide of things he could manage to swallow and those that he couldn't. He had thought at first that he might now be an exclusive carnivore, but some of the vegetables had been fine, as had part of the dessert. By the time he pushed the tray away he was pretty sure that he was going to have to learn all over again what he liked and disliked.

=====

The reprieve from having to talk to the Ministry representatives could not last forever and his time ran out an hour or so after lunch. He had no idea what time it was exactly, since no one had seen fit to tell him what time he had actually woken up, but the sun was still in the sky if the light coming through the curtains was anything to go by. He had been afraid that light would bother him since he clearly had vampire tendencies, but although it was more comfortable without bright sunlight streaming into the room it was not too much of a problem.

He was once again attempting to practise his Occlumency, this time sitting in the centre of the bed with his legs crossed, when the door opened once again. Caveo walked in with his wand in hand, followed by Tonks; Harry gave both Aurors a quick glance and then focused on the one he did not know. He was not inclined to like Caveo after their previous meeting and since his instincts were telling him the man had removed what was his as well, he was not in the best of moods.

"You could have knocked," he said icily.

The Auror was somewhat taken aback by that; it had obviously never occurred to him.

"They don't teach politeness in Auror training," Tonks said brightly and sat down in a chair as she fell over her own feet next to it.

Somehow she almost made it look like she meant to do it. Having had his attention caught, Harry could not help looking at Tonks, who had become a good

friend since Sirius' death; it was not the way she appeared, it was the way she felt. His magical sense did not seem to know how to classify her and it was trying really hard.

"We need to take a statement," Caveo interrupted his musing, which earned the man a black look from Harry.

He growled low in his throat for good measure and looked back at Tonks again.

"What happened after you were captured?" the Auror continued anyway.

The dark part of Harry suggested some interesting ways to eviscerate the annoying official and he dug his fingers into his leg to prevent himself doing anything he might regret.

"They used a portkey to bring me here," Harry said without trying to hide his annoyance, "and then they drugged me and put me through two days of hell, followed by a very interesting evening with Draco Malfoy, after which I killed Voldemort. There is nothing more, that's it."

"The ceremony used requires subject participation," Caveo said hotly at his dismissal and that was almost more than Harry could take.

He stood up in one swift movement and was very close to throttling the Auror and ripping out his windpipe just to make sure. He saw Tonks move out of the corner of his eye and he knew that there were two wands trained on him as he pulled himself up short. Standing on the bed he towered over the Auror and the wizard appeared somewhat uncomfortable.

"Are you trying to suggest that I wanted this?" he all but hissed at the man. "I was drugged up to the eyeballs, I don't remember most of it; for all I know I put on a tutu and danced the dying swan. If you think I agreed to any of this then you're a bigger fool than I already think you are."

Turning he jumped off the side of the bed and walked away from Caveo, just to make sure he couldn't do anything to the man without having to at least cover some distance. He had to maintain control; losing it in front of the Ministry's finest would not help him at all.

"So you admit that you could have been an active participant in the ceremony?" Caveo really seemed to have a bee in his bonnet about that point.

"I did not want to have Merlin knows how much magic forced into me," Harry said pointedly, picking up a pillow and clutching it to himself in an attempt to give his hands something to do. "I did not willingly do anything, but it's very difficult to fight off the Imperius curse when you can't remember your own name."

"Yet you have had relations with a known Death Eater," Caveo countered.

That rather drew up Harry short as he failed to comprehend what the Auror was implying.

"Draco Malfoy," Caveo clarified.

Now Harry laughed rather hysterically; the man was more of a moron than he had given him credit for. This was almost as ridiculous as Fudge refusing to believe that Voldemort had returned. Disbelief morphed into anger very quickly.

"Relations," Harry spat at the Auror, unable to keep his anger from the surface, "is that what you call it? You want to know what relations really means? I raped him. Voldemort put me in a room with him so that when I changed I would attack him and then kill him; and I woke up and decided he was mine. He didn't even have a wand and I just took him; he never stood a chance. If I hadn't wanted Voldemort dead so badly that I could taste it, Merlin knows what I would have done to him."

He was shouting by the time he had finished and he was almost angry enough to lose it completely. He was shaking, trying to maintain control and his fingers were shredding the pillow.

"Get out," he growled; knowing that if Caveo tried to accuse him of one more thing he would be pushed too far.

"But..." the Auror tried to protest.

"Now!" Harry yelled, backing himself into a corner to keep as far from the man as possible.

Tonks was moving, but Caveo seemed undecided.

"Do you want to die?" Harry demanded, barely in control.

Tonks took charge and even if Caveo did not believe Harry was serious, she did, and she pushed her fellow Auror towards the door. How dare they suggest that he had been complicit in the abomination that he had been put through; it was almost more than Harry could believe. He was so angry he could barely contain himself.

"Never let him back in here," he snarled as Tonks pushed Caveo out of the door, and he meant it; Harry did not know what he would do if he ever saw the man again.

The moment the door closed he let fly with the pillow and feathers went everywhere; then he set about destroying anything within reach. He did not know what powers he was using as things began to explode and the bed did not stand a chance as he went at it with supernatural strength.

After Harry destroyed half the room he sat down in the middle of it and didn't move for a good long time. The anger would not fade, but the chaos he was causing was not enough to appease it and he gave up trying, taking the battle into his mind instead. He let bloody scenario after bloody scenario play over and over in him thoughts, unheeding of what effect these gruesome and out of control ideas had on his body. He felt himself shift and change: teeth grew and shrank; scales appeared under his clothes and faded again; spines ripped little holes in the silk before disappearing once more; shapes jumped at him from all over the room as his eyesight became more acute; the wards on the room began clear to his senses; he could hear the conversation between the two Aurors outside his door. He ignored it all and just let it happen as he fumed in outrage at the accusation against him.

The effect was rather unexpected as the whole process became a macabre meditation and eventually he found himself calming down. He was surprisingly tired as his perceptions faded back to normal and he glanced around the room stupidly for a few moments, taking in the devastation he had caused. It occurred

to him that maybe he should do something about the mess, but he felt lethargic and un-inclined to move any more than he had to. In the end he pulled the still intact sheet off the partially shredded mattress, dragged over a cushion from the smashed armchair and curled up where he was. It did not take him long to fall asleep.

=====

The dream was so clear it almost felt as if he was there, but Harry knew this was not real. He was not at the Ministry and he was not walking behind two Aurors escorting Draco Malfoy to an interrogation room. The feeling of being detached and not a part of action told him that he was dreaming, but it did not mean he felt any more secure. Something was going to happen; he knew that as surely as he knew his own name, and it was almost as if he was holding his breath waiting to find out what was going on. This was important and it had all of his attention.

"Harry," a voice interrupted his watching.

It was not as important as his dream, so he tried to ignore it.

"Harry," the voice came again, and he felt the dreamscape shift as his conscious mind started to become aware.

He needed to see what was going to happen and he tried to hang on to the dream, but other things were making themselves known to his mind now and he was pulled from sleep. He opened his eyes as his other senses informed him that there was someone standing a few feet to his left and that person was not human. Instincts kicked in before he had any chance to control them and he came to his feet as a large black wolf in the tatters of the pyjamas he was wearing.

Remus stood very still as Harry approached him and Harry sniffed around the werewolf taking in the fresh, earthy scent that his instincts told him belonged to kin. It was peculiar to find that part of his personality had taken such complete control of him, but the human, logical part of his mind could do nothing except sit back and watch as the werewolf part of him satisfied its curiosity.

Remus held out his hand for Harry to snuffle and the sudden fear he had smelt on his companion receded as Remus began to relax. There was no attempt at any contact which Harry did not initiate, but it was clear that his friend was adjusting to the situation.

"I am sorry to wake you," Remus apologised even as Harry continued to investigate the different scents coming from him, "but it took a lot of persuading on Albus' part to get me in here at all. I do not know how long we will have."

Circling the werewolf, Harry came back to Remus' front and looked up at his friend's face. The wolf in him seemed satisfied and, with control once again his, he flowed back to human form. Rather embarrassed that he had just wrecked his only clothes he grabbed the sheet he had been sleeping in and wrapped it around himself.

"Sorry," he apologised as what he had been doing caught up with him, "I..."

He wasn't sure how to explain and he trailed off.

"Were at the mercy of instincts that took you by surprise?" Remus offered kindly.

Harry nodded, grateful for his friend's understanding.

"I know the feeling," Remus admitted with a slight smile; "even with the Wolfsbane potion I still feel the pull. I do believe I peed all over Sirius once while we were staying at Grimauld Place, and he never let me forget it."

The deadpan delivery was Harry's undoing and he found himself genuinely laughing for the first time in what felt like forever. It then dawned on him what Remus had just admitted.

"You peed on him," Harry asked in surprise, "but doesn't that mean..."

"That I was marking him as mine and telling everyone else to back off?" Remus added in smoothly. "Yes, that would be true. Sirius and I were more than friends for some time, but there was never the opportunity to explain it to you."

Harry found it a nice surprise to discover that there were revelations in the world that did not centre around him; he actually managed a real smile.

"That explains so many things," he said honestly and then looked around the room; "I'd offer you a seat, but I think I smashed them all."

"Tonks told me about her colleague's idea of taking a statement," Remus said, becoming serious again; "I believe that so far six people have had words with him. Most impressive was Minerva."

"Professor McGonagall is here?" Harry asked, surprised.

Remus nodded.

"Albus had to return to the school," the werewolf explained calmly, "and Minerva came to take his place here. The Order is watching everything the Ministry is doing very carefully; there will be no sweeping facts under the carpet for public relations reasons."

Harry had not quite believed that what Dumbledore had promised was true, but he was beginning to think that maybe he was being more pessimistic than necessary.

"Would you mind if I rectify some of this damage?" Remus asked politely, not moving for his wand as he tested the waters.

Taking a step back because he did not quite trust himself that much, Harry nodded. He was not sure how much Remus could repair, but he regretted making such a mess and destroying his living environment and he hoped his friend could help. Remus pulled out his wand in a very deliberate and controlled manner, but Harry still felt himself react to the possible threat. He pulled the sheet around his body a little tighter and looked way, holding on to the instinct to defend himself.

Remus went about his business quickly and efficiently and when he had finished one chair was back together, the bed had been repaired in that the mattress was back on the frame which was no longer in four pieces, and all the rest of the damage had been banished to one corner.

"Perhaps we should give you transfigured furniture until you can control your temper," Remus pondered reasonably; "it is much easier to just transfigure something back than to repair real objects."

"Might be an idea," Harry agreed, climbing onto the bare mattress and sitting down.

Perversely he felt more at ease in Remus' presence than he had in anyone else's; a section of his brain recognised his companion as similar to himself and it helped somehow. He was not comfortable with himself and he did not trust his instincts enough to sit any closer to Remus than the few feet away he was now, but it was better than with all the others he had met so far.

It occurred to Harry that Remus was probably the nearest person he had to someone who could understand what he was going through, and he had questions, but he really didn't know how to start.

"With Sirius," he began eventually, trying to decide how to phrase what he was thinking, "were you ... umm ... possessive as well, or was it just when you were a wolf?"

"You mean did I ever want to pee on him when I was a man as well as at full moon?" Remus clarified with a smile.

Harry appreciated his friend's attempt to lighten the mood and managed a small smile before he nodded.

"Sometimes," Remus admitted calmly, "usually around the time of my transformation. I was lucky, I was bitten when I was very young and by the time I had to interact with people other than my family, I had learned to control the wolf even when it was close to the surface. Adjusting to the instincts and the fact that it is not just at full moon that you are affected can be the most difficult part of becoming a werewolf for some. Since you seem to be able to change at will I can only assume you are assailed by this problem all of the time."

"And other things," Harry replied quietly with a nod.

Remus gave him an understanding smile.

"I may only be a werewolf," his companion said seriously, "but you can talk to me about anything, Harry. Whatever you need to get off your chest, just tell me, I won't judge you."

And Remus was probably the only person from whom that phrase could have rung true. Harry gave his friend a long, appraising look and then he began to talk. Everything seemed to want to come tumbling out of his mouth at the same time and he just started speaking as if his life depended on it.

Remus sat and listened patiently, offering phrases of comfort and understanding whenever Harry ran out of words, and Harry felt as if it was the greatest gift anyone had given him. He spoke of what he remembered of the ceremony; how afraid he had been when he realised what was happening; how out of control he felt now; and how good it had been to kill Voldemort. He confessed the he had enjoyed the slaughter and how the memory of it brought part of him pleasure, and he explained how he feared the return of the hunger which seemed able to bury his humanity. Remus never interrupted him and he never tried to tell him that these things were terrible; the werewolf just listened and accepted.

When they were finally interrupted, Harry felt as if he had been speaking forever. A light tap on the door stopped him in mid sentence and then Tonks put her head into the room.

"Caveo is being a prat again," the Auror apologised quickly; "Remus, time to leave before Mr I'm-in-charge-of-this-operation-so-I-am-God finds you in here."

The werewolf stood up with an apologetic smile.

"I'll come back when I can," Remus promised faithfully.

"Thank you," Harry responded genuinely, but he didn't know what else to say.

He stood up and stepped off the bed quickly, wrapping Remus in a one-armed hug, since the other was still occupied holding up his sheet. The werewolf hugged him back and patted him on the shoulder as they pulled back from each other.

"Stay strong, Harry," Remus said warmly, "we're here for you."

It was only as his companion turned and walked towards the door that Harry remembered the dream Remus had interrupted. For some reason it felt important and there were things he needed to know.

"Have they taken Malfoy to the Ministry?" he asked quickly, before he was left alone again.

Tonks and Remus shared a look and then Tonks shrugged.

"No," she replied openly, "we aren't moving anything including people until tomorrow. Why, did you want to see him?"

Harry shook his head rapidly; he didn't think he could cope with that right then.

"No," he said quickly, beginning to think that his dream had just been a rather vivid fantasy, "um, thanks."

He turned away from the door, not sure what to make of the insistence on the part of his subconscious that the dream meant something.

"I'll have some supper and some clothes sent up," Remus said as he left the room, but Harry was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to really pay much attention.

=====

Malfoy was a few feet in front of him between the two Aurors and they were walking down the corridor: it was the same scene he had dreamed before. There were two people coming from the other direction and the Aurors each had hold of one of Malfoy's arms to prevent any attempt at escape. It was a perfectly calm scene and yet Harry felt as if his life would be in danger at any moment.

It wasn't until the woman, who looked like an ordinary file clerk, walked past the small group and stopped that anything strange happened. Then everything seemed to slow down as Harry watched her drop the papers she was carrying to reveal a drawn wand. She turned on the spot and pointed it straight at Malfoy and the syllables of the killing curse dropped from her mouth.

There was nothing the two Aurors could do as the green flash lanced straight at their charge; both were thrown aside as spell collided with wizard.

"You'll not buy your way out of this one, Malfoy," the woman said resolutely as her victim crumpled to the ground.

Harry sat up, breathing hard and with an overriding need to wail his distress into the night. It was so strong that keeping it inside physically hurt and he suddenly knew what the dream was: it was a premonition of death and the banshee in him knew the truth of it. For long seconds he stared into the darkness, unable to bring himself to do anything as the image of Malfoy engulfed in green flame played over and over again in his mind's eye.

Someone he was connected to was going to die and the banshee wanted to scream his distress into the world, but he was not just a banshee and he did not have to impotently wail his grief over the countryside. Pulling himself together as well as he could he moved to the door and began banging on it.

"I need to talk to Dumbledore," he called through it, desperate to do something to change what he had seen.

He managed to control himself enough to step away from the door knowing that the wards would indicate to those outside that he was no longer close. He expected his guards to open up and find out what he needed, but he waited for a good few minutes as nothing happened. Walking back to the barrier between himself and the outside world, he banged again.

"Open this bloody door," he demanded, not liking the fact that he was being ignored one little bit.

"We can't do that, Mr Potter," a voice replied eventually, "our orders are no one in and no one out. Go back to sleep."

Harry boiled over and lunged at the door. His hand connected with the handle and he felt the wards trying to fight him off, but he was not about to let them win. There were some very serious locking charms and powerful barrier magic between him and the outside, but he didn't remotely care. Letting the banshee's instincts and a collection of other talents rise to the surface, he twisted the handle viciously and wrenched open the door. The Aurors on either side of the door jumped back instantly, drawing their wands and rounding on him.

"Albus Dumbledore or Minerva McGonagall, now!" Harry bellowed at the startled Ministry employees and then he stepped back into the room and slammed the door very loudly.

If that had not woken up the whole manor he didn't know what would. His first impulse was to wipe the opposition out of the way and go and find Dumbledore himself, but he knew that would probably end up with people injured or killed and he did not want any more death on his conscience. Knowing that whatever happened would take a few minutes he began to pace.

He was only just holding on to himself when the door finally opened to reveal the headmaster and Remus. Remus looked as if he had just woken up, but Dumbledore appeared as fresh as a daisy.

"What is it, Harry?" the headmaster asked calmly as Remus shut the door behind them

"Malfoy," Harry replied firmly.

The other two wizards shared a look and Harry was pretty sure they thought he had gone over the edge.

"You can't let them take him to the Ministry tomorrow," he elucidated quickly, "there is..." he found he couldn't say it, "and he..." something stopped the words in his throat, "he's going to die," he finished without being able to explain at all.

"How do you know, Harry?" Remus asked in his usual calm tone.

Harry opened his mouth to tell his friend about the dream and nothing came out. He tried again to explain what he had seen and still no words.

"He's going to die," he said eventually, totally unable to express himself in any other way.

It was completely bizarre and yet he could not say anything else.

"Did you have a premonition, Harry?" Dumbledore asked kindly and Harry was never more relieved to have the perceptive old wizard around.

He nodded and gave up trying to speak when all that started in his throat was a peculiar little whine. The urge to scream what he knew from the nearest window was incredible and yet he could not even form a single word.

"The curse of the banshee," Dumbledore observed calmly; "the ability to predict death, but being totally unable to communicate to prevent that death, being left with nothing but a deadly cry to announce their grief to the universe."

Harry opened his eyes in surprise; it all seemed to make sense when the headmaster explained it.

"Well done, My Boy," Dumbledore told him, "that must have taken great force of will. I shall go and explain the situation to the Ministry team and I am sure other arrangements can be made."

Harry sagged with relief.

"All will be well, Harry," the headmaster said kindly, "don't you worry. Do try to get some more sleep; I suspect tomorrow is going to be a long day."

It was with almost complete certainty that he would not be sleeping again that night that Harry nodded anyway. He might be sitting up until dawn, but he did not want to cause anyone else the same discomfort.

"Thank you," he said quietly; his voice having returned now that he was no longer trying to speak about Malfoy.

"Are you going to be all right, Harry?" Remus asked in a concerned tone and Harry gave his friend a quick affirmative.

It was not going to be a fun night, and he needed to put some of his demons back where they belonged, but he would be okay. Knowing that Dumbledore

would not allow anything to happen to one of his students, Harry sank back on to the bed as the two wizards left. He hoped fervently that he would not have these visions often.

=====

Breakfast arrived some time after the sun came up, and the cheerful house elf presented him with the tray and basked in his thanks. He had the feeling that Malfoy house elves were not used to kind words from their masters. Some of the smells coming from the tray actually appealed to him, but other things, which he had been quite fond of, turned his stomach just to look at them. Eating carefully what his nose found appetising he picked his way round the breakfast tray and actually managed to enjoy it.

It wasn't until he had finished and was looking out of the window that anything odd occurred. Usually the house elf came back to pick up the tray, but this time the door opened and one of his Auror guards walked in. Harry held himself perfectly still and watched as the man looked at his half eaten breakfast.

"You didn't eat your porridge," the Auror said in an almost conversational tone, "want me to leave it?"

"Um, no thank you," Harry replied, rather surprised that he had been spoken to.

"Anything else I can get you?" the man persisted, which Harry found very odd.

The couple of times he had seen his guards when the door opened to admit someone they had acted as if he didn't exist; that this wizard appeared to be trying to be pleasant caused all sorts of alarm bells to go off. Letting just a little of the creature within free he assessed his guard. Under the polite veneer the man was nervous and somewhat annoyed.

"No thank you," Harry replied evenly, "I'm not very hungry."

For a moment he thought the Auror might push the issue, but the man eventually nodded and picked up the tray. As his guard left and the door was once again closed, Harry let one of his aspects even closer to the surface and extended his hearing further than normal.

"He didn't eat the porridge," he heard the Auror say.

"But that McGonagall woman said it was his favourite, I heard her tell the house elf," the familiar tones of Caveo said in a very annoyed fashion. "How the hell are we supposed to put him out for the trip now?"

Harry found himself growling; they had tried to drug him. It took a great deal of self control not to wrench the door off its hinges and tell the Auror exactly what he thought of that idea. The wards had been strengthened since he'd decimated them, but he was not under the illusion they would hold him if he wanted out. Thanking his rebellious stomach for saving him from whatever concoction the Ministry people had decided to feed him he sat down and tried to decide what he could do to prevent them trying again.

=====

By refusing any further offers of food and drink, Harry knew he was frustrating the efforts of the Aurors to subdue him, and he quite enjoyed it. He also made

regular requests to see Dumbledore over the next hour and a half, but it did no good and he doubted his requests were even being passed on. He smelt a very large rat and he was beginning to seriously consider freeing himself and bypassing the Ministry. The only thing that kept him in his room was the fact that he did not trust himself.

In the end he decided to practice his Occlumency some more; at least that was productive and then he would be ready for anything that might happen. As it was, he was totally unprepared for what did occur.

One moment he was trying to close his thoughts down and eliminate any emotional reactions from his mind and the next he was so consumed with despair that he had no chance to stop the cry that started in the centre of his chest and erupted from his throat. It was worse than the wail he had released after he had killed Voldemort and it actually caused physical destruction in its wake. Furniture shook; glass shattered and wards tumbled down as banshee power combined with everything else in Harry's mixed up body and refused to be impotent anymore.

He knew without a doubt that Malfoy was being taken to the Ministry; he had never been so sure of anything in his life and he knew that it was a death sentence. There was no hesitation in his movements as he surged to his feet and ran for the shattered window, smashing through what was left of the ornate glass to the ground below. For a split second his body almost hovered as he descended, landing lightly on the grass below the second floor window, but the moment he hit the ground he shifted.

The wolf was faster than anything else and he ran as quickly as his legs would carry him towards the front of the house. Nothing would have stopped him as he focussed only on one thing: preventing Malfoy leaving. When he rounded the side of the building on to the main drive he saw two Aurors about to put Malfoy into a Ministry car and he did not even think about pausing as he leapt at the nearest of the two officials.

Wolf met man and Harry flattened the unprepared Auror with his considerable bulk, then without hesitating he took a mouthful of Malfoy's robes and dragged him away from the car. Unprepared for the attack, the Slytherin overbalanced and fell heavily, rolling off the drive and on to the grass. Once his prize stopped moving Harry jumped to stand over the fallen wizard, facing the Aurors and growling menacingly.

His opponents rounded on him with spells and he shifted form without even knowing he was doing it. His vision dimmed and the air around him grew cold as the magic bounced off of him harmlessly. The Aurors existed in his sight as bright spots of warmth and life and he was torn between trying to take that life and protecting the warmth he felt behind him.

"Expecto Patronum," one of the Aurors cast desperately and bright silver light filled Harry's awareness.

He shifted again, the world becoming flat and lifeless to his eyes as his sense of smell sharpened until it was almost overwhelming. He felt the skin of his neck change texture and stiffen and his tongue lengthen and fork. The Patronus coming towards him faded as its reason to be ceased to exist.

"By Merlin," one of the Aurors said as Harry looked at him, hissing his anger, and then the man turned to stone.

The other Auror threw his arms over his eyes and dived behind the car. The thrill of the hunt almost drew Harry away from his position, but he shifted again, holding himself in place with the enticing thrill of a human heartbeat.

"Enough of this!" Harry had never heard Dumbledore shout and he suddenly knew why; at the headmaster's instruction it was almost as if the universe came to a standstill.

He crouched down automatically, sensing danger and wanting to protect the human that was his. He snarled as the Auror behind the car came up with his wand in hand, but the wizard's arm went back and his wand went flying to the side as Dumbledore showed that he was serious.

"What is going on here?" the headmaster demanded as a hoard of the man's colleagues came charging out of the door from which Dumbledore had emerged previously.

Caveo was in the lead of his team and Harry growled loudly as he saw the man; the desire to attack was like a drug in his system and only one thing held him back. A light touch on his ankle brought his focus right back to where he was and he looked down to see a composed, but shaken Malfoy looking back at him.

"Take him down," Caveo ordered, causing Harry to flick right to the battle.

"Hold," Dumbledore countered with such authority that every single Auror obeyed, even Caveo.

Harry bared his teeth, ready to defend himself and Malfoy, but the tableau held.

"Do you really wish to end your life so soon, Auror Caveo?" Dumbledore asked evenly; his voice not back to its usual calm, but the terror inducing power cut down to a minimum.

"We have a duty to protect the public," the Auror replied firmly, "he cannot be allowed to get away."

"I do not believe Harry is going anywhere," the headmaster pointed out smoothly.

It did not seem to have occurred to Caveo that Harry was not trying to escape and the wizard appeared rather floored by the notion.

"Where were you taking Mr Malfoy?" Dumbledore continued, completely in control of the situation.

"The Ministry, as per regulations," Caveo replied rigidly.

When the amused twinkle was not in the headmaster's eye he could be a most scary individual; even Harry could appreciate that and at the moment he was feeling very scary himself.

"I do not make it a habit of warning of danger for my health," Dumbledore said evenly; "you are a fool young man and I can only hope you live to understand how much of one. By the power vested in me by the Wizengamot I relieve you of your duty, Auror Caveo; remove yourself from this property immediately."

"You can't do that," the Auror said incredulously.

"Actually, he can," Tonks said from behind him, "article three hundred and five, paragraph two: Any chief official of the Wizengamot may relieve an Auror of his or her duty if they deem them negligent in the care of their prisoner and in so being, deliberately endanger the afore mentioned prisoner's life."

The currently red haired (as in scarlet) Auror was not even trying to hide how much she was enjoying this. Harry could feel the animosity for Caveo coming off her in waves. The desire to give the wizard something to remember him by was quite tempting, but the fingers on his ankle held him at bay.

Caveo glared around the group and realising that he had no support at all stormed towards the front gate; Dumbledore immediately took charge.

"Gentlemen, Ladies," the headmaster started politely, "it appears we have injured parties. There are two of your number outside Mr Potter's room suffering from exposure to a banshee's cry, and Auror Jones appears to have been petrified. I suggest arrangements be made to remove all three to St Mungo's as soon as possible for treatment."

Suddenly people began to move and Harry found the activity very unsettling, he almost backed away when Dumbledore walked towards him.

"Harry, My Dear Boy," the headmaster said, slipping off his purple outer robe to reveal a bright blue one underneath, "you appear to have lost your clothes again."

Placating words probably wouldn't have worked, but Dumbledore's off hand comment was so out of the blue that Harry did not even try to object as the robe was draped across his shoulders and his mind tried to catch up.

"It is nearly December," the seemingly batty old man said conversationally, "you will catch a terrible cold if you are not careful. Remus, if you would be so kind as to assist Mr Malfoy."

The headmaster's approach was so completely normal that Harry never even tried to resist as he was steered back towards the house. Before he really knew what was happening he was installed in a large wingback chair, in front of a nice warm fire, still wrapped in Dumbledore's robe, and with a steaming mug of hot chocolate in his hands. Malfoy had been placed in a similar chair on the other side of the hearth and treated in exactly the same manner. Since Malfoy was right where he could see him, Harry found that he could control any inappropriate urges.

He sniffed warily at the hot chocolate, unsure whether the treatment for Dementor exposure might cause a bad reaction, but it smelt appetising and he took a tentative sip. It tasted remarkably good and he found himself relaxing slightly despite the situation.

Dumbledore was conferring with Tonks, Kingsley and Remus over by the door, which left Harry and Malfoy looking at each other. Harry didn't really know what to do; how did you talk to someone you had raped and then mauled?

"That banshee wail was for me?" Malfoy eventually asked as the silence drew out.

Opening his mouth to reply Harry found that he was once again without voice and just nodded. Half of him could not meet Malfoy's eyes and the other half wanted

to stride across the room and make a claim; he settled for staring at his mug in hopes that what he was thinking would not show on his face.

"You saved me again," Malfoy said wryly. "Trying to make a new career for yourself, Potter?"

Harry looked up sharply, not sure if the Slytherin was making fun of him and he caught Malfoy's grey-eyed gaze as anger gave him momentary courage. To his surprise his companion raised an eyebrow and smiled at him. Harry looked away again as Dumbledore walked over.

"It is time to make sure you are both safe," the headmaster said pleasantly. "The news of Voldemort's demise is being officially announced today and I believe you will both be much more comfortable away from here. It has been decided to return to Hogwarts."

Harry went completely cold and did not bother to try and hide his shock and his fear.

"The children," Harry whispered as his mind filled with all sorts of nasty possibilities; part of him looked at the school like a feast laid out for his delight.

"For once I find myself agreeing with Potter," Malfoy said evenly. "I am a self confessed Death Eater and he is a Dark creature; a school would seem to be an unlikely place for either of us."

Dumbledore smiled kindly at them both, back in the persona of the bumbling old headmaster.

"Actually I believe it to be the safest place for both of you," Dumbledore explained patiently; "Hogwarts has some unique properties which make it perfect for our needs. You Mr Malfoy cannot be taken to the Ministry, and until such time as you are cleared of charges, Young Man, you must remain in a secured location. There are ancient precautions at Hogwarts which will allow you to be spelled so that you cannot leave the grounds, but you will be free to roam."

It did not seem to be anywhere in Dumbledore's mindset that Malfoy might not be cleared, which Harry actually appreciated, because he wasn't sure what he would do if the Ministry tried anything with his human.

"And, Harry," the headmaster continued, "you are far too powerful for any measures the Ministry might take against you. The Department of Mysteries is probably the only place that might have somewhere remotely powerful enough to keep you secure and I think it would be better for everyone concerned that you not be put through the stress of returning there. I believe therefore that there is only one other place that will hold you for your own as well as others' safety; a place which is the sum of the founder's genius: the Room of Requirement."

For a moment Harry was not sure he understood correctly, and then he realised that Dumbledore was probably correct. The room was adaptive; if the headmaster required it of it, the room could probably keep him in. If the founders could not hold him, what could?

"When do we leave?" Harry asked quietly, shrinking down into the robe just a little bit more as he tried to take comfort in the fact that there might be one place he could be made safe, but it was an empty comfort as he also wondered if he would ever again be allowed beyond locked doors.

"As soon as transport can be arranged," Dumbledore replied.

Harry went back to staring at his mug of hot chocolate, unable to meet anyone's eyes as he lost himself in his own dark thoughts.

=====

Transport it turned out was a secure portkey and he, Malfoy, Dumbledore, Remus and Tonks all arrived in the headmaster's office just under an hour later. By this time Harry had clothes that were actually his size, which made him feel a little more comfortable, but he was quite frankly terrified of himself. The moment they landed, Harry felt the power of the school like a blanket around him, and it was almost as if he could reach out and touch it.

The magic sang to him and he found himself quite fascinated, looking around the study as if he had never seen it before. The darkness within him rose at the sensation of such energy and he wanted to touch the walls to see if they would give up their secrets. It was as he was fighting to hold himself still that the sixth being in the room made himself known, as Fawkes launched himself into the air with a trilling song.

The Phoenix landed first on Malfoy's shoulder, much to the Slytherin's shock, singing his heart out the entire time and then the bird jumped to land on Harry's. When Fawkes came to rest on him the Phoenix's song changed, but was still just as sweet, and Harry felt his knees go weak. If it hadn't of been for Remus he could have fallen as all strength left him.

Fawkes continued to sing and Harry began to become light headed, but it was strangely wonderful as well and his mind soared free of the darkness curling around his body. He sagged into Remus' arms, and, for the first time since Voldemort had kidnapped him, he felt at peace. Nothing mattered, nothing but the Phoenix's song.

Harry woke up very slowly feeling rested and at ease, which was a very pleasant surprise. It took him a few minutes to remember where he was and how he had ended up there. Sitting up rapidly he looked around at a room that was totally unfamiliar, but the feeling around him was the same and he knew he was still at Hogwarts. This had to be the Room of Requirement, but it was like he had never seen it before. He was sitting on a large four poster bed that had deep red sheets, just like in Gryffindor tower. There was an open door to the right where he could see a large bathroom and to the left was a library type area with shelves full of books and a large desk.

Unable to stop himself he reached out with the power inside his body and felt for the wards around the room; it was like hitting a brick wall and he lurched back onto the bed as the wards threw him off. He threw the pillow next to him in frustration as the part of him that wanted to be free rounded in anger, but his fit of pique did not last long. He calmed down surprisingly quickly as far as he was concerned and began to wonder what exactly was going on with him.

There was a letter sitting on the bedside table addressed to him so he picked it up and opened it quickly.

Dear Harry,

Fawkes' song appeared to affect you quite distinctly, and we brought you to the Room of Requirement while you were under his influence. I do hope you slept

well. Dobby has access to the room and if you need anything just call for him. If you are open to visitors tell Jeremy Kats, the portrait next to the door and he will allow us in if we call.

Rest assured we are all working to find a solution to your unique situation.

Yours,

Albus Dumbledore

For a while Harry just sat there looking at the headmaster's neat cursive script; he was home, at Hogwarts, and yet he felt like an alien. Then again he felt like a stranger in his own skin so it wasn't as if he had expected to be comfortable with his new surroundings.

Climbing off the bed he padded into the bathroom and tried to ignore the mirror on the wall as he relieved himself. He did not want to see the changes in himself, but as he washed his hands he really couldn't avoid seeing at least a partial reflection and he snatched his gaze away at the treacherous glance. He was turning away when he became angry with himself; how could he go through life afraid of his own reflection? Thumping the basin with his fist he glared at himself in the mirror and refused to flinch away.

"What are you?" he demanded of his reflection.

He could not understand how something so ugly on the inside could look so beautiful on the outside. His thoughts were full of death and violence, and yet ethereal, alluring features stared back at him from the mirror. He was a contradiction, and it repelled him; he was the devil in disguise.

How many creatures waited behind his green eyes to devour the innocent and unwary? He had not heard from Professor Snape yet, so he really did not know what to expect until it happened. So far he had concrete proof of incubus, vampire, werewolf, banshee and Dementor. There was also his sense of the emotions around him which he assumed was something to do with the incubus and the boggart, possibly also the Dementor and he had no idea why he could move through solid objects, or why he seemed to have a vague desire to absorb magic.

Of course, of all things, there was also the basilisk: about the only aspect of this he had to be thankful about was that his skewed version of the creature appeared only to be able to petrify and not kill with a look. If that Auror had dropped down dead he suspected he would now either be surrounded by the corpses of those defending their colleague, or be dead himself; Dumbledore or no Dumbledore. What else lurked beneath the pale surface?

Reaching out, he touched the mirror as if it would answer all his questions, but cool green eyes just continued to look back at him. Could be ever hope to control what was inside of him or would it consume him? Turning from his reflection he walked quickly back into the other room; at least here he had something to distract his troubled thoughts and he walked over to his small library. If he could not fight what he was, at least he could understand it, and he set about trying to find a book that might have information about the magic that curled through his body.

=====

"Mr Potter," a voice said from behind him as he leafed through his third book on magical creatures.

He turned, surprised to have been addressed and found that the empty frame beside the door was no longer without an occupant. A smartly dressed seventeenth century gentleman looked out of the canvas at him.

"Hello," Harry responded, unsure of why the portrait would be talking to him.

"I'm Jeremy Kats," the man introduced himself, "and Professor Dumbledore asked me to look after your door. Normally I wouldn't interrupt you, since you have not given me notice to alert you of visitors, but there is a Slytherin outside to see you, and he is rather insistent. Should I allow him in?"

Harry was beginning to suspect there was some sort of calming charm on the room, since he felt more stable now than he had since he first woke up, and he nodded. If Snape had come to see him it was probably important, and hopefully the Potions' Master would have some news.

"Yes, thank you," he replied politely.

Jeremy disappeared and Harry went back to the page he had been reading, not looking up again until he heard the door clicking closed. When he did glance towards the entrance he froze; it wasn't Snape.

"Expecting someone else, I see," Malfoy said casually and walked further into the room.

Harry suddenly found that maybe the alleged calming spell on the room was only so useful, as every cell of his body screamed and would have lunged at Malfoy like first years onto the welcome feast, if he had not been clutching the table as if his life depended on it.

"Are you insane?" Harry asked, desperately trying to keep himself in check.

Malfoy was back in school uniform, but Harry did not think he had ever seen anyone look quite so edible, and in his case that was literal as well as figurative.

"We need to talk," the interloped said pointedly and was definitely not walking back towards the door.

"Malfoy," Harry said, his voice deepening with a slight growl, whether he liked it or not, "remember what I did last time we were alone? Get out before I do something we will both regret."

If he had been hungry he would have pounced on Malfoy without a second thought, as it was, lust and various other desires stirred in the pit of his stomach and he could barely stay seated.

"No," Malfoy said simply and sat on the bed.

Harry closed his eyes and tried to banish the mental images that move put into his mind. Occlumency abandoned him as he fought to empty his thoughts only to have his very prominent instincts provide him with yet more possibilities.

"I don't blame you, Potter," the words dragged him back from the edge of the pit he was looking into and he glanced over at Malfoy, unsure of what to reply. "I admire your strength of character."

Harry would have laughed if he had not been so afraid that the reaction would be his undoing.

"That strength is failing," he said rather desperately.

The longer he was in Malfoy's presence the harder it became to ignore what his body was telling him and the quieter the voice of control was speaking. They were alone, there was not a raging battle going on and there was nothing else for Harry to focus on: the Slytherin had his undivided attention.

"Malfoy, every fibre of my being wants to do that to you again," Harry could think of nothing that might make the Slytherin leave except the truth, "please go."

For a few moments his focus of awareness did not move, the Slytherin remained elegantly poised where he was sitting, and then he rose to his feet. Harry closed his eyes and tried to hang on for the long seconds it would take Malfoy to cross the room to the door. Only as the click of the door did not come and he realised that feelings of curiosity, trepidation and want were assailing him, did he look up in shock and realise that his prey had not walked towards the door.

"I know," the Slytherin said from no more than a few inches away, "I can see it every time you look at me. Potter, I owe you for my life twice and for my mother's once, you can have whatever you want. They have locked you in here with no idea what to do when the hunger returns; well I am your solution."

Breathing was difficult as pure, unadulterated lust tried to strip Harry of any control he had left. The hunger was not forcing him along, burying his humanity in its intensity, but he wanted Malfoy with everything he was, and he almost reached out.

"No," he growled, more at himself than Malfoy and sent his chair skittering backwards as he pushed himself away from the table and away from the Slytherin, "I don't want you indebted to me, Malfoy. I don't want to use you; you are better than that."

Momentary shock flicked across the Slytherin's pale features, but he still did not move away. For a moment Malfoy appeared indecisive and then he shrugged off his outer school robe and put it on the table. As Harry watched, caught between fascinated horror and wanton desire, the Slytherin stepped up to him once more and reached out to touch the side of his face.

"Maybe I want this too," were the quiet words that became Harry's undoing.

There was only so much self control that he could manage and with that gesture Malfoy snapped Harry's will like a twig. The incubus surged to the surface as it tasted victory and he dragged his prey to him, forcing their bodies against each other and their lips together. Malfoy met his passion with equal fervour and the kiss left them both breathless and bloody by the time they pulled back; each having bitten the other at some point during the act.

Malfoy's eyes were bright with the same delirium that Harry felt running through his body and all doubt fled his mind. This human was willing and his: there was nothing else that mattered.

"Take off your clothes," he commanded firmly, knowing that if he had anything to do with undressing Malfoy, there would not be a lot left of the Slytherin's school uniform.

There was no hesitation in Malfoy's movements as his prey moved to obey and garments were shed with graceful efficiency. Harry watched every move and drank in the sight as pale skin was revealed to him. Malfoy did not even pause at his underwear, simply shedding it as well until he stood in front of Harry as naked as the day he was born.

There was nervous excitement coming from his prey as Harry looked Malfoy up and down, but this was not the same frightened human he had taken to him last time. The Slytherin stood with confidence and desire in his stance and it drew Harry like a moth to a flame.

He moved forward, placing a hand on one pale shoulder and for a moment holding himself completely still to admire what was on offer. Malfoy was perfect and, if his skin had not been warm, Harry could almost have believed it was made of creamy stone.

The Slytherin was really much bolder this time and as Harry paused Malfoy took the initiative, lifting hands to start unbuttoning the loose shirt Harry was wearing. As fingers unfastened buttons and pushed aside fabric, Malfoy replaced them with his mouth and Harry found himself surprisingly not in control. Not that he was complaining as he put his head back and closed his eyes, revelling in the sensation of Malfoy's teeth and tongue on his chest.

When the Slytherin worked his way onto his knees, reached Harry's waist and carried on going with the whole removing clothing and then using his mouth idea, Harry had to grab the side of the desk to stop his knees giving way. Sensual, warm hands pushed his trousers and his underwear towards the floor and Malfoy fixed his wonderful mouth on Harry's throbbing erection. They were too far from the wall and Harry did not want to bother with the brain power to remain upright. Entwining his fingers in Malfoy's hair he pulled the Slytherin back from him with a firm, smooth movement.

Grey eyes looked up at him from behind blond lashes with the most wanton expression and Harry could not help smiling.

"Bed, now," he said decisively.

He had not bothered putting on shoes and socks after he woke up, so he stepped out of his garments easily and then pulled Malfoy back to his feet using his current grip. The Slytherin did not resist and came easily, winding his arms around Harry under his shirt after he was released and kissing him leisurely before turning and doing what he was told. Following Malfoy to the bed Harry allowed himself to be kissed again and pushed back on to the bed. Then the Slytherin went back to what he had been doing and Harry arched into the touch, enjoying the opening of his senses as he became more and more aroused.

Not being in sexual control was a new sensation, not that Harry was particularly experienced, but the incubus part of him knew what he was doing; and not taking control seemed somehow wrong, yet deliciously wonderful at the same time. He arched his back, spread his legs to give Malfoy better access and let himself enjoy the skilful ministrations of his willing victim. Whatever else Malfoy might have been, he was definitely not sexually inexperienced with persons of the same gender.

The more the Slytherin caressed him, the more he wanted and Harry lifted his head, needing to see Malfoy as his bed fellow touched him. He felt the changes

begin in his body as dexterous fingers played with the inside of his thighs and Malfoy sucked him in deep. The moan that began deep in his chest came out of his mouth in a long breathy sound as he watched small ridges rise out of his skin to form little blunt spines in two long lines.

Malfoy pulled back, breathing hard and watching in fascination at the alterations occurring to Harry. The Slytherin's hot gaze was almost as erotic as his sinful tongue and Harry literally swelled under those eyes. He looked directly into Malfoy's face as he felt his body responding and when he was descended on again he put his head back and called out his encouragement to the room in general. With Malfoy's hand working the quickly slicking shaft and the Slytherin's mouth working the head it was not long before Harry arched completely off the mattress and came with shuddering gasps.

His bed partner did not stop his ministrations until Harry collapsed back on to the bed. Then the Slytherin looked at him with a very smug smile, which did nothing to quench the fires of desire that rather than being satisfied with his incredible orgasm were actually burning brighter by the second.

He pounced as soon as he could gather the muscle control to move and he rolled Malfoy on to the bed. His first instinct was to turn his prey over and take the Slytherin as he had before, but Malfoy held his ground as Harry tried to flip him.

"Let me see you," the Slytherin requested breathlessly, "please."

Harry sat back, positioning himself between Malfoy's legs and looking down at his prize. He knew he would not be resisted if he chose to insist, but he liked looking into those powerfully emotive eyes. Pushing his lover's legs up and apart he ran his hands down the undersides of Malfoy's thighs. He moved his fingers to run them over his companion's sensitive balls and further down between the cheeks of his arse. The long nails on his fingers retracted automatically as he chose to put his fingers to other uses, but what he found was an entrance already slick and ready.

"You came prepared," Harry said with what he suspected was rather a manic smile.

"Of course I did," Malfoy replied, curling his hands into the bed sheets as he spoke, "I'm a Slytherin."

With a slight shift of hips and a little thrust up, his prey made himself very clear, and Harry did not hesitate to take up the invitation. Malfoy grunted when Harry breached him, but the Slytherin did not tense and Harry slid in smoothly. The gasp from those talented lips was one of unbridled pleasure.

"Make me scream again," Malfoy said breathlessly.

It was not a request Harry had any intention of denying and as he pulled out slightly he placed his hands on his lover's hips and pushed the smallest amount of power through his limbs. Malfoy moaned and pulled on the sheets, his legs falling apart further and Harry took the opportunity to push back in. The almost ecstatic panting that came from his lover as he did so, and the rush of pure sexual energy Harry felt let him know that he had struck the right spot.

Now he was feeding off Malfoy's sexual high as well as his own, and nothing could have stopped him pushing his lover to the limit. Thrust after thrust he drew moans and sighs and words of encouragement, while the whole time those grey

eyes pinned Harry down. When he reached down to take hold of Malfoy's straining erection his lover almost threw his head back and closed his eyes, but pure obstinacy seemed to have hold of the Slytherin and he did not look away.

Harry stroked his lover in time with his movements and Malfoy's sounds became totally incoherent; the words didn't make sense any more. His prey was almost there, so close to the edge that Harry could taste the energy in the air around them. Thrusting in hard one more time he fisted Malfoy's cock and forced magic through his hand. Now his lover's eyes did close and his head went back as he came, screaming Harry's name. The power release hit Harry like a wave and he climaxed for a second time, collapsing onto Malfoy as the concussion force of sex magic and sexual release meeting took his mind away for a moment.

When he came back down from the high, he found himself nose to nose with his lover and grey eyes were once again looking at him. That gaze was sated and sexually replete and a little smile played at the corners of the Slytherin's mouth.

"Was that loud enough?" Malfoy asked irreverently and all Harry could do was smile.

They were still intimately joined and part of him did not want to give that up, but the incubus was satisfied and Harry felt his body shutting down accordingly. It did not feel as if the sexual predator was far below the surface, but he did not believe that Malfoy was in any state for another round and, reluctantly, he climbed off his lover. He was not really sure what their relationship was, but he liked it none-the-less.

They lay spooned against one another with Harry holding Malfoy in a loose embrace, drifting in the post coital haze. Harry found that the darkness within him had other, less pleasant plans for his lover, but the voices were very dim and easy to ignore. This was as close to appeasing both sides of his nature as he could possibly come, and he did not want it to end. Tightening his grip slightly on his relaxed companion, Harry chose to push other thoughts away and enjoy the warmth of the moment.

The End

Alteration

Summary: Harry has returned to Hogwarts after Dumbledore took charge of the situation at Malfoy Manor, but is he safe from the Ministry and is the world safe from him?

Author's Notes: Okay so this is turning into an epic, but I will continue in the vein that each story adds to the last and the sequence could stop at the end of any of them. Thanks go to Soph for beta reading this as usual.

Chapter 1

When Malfoy shifted as if to move off the bed, Harry's instinctive reaction was to tighten his loose embrace and not let his bed partner go. Surprisingly that caused the Slytherin to laugh.

"I have to use the loo," Malfoy said and gently, but firmly moved Harry's arm.

It was another one of those moments when Harry was sharply aware that if he insisted in his position, his companion would have no choice but to conform, and yet found himself letting the Slytherin have his way even though his reasoning in the situation had nothing to do with logic. Watching Malfoy climb off the bed and saunter towards the bathroom in all his naked glory gave Harry a nice view, but that wasn't why he let it happen either. It was almost as if Malfoy had a get out of jail free card, which the darker part of Harry found strangely disturbing and the human part couldn't quite understand.

"You should think about getting up as well," his companion said as he disappeared into the bathroom, "it is only lunch time after all."

At this, one little voice in his head told the world to go shove its rationality, another pointed out that during the day was a perfect time to be sleeping, and a third looked at the discarded books on the table and agreed that possibly Malfoy had a point. They had been lying around for a good half an hour since their rather satisfying tryst and Harry slowly stretched and climbed off the bed. The shirt he was still partially wearing was crumpled and a little on the sticky side so he pulled it off and threw it at the basket in the corner.

He looked at the door of the bathroom and considered invading it as well since he wanted to be clean, but then turned and walked to the desk, leaving Malfoy to his ablutions alone. Picking up his trousers and his underwear he laid them over the back of the chair and aimlessly glanced at the book he had discarded when his companion arrived, waiting for the Slytherin to finish whatever he was doing. The illustration on the open page was of a banshee mid wail, forever caught crying her grief to the world, and it was a mournful picture that filled him with a strange melancholy. They had briefly studied banshees last year in DADA and about the only thing that had been important at the time was to avoid the creatures, and cast a silencing charm at the first opportunity if faced with one about to open her mouth.

Now he found that the creatures' fate to scream their pain was much more important to him and he ran a finger over the moving picture, wondering at how little the Wizarding world really understood about magical creatures. When he finally moved, he turned and found Malfoy watching him from the doorway of the bathroom. The Slytherin had a very contemplative expression on his face and Harry could not help wondering what was going through his companion's mind.

"I never thought of you as someone who would be comfortable naked," Malfoy said eventually and wandered further into the room, looking around for his clothes.

Harry glanced down at himself and realised that he hadn't actually been thinking about it at all. He had thought about putting his clothes back on because the air in the room was slightly less warm than was comfortable without activity, but he really wasn't bothered otherwise. It occurred to him that this was quite odd considering the fact that he had not wanted to look at himself in the mirror, but he could not explain quite a lot of his mind at the moment so he didn't see why this should be any different.

"I wasn't," he admitted honestly, and walked towards the bathroom.

He was sure he would end up analysing what he was feeling sooner or later, since it was in his nature to brood, but right then he didn't feel like it and he simply wanted to be clean. He wandered into the smaller room and set about his immediate task, letting his mind drift away from serious thoughts as he became absorbed in what he was doing. Malfoy's curiosity could wait until later.

It was only as he stepped out of the bathroom again, clean to his own satisfaction that his thoughts clicked back on, and they were suddenly focused on only one thing. Malfoy was slowly pulling on his clothes and the glimpses of pale flesh in graceful motion high-jacked every sentient impulse in Harry's body. Motor function kicked back in after a moment and he discarded the towel he was using to dry himself off in favour of putting his fingers to better use on his lover.

He walked up behind Malfoy as the Slytherin was pulling on his shirt and he found his hands moving without much conscious thought as he reached up and pulled the collar away from his companion's neck before Malfoy could begin to fasten any of the buttons. He ran one finger down the pale skin he revealed and continued to pull off the shirt with his other hand.

"You cannot still be hungry," Malfoy said, but did not pull his top back on.

"Wasn't hungry the last time," Harry said shortly, feeling the pull towards the Slytherin never the less.

"You certainly felt like you were," was the response as Harry removed the shirt completely again, running his hands over his lover's arms.

"Not the hunger," he said almost absently as his eyes ran over pale shoulders and back, "I find you irresistible."

Something was trying to attract his attention, something which was speaking to his instincts, but not his higher brain and it was definitely to do with Malfoy. He had not realised that his words might have an impact on the Slytherin until his companion turned and looked at him in quite a shocked manner.

"You are attracted to me without the hunger?" Malfoy sounded surprised and a little confused.

It occurred to Harry then that the Slytherin appeared to have convinced himself that the only reason he was fixating on his lover was because of the incubus' needs, and while the incubus definitely drove his sexual appetite, it was not only his instincts which were guiding him. He didn't really understand it himself; after all, Malfoy had been his enemy for so long that any idea of an attraction between

them, which was not based on extreme circumstances, was quite strange. However, Harry could quite honestly say that his human nature was as attracted to Malfoy as his dark nature, a fact which at one time might have horrified him, but which now simply puzzled him. Whether the uninhibited nature of the beast within had allowed him to realise something which had previously passed him by, or whether his human nature was adapting to cope with his new situation, he had no idea, and he could not explain it to himself yet.

"Yes," he said simply and went back to what he was doing.

He walked behind the shocked Slytherin and took the opportunity to move in close, pressing his bare chest against Malfoy's naked back. He smiled into his lover's hair as he ran his hands down Malfoy's arms again, encircling the Slytherin's wrists with his fingers and nuzzling at the beautiful long neck. Malfoy was motionless under his attentions, he did not resist, but neither did he encourage, but Harry was too wrapped up in the feeling of what he was doing to take much notice.

Lifting Malfoy's left arm he brought his lover's wrist to eye level, his gaze running along the pale, elegant limb. It was inevitable that his attention would end up resting on the Dark Mark; black ugly lines etched onto alabaster skin, stating a claim even after death.

"He is not yours," Harry whispered as if Voldemort could still hear him, "he is mine."

The feeling of possession was all encompassing and hatred of the reminder of the Dark Lord flared in Harry's chest. Before he could consciously decide what he was going to do, he moved around his human once more and with a swift step he shifted them both across the room until Malfoy was pushed up against the wall. Harry pinned his lover there, left arm stretched out against the stone surface with his hand covering the offending mark.

"Never his," he said low in his throat, totally fixated on that one thought.

"Never his," Malfoy repeated, grey eyes looking directing into Harry's.

"Mine," Harry said firmly.

Malfoy did not reply this time, but neither did he flinch, nor look away. When Harry crushed his lips to his lover's, the Slytherin responded immediately and Malfoy's mouth opened to be claimed by Harry's tongue.

'Mine': the word continued to repeat in Harry's mind like a mantra, consuming every other thought in its wake, demanding the universe acknowledge that it was true. He was so lost in the rhythm of the mental sound and the sweet taste of his lover's mouth the he did not feel the power building in him until it spilled out of his body.

The kiss broke the moment the magic burst its bonds and Malfoy's head went back to rest against the wall with a sound somewhere between a moan of ecstasy and a cry of pain. Their bodies were pushed together and Harry held firm as the Slytherin writhed against him; at that moment he was as incapable of moving as Malfoy was to stop reacting. The power flood out of him and into his lover as the mantra repeated over and over in his mind; Voldemort would retain no part of what was his.

When the magic finally ran dry, Harry slumped forward against the now panting Slytherin, resting his head on his lover's shoulder as his human did the same to him. Only the friction of the wall prevented them both sliding towards the ground and for long seconds they remained in that position, leaning against each other with the stone stopping them falling to the floor. Harry was not sure how to describe this latest experience, but he definitely felt as if he had been through a marathon session of something.

"I think I'd like to sit down," were Draco's quiet words, which finally drew him out of his daze, and he forced himself to stand up properly in response.

Grey eyes were looking at him in a rather dazed fashion, but slowly both their gazes moved to where Harry's hand was still covering his lover's arm. Almost as if he might see something terrible Harry tentatively uncurled his fingers and reluctantly pulled back his limb. A rather shocked gasp was the Slytherin's only reaction at first, as the pale limb was drawn in and examined.

"Draco, I..." and then Harry stopped as he realised what he had said.

The startled look on his lover's features as he glanced up was even more shocked than before. It was then that Harry realised that not only had he changed Draco's Dark Mark so that only the snake remained, curled gently around itself rather than sliding from a skull's mouth, but also something fundamental had shifted inside his head. Where before there had been Malfoy, his human, there was Draco; still his, but much more a person than simply the Prince of Slytherin. Malfoy was his lover; Draco had the possibility of being far more.

"What do you want from me?" Draco did not seem to be able to comprehend what was going on.

Harry stepped up to the Slytherin again and ran his fingers lightly over the new mark.

"A friend," he said quietly.

=====

Sitting propped up on the bed with a book in his lap and his foot pressed up against the warmth of Draco's side, Harry felt almost content. The Slytherin was lying on his front reading a school text book, and Harry found the way his lover scrunched up his forehead when he concentrated adorable. The fact that Draco still hadn't done his shirt up and hence every time he moved gave Harry glimpses of pale flesh was an added bonus as well.

"Were you supposed to be anywhere this afternoon?" he asked eventually as it occurred to him that it was a Wednesday (it had been so mad since he had been kidnapped that it was hard to believe it had been under five days ago).

"No," Draco replied absently, lost in his reading, "Dumbledore gave me today to adjust back into the school routine. I start lessons tomorrow, well that is unless they call a national holiday or something, and then I have a make up timetable from hell. It seems the headmaster wants me to pass my N.E.W.T.s even though I might be in Azkaban before I can take them."

A small growl sounded in the back of Harry's throat at that idea and his companion finally looked up at him. The idea of anyone trying to take away his human, his Draco, set Harry completely on edge and he could not control the

reaction. It occurred to him that the calming field did not appear to be working, but he could not care less as he concentrated on his lover.

"You never belonged to him," he said in a dangerously low tone, "and you never did anything."

Draco glanced down at the black snake on his wrist as Harry spoke and it was clear he was remembering what had occurred over an hour earlier. Harry felt a little embarrassed by his actions, but also perfectly justified in taking them.

"I am, however, a Malfoy," the Slytherin replied with practical logic, "and since my father is dead, the Ministry would very much like to make an example of the family. Mother never had the mark, which leaves me."

Slamming his book closed, Harry leant forward and stopped only millimetres from his lover.

"You are mine," he said firmly, "and I will protect you."

A smile played at the corners of Draco's mouth.

"You are still such a hero," the Slytherin said, and Harry did not know if it was a compliment or an insult, "even with everything you are, at the core you belong to Gryffindor, and I suspect you always will."

He really didn't know what to say to that, but they were interrupted anyway by a quiet cough. Looking over, Harry saw Jeremy in his frame shifting awkwardly.

"So sorry to interrupt once again," the portrait offered apologetically, "but there is another Slytherin outside. He threatened to burn my canvas if I did not announce him."

"Tall, dark hair, hooked nose, wears black?" Draco asked chattily.

Jeremy nodded.

"Let him in," Harry said shortly, climbing off the bed.

Snape would not be here for a social visit.

"Aren't you going to put some more clothes on?" Draco asked, sliding his legs off the bed, but remaining elegantly posed as he came to a sitting position.

Looking down at himself, Harry noted the trousers slung low on his hips, and his bare chest and feet, but could not find it in himself to be bothered. Knowing Snape he'd want to test something anyway, so Harry shook his head. His sensibilities only caught up with his actions as the door opened and it occurred to him that Snape might find the whole situation embarrassing. As it was the Potions master entered the room carrying a small tray almost identical to the one he had had at Malfoy Manor and stopped dead as he saw Harry. Snape's eyes then moved from Harry to Draco and back again in a way that Harry's darker sense of humour found very amusing.

"Mr Malfoy," the head of Slytherin said evenly, "I do not remember you being given access to the corridor outside this room."

Draco nodded his head in respect.

"I was quite surprised as well, Sir," the younger Slytherin replied honestly. "I expected to have to try and break in, but the wards let me through."

It had not occurred to Harry what security measures might be in place to prevent people reaching his door, but the fact that the corridor was off limits did not really surprise him.

"Does the rest of the school know I'm in here?" he asked as the idea occurred to him.

"Of course," Snape said as if he was highly unimpressed with the fact, "it would be entirely impossible to keep a secret within these walls."

Harry, for once agreed with the derision; he was uncomfortable with the school being privy to his condition.

"Do they know?" he asked awkwardly.

"The school and the rest of the world have been told that you are suffering from the after effects of your imprisonment and your battle with Voldemort," the Potions master replied, finally walking further into the room. "Not exactly a lie, but not the complete truth either."

It did not escape Harry that Snape had so far refrained from asking why Draco was in the room. It had to be quite obvious what they had been doing, but it did not look as if the head of Slytherin was inclined to call either of them on their behaviour.

"I require another blood sample," Snape said efficiently, "the previous volume was not enough to complete my experiments."

Looking at the equipment on the tray, Harry had concluded as much, but he was also intrigued by the folded piece of parchment sitting beside the clear flask.

"What have you found out so far?" it was difficult to hide the trepidation in his voice.

"This," the Potions master replied and handed him the parchment. "Isolating the different magical signatures has been challenging and the creatures at the top of the list are those that have contributed physical properties as well. I took the opportunity of copying the sigils on your skin while you were unconscious, which should aid in the research."

At the comment Harry looked down at the ghostly marks he could see on his chest and managed to swallow the annoyance at the liberty Snape had taken. The Potions master was trying to help him and although it grated to be the focus of such clinical observation, he knew it was necessary. Holding the parchment he thought about opening it, but part of him did not really want to know, and the rest, which was not sure what his reaction would be, rather felt that after Snape had gone would be a better time to read it. Folding it once more he slipped it into his pocket. Snape raised an eyebrow at the move, but did not comment.

"I would suggest you sit down," the Potions master said as he picked up the familiar rubberised band.

As he did as he was told and quietly allowed Snape access to his arm, Harry distracted himself from his predicament by looking over to where Draco was sitting quietly on the bed, watching. The Slytherin really was elegant; beautiful, yet very masculine, and Harry was quite surprised that he had never noticed it before the other night. Possibly, before the incubus had added to his character he had never thought like that. He had never been a very sexual person and his only girlfriend had been Cho, having had no time for such things when returning to school after Sirius' death. Quite frankly he had probably been the only boy in his year completely uninterested in sex, and now, well now things were just weird.

Draco watched him steadily for a few minutes and then slowly stood up. When his lover came into range, Harry couldn't help himself and he reached out the arm that was not currently being exsanguinated and ran his fingers down his lover's forearm in a need to simply touch. When he glanced back at Snape the man appeared confused, and Harry really couldn't blame him; he was confused himself. Logically he and Draco should want nothing to do with each other, and yet here they were. It was obvious that Snape would have liked to ask questions, but, being a true Slytherin, the Potions master held his tongue.

"I would suggest discretion," was the man's only word on the matter; "the Ministry would undoubtedly attempt to misconstrue any relationship between you."

"I agree, Professor," Draco replied, stepping closer to Harry as he spoke, "however, I find myself at a loss to be able to explain this."

Holding out his wrist the Slytherin exhibited what was left of his Dark Mark. Snape actually showed his shock, looking down at his own wrist reflexively. The head of Slytherin covered his reaction quickly, putting into place his usual mask, but Harry had seen enough to know that Snape was flabbergasted. After that it took even less time for the mask to change again and the expression on Snape's face was one of calculated cunning.

"Mr Malfoy," the head of Slytherin asked evenly, "how many Death Eaters were present at your initiation?"

"Five," Draco replied without hesitation, "it was a private gathering: My father, Aunt Bellatrix, Wormtail, Nott and Langborn. They are all dead except Wormtail and no one knows where he is."

Harry just about managed to hold on to the hiss of anger that threatened at the mention of Wormtail. How the rat had escaped again was a mystery, but Voldemort's lackey was missing. If Harry ever caught up with him he was going to die very, very slowly.

"Then I believe, Mr Malfoy, we may have a workable solution to the charges levelled against you," Snape said, his dark eyes glinting with glee in a way Harry had witnessed only a few times before. "The Ministry is attempting to prosecute you for collaborating with a known enemy of the crown, are they not?"

Draco nodded.

"The Dark Mark on my arm is on record," the Slytherin pointed out, "even if it has changed now; Caveo made very sure everything was documented."

At that, Snape smiled.

"But everyone knows, Mr Malfoy," the Potions master said in his usual understated, yet triumphant manner, "that the Dark Mark is impervious to any type of alteration or removal. Yours was obviously a very clever fake that even fooled the Dark Lord himself."

Harry smiled at that as well; he was beginning to enjoy being associated with Slytherins.

"But no one would believe me capable of such a fake," Draco pointed out, "and my father was openly in support of Voldemort. Who could create something that would fool the Dark Lord at his own ceremony?"

"Dumbledore," Harry said firmly.

Snape inclined his head in agreement; the Potions master appeared to have been thinking the same thing.

"Why?" Draco continued to play devil's advocate in a typically Slytherin, pessimistic manner.

Now Snape looked directly at Harry, as if considering something and Harry stared back steadily.

"Mr Potter," the Potions master said evenly, "would you lie to the Ministry for Mr Malfoy?"

"I think that's probably a better solution to tearing them into little tiny pieces," he replied openly, his hand curling protectively around Draco's wrist.

Snape's eyes did the flicking between him and Draco again and Harry could tell the Potions master was reassessing his opinion of them yet again. Merlin knew what the wizard was thinking, but Harry did not really care as long as the Head of Slytherin remained firmly on Draco's side.

"Then, Mr Potter," Snape said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, "with the headmaster's agreement, I would suggest we use a cover story which will not only turn suspicion from Mr Malfoy, but also assist with the acceptance of your relationship currently."

Now all of Harry's attention was firmly focussed on the man.

"You and Mr Malfoy have been involved since before the end of the sixth year," Snape explained evenly. "You kept the relationship a secret from everyone except Dumbledore, knowing that it would be used to exploit you both. Returning home for the Summer, you, Mr Malfoy, were aware that your father would make you join the Death Eaters, hence the fake mark, designed to become visible at the ceremony, and resemble and mimic the properties of the real Dark Mark until such time as Voldemort was destroyed. His influence took time to dissipate after his death and hence your mark did not change until now. Your experiences after Mr Potter's changes led you both to deny that there was anything between you and this attitude only altered when Mr Malfoy's mark transformed. The story will undoubtedly leak to the press and will have witches wailing in the aisles about the romance of the whole thing."

Draco looked very impressed and Harry found himself agreeing whole heartedly with his lover's assessment.

"Professor Snape," he said sincerely, feeling oddly like the awkward teenager he was supposed to be, "that's brilliant."

After his more than apparent enjoyment of the plotting, Snape had returned to his role as austere Potions master and Harry's comment caused merely a raised eyebrow. Tapping Harry's arm Snape removed the band and Harry was surprised to see that the flask was already full.

"You will of course have to work out the details between yourselves," the Potions master said evenly. "I will speak to the headmaster. No doubt such romantic notions will appeal to him."

Harry was not about to argue; his delight at the new plan was so great that it was almost enough to squelch the desire he had been harbouring to rend Auror Caveo limb from limb. As Snape turned to leave, Harry looked at Draco, and although his lover did not appear as enthusiastic about the whole idea he could tell that the Slytherin was intrigued. They were going to have a lot to talk about.

=====

Nearly two hours later Harry finally let Draco leave. It had taken more willpower than he cared to admit to let the Slytherin go, but they had talked the new plan into the ground and Draco couldn't exactly stay locked up with him forever. After he'd chucked a few cushions and pillows around the room to appease the completely irrational annoyance at having to allow his human out of his sight, he went and sat back at the desk. Then and only then did he pull the parchment Snape had given him out of his pocket. It sat on the desk taunting him after he let it drop from his fingers; he was afraid to open it.

He knew he was a monster, but what other horrors would Snape's work reveal. How much magic had been forced into him over those forgotten two days? How many creatures lurked within him just waiting to show him their darkness?

It took him a good five minutes to squash the little voice that kept telling him it was better not to know; that he would find out if he needed to and that ignorance was often easier than knowledge. Reaching out quickly, he unfolded the document and placed it flat in front of him, Snape's neat handwriting leaping out to meet his gaze. Balling up his Gryffindor courage he began to read. The first four creatures listed were not unexpected: vampire; banshee; Dementor and werewolf, but the fifth caught his eye: shadow fae. He had no idea what one of those was, which rather circumvented his fear with a healthy dose of curiosity. Turning to the book he had been reading before Draco arrived, he flicked to the index.

"Shadow fae," he read aloud, not caring that there was no one to hear him, "dark creature, related to a fairy. Feeds on the chemical reactions of a physical body in pain and can be found anywhere pain is being suffered by human or animal. These creatures are scavengers and rarely dangerous unless present in large numbers, when they will attack. They have the ability to become non-corporeal and pass through solid material, but are intolerant to light and may be dispersed by a simple Lumos spell. Basic wards will prevent them entering a building."

Well that explained his little trick with the door the night he had killed Voldemort and at least this creature didn't sound too bad. Picking up the list once more he continued down it: incubus, boggart and basilisk were next, and then the last creature listed was another one that he remembered vaguely from DADA: Ethologi, but he could not recall any details. Studiously he went back to the book.

"Ethologi, commonly known as doppelgangers are rare and extremely dangerous to magical beings," he read slowly, not liking this one at all. "In their natural state these creatures appear as a black pool of liquid, but they have the power to mimic anything living with which they come into contact. They use this ability to hunt, taking on the form of something familiar to their prey and slowly draining the victim of magical energy. The shock to the system of being drained of all magic will kill most magical beings, including humans and recovery from a partial attack can take months. Being liquid based Ethologi are intolerant to fire and a flame spell will repel, although not kill, one."

Now he knew where the faint urge to draw the magic out of Dumbledore had come from, and how it was that his sense of magic seemed heightened. He only prayed that this creature's power within him never became as strong as those he had already used: he would not ever, under any circumstances knowingly drain anyone of magic; he would rather die first. Magic was very precious to Harry, and it was something to be treasured. The whole idea of the Ethologi made his skin crawl.

He sighed and closed the book; it could have been worse, at least the list wasn't longer. Briefly it occurred to him that the ability to mimic anyone and any thing could be useful, but he put the idea aside. If he tried to use a power that was not at the surface he might bring with it the creatures cravings, and while the desire to feed off of powerful magical sources was just a niggling urge it could become something much worse. Picking up the book he headed back to the bed and the other tome he had left lying around. Sitting down, leaning against the headboard he flicked to the index of the other book knowing it never hurt to have multiple sources; that much Hermione had drummed into him over the years.

=====

"Harry Potter, Sir," a familiar, squeaky voice interrupted his contemplations and he looked to the side to see Dobby standing there looking rather worried, "Dobby is sorry to be disturbing you, but Headmaster Dumbledore is telling Dobby that if Harry Potter is not asking for food by the time the rest of the school is having dinner, Dobby is to go to Harry Potter and be offering his services."

Harry blinked at the house elf in surprise; it was dinner time? He had thought it was only about four o'clock. Adding up the time in his mind he realised it had to be much later than that because Draco had been with him for a considerable length of time.

"Oh, thanks, Dobby," he said a little absently, his mind still on what he was reading, "anything will be fine."

The house elf beamed at being accepted and disappeared with a soft pop just as Harry caught up with what he had said. With a sinking feeling he realised that he was probably going to end up with enough food to feed an army, and he wasn't really that hungry. He'd also answered without remembering that there was a large amount of things that he couldn't eat any more. Just as he was trying to figure out how to explain to the house elf why he wasn't eating everything put in front of him without insulting the poor creature, Dobby popped back in again.

"Dobby is just remembering, Harry Potter, Sir," the elf said cheerfully, "Headmaster Dumbledore is also explaining how Harry Potter can no longer eat all of his favourites. Dobby is wondering if Harry Potter could be a bit more specific about what he is liking?"

"I'm sorry, Dobby," Harry apologised quickly, "I wasn't really paying attention. Anything meat based would be fine, but no pastry if possible. Green veggies are good, but anything else is hit or miss. As for pudding, I have this real thing for custard, but I can't seem to eat anything that goes with it; ice cream is good too."

The elf nodded sagely.

"Dobby will be bringing Harry Potter a selection," Dobby said seriously, "that way next time Dobby will be knowing what Harry Potter likes."

"Thank you," Harry replied with genuine gratitude.

The elf disappeared a second time and discovering that his foot had gone numb; Harry decided it was time to get up and move around a bit. A trip to the loo wouldn't be amiss either and he quickly busied himself with preparing for dinner. It was as he was pulling on a T-shirt that Jeremy's familiar throat-clearing attracted his attention. After Draco had left he had instructed the portrait to announce anyone that came to the door, at which point he would decide if they could come in or not. It was easier than having the poor man threatened every time a Slytherin dropped by.

"Yes, Jeremy," Harry asked politely.

"Headmaster Dumbledore requests a few moments of your time," the portrait replied efficiently, "should I let him in?"

"Yes thank you," Harry replied, although on the inside he was dreading the visit.

It was one thing to know that the crafty old wizard had known that Draco would be visiting, the wards letting the Slytherin through making that much obvious, but to have to talk about that and other things was not a comforting idea. Dumbledore would be kind, and considerate and supportive, but at times Harry preferred Snape's straightforwardness to the headmaster's concern. However the moment Dumbledore stepped into the room, Harry forgot about just about everything as his attention focused solely on the covered something that the headmaster was carrying in his right hand.

The vague unease at being in the presence of such a magically gifted individual was dwarfed as his nose twitched and his teeth ached; he could smell blood and his vampire aspect had sat up and taken notice.

"Good evening, Harry," Dumbledore greeted pleasantly, "I do hope you don't mind, but I asked Dobby to inform me when he would be bringing you your evening meal."

"Hello," Harry managed to say, although what he really wanted to do was launch himself at the headmaster and take whatever was under the cloth.

"I do hope you are settling in," the older wizard continued conversationally. "Professor Snape informed me of his previous visit and what you did for Mr Malfoy; an ingenious plan I must admit. Under normal circumstances I would never condone falsifying such an important matter, but I must admit to perceiving that the Ministry may be attempting to make an example of the Malfoy family, although Lucius has already paid the ultimate price."

The smell was driving Harry crazy and he could barely hold himself still; it was only as Dumbledore smiled at him with something more than the usual twinkle in his eye that Harry realised the headmaster knew exactly what he was doing. In a flash of insight that rarely ever happened to him, Harry became aware that he was being tested. Part of him was furious and demanded to be set free, but this time his human nature won and he pushed the instincts down. Dumbledore appeared pleased as if the headmaster was completely aware of Harry's internal struggle, and approved of the outcome.

"Professor Snape is an ingenious man," Harry said without the slightest trace of sarcasm; it was a truth he had taken a long time to see.

With a nod Dumbledore placed whatever he was carrying on the desk and calmly conjured himself a chair. Another test, Harry was sure of it as his control was tried yet again; this time he had wanted to react to the magic and the possible danger it represented, but biting his lip he did not even let loose the animalistic growl that threatened. The casual bravery the headmaster employed as he all but faced down the darkest creature ever known to wizard kind was actually quite astounding.

"This is for you," Dumbledore finally said as if they both didn't know what he had been doing.

Pulling off the cloth the headmaster revealed a goblet full of deep red liquid.

"I understand that Mr Malfoy has, shall we say, volunteered to assist with your other known needs," Dumbledore said chattily, which would have made Harry blush to the roots of his hair if he had not been quite so fixated on the blood, "but I believe it would be prudent to avoid first person donation for your vampire tendencies. Professor Snape's tests confirm that you are in no way contagious, but we do not want any accidents. Several Gryffindors have volunteered to give blood on your behalf, although they are unaware of exactly why, and Madame Pomfrey recommends you should drink once every other day to avoid any chance of the hunger returning."

Harry was almost vibrating as he held on to his control and prevented himself pouncing on the goblet. It was with the utmost care that he walked the final few feet to the desk and shakily picked up the vessel. It smelt like nectar from heaven and he could not hold back anymore. His fangs descended in response and the first mouthful sent the most wonderful sensations all over his body. Had he been alone he would have groaned, as it was he managed to stifle his reaction into a breathy gasp. After that he couldn't stop, and he tipped the goblet back, drinking greedily as the velvety liquid flowed down his throat. Normal food just couldn't compare anymore; this was more than sustenance, it was life; and yet, when he finally placed the goblet back on the table, every drop gone, there was a fraction of a second when it felt as if something was missing.

"Everything all right, Harry?" Dumbledore asked calmly as he stared at the cup trying to isolate the fleeting sensation.

"Um, what?" Harry responded, rather dazed at his reaction, "oh, yes, I'm fine, thank you. That was just a little intense."

The headmaster's response was his usual benevolent smile and Harry had no doubt his entire performance had been catalogued for posterity. It was then that he remembered that the calming field he was sure had been in place before did not appear to have been working all day.

"Did you remove the calming charm that was on the room?" he asked curiously.

"Yes, Harry," the headmaster replied lightly, "I felt it necessary to assist with your transition to here, however, I am a strong believer in not allowing oneself to become reliant on artificial means of support."

He had not expected quite such a straight forward answer, but he could not ignore the logic of it. Nodding slowly in agreement he glanced at the goblet one more time as he went over what he had been feeling as he had drunk the blood.

"Would you mind terribly if I joined you for dinner, My Boy?" Dumbledore asked politely. "I believe there are some things we need to discuss and if you are willing, now would seem an appropriate time."

Harry was in two minds as to whether he really wanted to have this conversation, but he knew which the sensible, adult answer was, and he reluctantly nodded. He sat down at the desk just as Dobby reappeared and then suddenly there was a table between him and the headmaster, covered in food.

"Thank you, Dobby," Dumbledore said cheerfully, before Harry recovered from his surprise, "you have outdone yourself. Please carry our thanks to the kitchen elves."

The house elf disappeared with a huge smile. It was all Harry could do not to stare at the table: even at the school feasts he didn't think he had seen so much food crammed into one place.

"I think I should have been more specific," he said rather lamely.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea to eat while it's hot," the headmaster suggested with a smile and handed Harry a plate.

The blood had settled in Harry's stomach nicely and he was quite surprised to find that he did actually feel hungry in a very human way now, rather than anything else. He was beginning to suspect that the headmaster knew exactly what he was about, and he really didn't feel like second guessing his mentor. Accepting the plate, he decided that Dumbledore could test him all he liked; nothing he could do would stop it so he might as well just let it happen. Knowing that he was being watched, he ignored the headmaster for a while and set about deciding what he could and could not eat from the incredible spread in front of him. In the end he sat back with a nice helping of some sort of stew, some green beans and a large helping of carrots, and Dumbledore had chosen an eclectic mix of shepherds pie, sprouts and a large stick of celery he was using instead of a fork, chewing the end off when he felt like it. They ate in companionable silence for a few minutes and Harry felt himself starting to relax, despite his anxiety.

"Well, Harry," Dumbledore said eventually as he reached for a second stick of celery, "I think perhaps we should consider you continuing your lessons, we wouldn't want you to fall too far behind."

That confused the magic out of Harry and pushed all thoughts of eating from his mind, he froze, mid bite.

"Um, how?" he asked openly. "I can't leave here and I don't have a wand."

"Ah, yes," the headmaster replied, fishing in his pocket in a superb impression of a forgetful old man, which Harry knew for a fact he most definitely was not, "I believe this is yours."

With a flourish Dumbledore held out Harry's wand and all he could do was stare at it as if it might bite. So many reasons for him not to take it jumped into his head that they clashed with the part of him that was completely delighted and immobilized him into complete inaction.

"Where did you find it?" he eventually managed to ask, delaying the moment when he would have to reach out and accept it back.

It was such a powerful thing to give a wizard a wand and Harry knew he was dangerous enough as it was, without giving him another weapon. The wand was like part of him, had been since he was eleven, but he was no longer sure how large a piece of him was fit to accept it.

"Tom had it hidden in the chamber where he died," Dumbledore explained patiently; "under his chair to be precise. It was warded, but I retrieved it before the Aurors arrived."

It did not surprise him that the headmaster had had his wand all the time, but it did surprise him that he was being given it back. He had had no expectations of being allowed to be a real wizard any time soon, if ever.

"I'm not safe," Harry said in little more than a whisper, although it caused him great pain to try and refuse the return.

"Your magic has changed, Harry," Dumbledore said kindly, "and the longer you are without your wand, the more difficult it will be for you to take it back. I know you are afraid of yourself, My Boy, you have much which challenges your control, but I am sure you will come through this. With the support of those of us fortunate enough to look upon you as family, you will return to us; maybe not quite the same, but never-the-less, whole."

The faith of an old wizard could seem to some such an insignificant thing, but it took Harry's breath away. With a shaking hand he placed his plate back on the table and slowly reached out to take back his wand. It was like putting on a warm glove as his fingers curled around the wooden shaft and he felt energy shoot up his arm. There was no pain or electric shock with the wand rejecting him, just the comfortable feeling of finding a part of himself that he had lost, and a half laugh, half sob erupted from his mouth before he could stop it. So many things had changed, he was so different he was not sure anyone would understand, but this, this was still his and he did not know whether to laugh or cry.

"It is a hard thing to lose a wand," the headmaster said sagely, "but it is such a beautiful thing to find one again."

"Thank you," was all Harry could find to say as he cradled the wand to him, almost as if it was a child.

They did not speak for a long time as Harry lost himself in the moment. Eventually he looked up and over at the desk; there was one more thing he needed to do. With a swish and a flick he pointed the wand at one of the smaller books.

"Wingardium Leviosa," he said calmly and the spell launched from the tip of his wand.

The book bounced off the ceiling.

"Oh hell," Harry said quite distinctly.

"Indeed," Dumbledore said pleasantly, "perhaps it would be fortuitous to regulate the power behind the spell just a little more."

Harry just gave Dumbledore a look for that comment. It occurred to him then that Voldemort could have had no concept of what he was going to create, if the Dark Lord had known that Harry's wizarding power would increase so significantly he would have been a fool to allow it to happen. Even insane dark wizards knew that you didn't create something more powerful than yourself.

After that, they made it to pudding without further incident, chatting about inane things like the last house Quidditch match between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, and the state of the East Tower after having been hit by a class worth of freezing charms when Professor Flitwick had taken his third year lesson outside. It was all really quite pleasant, which was why Harry's defences were low when Dumbledore decided to become serious again.

"About your friends, Harry." He dropped the apple he had just picked up as the headmaster spoke.

Hermione, Ron, Neville and the rest were a subject he had been attempting not to think about; he didn't know what they knew and he definitely didn't want to have to consider how they would react. As far as he was concerned it was better for all parties if they stayed as far away as possible and dissociated themselves with him.

"What about them?" he asked, trying to keep his voice cold and emotionless.

"They wish to see you," Dumbledore said sympathetically, but in a tone that suggested to Harry he felt this was very important; "they have been most anxious since your abduction. Mr Weasley insisted on leaving the hospital wing before he was fully recovered in order that he could be with Miss Granger waiting for news of you."

"Ron was hurt?" guilt welled up in Harry as he realised he had been so wrapped up in his own problems that he had no idea what had happened to his friends.

He had asked Dumbledore if they were all right when they had spoken at Malfoy Manor, but he had gone no further with his enquiries. Ron had been with him during the attack; it was really blindingly obvious that his best friend could have been hurt. For a moment he felt a little resentful that Dumbledore had not told him everything at their first meeting, but logic quickly informed him that he had been in no state of mind to deal with the details at that point.

"He was assaulted by a rather nasty blasting hex," the headmaster replied. "The wall which stopped his progress was, I believe his exact words were 'bloody hard', and he sustained some nasty bruising and several broken bones. Madame Pomfrey patched him up in her usual proficient fashion, and I believe he has only one bandage remaining to show for his war wounds. Miss Granger has been making a suitable fuss of him."

Harry could just imagine; Hermione was incredibly practical, but when it came to her friends being hurt, she had been known to go over the top. It didn't happen often, but Hermione could actually be quite girly when she set her mind to it.

"Have you told them?" It was the question that was really praying on his mind.
"Do they know what Voldemort did to me?"

"I rather believe they should be made aware of the truth," the Dumbledore said evenly, "however, I refrained from explaining the situation until such time as I could consult you in the matter. I am of the opinion that telling them sooner rather than later will be the most advantageous to you as well as them. They are aware you are recovering from Voldemort's attentions, but they are unaware of the consequences of Tom's machinations."

Sitting back in the chair Harry stared at the table; rationally he knew that he could not hide forever, people were going to find out the truth, but knowing this did not stop him being afraid, and being afraid made him tense, and being tense disrupted his control, and that let his baser instincts to the surface. Swiping viciously at the table he sent one bowl flying and stormed to his feet, turning away from Dumbledore and the headmaster's logic, as anger won over sense. His desire to destroy something was almost overpowering, but he walked away, trying to bring back the relative calm that the Occlumency usually helped him find. Why did everything have to be so hard?

"I don't want them to know," he said as all the terrible possibilities flooded into his mind, "I don't want anyone to ever know."

Lashing out with claws and supernatural strength he took a chunk out of one of the bed posts; the pain of the impact was so much easier to deal with than the pain he felt in his heart. Fascinated he watched as the mess of splinters slowly reformed as if organically growing back and it helped to bring his raging thoughts under control.

"What we want and what we are required to endure are unfortunately, often quite dissimilar," Dumbledore said calmly, obviously in great white sage mode.

The cynical part of Harry wanted to tell the headmaster where to stick his wisdom, but he managed to curb that impulse.

"At least they won't want to see me anymore," he said coldly, "once they know what I am."

Dumbledore appeared disappointed by that statement.

"I believe you do your friends a great disservice with those words, Harry," the headmaster responded. "They care for you very deeply, and it will take more than that to frighten them away. I suggest you do not try and find out where that point may be."

Harry sneered at the old man over his shoulder; he was in no mood to play word games.

"Perhaps it is time for me to leave you in peace," Dumbledore suggested politely.
"Do I have your permission to enlighten Mr Weasley and Miss Granger of your condition, and maybe Mr Longbottom as well?"

That was the scale the broke the dragon's wing and Harry snapped; the simply gentility of the headmaster's question enraged him.

"Tell the whole bloody world for all I care," he yelled, taking another swipe at the bed post. "Let them point and stare; they've done it to me my whole life. Just don't let them in here; never let them in here with me."

Harry did not watch Dumbledore leave, but he felt him go, and a soon as he knew he was alone he let go completely and the room filled with sound as the bedpost literally exploded.

End of Chapter 1

Chapter 1

It was nearly midnight by the time Harry decided that sleep was not going to come and he needed to talk. He had calmed down enough to be very ashamed of his behaviour, and it weighed on his mind as well as everything else.

"Dobby," he said clearly, climbing out of bed and lifting the level of the lights with a flick of his wand.

The house elf popped into being almost instantly.

"Good evening," Dobby greeted cheerfully, "is Harry Potter feeling better?"

"Yes thank you, Dobby," Harry replied apologetically, "I'm sorry I shouted at you when you came to clear away the dinner things. I find it difficult to control myself sometimes."

"Dobby is understanding," the elf replied graciously, "Headmaster Dumbledore is explaining everything to Dobby when he is volunteering for this job."

Harry smiled at the small creature gratefully; he only hoped he was not about to annoy more people.

"I was wondering, Dobby," he said quickly, "do you know if Professor Dumbledore will still be up?"

"Dobby will check for Harry Potter," the elf said instantly and disappeared before Harry could do anything about it.

With a resigned sigh, he walked over to the desk and waited for Dobby to return. Taking a quill he scribbled a quick note to Dumbledore apologising for his behaviour and asking the headmaster if he would mind visiting, hoping all the while that Dobby would not wake Dumbledore to ask him if he was still up. Sometimes house elves could be very peculiar in their reasoning. A few moments after he finished the message Dobby reappeared.

"Headmaster Dumbledore is still being in his study," the elf said, very pleased with himself.

"Thank you, Dobby," Harry said politely, "I was wondering if you would mind delivering this to him for me."

And with that he handed the house elf the note.

"Not at all, Harry Potter," Dobby replied brightly, taking the scrap of parchment. "Would there be anything else once Dobby is delivering the message?"

Shaking his head, Harry sat down on the desk chair.

"No thank you," he said, rubbing his eyes and trying to clear his head, "that's all."

Dobby disappeared a second time and Harry was left to hope that Dumbledore would be available. He had never timed how long it took to walk from the headmaster's study to the Room of Requirement, and he stood up again after only a minute or so and began pacing. It felt like an age, but could only have been about fifteen minutes when a sleepy Jeremy appeared in his second frame.

"Please let him in," Harry said without even waiting for the portrait to speak.

Jeremy just nodded and disappeared again.

"Good evening, Harry," Dumbledore said pleasantly as he walked in, "how may I be of assistance?"

"How did they take it?" Harry asked, having worked himself into quite a panic.

With a benevolent smile the headmaster conjured two chairs and indicated that Harry should sit down.

"Perhaps some tea," Dumbledore suggested and summoned his usual pot and cups and saucers from thin air.

Harry really didn't want tea, he wanted to know what had happened when the headmaster explained what had occurred to Hermione and Ron, but he sat down and accepted the cup anyway. Remaining calm was his biggest aim, losing it a second time would not be productive.

"I believe Miss Granger intended to go straight to Professor Snape and offer her assistance with his work," Dumbledore said as he poured the tea, "Mr Weasley wished to know when he could visit you and Mr Longbottom offered to research rare plants and their use in treating such conditions as lycanthropy."

For a moment Harry sat very still, quite aware that the headmaster was not lying to him, but not quite able to comprehend what Dumbledore had said either.

"They what?" he finally asked rather lamely.

Dumbledore gave him a patient smile.

"All three wished to do everything they can to help you in your new situation," the headmaster explained slowly. "They all expressed a desire to see you, but Mr Weasley most of all. I believe his reasoning being along the lines that while Miss Granger and Mr Longbottom have expertise to offer useful to the situation, he would like to keep you company when he can, until such time as you are able to leave here."

"You're not going to let them," Harry said as the absurdity of the whole idea hit him, "are you?"

From the expression on Dumbledore's face it was quite obvious that the wizard was entertaining such ridiculous thoughts.

"I'm a dark creature, Professor," Harry said vehemently, "I'm deadly. Look what I did to Draco. I could kill them, or worse."

He shuddered at the mental images his own thoughts sent him. If he hurt any of them he would never forgive himself.

"Your crimes against Mr Malfoy were so heinous that the moment he was released into the school he made his way here," Dumbledore said kindly, but firmly. "Your response to normal provocation has been to damage a little furniture, and when offered the opportunity to revenge yourself on the Aurors who were undoubtedly about to take Mr Malfoy to his death, you took it upon yourself to protect him and refrain from killing anyone."

"I turned a man to stone," Harry persisted, "and put another two in St Mungo's."

"Where you could quite easily have killed all three," the headmaster seemed quite positive in his argument.

Leaning back in the very comfortable chair Dumbledore has conjured for him, Harry sipped his tea and tried not to think too black thoughts. The whole idea of letting his friends anywhere near him, scared him witless.

"I couldn't bear it if I hurt them," he admitted in little more than a whisper.

The headmaster fished in his pocket and handed Harry a chocolate frog, which he took without thinking. Only with the wrapped confectionary in his hand did he come to a halt and look at the object in confusion.

"Chocolate always makes me feel better," Dumbledore offered in way of explanation.

Harry really didn't know what to say.

"I will not try and pretend there is no danger, My Boy," the headmaster continued as if their interaction had not suddenly taken a major left turn. "You are a most powerful individual and the instincts which drive you can be very dark, but in my long life I have met no other man, woman or child who fills me with as much faith as you do. Already you have overcome more than any human being to have ever come to my attention. The hardest part was maintaining your humanity after what Tom did to you. That there is any of you left at all is a marvel and that you can control what you have become is in no doubt in my mind."

Unwrapping the frog, Harry avoided looking at his mentor for some time; when he finally did he saw such confidence in Dumbledore's eyes that it made the breath catch in his throat. How was he supposed to protest in the face of such belief?

"There is also the question of the Ministry," the headmaster continued eventually. "I have exerted my influence and a hearing has been arranged for after the weekend, where we will settle the matter of their control over you. Cornelius will undoubtedly try and have you classified as a dangerous dark creature, rest assured this will not happen."

The tone Dumbledore used gave Harry no choice but to accept everything the headmaster said as fact. He had the feeling that when Dumbledore wanted something, nothing could actually stop him.

"However, I am sure Minister Fudge will insist that the hearing be held at the Ministry," the explanation went on. "The more people you have come into contact with before that time, the easier the transition will be on you."

"That man's a pompous idiot," Harry said acidly; at least he had a valid target on which to take out his ire. "He would use anything but me showing up as an excuse to lock me up forever, wouldn't he?"

Dumbledore nodded, not that Harry was not sure that in this case that course of action might not be a bad idea.

"Unfortunately I believe that Cornelius is far more worried about public opinion than he is about you," the headmaster said regretfully. "I believe he does not think our world will react well to their hero being so afflicted, and hence wishes to hide you away. It is time, however, for our society to grow up; they have been coddled long enough and hiding reality from them will not help. You will be rewarded for your bravery and dedication, Harry, not punished, that much I promise you."

The bitter laugh was impossible to stop as it made its way out of Harry's mouth; he would have settled for normal obscurity any day.

"There is already a pile of letters for you in my office," Dumbledore continued calmly; "they have been arriving non stop since a special edition of the Prophet announced your defeat of Voldemort this afternoon. Tomorrow is to be an official holiday across the whole of the British Wizarding world. You have done us a great service, Harry, and all our people thank you."

"Until they find out what I am now," Harry replied with less bitterness than he expected. "I am not sure Fudge is wrong."

"It is a matter of perception, My Boy," the headmaster said kindly, "and we shall just have to make sure they perceive the real you."

If Harry had been sure what the real him was he might have found that comforting.

=====

Dumbledore had stayed and talked until the small hours of the morning, about which Harry was both feeling grateful and guilty. It had taken the headmaster a long time to convince him that letting his friends visit was a good idea, but he had eventually agreed. What was stranger, however, was that after he had made the decision he had gone to bed and actually fallen asleep.

Bacon was what eventually woke him, the smell of freshly cooked bacon; a scent proven to wake the dead. He rolled over and peered in the general direction of where Dobby had set up the table the previous day and there was a familiar blond figure standing next to it. Jeremy had standing instructions to let Draco in unless told specifically not to do so, making his presence not wholly surprising, except for the timing.

"I was beginning to wonder if you were ever going to wake up," Draco said, picking up a slice of the bacon which had managed to pull Harry from sleep and chewing on it sexily.

Harry shook his head and sat up; if he was finding the way his lover was eating breakfast sexy, then there was little hope of Draco escaping unravished. It was not a demanding, rip-his-clothes-off-now, kind of feeling, but he definitely had the urge to worm his way under Draco's robes. The urgency of the previous day was gone, almost as if the fact that he had unequivocally marked his companion as his lessened the pressure of his demanding libido, but he had the sneaking suspicion he would never be able to look at Draco without considering how best to get him naked.

Climbing out of bed he wandered over towards the Slytherin, gave Draco a rather absent kiss, mumbled a greeting, snagged a piece of bacon from the plate on the table and headed for the bathroom. It was only after he had put his head under the shower and started to clean his teeth that he had thought about the way

Draco had appeared rather startled by his actions, but he didn't think about it too much. However, he was expecting something similar to the words which greeted him as he walked back into the other room, "You're odd first thing in the morning."

"What did I do this time?" Harry asked, pretty sure he knew, but interested to see what Draco would say.

"Random shows of affection," the Slytherin replied, as if the whole notion offended his sensibilities, "it is entirely bizarre behaviour."

"Well you'll have to forgive me," he said as he rummaged in his trunk, "I was not brought up with proper Slytherin manners and we Gryffindors are quite prone to forget ourselves."

It was strangely comforting to simply chat about nothing and for a few moments Harry managed to forget quite what a left turn his life had taken. Then as he was pulling on his clothes his mind flicked to the impending visit today of Ron, Hermione and Neville. Nev had become quite a fixture in their lives since the end of the fifth year, and although Harry knew people still referred to them as the Gryffindor trio, these days Neville was in on most of their antics. No matter how much part of him missed all three, the thought of facing them rather squashed his mood.

"Who doused your fairy light?" Draco asked as Harry walked towards the breakfast table with a frown on his face.

"My friends are visiting today," he responded and sat down.

The table was laid for two with a range of food not quite as large as the dinner the previous night, but still very extensive. Harry tried to distract himself back on to more settling thoughts by filling his plate; by the time he had finished, he had enough protein to feed a Quidditch team. One elegant eyebrow raised under a neatly trimmed fringe was Draco's only comment about that, but Harry had to admit that maybe he had been a little over enthusiastic.

"What time?" his companion asked conversationally while helping himself to a rather more normal selection of breakfast items. "With all lessons cancelled today there are bound to be far too many Gryffindors hanging around, and if yesterday at dinner was anything to go by, until our little fabrication becomes public knowledge, half of them want to kill me."

Harry looked up sharply at the same time Draco realised what he had said.

"Figure of speech," the Slytherin corrected quickly and then paused, "at least I don't think any of them really want to do permanent damage," he continued thoughtfully; "but there is a definite hostility. If it wasn't for Crabbe and Goyle I might be worried, not having my wand at the moment thanks to the bloody bureaucracy we call a government, but they seem to think I'm worth protecting. I wouldn't want to come face to face with Weasley though; I think he believes I am the spawn of Voldemort himself."

That sounded very like Ron, which of course brought up the other dilemma about the whole Draco relationship. How his friends were going to take that he had no idea, and he decided that one hurdle at a time was probably a good idea. If they could get past the whole star of a horror movie bit he would be incredibly grateful.

"Just after lunch," Harry replied, sitting on the instincts that tried to rise to the surface at any suggestion that someone would hurt his human.

The possessive view point no longer took him by surprise, but it did make him wonder what Draco thought about the whole situation. The Slytherin did not appear to be complaining about the idea, but Draco had also shown he was not someone who would belong to anyone else either. It was clear Draco would pledge allegiance when pushed, but there was a line he would not cross. Harry could not help wondering why his lover had not run the moment he marked him, since Draco had clearly had no choice in the matter.

"Why don't you hate me?" Harry suddenly decided to ask the question that was really bothering him.

They had started to have this conversation before, but the whole changing the Dark Mark had rather interrupted it. The enquiry did not seem to faze Draco and the Slytherin sipped his tea thoughtfully before opening his mouth.

"At first I thought that my feelings towards you were simply to do with gratitude," Draco said eventually, "at least that is what I preferred to believe, but you rather destroyed that idea when you tried to be noble and throw me out yesterday. You may have noticed over the years that relationships are not my strong point; in my world relationships of any kind tend to be arranged for me, so I'm rather new at this. Having thought about it endlessly all night, the only conclusion I can come to is that I have no idea why I am drawn to you, I just am and I may as well become used to the idea. I care what happens to you and I care for you; both of which, outside my immediate family, are new experiences, I don't think I wish to analyse it further than that ... yet."

Draco's tone was very final about that, and Harry decided he was not going to receive any more answers for the moment. His own emotions concerning the Slytherin were also so mixed up that he wasn't sure he could give a sensible answer to the question either. They were connected, emotionally and now magically through the changes Harry had wrought on the Dark Mark and, for the time being, explanations would have to wait.

"Seen the Quidditch scores yet?" he decided that a complete change of tack was in order. "Your team's new Seeker is really bad; have you poached back the position yet?"

"Give me a chance, Potter," Draco said with a smirk, "rebuilding an empire takes time."

=====

Harry managed to control the urge to touch Draco for a good half an hour, but eventually he couldn't resist and he snaked out one foot, rubbing it up against his lover's leg. The only reaction this garnered from the subject of his attention was a vaguely interested look over a tea cup as Draco took a sip of his drink. Harry could not help the small predatory smile that graced his face as he watched his blond lover virtually ignore his opening gambit.

"Are you expecting any visitors other than the horde of Gryffindors today?" Draco asked conversationally as Harry sank a little lower in his chair and moved his foot further up his companion's leg.

"No one I know of," he replied, playing the game, "but even if they turn up unannounced I shouldn't think it'll be anytime soon."

"So if I push off you'd be in for a boring morning, then?" his lover commented without the slightest indication that Harry was doing anything at all.

In response he ran his toes down the inside of Draco's thigh, at which point his lover's legs moved apart, but above the table there was not even a flicker.

"Very boring," Harry replied casually, although he had no intention of letting Draco leave.

He had set his sights and there was little which could derail him once he was focussed, even before his change of status he had been stubborn; now, when the wild forces inside him took charge he barely understood the concept of 'no'. It crossed his mind briefly that he was lucky Draco seemed to understand this as well, or he could have found himself in serious trouble. Shifting again and moving his foot even further he soon found out that although Draco's face showed no reaction at all, there was at least one part of his lover's anatomy that was very interested in what he was doing. From the considerable firmness he found between Draco's legs, Harry decided that maybe the Slytherin had been expecting this move and anticipating it.

"I would probably pine away from sheer loneliness," he said innocently.

Draco was sitting just a little straighter in his chair now, and the way his lover's lips were slightly parted gave Harry a very good indication that he had Draco's whole attention. Smoothly the teacup was placed back on the table and elegant fingers rested on the tabletop. Curling his toes slightly around the bulge, he could feel beneath the soft fabric of Draco's trousers, he pushed gently, lifting his foot slightly and running it along the length of the hardness he could feel. Finally he was rewarded with a reaction as his lover's eyes flickered closed for a moment and a low groan answered the move. Draco also sunk slightly in his chair, his legs falling further open.

"That would be unfortunate," Draco said, voice tight, but still playing the game of words, "it would place a hole in my ruse with the Ministry."

For that Harry pushed just a little harder, producing a grunt from his lover, but then he curled his toes again and ran them the length of Draco's inside leg before returning to his previous position. Finally Harry gained the reaction he had been after as his lover gave in and melted into his touch. Draco's eyes closed all the way, the blond head went back and Harry rewarded his lover with another caress. Watching Draco's face, a small smile playing at his own features, he continued his ministrations and enjoyed the expression of pleasure which graced his lover's visage. He could have just kept going, but as much as he liked the sparks of arousal he could feel coming from Draco, he wanted to be closer to the source of that tingling power.

Withdrawing his leg, he slipped under the table without waiting for Draco's reaction and moved straight towards his target. Controlling the urges of his incubus part, he freed the button of Draco's trousers and undid the zip gently rather than ripping it apart, which was what he really wanted to do. The silk boxers he found underneath were not a surprise and neither was their colour of deep green, but Harry was not particularly interested in the soft material. What he wanted was the prize within and he slipped nimble fingers into the opening in the underwear, sliding talon tipped digits gently around what he found. He ran his

tongue over his lips as he released Draco's healthy erection from the confines of the material restraining it, and breathed in deeply, taking in the scent of male arousal.

It was all he needed to encourage the incubus form out completely and he felt his chest tingling as the spines erupted, forcing his t-shirt away from his body and his own trousers were suddenly tight. There was a moan in response from Draco, almost as if his lover had felt the change in Harry, but he was too focussed on his prize to take much notice. The tingling of arousal from his companion was enough to keep him very much absorbed and everything around him disappeared into insignificance.

If there was one thing that might get him killed one day, it was his fanatical focus when it came to his incubus' needs. Leaning in, he let Draco's scent flood his senses and stroked his lover's erection from root to tip with both his index fingers. The breathy response and the fact that Draco opened his legs wider, slouching in the chair, encouraged Harry in his next action. Placing his hand flat on the underside of his lover's cock he opened his mouth and almost experimentally, stuck out his tongue and ran it over the head.

A hand snaked under the table then and long fingers wrapped into his hair. He took that as a positive response. The taste of Draco was fantastic, alive and real, and it filled his mouth and nose, drawing him in closer as he firmly sucked his prize between his lips and onto his tongue, running the tip down the moist slit.

The incubus had many talents, a very well designed predator, perfectly suited to all things sexual and he allowed the demon to change him yet further as his tongue thinned and lengthened. He had not employed the more extreme changes the incubus could attain since that first night and this time he did not split his tongue, snake like, but experimented, allowing it to elongate even further, coiling it around the length of Draco's erection and pulling back slightly, tightening his grip. The explosive groan from his lover and the fingers grasping at his scalp rather indicated that his experimentation was appreciated.

Concentrating, he moved forward again, allowing the sexual energy from Draco to spur him on, and he felt a wave of possessiveness sweep through him as he claimed his lover whole. The momentary gag reflex was ignored as the dark creature in him took over and forced his human reactions to the background. His tongue moved as he used his throat and lips to stimulate Draco, drawing small sounds and movements of encouragement from his lover. Using his hands, he pushed Draco's legs even further apart and slightly up, giving him more access as he buried his face in silk.

Now he upped his pace and began to move his head up and down as Draco surrendered all control to him. Shortening his tongue, he allowed it to split, and rather than coiling it around his prize, he wrapped it much more firmly around Draco's cock and sucked, hard. It couldn't exactly be said he was stimulating his lover in the old fashioned way, but he held back on the desire to force power between them; he wanted to do this manually. He might have been mostly under the influence of the incubus, but that did not mean the human part had no needs as well. Touching Draco was a joy that all of him enjoyed.

With his movements and firm tongue it was not long before Draco was panting and moaning in time with his ministrations. Harry could feel the arousal building and building in his lover and his body vibrated in response. His own erection pressed uncomfortably against the zip of his jeans, but it did very little to distract him. Slipping his hands further down Draco's legs, under his lover's body, he

gripped the firm buttocks and squeezed as he deep throated Draco yet again. He felt the Slytherin's orgasm coming before it arrived and pulled back just slightly, feeling the beginnings of the payoff with relish.

Almost immediately Draco bucked into his mouth, calling out wordlessly as liquid hit the back of Harry's throat. As the incubus drank in the energy of sexual release, the human drank the very physical reaction and all of Harry rode the high. Sometimes he needed this, sometimes he just wanted it, but in this the sexual predator and the human need came together as one and he could deny himself the sensation. He needed Draco in a physical sense or his incubus nature would drive him to acts he could barely admit to himself, but he was beginning to realise that he needed this for far more human reasons as well. He refused to dwell on the ideas that flashed through his mind, but they settled at the back of his thoughts never the less.

Only as he drew back, tongue returning to its normal shape and size, but still very efficiently removing all signs of Draco's orgasm from the Slytherin's slowly softening cock, did Harry's own state of arousal make it back into his senses. His lover was lounging bonelessly in the chair, barely staying in place as Harry withdrew his support and Draco gave no indication of moving any time soon as Harry crawled out from under the table. In other circumstances he might have waited for his lover to recover and then request that Draco return the favour, but he was rather too much in need for that.

Sitting on the floor – he really didn't care what impression he was going to give – he fumbled with the fastenings on his jeans, pushed them down and freed his erection from his underwear. He could not help the moan as he wrapped his fingers around his cock. He was almost painfully aroused and he needed his own release as quickly as possible. Pulling his t-shirt up and out the way he spread his legs and fisted his erection firmly, grunting with relief as he felt the beginnings of his own completion.

It took only a few stokes before he was bucking into his hands and firing creamy liquid all over his stomach. It was quite strange to feel his own orgasm in isolation, without his lover's at the same time, but it still took his breath away as he shuddered uncontrollably. Only as he sat there panting did he begin to come down properly and the incubus attributes begin to fade from his body. It took him a long few seconds to sort his head out and then he looked up to find hungry grey eyes watching him intently.

"Merlin, you're beautiful," Draco said in little more than a whisper.

Harry felt himself flush.

=====

It was almost an ordinary morning in that at least Harry was feeling vaguely human after satisfying his sexual urges, and he and Draco chatted idly about anything and everything. It was quite simply nice, and Harry enjoyed his lover's company. They were not disturbed until about ten at which point Jeremy announced that Professor Snape was outside. The pair shared a look. The Potions master would only be here for business; it wasn't as if he was the social type.

"Please let him in, Jeremy," Harry said after a few moments.

At least this time they were both fully clothed, except for the fact that Harry wasn't wearing shoes and socks. When Snape entered the room this time he was

carrying a tray once more, but it was covered and the chemical smell that assailed Harry's sensitive nose set his teeth on edge. The Potions master did not appear even remotely surprised to see Draco in the room and Snape acknowledged the member of his house with a nod.

"Good morning, Professor," Harry said evenly, , squashing the discomfort he always felt around the wizard so that his darker side would not react.

"Mr Potter," Snape replied in his usual tone, "Mr Malfoy."

"Professor," Draco returned cordially.

"I have been carrying out some preliminary experiments," Snape returned to business immediately, "and I believe I have constructed a potion which should help with some of the more over powering urges. Unfortunately due to your unique physiology I cannot guarantee the potency of the mixture; however, I can assure there will be no major side effects. I have also updated the list which I gave you at the time I took the blood sample."

He handed Harry another piece of parchment and if he had been talking to a Gryffindor, Harry would not have hesitated to leave it at that, but he was talking to a Slytherin, and the head Slytherin to boot, so his eyes narrowed in suspicion. He let his mind run over the first comment carefully.

"So what are the minor side effects?" he asked bluntly.

Snape appeared vaguely surprised by the question and removed the cloth from the tray with a raise of his eyebrows.

"Possible nausea, light headedness and drowsiness," the potions master replied openly.

"But it might stop me hurting someone?" Harry wanted to be sure he had this correct.

For a while Snape did not reply, and continued to arrange things on the tray.

"Although it pains me to say it, Mr Potter," the head of Slytherin said evenly, "I believe you will prevent that yourself. However, the general idea is to make that onus easier on you. With Miss Granger's input a solution presented itself, but the results cannot be assured."

Looking at the goblet of what appeared to be a noxious green liquid, Harry made his decision and he picked it up dubiously.

"Any particular instructions?" he asked as he held it away from his nose.

This close the smell was almost overpowering.

"I would suggest downing it in one," Snape said unsympathetically.

That made Harry grimace, but he was nothing if not brave and he lifted the goblet slowly. The smell was enough to set some of his darker aspects screeching that he was insane, but he put the vessel to his lips and tipped it back quickly. It tasted like nothing on this earth, worse than polyjuice, and that had been bad, and it hit his stomach like a stone, but he finished it anyway.

"You out did yourself," he said when he could finally control the retching that followed, "that was worse than I can possibly describe."

"I'll remember to add essence of orange next time," Snape said sarcastically.
"Any immediate effects?"

Harry felt like telling him where he could stuff his 'immediate effects', and it was a very close thing, but he held his tongue. The only thing that he could feel at the moment was the desire to bring back what he had just swallowed.

"The nausea you mentioned," he said slowly, "but I don't feel any different."

"Please record any other results," Snape said efficiently as he replaced the cover on the goblet. "Positive as well as adverse; your reactions could be important."

"Uh-huh," Harry replied, but he was beginning to think that the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach was not going to stop.

In fact it was getting worse and he looked at Draco worriedly.

"You look almost as green as my bed sheets," his lover said unhelpfully.

For once a snarky reply jumped to his mind, but he had no chance to say it. At that moment his stomach did a flip and he knew instantly that he was about to loose this battle. Without even making a vain attempt to try and maintain his dignity he put his hand over his mouth and ran to the bathroom. The potion revisited the world as quickly as it had gone down as he knelt helplessly over the toilet bowl.

"Uncontrolled vomiting," he heard Snape's dispassionate voice catalogue his predicament and he would have reacted if he had been able to, but he was incapable of anything except being very, very sick. "Tea, Mr Malfoy, peppermint tea; he will be dehydrated when he is finished."

"Yes, Sir," Harry heard Draco reply, but all he really cared about was the turmoil in his intestine.

Bloody revenge seemed like a very good idea at that moment, just as soon as his stomach let him stand up.

"I shall return to my lab," he heard Snape say and he really didn't want his victim to run away, but there wasn't a lot he could do to stop it.

As revenge moved away from him he realised that he was probably going to get to know the toilet bowl very well.

=====

The nausea was beginning to pass after about three quarters of an hour, but Harry was still feeling sorry for himself, and he was in the mood to be decidedly antisocial. Draco had stopped trying to make him talk or do anything for that matter after five minutes of prying him away from the toilet and had moved to the desk and was reading a text book of some sort. Harry was sitting on the bed sulking, or at least that's what his lover had told him he was doing. Harry for his part had no intention of stopping even if he was just being difficult; as far as he

was concerned he had every right to be annoyed (although Snape's fate had been relegated to maiming rather than outright murder now).

It was not exactly the best time for someone to come calling and when Jeremy announced that Professor McGonagall was waiting outside Harry almost told the portrait to tell her to go away, but Draco got there first.

"Let her in please, Jeremy," the Slytherin said, much to Harry's growing outrage.

The portrait looked to Harry and then back at Draco, and it was a credit to the power of Slytherin determination when his door guardian decided to obey Draco rather than the unhappy look Harry was sporting.

"What if I don't want her to come in?" he demanded pointedly, standing up and glaring.

"She's your head of house," Draco said looking back at his book, "and she has been fighting your corner since the moment she set foot at the Manor. Now be polite."

The urge to maim and rend almost switched focus to his lover at that moment, but the get out of jail free card kicked in and derailed his anger just as Professor McGonagall walked in. He looked awkwardly at her for a moment and her eyes ran over him and then to Draco. The head of Gryffindor had never been one of Draco's biggest fans, in fact it could be said that Professor McGonagall had been glad when Draco had not returned to school for his seventh year and she still appeared somewhat uncomfortable with him in the room.

"Good morning, Harry, Draco," Professor McGonagall greeted politely.

"Hello," was about the nicest response Harry could manage.

"Good morning, Professor," Draco was far more charming and stood up as he spoke.

That appeared to cause a quandary in the head of Gryffindor; it seemed to Harry as if she had expected more of an opposite response where he was the overly polite one and Draco the surly. Well he was in no mood to play nice, so quite frankly Draco could lay on the charm as much as he liked as far as Harry was concerned.

"I'm afraid there was an unfortunate incident with a potion this morning," his lover continued to speak to his head of house as Harry just glared, "and Harry is not in the best of moods."

"Snape bloody poisoned me is what happened," he said pointedly, totally ignoring the fact that he was swearing in front of the head of Gryffindor.

Understanding dawned in Professor McGonagall's eyes and she smiled sympathetically at Harry.

"Ah, I see," she said in a very understanding tone, "I can understand how that would be unpleasant. I was just dropping in to discuss the arrangements for Miss Granger, Mr Weasley and Mr Longbottom to visit, but it may be a better idea to delay the meeting if you are feeling unwell."

Part of Harry jumped for joy, but the rest of him went cold. Although the idea of the visit terrified him on one level, the social part of his nature had been longing to see his friends again. The suggestion caught him totally off guard and rather derailed any annoyance he might have been feeling. He opened his mouth to object, but found himself far too conflicted to speak, and, not knowing what to do, he sat down and stared at the floor. These days, when it came to any interaction with the outside world he seemed to spend his time in a perpetual haze of confusion. He rather forgot he was not alone as he did his best to sort out the mixed emotions that had so suddenly swamped him.

"Harry," he snapped back to reality as someone spoke to him and he looked up quickly.

Professor McGonagall was standing only a few feet away and she appeared concerned, Draco was only another foot or so behind her.

"Are you all right," his head of house asked kindly.

"Confused," he said shortly, but mainly because he couldn't explain it beyond that, rather than because he was still sulking.

"Would you like to talk about it?" Professor McGonagall enquired supportively.

It was a genuine question rather than anything born of forced feelings of responsibility so Harry considered it for a moment, but slowly shook his head. He really did not think he wanted to explain what he was feeling.

"It's difficult," he said and hoped that his head of house would not push.

As it was she nodded in acceptance and looked around the room.

"As you wish, Young man," she said agreeably. "Perhaps we should discuss the arrangements for this afternoon and decide on timing later. Would you mind if I sat down?"

It was then that Harry realised what Professor McGonagall had been looking for: somewhere to sit.

"Um," he said apologetically, "Professor Dumbledore usually conjures himself a chair."

That caused the witch to smile.

"Yes, well, the headmaster has rather particular taste in furniture," she replied fondly, "however, I was led to believe that the Room of Requirements would provide whatever is needed by the occupants. Would you care to do the honours or shall I?"

It had not occurred to Harry that he could add to what was already in the room, and it dawned on him that maybe he had been being somewhat dense.

"Um, I'm not sure how," he admitted sheepishly.

"Concentration, Harry," Professor McGonagall said, almost as if she was at the head of a class teaching; "the key to most magic is concentration."

That sounded far too easy, in Harry's experience magic was actually concentration and some hideously complicated words and actions, but although he was a peevish dark creature he was not about to contradict Professor Minerva McGonagall to her face. Voldemort was one thing, an annoyed McGonagall was another, and he had already dealt with the only one he had any intention of engaging.

"So all I need to do is think hard enough?" he asked, honestly intrigued.

He had stood in the hallway concentrating to make the room into what he needed many times, but once inside, changing it had never come up. His head of house nodded with a small smile. Dubiously Harry closed his eyes and concentrated on a mental image of the high back chairs that the staff used in the Great Hall. He really wasn't sure the room worked in quite the way Professor McGonagall seemed to think it did, but he was willing to try.

"Thank you, Harry," his head of house's voice broke through his concentration and he opened his eyes to find the chair from his mental image sitting next to his head of house.

He did not bother to hide his surprise. His eyes flicked to Draco and then back to the chair: this opened up a whole new world of possibilities.

"So, Harry," Professor McGonagall said cheerfully as she sat down, "about this afternoon."

=====

Harry heard the entrance to his room open as he shamelessly hid behind the almost closed bathroom door. He had recovered from Snape's potion, and managed to restore his better mood, but that was rapidly changing again. Jeremy was under instructions to let his visitors in when they arrived and Harry had been cowering in the smaller room for a good ten minutes; quite frankly he was terrified.

"Ah, Harry must be in the bathroom," Professor McGonagall said pleasantly as he listened at the door, "I'm sure he won't be a moment."

Harry swallowed hard and stared at his reflection in the mirror; so different. Would they be able to see him under the physical changes his condition had made, or would they just see this dark creature which stared back at him? The idea of slamming the door home, locking it and screaming for them to go away briefly flitted through his head, but he managed to suppress it, just. Biting his lip nervously he reached for the door handle, and tried to bring his thundering heart rate under control.

Pulling back the safety barrier between himself and his friends was one of the hardest things he had ever done, and he stepped into the main chamber with all the confidence of a ferret amongst a heard of hippogriffs. His friends were all stood around the library area and appeared to be pretending to look at various book titles as if they were the most interesting thing in the world. Professor McGonagall gave him a supportive smile as he hovered just inside the room and Neville was the first to turn.

His friend's eye went wide and Neville's mouth turned into a little round 'o'. If one thing could always be relied upon, it was Neville's complete inability to hide what he was thinking. Harry almost bolted.

"Harry," the flustered Gryffindor said, which of course caused Ron and Hermione to both look in his direction as well.

Ron just stared, face completely blank and Hermione was the first to move. To Harry's growing horror she hurried across the room, and if he hadn't been quite so shocked he might have reacted defensively; as it was, when she threw her arms around him he simply froze completely.

"Harry," she said into his shoulder, "we've been so worried."

He was assailed by a confusing influx of instincts which ranged from the desire to remove the threat of the very powerful witch who was embracing him, up to wanting to return the hug. It left him rather shocked and stiff in his friend's arms. Hermione was nothing if not persistent, however, and she held on until eventually he managed to overcome his conflict and awkwardly embraced her back.

"Hello," he said quietly as she finally pulled back.

The genuine smile on Hermione's face rather took his breath away, she seemed so pleased to see him and he couldn't understand why he didn't horrify her.

"When they took you we were frantic," Hermione said earnestly, "I'm so glad you're back and in one piece."

"With added extras," he said far more bitterly than he had meant to.

For a moment his friend frowned at him and then pursed her lips.

"Yes, well we can help you with that," she said firmly, "I'm just glad you're alive. One reason to be thankful for Voldemort's complete insanity; anyone with any sense would have just killed you."

It was typical of Hermione to be practical and Harry did not quite know how to react. He had expected horrified reactions, fear and a division that could not be breached, but it was almost as if he hadn't changed at all. It seemed that Hermione was still quite willing to express her forthright opinions, and she didn't seem to be remotely nervous of him. In fact all he could feel from her was a deep curiosity, sympathy and happiness; he was rather at a loss to know how to proceed.

"Well," Professor McGonagall said in her usual, kind but firm tone, "having dispatched my duty in delivering your friends, Mr Potter, I shall take my leave. I hope you all have a pleasant afternoon."

It was funny how the woman could be so formal one moment and almost like an eccentric aunt the next.

"Thank you, Professor," Harry said politely even as part of him wanted to beg her to stay and maintain the position of chaperone.

"The wards will allow you through from this direction, Miss Granger, Mr Weasley, Mr Longbottom," Professor McGonagall said pleasantly, "and there is no need to let anyone know when you leave; the protections will inform the headmaster when you choose to return to Gryffindor Tower."

"Thank you," Hermione spoke for the other three.

As the door closed behind the Professor, Harry felt as if the ground was opening beneath him. Hermione may have been taking everything calmly, but Neville still appeared shocked and Ron was not reacting in anyway Harry had come to expect from his best friend. Whether he liked it or not, Ron was the epitome of a fiery redhead and Molly's son was like his mother in that he tended to be very emotive. The fact that Ron barely had any expression said far more than if his best friend had been raging around the room.

"You seem to have been doing a lot of reading," Hermione made an opening gambit to break the stillness that had fallen the moment Professor McGonagall had left. "You must have half the restricted section in here."

"I don't think they're actually here until I need them," Harry said, willing to take the opening for what it was. "I'm not quite sure how it works, but Dumbledore said something about the books being images until I want to read them, and then the library lets me borrow the real book when I take it off the shelf. I've been trying to figure out what I am; I had never even heard of some of the creatures on Snape's list."

Hermione smiled at that.

"Well some of them are a little obscure," she said, "I had to look some of them up as well."

Perversely, Harry couldn't help enjoying that; stumping Hermione was almost unheard of and he smiled back.

"I'll have to make a note on the calendar," he said lightly; "'Am something Hermione didn't know about, have achieved life's aim.'"

This time the bitterness was far less pronounced and his friend politely ignored that it was there at all.

"How are you feeling, Mate?" Ron finally entered the conversation.

Several curt answers came to mind, especially after the potions fiasco, but the part of Harry who was glad that his best friend had chosen to speak won the race to his mouth.

"Pretty bizarre," he admitted honestly, "but I think I'm getting the hang of some of it. If I snap at you, don't take any notice, I have a foul temper these days."

"So what's new?" Harry couldn't help staring as Neville launched in boldly.

For a second he was so shocked at his friend's words that he didn't know how to react, and Neville appeared ready to run if necessary. Eventually a heartfelt laugh bubbled up and out of his throat; maybe his fellow Gryffindor had a point. He had almost forgotten how good it felt to simply laugh and he was very happy to see a smile replace the unsure look on Neville's face.

"Yeah," Harry said lightly, "you could be right. Just if I get in a snit don't get between me and the furniture; it can cope with my frustration. Shall we sit down?"

That brokered confusion in his friends since there was apparently only one chair in the room.

"Three piece or a table and chairs?" Harry asked pleasantly.

"Something comfortable," Hermione said, catching on.

Harry closed his eyes and made a firm picture of furniture similar to that in the Gryffindor common room in his mind. After his little try and success at asking the room for things earlier that morning, he hoped fervently it worked this time. When he opened his eyes there were two arm chairs and a sofa sitting in the middle of the room and he smiled, pleased with himself.

"Perk of living in the Room of Requirement," he said lightly as Ron looked at him in a rather startled manner.

Taking the lead he flopped down into one of the chairs and hoped the others would follow him. Unsurprisingly, Neville took the other chair and Hermione and Ron sat down on the sofa; it was so completely normal that for a moment Harry could almost have believed they were all in the common room. It was a pleasant feeling and he managed to hold onto it for a good few seconds before reality insisted on being acknowledged.

"So what have I missed?" he asked in an attempt to keep his mood buoyant.

"You're better off in here," Ron said in almost his normal tone, "it's gone mental out there. As soon as the special edition of the Prophet came out the world ground to a halt; lessons weren't officially cancelled yesterday afternoon, but I don't think anyone did any work, and the girls have been wandering around decorating anything that doesn't walk away."

"Not all the girls, Ron," Hermione corrected lightly, "and you're only annoyed because Lavender tried to make you wear that flowery banner. It's good to see people celebrating."

Harry looked at his best friend's uncomfortable expression.

"Flowery banner?" he asked, knowing that this had to be interesting.

Hermione actually looked gleeful at the enquiry.

"The seventh years have been doing Hippies in Muggle Studies," she said brightly, "and Lavender has decided that flower power is the perfect way to celebrate peace. Flowers are turning up everywhere, and she has enlisted half of Hufflepuff as well. Since she doesn't have you to work with, she decided that Ron, as your best friend, was a valid target and she tried to stick him into a banner proclaiming peace and love with bright pink flowers."

"Yeah and if Hermione hadn't been good at undoing sticking charms I'd still be wearing it," Ron said in a very affronted tone.

"It clashed with his hair," Neville said with a laugh.

"Wasn't bloody funny," Ron grumbled, in his annoyance seeming to forget any awkwardness.

Harry knew, as a best friend, he should have agreed with Ron and commiserated with him, but he couldn't help himself as he laughed. Lavender could be insistent when she felt like it and he could just imagine Ron trying to get away. When it

came to any threat they had ever faced, Ron had been there ready to deal with it, but his best friend was hopeless when it came to coping with stubborn girls. The betrayed looked on Ron's face was a picture and just made Harry laugh harder.

"Sorry, Ron," he apologised between chuckles, "but I wish I'd been there to see that."

"Yeah, well if you had been there she wouldn't have bothered with me would she?" his friend said sulkily.

For once it appeared that Ron would have preferred to play second fiddle to The Boy Who Lived. For a brief second Harry wondered if in his altered state he'd have a similar reaction to Ron, or if he'd try and eat Lavender for her trouble. He managed to sit on the morbid thought before he could dwell on it, but it sobered him a little. It looked like another awkward silence would fall when Hermione elbowed Ron in the ribs and looked at him rather meaningfully.

"Wha... oh," Ron was as clueless as usual to begin with. "We went to Hogsmeade this morning, what with the day off and all, and since you can't go yet we brought you some stuff."

His friend then fished in what Harry realised was a suspiciously stuffed pocket and produced a handful of sweets. Then a small problem popped up as Ron looked for somewhere to put them. Quickly Harry closed his eyes and concentrated on a coffee table, which dutifully appeared between.

"Thanks, Mate," Ron said almost absently and dumped the contents of his hand on the new piece of furniture.

"Dobby told us there were some things you couldn't eat any more," Neville said conversationally, "but sweets were okay."

Harry felt strangely warm inside as he realised how much trouble his friends had gone to for him.

"Yeah," he said around the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat, "it's really weird; saved me from the Ministry trying to drug me though."

"They did what?" Hermione sounded outraged.

"I think they wanted to make sure I wouldn't be any trouble while they took me somewhere," Harry said quietly, "but they put whatever it was in the porridge and I couldn't eat it."

"Idiots," his friend raged bluntly, "with your physiology as it is now anything could have happened. They couldn't possibly have known what would be safe. Thank Merlin Dumbledore took over."

"Um, yeah," Harry agreed, although this wasn't really the direction he wanted the conversation to go and he regretted his earlier words. "Is that what I think it is?" he asked, seeing a familiar looking red lollipop on the table.

It was a diversionary tactic, but it worked as everyone looked down.

"Blood flavoured lollipop," Neville replied brightly, "my idea."

"Thanks, Nev," Harry said in kind and snagged the confectionary with a grin.

The other three just sat there, watching him as he began to unwrap his prize.

"Well," he asked as he noticed, "isn't anyone else going to have something?"

That broke the stillness and his friends dived in as well. It was when he stuck the lollipop into his mouth that Harry suddenly decided that maybe he had made a mistake. The moment the flavour burst onto his tongue his fangs descended in response and he kept his mouth firmly closed to hide them. He had not expected his physiology to react to the sweet, and he did not want to frighten his friends with more strangeness. The major problem was that he couldn't remove the lollipop without revealing that he now had long, vicious fangs in his mouth. For a moment he panicked; unfortunately, Ron noticed.

"Harry, Mate, you okay?" his best friend asked.

"Uh-huh," Harry mumbled around the sweet in his mouth, not sure how he could get out of this one.

A quick trip to the bathroom seemed like a sensible option, but he couldn't exactly explain with the lolly in his mouth and he couldn't take it out so he was rather stuck. The confectionary really did taste rather good, but that was not helping his predicament at all.

"Are you sure, Harry?" Hermione asked in her usual, slightly concerned manner.

All three were looking at him now and he really didn't know what to do; he couldn't even speak like this. They all appeared so worried, and eventually Harry gave up. He'd lost this round and he had to take the consequences. Very slowly he opened his mouth wide enough to remove the lollipop and in doing so revealed his fangs.

"Um," he said awkwardly, looking anywhere but directly at his friends.

"Well I've never seen anyone react that way to a lollipop," Ron said suddenly; "makes me wonder what reaction we could get with a liquorice wand."

Harry glanced up quickly at his best friend's words and was surprised to find a half smile playing at Ron's mouth. When his eyes flicked to the other two Hermione gave him a supportive smile and Neville shrugged. At that reaction Harry managed a sheepish grin.

"I wouldn't chance it if I were you," he said quietly, matching Ron's tone.

That finally coaxed a laugh out of his friend. As he looked at his three year mates he was very glad for such accepting friends and he only hoped that he would never do anything that would make them regret their faith. Relaxing just a little he sat back in his chair and popped the sweet back in his mouth; he might as well enjoy it now that it had embarrassed him.

The real chat began then, rather than the forced camaraderie and Harry found himself joining in with the meaningless banter. Ron wanted to talk about Quidditch tactics since, as deputy Gryffindor captain, he now had responsibility for the team, but Hermione and Neville managed to head him off after only a few minutes. There would be plenty of time for that later and Neville, who it had turned out always knew all the gossip, began to give them all the low down on

every bit of scandal from around the school.

They were doing really well, laughing and joking about the misdemeanours and indiscretions of their fellow pupils, until an obvious topic came up; one of Ron's favourites, and then things went down hill.

"The Slytherins are as weird as usual," the epitome of Gryffindorish directness said rather spitefully, "half of them are really quiet, and you just know they must be planning something, and the other half of them is pretending that they wanted You Know Who dead all along."

Harry's hackles went up straight away; he knew where this was going.

"They're not all..." he tried to head it off before it went any further.

As usual when winding up into a rant about Slytherin house, Ron was oblivious.

"As if we didn't all know that they're junior Death Eaters," his best friend continued. "I know for a fact that some of their parents are You Know Who's lackeys."

Harry glared at Ron, but it did no good, his friend was not taking any notice.

"Take Draco bloody Malfoy, for a start," Ron was really on a roll. "One of the Hufflepuffs gave him a peace flower and can you believe that he actually wore it. Him, of all people, a peace flower!"

Anger flared in Harry and he balled his hands into fists as his best friend continued to rant.

"Ron," Neville's voice was low and nervous.

"It's like You Know Who himself joining in," Ron was far too into his stride to listen and Harry was becoming tenser and angrier by the second.

"Ron, shut up!" Neville sounded a little desperate.

That finally brought Ron's rant to a halt and he looked over at his dorm mate rather annoyed before looking directly at Harry. Ron's eyes went wide and he sat back, away from Harry, which at another time would probably have hurt, but Harry was far too angry to worry about it. Dark ideas were travelling through his head and the power to carry them out lurked very close to the surface.

"I was almost a Slytherin, Ron," he said, his voice low and dangerously resonant, "would you have said the same of me?"

"Harry, I..." Ron tried to say something, but Harry was not interested.

"Tarring them all with the same brush is as bad as them calling Hermione a Mudblood, or denouncing Muggles as being stupid just because they don't have magic," he continued, angry on several different levels.

Part of him was annoyed that Ron had insulted and tried to denigrate Draco; another part was angry that his best friend was still drawing lines in the sand; and yet another was furious that with attitudes like that, all he had been through would likely end up as nothing.

"Are you your father, Ron?" he asked pointedly. "Do you want to go and work for the Ministry in a little office because you're obsessed with Muggle devices? Do you have a plug collection? They're children, Ron, they're not demons or monsters or murderers. They can be happy he's gone as much as you."

He was working himself up, he knew it, and yet he couldn't stop it. With a snarl he stood up and walked away, leaving a deathly silence behind him. His temper was too high, his anger too hot and he did not trust himself in the vicinity of his friends. Ron was just blowing off steam, Harry knew this intellectually, but he could not separate his emotions from his response and he did not want to take the risk of staying close to his best friend. He went and stood by the bed post the same way he had with Dumbledore, just in case he needed a target, but wrapping his arms around himself he tried to bring his raging feelings under control without destroying anything.

"Harry," eventually Hermione spoke, "is everything all right?"

He didn't turn, he didn't dare, and he was almost sure he heard slight fear in his friend's voice. It hurt to know he was failing so badly. How could he have let himself frighten Hermione?

"I'm sorry, Mate," Ron sounded genuinely remorseful and Harry wondered just how badly he had frightened his best friend.

Ron was sincere, that much Harry knew, but he was on the verge of asking them all to leave.

"You know Ron, Harry, always running off at the mouth," Neville tried to joke.

"It's just that they're all having fun," Ron tried again when Harry did not respond, "and you're stuck here and it's so bloody unfair."

Harry's anger seeped away and he slowly looked round; all three of his friends were looking at him worriedly, only they didn't seem worried about what he might do, they were worried about him. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to hug them, or scream at them not to be so stupid, couldn't they tell he was dangerous to them. What to do next seemed like such a difficult thing to decide.

Eventually Hermione leant forward and patted his empty chair.

"Come back and sit down," she said coaxingly and gave him a winning smile, "no more talk of Slytherins, Ron promises, or he'll have me to deal with as well."

Now Ron looked aghast and paled considerable, which Harry found ironically funny. He managed to smile slightly as he realised Ron was more scared of Hermione than his friend was of him. Seeing that, Harry felt just a glimmer of hope breaking through his dark mood; it was not a lot, but it was something to hold on to.

End of Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Neville stepped into the room looking a little awkward, so Harry gave his friend what he hoped was a reassuring smile. He could never be quite sure these days if he looked pleasant or demonic.

"Um, the portrait said I should just come in," his fellow Gryffindor said nervously.

"Yeah," Harry replied, trying to decide if it would make Nev feel better if he walked towards him or whether it would put his friend off even more, "Jeremy will let you in whenever you visit unless I'm really busy with something."

"Oh," Neville replied sounding quite surprised.

Finally deciding that the pair of them hovering on either side of the room was making the whole situation worse, Harry walked over to his friend.

"Easier that way, don't you think," he said as cheerfully as he could manage.

His companion nodded and looked around the room.

"You have windows," Neville commented, shocked again.

"Hermione's idea," Harry explained with a grin, "you know what she's like when she gets an idea in her head. Took us an hour to get them right when she and Ron came over this morning; she decided I needed some natural light so we spent our time asking the room to provide different types of windows."

Talking about other people seemed to help with Neville's nervousness and Harry was pleased when some of the tension appeared to run out of his friend. He could still feel the anxiety running through the other Gryffindor, but it was dimming by the second.

"But don't you have trouble with light, what with..." Neville trailed off as if he suddenly realised he might be broaching an uncomfortable subject.

"The vampire and other nocturnal creatures in me?" Harry supplied calmly, hiding any trepidation the topic of conversation caused him. "Yeah, we had a few problems to begin with, but I'm not that sensitive to make it a real problem; it just makes my eyes hurt if it's too bright too long. Hermione played with some complicated filtering ideas to get everything right."

"We can always rely on Hermione, can't we?" his friend responded, obviously relieved he hadn't put his foot in it.

Harry laughed. He knew they could always rely on Hermione for several things, whether it was nagging about their homework, or the answer to the universe. It was so true that she was always there for all of them.

"You're making sure she's not working herself into a frenzy over this whole business, aren't you," he said, becoming serious for a moment. "I know she's probably trying to solve the puzzle that is me and this time I don't think there is a solution, so I'm relying on you and Ron to make sure Hermione doesn't kill herself trying."

"Ron confiscated her text books last night and made her play exploding snap," Nev said with a perfectly straight face, "she hexed him with green hair without

him even noticing, didn't take it off until he apologised at breakfast," his friend confided, breaking into a grin. "You should have heard him when he saw himself in the mirror this morning, and Colin has pictures."

For a moment Harry just stood there as the mental images attempted to make sense in his brain, and then a laugh bubbled up from deep in his chest.

"Green?" he asked, not quite believing it.

Neville nodded.

"And they never said anything earlier," Harry said, grinning broadly.

"I think they've come to an understanding," his friend replied, much more relaxed now.

Harry could just imagine, that must have been a conversation to behold.

"So what do you want to do?" he asked, changing the subject. "I'm afraid there's not a lot of options around here at the moment, but the room's quite good at coming up with things."

"Well actually I wanted to talk plants," Neville said, as if he was sorry to bring up the subject. "I have some ideas for Hermione and P...pro... Snape, but I need to know if you've ever had reactions to things in the past."

The seriousness of the subject matter surprised Harry and he could not help the slight disappointment he was feeling from reaching his face. Everything around him seemed to be so concentrated on him that he had been hoping for an hour or so of diversion.

"But," his friend continued seemingly without missing a beat, "that won't take long, and I think I'd like to try out the room first. Ron says it's wicked fun."

The change of track almost left Harry behind, but as he caught up he grinned again.

"It is," he said with a laugh, "only you have to be very clear about what you want. Ron created the oddest looking sofa yesterday."

"I'm sure it was exactly what he was expecting," Neville said with mock seriousness.

"Yeah, sure," Harry replied, "he really wanted it yellow with pink spots. I think he's still traumatised by Lavender's flowers."

Now Nev laughed, long and hard.

=====

Harry watched his queen smashing Ron's knight to a pulp with a small grin of pleasure; the harmless violence of the chess game appealed to both his dark side and his simple human competitiveness. He was never going to beat Ron, of that he was one hundred percent sure, but it was fun throwing caution to the wind and enjoying the destruction. He had not been feeling well after taking Snape's latest concoction around lunch time, and Ron's visit had been a welcome distraction.

"Harry," Ron complained good-naturedly, "are you actually thinking at all? You do know that I'm going to take your queen now, don't you."

Harry just grinned and sat back in his chair, he really couldn't care less, and he was enjoying himself. By indulging his destructive tendencies he had managed to lessen the churning in his stomach, which was a bonus to the joy of just playing at being normal. There had still been a slight awkwardness when Ron had first arrived with his chess set in hand, as there had been with Neville the day before, but that had dissipated quickly and Harry was very glad to have his friend back. It had been two days since the first visit and things seemed to be settling down.

The room was quite dim, with light from candles and there was a homely feel about the whole place. There was also a nice view out over the lake through the fake windows, of course, by now it was almost completely dark, what with it being late afternoon, Winter and Scotland, but it still added a nice illusion of space to the room.

Watching Ron reach out and move a rook to take Harry's queen, he found himself admiring the long line of freckled wrist that poked out of his friend's ratty old maroon jumper as Ron stretched to reach the pieces. So fragile and yet so full of life, small bones which could be snapped like twigs, but that fitted together to form such a capable structure. Each movement of muscle and sinew, tendon and skin held him fascinated as Ron placed his rook on the same square as the queen. Battle was joined and yet Harry found himself watching the retreating hand rather than the melee of destruction.

"Mate," Ron's voice broke through his reverie, "you in there?"

Harry blinked and looked up at his best friend's slightly worried expression.

"Your move," Ron prompted as Harry just sat there.

With a smile, he leant forward in his seat and picked up the nearest chess piece and moved it into battle range of one of his friend's pawns, towards his side of the board. That caused Ron to frown at the board and look at it very carefully; obviously trying to work out what Harry was up to. So far it had been a matter of battle at every opportunity, and the seemingly needless sacrifice of his piece had Ron confused; of course the oblivious red head could have no idea that Harry had chosen the move for no other reason than to see his friend stretch across the board once more.

He smiled as that pale wrist appeared from the jumper sleeve again; he could feel the beat of life running through his friend and he let the sound reverberate through him. Such intoxicating humanity, calling to him with its rhythmic thudding; so easy to reach out and take and he closed his eyes, revelling in the sound.

"Harry?" Ron called him from his drifting once again.

When he opened his eyes he moved instantly, his hand reaching out to snag Ron's exposed wrist. His friend had frozen mid move and even Quidditch Keeper reflexes were not enough to save him from Harry's grab.

"What are you doing, Mate?" Ron was trying to sound calm, but the tremor in his voice made Harry's smile widen.

"It won't hurt, Ron," Harry said, staring straight into his friend's eyes, "I promise."

Ron's stare became slightly glassy as Harry held his gaze and his friend did not try and resist as he lifted the pale, freckled wrist towards his mouth. It took only moments for his fangs to descend as the frightened pounding of Ron's heart sang to him. His friend made no move to get away, his glazed eyes following what Harry was doing, but his expression remaining fixed and almost blank. Only when Harry bit slowly into the soft yielding flesh and warm, sweet blood flowed into his mouth did Ron react, and the moan that came out of his friend's mouth was not one of pain. The trickle of raw magic that Harry was sending into Ron with the bite caused his companion to slump forward, barely allowing his friend to hold himself up on the edge of the table as Ron shuddered with pleasure. One of the reasons vampires could be even more dangerous to wizards than they were to Muggles was because their innate control of magic was so seductive to magical beings.

Harry had taken two delicious swallows when reality suddenly flicked back on in his head. He shied back instantly, tipping over his chair and sending chess pieces flying off the board as horror at what he was doing coursed through him. Ron looked up at him with a dazed expression and Harry backed away in pure terror of what he had done. He could taste his best friend's blood in his mouth, he could feel the essence of Ron on his lips; he was horrified and disgusted with himself.

Yet the vampire wanted more, Harry could sense the instincts clawing at his self control and he continued to back away, shaking with the effort to leave his friend alone. How could he have hurt Ron; his best friend and the closest thing he had to a brother in the whole world? Nothing could excuse what he had just done, nothing. He was a despicable thing and he had betrayed a sacred trust.

He did not stop backing away until he hit the wall and then he slowly sank to the floor, breathing in short gasps as panic took away all rational thought. Wrapping his arms around himself he curled into the smallest shape he could, head buried, and face hidden in shame. He had bitten Ron and he deserved anything he had coming. Dumbledore should just abandon him to the Ministry, he was a dark creature, and nothing was safe from him.

The recriminations flowed round and round his head, spiralling up and down, feeding his hatred of what he was. Loosing track of time and his surroundings his mind folded in on itself as instinct warred with horror for dominance. Ron would hate him, he had just killed the friendship that had held him together through so many things, and it was all his fault. They should lock him in Azkaban and throw away the key.

"Mr Potter," Snape's cool tones made it past his defences, but he could not seem to react.

If he did not move he could not hurt anyone else he cared about.

"Is he alright?" Ron's concerned voice almost made an impression, but Harry decided it was wishful thinking.

"I believe, Mr Weasley," Snape replied evenly, "that Mr Potter is very far from alright. I believe you were instructed to leave."

"No bloody way," was Ron's emphatic response.

Now Harry knew he was hallucinating; he had hurt Ron, Ron must be long gone by now. A hand reached past his protective barrier of arms, and fingers fixed on his chin; he did not resist as he head was lifted. Blearily he stared straight ahead; aware of Snape looking at him critically, but with all his strength aimed at his internal struggle there was nothing left to let him interact.

"What's wrong with his eyes?" the figment of his imagination that was Ron, asked anxiously.

The snort from Snape indicated that he was unimpressed with the question.

"The pale yellow of the whites and the red streaks in the irises indicate vampire malnutrition," the Potions master explained none-the-less; "quite simply, Mr Weasley, Mr Potter is starving."

Harry would have been surprised if he had had the energy left to manage it.

"But I thought he was getting blood when he needed it," imaginary Ron sounded outraged.

"He was," Snape replied coolly, "obviously it was not enough."

The Potions master moved Harry's chin from one side to the other; Harry kept his eyes on the man in front of him.

"Mr Potter," Snape said firmly, "do you understand me?"

Harry could not let himself react, if he let himself move he might do something else terrible and he could never allow that. All he could do was blink slowly and let his gaze stay on the dark eyes of the Potions master.

"Severus," the headmaster's voice entered the conversation, but Harry did not look away from his centre of attention, "can you ascertain the reason for Harry's predicament?"

"I cannot be certain, Headmaster," Snape replied evenly, "but I would conjecture that Mr Potter requires a live donor: precious little is actually known about vampires and their habits and this reaction could be normal or it may be the combination of creatures within him. In public vampires have been observed to drink blood like a human being would drink wine, but it does not appear to be sufficient to feed Mr Potter."

Harry found himself wanting to laugh at the rational conversation going on; he was evil, didn't they understand that? He had attacked his best friend; they should be preparing to lock him up forever, not talking about why.

"That would appear to complicate matters," Dumbledore said calmly.

"I'll do it," imaginary Ron was being so supportive that for a moment Harry almost let himself hope that he was real.

"Mr Weasley," Snape said acidly, "do you have any concept of what you are volunteering for?"

"He already bit me once," Ron replied with a note of annoyance in his voice, "if Harry needs more then I want to help him."

It occurred to Harry then that Snape must be a figment of his imagination as well, because he was talking to imaginary Ron; which probably meant this whole conversation was part of his insane hallucination. Why this had not occurred to him before he really didn't know, but he had obviously totally lost the plot.

"Mr Potter appears to need to feed once every three to four days," Snape pointed out, "one donor would not be enough. To be safe there would need to be four."

"At least I could help him now," imaginary Ron sounded stubborn; Harry would have liked him to be real.

"Would it be safe for Ron to assist, Severus?" Dumbledore asked in his usual tone.

Harry didn't think Snape liked the idea from the expression on his face, but then this was all in his head so he thought he should really be more sure of his facts.

"Mr Potter is in shock and he is starving," the Potions master replied; "it is impossible to be sure of anything at this time."

"I still want to help," imaginary Ron said firmly.

Letting his eyes drift, Harry decided that imaginary Ron really did appear to be exactly like the real Ron; he even had blood on his wrist that Harry's sharp nose could smell. Snape was looking at Ron as well and the potions master finally drew his wand.

"He appears to have entered a catatonic state," Snape said unhappily, "blood may wake him, or it may not, either way you will have to help him initially. I will reopen the wounds on your wrist; you tip his head back slightly and allow them to bleed into his mouth."

Imaginary Ron appeared very nervous at this, but he nodded anyway and knelt down when Snape indicated he should do so. Harry found the wrist that was offered in front of his face completely fascinating, but he could do nothing to reach out for it. His fangs were still descended and they ached at what he could see and smell; he really was starving. A whispered spell and the two red wounds became wet with fresh, coppery-smelling blood and yet there was a barrier of his own making between him and it. His mind was a cruel place to offer him such obviously unreal images.

It was funny, he had never expected an hallucination to be so solid; Snape was touching him and then Ron was touching him as well and there was no way they actually existed. Together they lifted his chin and then Ron brought his bleeding wrist to Harry's lips, allowing the blood to drip into his mouth. The taste and the sense of Ron exploded in his mouth and in his brain and he felt his whole body convulse. In that moment he knew it was real and in that moment he knew what his best friend was willing to do for him; as even his last tentative grip on reality fled and his consciousness dissolved into feeding he was filled with such love and gratitude for his friend that he wanted to scream it at the top of his lungs.

=====

Harry opened his eyes as he felt the mattress dip and he noted that it was dark. The whole room was a sequence of pitch black patches and objects lined in silver as his eyes picked up the slightest traces of light and heat. He was lying on his side next to the right edge of the bed and someone had just climbed in behind

him. Rolling over he found a familiar profile framed against the stars in the fake window.

"Go back to sleep," Draco said quietly. "Snape told me what happened and I came as soon as I could. You need to rest; I'll be here if you need me."

Memories of the afternoon tried to make it into Harry's mind, but he was still too tired to think properly and as Draco's arm snaked over him and pulled him close, Harry closed his eyes and drifted back to sleep.

=====

Warm fresh blood poured into his mouth and it was so delicious and the sensations running through his body were so encompassing that he couldn't stop; didn't even want to. He just drank and drank until he couldn't drink anymore and finally sated he pulled back. Blood dribbled down his chin in a small stream and he laughed his pleasure to the world before he looked down. It wasn't until he saw the body in his arms that reality made it into his mindset and Ron's pale, dead features etched themselves into his brain.

"Ron!" Harry found himself sitting in bed staring wildly around.

A gentle hand touched his shoulder and he whipped his gaze around to find Draco sitting up next to him.

"He's fine," his lover said calmly, "you didn't hurt him."

"I bit him," he whispered as if he almost didn't believe it.

Memories mixed with his dream and for a few moments he could not separate them as the images flew around his mind.

"Yes," Draco agreed with him, while rubbing gently at the back of his neck, "but you didn't hurt him. According to Snape you were starving; something about drinking from a cup did not satisfy your hunger and Weasley was there when you finally broke. You took only a little and then you shut yourself down. Weasley called Dumbledore and then with Snape's help Weasley fed you. Do you remember?"

The real recollections were fuzzy in his brain, but Harry nodded as he managed to bring back some idea of what had happened. Ron had not run; he had attacked him and Ron had not run; Harry did not understand.

"He wanted to help me," he said, voicing his confusion, "but I attacked him. Why did he want to help me?"

Draco shook his head and rolled his eyes in exasperation, Harry really couldn't fathom that either. His brain was not working too well and he was confused.

"He's your friend, you idiot," his lover said gently, "he would follow you into fire if you asked. You Gryffindors can be dense, but you're loyal to a fault. Harry, just because you have been changed doesn't mean you deserve his loyalty even less."

"But I attacked him," Harry insisted.

There were limits to any friendship.

"You were starving," Draco replied pointedly. "Mark it up as a bump along the road to making you fit for civilised society and don't think about it too hard; don't want to over tax that brain of yours, it hasn't been used much in the past and it might overheat."

It took Harry a moment to realise he had been insulted.

"Hey," he protested, indignation helping his thoughts to some semblance of normality, "I do think things through."

"Could have fooled me," Draco said with an arch of one elegant eyebrow.

Harry opened his mouth to protest again, but then realised he was being misdirected and the guilt hit him again.

"Everything is okay," Draco insisted seriously, "you stopped yourself doing any damage. You have more control over your dark side than you give yourself credit for."

"If I have so much control why did I attack him?" Harry countered.

His lover threw his arms in the air with an exasperated sigh and climbed out of bed.

"Which bit of 'you were starving' do you not understand you stupid Gryffindor?" Draco asked in a very frustrated tone.

The Slytherin stood beside the bed glaring at Harry and he could feel the annoyance coming off his lover in waves. Part of him informed him that Draco was very attractive when he was angry, which managed to distract him just a little from the guilt.

"He's really okay?" he asked quietly.

"Fit as a fairy on moon dust," his lover replied firmly. "Now, did you get enough yesterday, or are you still hungry?"

Harry examined his feelings at the question and he realised that the nagging feeling he was missing something, which had been bothering him for days, was completely gone. He had not recognised it for what it was before, but he was damn sure he would not misinterpret it again.

"Not hungry," he replied with certainty.

"Good," Draco said, his expression softening, "but let me know when you are again, because I'm here."

Part of the conversation between Snape and Ron came back to him at that point.

"Snape said there would have to be four to be safe," Harry quoted as he sifted the information out.

"Yes, well, I suspect you'll be surprised how easily that one is solved," Draco said enigmatically, "but for now, promise me you will tell me if you need anything."

There was a very stubborn expression on his lover's face and Harry knew that he would get away with nothing less than agreeing so he nodded. That, at least,

seemed to satisfy the suddenly bossy Slytherin. When Harry had gone from total domination to an equal partner in this relationship he was not sure, but no matter how possessive he felt, he realised that Draco seemed to have a similar stake in whatever was between them now.

"Right, well, whatever you did to stop yourself hurting Weasley, it was not good for you," Draco continued efficiently, "breakfast first and then we can laze around for the rest of the morning. Snape said he would make sure there were no interruptions until at least lunch."

His lover turned and walked towards where the table was usually set up for meals and Harry could not help admiring the shapely behind in silk pyjamas. Draco seemed to think that he was in charge this morning, but with his equilibrium rapidly returning, Harry didn't think that he was going to let that stay for long. Okay so he was not hungry in any supernatural sense, technically, but if they had all morning they had plenty of time for breakfast and he rather fancied satisfying other urges. With a grin he climbed gracefully off the bed and tried to decide to which surface he was going to pin his lover.

=====

Draco had to make an appearance at lunch in the Great Hall to avoid the awkward questions that came with him apparently missing so many meals, so Harry was left alone just before twelve. He had a nice long shower and then went back to his reading and research, in a much better mood than the one in which he had woken. Absorbing himself in the information in the books he managed to put the remaining guilt to the back of his mind, so much so that he did not even think about it until he heard a very familiar voice.

"Harry, are you busy?"

Shock and complete horror were Harry's initial reaction as he turned and found Ron's head peering around the inner entrance to his room. It was then and only then that he remembered the instructions he had given to Jeremy to let his friends in if they called unless he was busy with someone else. He had been so wrapped up in what he was doing that he had never told the portrait any different.

"Um, no," Harry managed to reply as his eyes darted desperately around the room, looking for anyway out.

"Cool," Ron said, seemingly not in the least bit phased by what had happened the previous day, "because we wanted to talk to you."

Horror morphed into abject terror as Harry realised that Ron had brought reinforcements. As his three friends trooped through the door he seriously considered making a dash for the bathroom and locking himself in. All three appeared very determined about something and although he had stood against Voldemort and his whole inner circle, Harry suddenly felt outnumbered.

"Hello, Harry," Neville greeted pleasantly in his usual cheerful, if somewhat befuddled, manner.

Harry didn't even try and reply; his voice was hiding somewhere, cowering in fear and he knew if he tried to speak he would just squeak at his friends.

"Harry, Mate," Ron said after a few moments of silence, "why do you look like there's a dragon behind us?"

"Ron," Hermione said patiently, "I think perhaps Harry's a little," she paused to pick the right word, "worried about what happened yesterday."

The tension had caused Harry's entire chest to tighten up and he was breathing in short little gasps, making his lungs feel like they were on fire. He tried very hard to calm down, but he was petrified. The image that kept passing through his brain was Ron's dead face from his dream.

"That's what we're here to talk about," Ron said brightly, which really did not help Harry at all.

"What Ron's trying to say," Neville decided to step in, "is that we're volunteering. Ron says that Professor Snape reckons you need four donors, and there are only three of us, but we're willing to give it a go, if it's alright with you."

Harry just stared. He sat in his chair, forgotten book in hand and stared. He wasn't quite sure he had heard that correctly. The idea would just not stick in his head; he'd mentally grasp at it and it would slip out of his reach. Neville had definitely said something about donors, but the dream image of Ron kept putting itself in the way of all his other thought processes.

"Harry," Hermione asked gently, moving forward from where she was standing in a line with the other two, "are you feeling alright."

He blinked at her. This was Hermione, calm, rational, practical Hermione, she could not possibly be part of what he thought he might have heard, could she?

"I," Harry said, in his opinion, rather pathetically.

The mental image of Ron's dead face overlaid itself on Hermione's and he had to look away.

"Look, Harry," Ron's voice broke through the waking nightmare, "you're not blaming yourself for what happened are you? It's not your fault, and it wasn't as if you hurt me or anything. It was rather good to tell you the truth."

There was the sound of a hand slapping an arm and Harry managed to look up to find Hermione had just hit Ron.

"What?" his best friend asked hotly. "It's true; he might as well know it. He'll only sit there thinking we're sacrificing ourselves for him, and tell us not to be noble, when I, for a start, think it might actually be a bonus."

Ron really had no concept of the word subtle and for once Harry was so glad of it.

"Ron, did it occur to you that you might embarrass Harry?" Hermione asked pointedly, and the simple, friendly dispute contrasted so completely with the dark thoughts moving through Harry's mind that it broke him out of his fear.

His friends really were standing in front of him arguing because Ron had just confessed that he enjoyed being bitten. It was one of those laugh or cry moments that seemed to make up Harry's life these days, and the rather disbelieving giggle escaped him before he could stop it. He had never been prone to giggling and this sounded rather ridiculous coming out of his mouth, but he had no choice. All

three of his friends looked at him as if he was mad, which was a distinct possibility the way he was feeling.

"Harry?" Hermione asked with a worried little frown.

"Do any of you know how dangerous I am," he asked quietly, the giggle dying, "what I could have done to Ron yesterday?"

"But you didn't, Mate," Ron said firmly, "and that's what counts."

"Let us help you, Harry," Neville said earnestly.

"We talked about it very carefully, Harry," Hermione assured him, "we know the risks. We looked everything up, and we're sure about this."

Typical Hermione, research a subject into the ground and go with her heart anyway. Only in this case she could not know everything, because no one did, not even Harry.

"We went to Madame Pomfrey," Neville explained further, "and she checked us all out. We're all perfectly healthy and this won't hurt us."

"But," Harry said looking at their sincere faces.

"No buts, Harry," Ron said firmly. "You can't push us away and we will help you even if we just have to sit here until you lose control again. You're our friend, and you're the best mate a bloke could ever have; for once you're going to let us tell you what to do."

He opened his mouth again to protest again.

"Harry James Potter," Hermione said sternly, "give in, you aren't going to win this one."

They had moved closer over the conversation and now Neville moved up to join them. It was a Gryffindor wall, but rather than needing to climb it and escape, Harry suddenly felt strangely safe, as if they were his own personal fortress.

"Okay," he said in little more than a whisper.

The smiles on his friends' faces were so happy that they took his breath away and he suddenly found himself at the centre of a four way hug. Strangely the dark magic inside him, which usually reacted to such contact, was almost silent, and he relaxed into the arms of his friends.

=====

Only that lunchtime he had seen them all as they pledged their allegiance to him, offering their blood as well as their friendship, and now here he was calling them back, sure that they would hate him for what he had to tell them. Their gift to him had overwhelmed him and he had spent all day thinking. If they were willing to give him so much then he could do no less for them, and he knew he owed them the truth. He could not stop pacing as he waited for them to arrive. He had asked Jeremy to give him a quick warning before letting them in and he was on his twentieth lap of the room when the portrait finally announced that his friends were outside.

"Thanks," he said quickly.

They trailed in one after another, all buzzing with curiosity.

"Hi Harry," Ron greeted immediately, "anything wrong, Mate?"

"Um, not exactly," Harry said slowly, "but there are some things I think you need to know, and I wanted to tell you in person rather than you finding out second hand. Let's sit down."

His three friends made their way over to the table that Harry had decided was best for this meeting and took places on three sides. Harry walked over to the fourth chair, but found that he was too nervous to sit down.

"Whatever it is, Harry," Neville said warmly, "we'll understand."

Biting his lip, Harry wished fervently that he could be sure of that. It was not that he did not trust his friends; it was that he knew them very well and Ron tended to over react, Hermione often over analysed, and Neville was far too easily shocked. He had no idea how they would take the information he had to give them.

"Well, you all know that I have certain, unusual needs," he began hesitantly as he tried to decide which explanation he had worked out to use, "it's not just the blood."

All three looked at him supportively, willing him to go on.

"You may also have noticed that I'm a little touchy when it comes to Draco Malfoy," he continued slowly, searching their faces to see if any of them would guess what he was driving.

"You've only bitten my head off twice, Harry," Ron said lightly in an attempt to break the tension.

It didn't work too well and Harry began to pace beside the table.

"Well there's a reason for that as well," he said, plucking up his courage for what was coming next; "I'm rather possessive and he's my fourth donor."

Ron looked at if his eyes might pop out, and Harry knew there was worse to come.

"And I'm sleeping with him," he said bluntly, at a loss how else to put it.

Total silence greeted this announcement. He came to a halt, looking at them, afraid that one or all of them would storm out in disgust.

"The incubus?" Hermione asked eventually in her usual analytical manner.

"Sort of," Harry admitted quietly, feeling as if the spell might break any moment and his friends would be heading for the door, "but its more than that. He's not what he seems, he had as little choice in this as I did."

"But, Harry," Ron said in a surprisingly calm voice, "he has the Dark Mark; the Prophet reported it and he's under house arrest here because of it. He chose You Know Who."

It would have been so easy to tell them the lies that he, Draco and Snape had worked out for the Ministry and the press, to pretend that it was far less complicated than it was, but Harry did not want to lie to his friends.

"He didn't have much choice," he said, fighting down the emotions that threatened to wipe out his control and send him running for the bathroom. "He took the mark willingly, he told me as much, but it was that or face Voldemort's wrath. What he didn't realise at the time was that Voldemort wanted more than another Death Eater."

He paused, knowing that they had to know this to understand, but feeling strangely like a betrayer for telling anyone something so personal about Draco.

"He wanted a bedmate," Harry continued eventually, "and Draco refused him. That was why he wasn't allowed back to school, Voldemort locked him up until he agreed. I was supposed to be Voldemort's revenge; wake up as a dark creature, do unspeakable things to Draco and then kill him. He looked after me when I first woke up, before the magic changed me, and then I just took him when I woke up a second time. I told his mum to take him and leave when I went after Voldemort, but he came back for me, I still don't understand why. There's something between us that I can't explain; he should hate me, but he doesn't."

Ron was definitely having trouble with the whole idea, Harry could tell, but he also knew that his friend was trying. There was a deep crease in his best friend's forehead as Ron sorted through his thoughts.

"So all the time he was a Death Eater he was locked up?" Neville asked for clarification.

Harry nodded.

"And he didn't really choose to join Voldemort," his friend continued to rationalise calmly, "he was pushed into it, it was expected of him."

Of all three Harry knew Neville understood family pressures the best; after all he was very much expected to be certain things by his grandmother.

"So he's innocent," Neville concluded calmly.

Harry could have cried at his friend's simple logic: Ron looked at Neville as if he had grown another head. The frown slowly cleared, however, and then Ron looked back at Harry. His best friend was not yet ready to speak, but the disbelief was gone from Ron's gaze.

"That's why we're going to lie to the Ministry," Harry said eventually and glanced around at all three again. "The truth of it is that I thought the same as you until I woke up after Voldemort took me, but that's not what we're telling the Ministry, or they will try and make an example of Draco because his father is dead."

All three were true Gryffindors and they understood the sentiment of what was right rather than what was to the letter of the law.

"He did have the Dark Mark," Harry said evenly, "but it's not the same anymore."

"But I thought the Dark Mark was impervious to known magic," Hermione said straight away, "it only fades with time."

"Not my magic," Harry said quietly.

That made even Hermione's eyes open slightly in shock.

"Harry, are you saying you changed Malfoy's Dark Mark?" Ron asked a little incredulously.

Wordlessly Harry nodded.

"Why? How?" Hermione was ever the inquisitive one.

"Because he's mine," Harry snapped before he could stop himself. "He never belonged to him," he finished in a softer tone.

That rather bluntly put all his cards on the table, but he couldn't do anything about it. When it came to Draco he was very much of one mind.

"We're going to tell the Ministry it was always a fake," he explained slowly, "one that Dumbledore created. We're going to pretend that Draco and I have been together secretly since before the end of sixth year and that Dumbledore created the fake mark to prevent Draco having to join Voldemort properly. That way the Ministry will have nothing on him, they'll have to drop all charges. I just needed you to know the truth."

He looked them each in the eyes once.

"If they tried to send him to Azkaban, I don't know what I'd do," he said quietly.

Staring down at the floor he reigned in the darker thoughts this simple idea caused to stir inside him and he didn't look up until a hand covered his own where he was holding the back of the chair. He ran his eyes up Hermione's arm from where her fingers were covering his, then down her other arm to where she was holding Ron's hand and on to where Ron was holding Neville's; Harry suspected that if Neville had been able to reach he would have found his other hand covered.

"We're with you, Harry," Hermione said firmly, "whatever we can do we will."

"You and the Ferret seems mental to me, Mate," Ron said calmly, "but you know what I'm like, give me a few weeks and it'll be like it was always this way; takes a while to get these things into my thick skull."

Harry managed a small smile at that, at least Ron recognised his strengths and weaknesses.

"As long as he doesn't hex me I'll be fine," Neville said with a little grin.

"Thank you," Harry said his voice thick with emotion.

The tableau held for a good few seconds before Ron finally frowned again.

"Harry," he said, his voice full of curiosity rather than anything else, "how long have you preferred blokes?"

Harry just looked at him blankly.

End of Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Harry walked in to the dungeon room at the Ministry to find that the benches were full and it appeared that anyone who was anyone had decided to be present. Harry suspected Dumbledore's hand in the matter since at least this way Fudge could not sweep the whole thing under the carpet. The only section of society missing, other than the children, was the press, and Harry knew exactly where they were since he had had to dodge them on the way in. There were several gasps and some low whispering the moment those in attendance caught sight of him. Remus, Molly, Arthur, Hermione, Ron and Neville all gave him encouraging smiles as he walked to the chair before the adjudicating council. One was Fudge; one was Amelia Bones and the third he did not recognise.

Sitting down carefully he waited for what he was absolutely positive would happen, and true to form the chains on the chair leapt into life; Fudge had obviously ordered him bound. There was a murmuring of unrest at the action, but Harry was not about to let it occur anyway. His magic flared into life at the threat and the chains never reached him, becoming seemingly stuck in some invisible substance as they waved almost gently in the air.

"I believe perhaps a mistake has been made," Dumbledore said politely; "Harry is not a prisoner, why have the bindings been made active?"

"I ordered it," Fudge said angrily, seemingly believing that the headmaster was responsible for the halt of the chains. "This hearing is to ascertain how dangerous Harry Potter is to those around him, he must be bound to maintain court security. Release your hold on the chains, Dumbledore."

"Professor Dumbledore is doing nothing to them," Harry said in a menacing, but completely calm tone, "I am. Deactivate them now, or I promise you they will never work again."

It was probably not the best way to start the hearing, but he was in no mood to pretend. The whole situation was folly; Fudge had taken him out of the only place he felt secure and Harry wanted to make sure the man understood his idiocy. The Minister was now looking at him with something akin to horror, but Madame Bones came to the court's rescue, pointing her wand at the chair and speaking one word. The chains fell back to their original position.

"I protest," Fudge said immediately.

"Minister," Amelia Bones said calmly, "the chains are clearly pointless. Mr Potter is here of his own volition, he is not a prisoner and hence binding him to the chair is technically illegal."

That shut up the annoying little man and Harry sat on his desire to snarl at the Minister. Ripping the man's throat out would be such a delightful pleasure, but even if Fudge was an incompetent moron, Harry doubted that action would win him any friends. Focussing everything he had on his Occlumency skills he held on to his darker side.

"I would suggest you call the hearing to order, Minister," the man Harry did not know said calmly.

"Enquiry hearing of the sixth of December," Fudge said through clenched teeth, "in the matter of the magical status of Harry James Potter. Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister for Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the

Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Francis Maxwell Agito, Head of the Department for Control of Dark Creatures. Acting for the defence, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore."

Harry looked into the eyes of the afore name head of Control of Dark Creatures and the man looked back without flinching; he was impressed, from what he understood, these days that was a hard thing to do. With so many people around it was impossible to isolate what any single wizard or witch was feeling without revealing more of himself than he wanted to, so Harry had to be content with the truth his eyes beheld, rather than the truth his extra senses could give him.

"Mr Potter," Fudge launched in immediately, "are you, or are you not a Dark creature."

"I believe, Cornelius," Dumbledore countered pleasantly, "that this is the question which we have come here to discuss. That Harry has gained certain abilities from several species of Dark Creature is not in question, however, what he has become as a result of Voldemort's," a murmur went round the room at the Dark Lord's name, "meddling is yet to be decided."

"Quite," Agito said evenly, "perhaps, Minister, we should move on. The facts of the case should be entered into the record."

Whether the wizard was on his side or not, Harry rather admired Agito's technique. The instincts clawing just beneath the surface had labelled everyone on the bench an adversary, but the logical part of Harry was not so sure.

"In a case of such grave importance I call for the use of Veritaserum," Fudge said bluntly.

Harry went cold and was unable to completely hide the snarl that threatened; his lip curled and his fingers went white on the arms of his chair.

"If it pleases the Wizengamot," Snape's voice carried over the stunned court room, "I believe that to be unwise."

"The Wizengamot recognises Severus Snape, Potions Master and Professor at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry," Amelia Bones said smoothly before the Minister could object.

"Thank you, Madame Bones," Snape said in his usual cold tone, standing up where he was still to one side. "Mr Potter's physiology is not understood and he has shown adverse reactions to some common potions ingredients. To administer Veritaserum would endanger Mr Potter and the Wizengamot."

"I do not see ..." Fudge began to bluster back.

"To place any wizard in an altered state is dangerous," Snape continued smoothly as if the Minister had not spoken, "due to unconscious magic; to place Mr Potter in an altered state could be tantamount to suicide."

That brought the whole room to complete silence.

"The Wizengamot relinquishes its requirement for Veritaserum," Agito said firmly, without bothering to look at either of his fellow bench members.

The expression on Fudge's face was furious, but the Minister had been out manoeuvred.

"Mr Potter," Fudge launched straight in again before either of the others had a chance, "on Saturday the twenty seventh of November you went from Hogsmeade village to Malfoy Manor in the company of four Death Eaters, is this not correct?"

"Was taken," Harry said firmly, "by force."

He was no longer the scared fifteen year old he had been last time he had set foot in this room and he was not about to take Fudge's contemptible bullying. The Minister's attempts to skew the court record were, quite frankly, annoying rather than worrying.

"Would you care to tell the court, in your own words," Madame Bones put in before Fudge could react, "what happened that afternoon."

Having to sit quite firmly on his desire to tell Fudge exactly what he thought of him, Harry nodded.

"Ron and I were in Honeydukes," he began as evenly as he could, focusing on the woman who had asked the question rather than the vexing Minister.

"This would be Ronald Bilius Weasley, son of Arthur and Molly Weasley?" Agito clarified calmly.

"Yes, Sir," Harry replied, though he really didn't feel like being particularly polite. "It was when we walked out of the shop that it happened; there was a large explosion, at least I think it was large, but I was right next to it and it hit me full on so I could be wrong. I hit my head when I fell back and I vaguely remember a couple of people grabbing me, but nothing else. The next thing I knew I was being dragged in front of Voldemort. He jeered at me for a while, gloated, the usual thing, and then he had one of his Death Eaters force a potion down my throat. That's the last thing I remember except for vague feelings and pain, until I woke up in Draco Malfoy's bedroom."

He stopped, unwilling to just plough on unless he was pushed. It seemed that for now Fudge was more interested in the events he had described rather than anything else, if the malicious glint in the man's eye could be believed.

"So you claim you were not a willing participant in the Dark Magic performed on your person," the Minister said evenly.

Harry knew what was coming, but there was little he could do to avoid it; he just hoped he could hold on to his temper better than he had when Caveo had accused him of the same thing.

"I offer into evidence the report of the specialist Auror unit who examined, revealed and catalogued the spells performed to render Mr Potter into his current state," Fudge said, barely hiding his glee.

"So noted," Madame Bones said formally.

"Mr Potter, are you familiar with the Crevitemero ceremony?" the Minister asked and Harry just about managed to keep his features from showing his anger at the wizard.

It was a stupid question; they both knew Harry had no idea what Fudge was on about.

"No," he answered shortly.

"It is a Dark Magic ceremony to take power from one wizard and place it in another," the Minister continued eagerly, "it requires the wizard receiving the power to be a willing participant. A variation of this ceremony was performed on you."

A muttering filled the room and Madame Bones struck a large round stone on the desk to quiet every one down.

"Could you be a little clearer in your definition of 'willing participant', please, Cornelius?" Dumbledore's calm tones begged no argument, even though he sounded as if he had just asked the Minister to pass the butter.

"The participant is required to chant the ceremonial spells with those performing the power transfer," Fudge said victoriously, "and hence Harry Potter must have been complicit in his own transformation."

When Dumbledore did not immediately deny this Harry looked round at his mentor, to see what the headmaster was up to.

"Come now, Cornelius," Dumbledore said pleasantly as if speaking to a child, "Harry had already revealed that he was drugged. A drugged mind cannot protect itself. When I arrived at Malfoy Manor on the morning of the twenty ninth of November I took the liberty of having Harry checked for traces of Imperio. The results I believe were positive and are also a matter or record."

Fudge appeared dumbfounded; the Minister had obviously not read that far in the report.

"I would put it to the assembled council that Harry was not complicit in his own transformation, but was drugged to prevent his resistance of the Imperius curse, and was subsequently forced to take part in the Crevitemero ceremony," the headmaster said calmly.

Both Madame Bones and Agito nodded in agreement, Fudge had no choice but to come in to line. Smug satisfaction was not something Harry often felt, but he experienced it now on Dumbledore's behalf. It couldn't last though, and he knew it.

"What happened after you woke up, Mr Potter?" Madame Bones asked kindly, but professionally.

He went cold again and the hostile feelings rose to just below the surface as every one became the enemy once more.

"I met Draco Malfoy for the first time since the train home after the sixth year," he said, picking his words very carefully and holding on to his feelings with an iron will.

"And?" Agito prompted evenly.

"He told me what had happened, what I was becoming," Harry said shortly.

"So at this point you were still human?" Amelia Bones looked sorry to have to ask the question, but her tone was firm never the less.

"Yes, Ma'am," Harry replied, trying to distance himself from the memory, "I could feel the power inside, but it hadn't changed me yet. I think the patterns were some sort of holding spell and only when they started to fade could the magic alter me. Once that started I passed out."

This time the murmuring sounded vaguely sympathetic.

"And when you woke up the second time," Agito asked plainly, "what occurred, Mr Potter."

"I did part of what Voldemort expected of me," Harry said, unable to keep the self-loathing out of his voice, "I had sex with Draco Malfoy, whether he really wanted to or not, and then I bit him."

"Are you saying you raped, Draco Malfoy?" Fudge leapt at the chance to confirm what Harry could not bring himself to outright admit without the anger he had shown Caveo.

"If it pleases the Wizengamot," Snape's voice carried over the room a second time, "I believe this answers that question."

Harry turned his head to look at the Potions master in surprise; he had not expected anyone to come to his rescue on this point. He had not given Draco a choice, even if his lover had not resisted.

"What is it?" Madame Bones asked calmly.

"A written account of the incident in question by Draco Malfoy," Snape said evenly.

"Hearsay," Fudge said instantly, "if the witness cannot appear the evidence cannot be accepted."

"The document has the Malfoy family seal," Snape replied and the Minister's face fell again.

Harry didn't understand.

"There are only two individuals who may use the Malfoy family seal," Agito pointed out to the other two members of the bench, "Narcissa Malfoy who is unlikely to produce a document defending a wizard who attacked her son, and Draco Malfoy. Hence I do not see why the account should not be read into evidence."

"He could have been coerced," Fudge insisted.

"Mr Malfoy also requested that I present this if necessary," Snape replied and held out a small globe, "it is a memory ball of him creating the document."

Madame Bones nodded to a prim looking woman to her left who stood up and walked over to Snape to retrieve the two objects. When the witch handed the parchment and the globe to the bench the Head of Magical Law Enforcement peered into the memory ball before passing it to Agito and then opened the letter. Harry just stared as she read, wondering what Draco would have said in

the letter. The document and the memory ball worked their way through all three Interrogators and then back to Madame Bones.

"I believe the only section required for evidence is the last paragraph," she said firmly, and the look she sent Fudge dared the man to disagree.

Her companions both nodded.

"I, Draco Malfoy," Madame Bones read firmly, "was complicit in all actions upon my person taken by Harry Potter on the night of the twenty eighth of November. I expected to die at his hand, as was Voldemort's desire; that I am not dead is a tribute to Harry Potter's character."

Total silence reigned around the room and Harry dared not look at anyone as conflicting emotions raged within him. His memories were too clear, and they excited the darker part of his nature, but what he had done still abhorred the human part. Whatever Draco claimed, it had not been a mutual choice.

"Perhaps you would care to tell us what occurred after this point," Madame Bones said eventually.

It took Harry a few more long seconds before he could lift his eyes from where he was staring at the floor and meet the witch's gaze. They would pull every detail from him, he knew it, and he steeled himself against his own reactions.

"Mr Potter?" Madame Bones coaxed kindly.

"I left him unconscious on the bed and left the room," he said slowly and watched as Fudge leapt at the opportunity to interrogate him.

"How exactly did you do that, Mr Potter?" the Minister asked shortly.

The man was determined to reveal everything dark about Harry to the court and Harry glared at him without being able to stop himself.

"I changed into a wolf and jumped through the door," he said plainly, stating things directly being the only way he could deal with the emotions the memories recalled.

The murmuring around the court increased again, but quietened down before Madame Bones was required to call for order.

"And what did you do once outside?" Agito, asked evenly.

Harry's eyes flicked to Fudge, he knew that the man would have read the report and there was no point in trying to hide the truth. Circumventing the issue of who he had and had not killed was going to be impossible.

"I killed the Death Eater on guard," he admitted, trying to keep any emotion from his voice.

"How and why?" Fudge demanded instantly.

"Now, Cornelius," Dumbledore put in immediately, "the how is a matter of record, I do not believe it would serve any purpose to bring in such details at this time."

"I concur," Madame Bones agreed before the Minister could protest, "but the why is pertinent to this enquiry."

"He drew his wand on me," Harry said, knowing that Fudge would make an issue out of the matter if he hesitated and let the Minister have a way in; "he was a danger to me, so I killed him."

"Did it not occur to you to disarm the wizard?" Agito asked reasonably.

This line of questioning seemed to appease Fudge somewhat since someone else was asking difficult questions, but Harry's glare still focused on the Minister.

"No," he replied honestly, "nothing occurred to me except removing the threat."

"And if you were threatened now, what would be the result?" the Head of Control of Dark Creatures asked calmly.

"I don't know," Harry replied, unable to answer the question, "it would depend on the threat."

He really didn't know how to explain it, it seemed rather obvious to him.

"I believe what Harry is trying to say," Dumbledore entered in to the conversation slowly, "is that his response is equivalent to the nature of the threat. Death Eaters have been trying to kill Harry for years; he had no reason to suspect less of them in this instance."

"So you considered everyone in that house a deadly threat?" Agito asked, obviously trying to clarify the point in his mind.

"Yes," Harry said immediately and then paused, "well all the Death Eaters. They were the enemy; they'd been torturing me for two days, what was I supposed to think?"

The anger at being second guessed and put on display twisted in the pit of his stomach, but he held himself very still to prevent a reaction.

"Quite," Agito said, seemingly satisfied. "Why did you clarify 'Death Eaters'? Surely all those at the Manor were in Voldemort's employ?"

"No," Harry replied, his mind skipping back, "I met Narcissa Malfoy at the bottom of the stairs, she was only worried that her son had been sacrificed to," he paused, waiting for the memory to crystallise, "'this madness' is what she called it. I told her to take Draco and leave, and then I went to the secret rooms under the kitchen."

His memory was already flicking forward to Voldemort and he was ready to go on, but Madam Bones interrupted him.

"I'm sorry, Mr Potter," she said professionally, "but you're saying you met Narcissa Malfoy and let her go?"

Harry nodded.

"Did you mention this when you made your statement?" she asked evenly.

Harry nodded again; when Tonks had taken his statement, after Remus' first visit he had told her everything.

"Why is it not in the official record?" Madam Bones asked pointedly, looking at both of her fellows. "If someone has been tampering with official statements I will have them thrown in Azkaban."

Fudge did not appear in the least guilty, but then Harry suspected the man had had a lot of practice. A quiet rumble of a growl made it past his clenched teeth and he looked away to calm himself down.

"There must have been a clerical error," the Minister said as if he was perfectly innocent. "I will have the matter looked into as soon as this hearing is over."

"Why did you let Narcissa Malfoy leave, Mr Potter?" Agito seemed to consider the matter closed and was moving on.

Harry let his mind trawl over the memory, trying to understand his reasoning. At the time he had not really been thinking, just doing.

"She was almost as desperate as I was," he said eventually, "and she wasn't a threat. She was like Draco, a prisoner of circumstance. I didn't need to harm her and she could help get Draco away."

All three members of the bench were looking at him when he glanced back at them this time; even Fudge seemed to be considering what he had said.

"I am sorry to dwell on the matter, Mr Potter," Madam Bones said kindly, "but would you mind explaining why the freedom of Draco Malfoy was important to you? Surely once he had provided what you needed he was no longer relevant to you?"

"He was innocent," Harry said, not understanding quite what she was getting at. "I didn't know what would happen when I confronted Voldemort, I didn't want anyone innocent being hurt."

The witch sat back in her chair a small smile playing at her mouth and he realised suddenly that he had said exactly what she was hoping to hear. In that moment he knew that in this Madam Bones was on his side.

"So, Harry," Dumbledore said pleasantly, "am I correct in saying that even as a werewolf you maintained enough of your original personality to wish others out of harm's way?"

Harry glanced at his mentor now and he found himself in awe of the war of words being played around him; it was almost as if the whole thing was scripted. Not quite sure of his voice at that moment, he nodded.

"Thank you, Harry," the headmaster said with a smile, "please go on."

Turning back he found Fudge glaring at him once more, but the other two members of the bench seemed to have relaxed slightly.

"Um," he said, trying to gather his thoughts again, for now his confusion quelling the anger which had been building, "I went to the underground rooms; Voldemort was waiting for me. He seemed to think that now I had so much Dark Magic in me I was his to command. I don't really understand it, he seemed to think he had

created a Dark slave, it never seemed to have occurred to him that I might still want to kill him."

He paused for a moment, using his Occlumency training to distance himself from the memory.

"I played along for a while," he began again, concentrating on long, calming breaths, "until I was close enough to strike. Then I ripped out his heart."

No matter what steps he had tried to take, his proclamation of victory came out with a relish he could not hide. It was almost as if he could smell Voldemort's blood on his hands and more than just the dark creatures inside him revelled in the recollection.

"You expect us to believe that You Know Who just allowed you to walk up to him and kill him?" Fudge asked derisively. "Are you sure it was not more that you were now a trusted ally and killed everyone present to prevent them telling the world?"

That pushed the wrong button in Harry's head and he stood up with a snarl, fangs descending and supernatural defences coming to the fore.

"Voldemort has been trying to kill me since I was eleven," he said in a very low voice, resonating the power he could no longer hide; "he did kill my family and as good as killed my godfather. I would never, ever have pledged my allegiance to that monster. No Dark Mark, see," he finished coldly, holding up his arm and ripping back the sleeve of his shirt.

There had been some rustling and he could see the Aurors of the court with their hands on their wands and several plain clothed officers doing the same in the assembly. In a second his gaze flicked around the entire room cataloguing every possible threat in an instinctive move, then with a last glare at Fudge, he sat down again.

"Minister, do you have any evidence to support your hypothesis?" Agito asked calmly, as if nothing had just happened.

Fudge appeared suddenly slightly awkward.

"No," the Minister said evenly, "I just thought it best to record Mr Potter's reaction first hand."

Agito wrote something on the parchment he had been making notes on all though the hearing and then looked up once more at Harry.

"What occurred once Voldemort," the official pronounced the name slowly and calmly, "was dead?"

Harry tried to banish the bloody images of rending Fudge limb from limb from his mind, but his imagination was feeding off the memories he did have of the slaughter he had committed after killing Tom Riddle. It was a few moments before he could make his fangs ascend back into his jaw and bring himself to answer.

"I went after Bellatrix Lestrange next," he said quietly; "she killed my godfather. I don't remember how I killed her; it's all quite hazy after that. All I know is that I chased them all down; his whole inner council and I killed them. I don't really

remember anything clearly until Draco Malfoy came back for me, I think I wanted to be dead."

"And it was Draco Malfoy who alerted Headmaster Dumbledore and the Ministry," Madam Bones interposed smoothly, "is that correct, Mr Potter?"

A nod was about all Harry could manage. The self-hatred he had felt after the killing had faded, but it still hurt and it was difficult not to allow it to take over again. He did not think the court would appreciate a banshee wail.

"Thank you, Mr Potter," Agito said calmly, "do you require a few minutes to compose yourself before we proceed?"

Taking a deep breath, Harry lifted his eyes and shook his head slowly. He was not sure how long he could keep this up, and a break was unlikely to help. What he really wanted was to leave the room and never have to come back.

"I believe the next incident of interest to the court occurred the morning of the thirtieth," the Head of Control of Dark Creatures said in response.

"An incident in which three Aurors were injured seriously enough to require treatment at St Mungo's," Fudge put in his two pence worth quickly, "one was petrified."

The murmuring grew again.

"Thank you, Minister," Agito said calmly, "I am sure we will come to that."

Fudge appeared rather affronted at that, but something stopped the pompous wizard from reacting.

"Mr Potter," Agito continued, "would you please explain what precipitated this incident."

"I had to stop them taking Draco to the Ministry," Harry said plainly.

"Why?" the simple question came back.

"I..." the words caught in Harry's throat as he hit the barrier in his mind, "he...Draco was going to die."

Was all he could say and he looked to Dumbledore for assistance.

"If I may be permitted to explain," the headmaster said smoothly, "we were able to ascertain that Harry had a premonition of Mr Malfoy's death. This ability comes from the banshee power forced into him, and hence he cannot speak of it. The Auror in charge was informed of the situation and he chose to ignore the warning."

"Draco Malfoy bears the Dark Mark," Fudge blustered quickly, "it was of tantamount importance that he be taken to a secure location. The Auror in charge was following procedure."

"And endangering the life of his prisoner, Cornelius," Dumbledore said smoothly, "a banshee has never been wrong."

Even the Minister of magic could not really argue with that one.

"So you reacted when the Auror team attempted to remove Mr Malfoy to the Ministry, is that correct?" Agito continued his questioning and headed off any confrontation between Dumbledore and Fudge.

"Yes," Harry replied very firmly, glad to have his voice back.

"Please tell us in your own words, what happened," the wizard requested in a professional manner.

It was not an easy thing to explain since he had mostly been working on instinct at the time, but he tried to make sense of what had occurred.

"I just knew they were taking him," Harry said, grasping for words as he went, "the banshee knew. It was the worse feeling I had ever felt, like I would explode if I didn't react and the wail just happened. I couldn't stop it. I didn't mean to hurt the Aurors on guard, but I couldn't control it. Everything in me needed to save Draco and I jumped out of the window. They were trying to put him in a car when I dragged him away from them; they couldn't have him, he's mine."

A reassuring hand on his shoulder brought him back from the memory and he looked up at Dumbledore as he gathered his thoughts.

"Why did you petrify Auror Blythe?" Agito did not give him much of a respite.

"He cast a Patronus when I tried to use the Dementor to keep them away," Harry said, automatically telling the truth without even considering it, "I just reacted. I had to protect Draco."

"Harry," Dumbledore said calmly, from beside him, "the Aurors were firing spells at you, were they not; spells which can be deadly to the creatures which now make up part of your nature. Is this not true?"

Harry frowned.

"I don't know," he said honestly, "I supposed so; I would have done if I was them."

"Madam Bones," his mentor continued, turning back to the bench, "what is standard procedure when faced with a dangerous dark creature?"

"In the case of a Dark Creature which can be lethal," Madam Bones explained calmly, "and does not stand down, standard orders are to kill it."

"So when faced with a werewolf, a Dementor and a basilisk," Dumbledore said in a very reasonable tone, "it is safe to assume they would not have been trying to merely subdue Harry?"

"That is correct," the Head of Magical Law Enforcement replied.

"You have no proof..." Fudge tried to put in.

"My Aurors are highly trained," Madam Bones said firmly, "if they react incorrectly in a situation they could die or worse. As is also standard procedure Auror Blythe's and Auror Patterson's wands were inventoried and the spells used entered into their reports. Mr Potter was in mortal peril."

Dumbledore smiled at the witch with a short nod.

"Harry," the headmaster turned his attention back to the bemused young man, "when the Aurors were trying to kill you, why did you not kill them?"

Harry just sat there, blinking at his mentor blankly. He had never thought of it like that, and the question stunned him for a moment.

"I," he said, trying to answer it and having to pause. "They weren't my enemy," he said eventually, finding it quite a revelation himself.

"But they were trying to kill you, Harry," Dumbledore insisted gently, "doesn't that make them your enemy?"

"Not like that," Harry said without thinking, "Aurors fight on the side of the Light; they were only doing their jobs, but I had to protect Draco."

He remembered the desires that had flooded through him, the need to hunt and kill, but he also recalled controlling them and it was not until now that he truly understood why. He could have killed them easily, he had proved that with Voldemort and his Death Eaters, and he knew he would have had there been no other choice, but he also realised that he had not wanted to destroy them. The fight with the Death Eaters had been so different and now he knew why. He looked into Dumbledore's sparkling blue eyes a little in awe of what the headmaster seemed to have known all the time and what he had only just come to accept.

"Thank you, Mr Potter," Agito took over again with his seemingly habitual efficiency. "Is there anything else we wish to ask Mr Potter at this stage, Interrogators, or do you wish to call your first witness, Minister?"

The look Fudge sent Harry was anything but happy.

"The Wizengamot calls Professor Algernon Priest to be a witness for the Ministry," the Minister said eventually, obviously exasperated with Dumbledore and annoyed with the way things were going.

A short wizard with glasses and a closely cropped white beard stood on the left of the bench.

"This tribunal recognises Professor Algernon Priest," this time it was Agito who spoke the formal words.

"Good morning, Algernon," Dumbledore greeted pleasantly, although from the expression on the other wizard's face Harry did not think there was any love lost between the two, "for the benefit of those not lucky enough to be of your acquaintance would you mind explaining what you do?"

"I am the chief potions master for the Department for Control of Magical creatures." If Harry had been in wolf form his hackles would have stood straight up at that moment; he didn't like Priest at all.

"I do believe he's your witness, Cornelius," Dumbledore turned back to the bench and smiled politely at the Minister.

It was a toss up as to whether Fudge asked his questions or blew a blood vessel if the bright red cheeks with little white spots were anything to go by. That at least

gave Harry some satisfaction, which handed him some ammunition to help keep his dark side under wraps.

"Professor Priest," the Minister said eventually, "would you please tell this assembly all the dark creatures you have identified that now make up Mr Potter."

"Do not forget that Harry is human as well, Cornelius," Dumbledore said pleasantly; "if he wasn't I do not believe we would be sitting here today."

Fudge just glared and then looked at Priest as if the headmaster had not spoken. The man in question produced a list from his pocket and began to read.

"I turned him down for the post of Potions master at Hogwarts," Dumbledore said quietly in Harry's ear, which he appreciated no end as he tried to ignore most of what he already knew. "He has never forgiven me for choosing Severus over him, but Severus always was and always will be a superior potions master to Algernon."

Even trying not to listen, Harry couldn't help himself and when Priest finally finished he knew that the Ministry knew less than Snape. Of course they had not had access to more blood samples, but Priest had missed the Ethologi for a start, and a couple of others Snape had come up with over the last two days.

"Thank you, Professor," Fudge said in an oily tone as Priest finished.

Now the Minister seemed very pleased with himself.

"How can we possibly be asked to believe that Harry Potter is safe to remain at large with that many dark creatures within him?" Fudge said pointedly.

Dumbledore simply walked towards the bench and smiled, producing two parchments from within his robes.

"I believe Algernon missed a few," the headmaster said cheerfully, "and I have also included a list of which powers Harry has been shown to manifest from which creatures, and a list of his donors for any hungers which have come to light as well. Professor Snape has had more ready access to Harry so his research is more complete."

Fudge looked stunned and now it was Priest's turn to blow a blood vessel. For his part, Harry was not surprised; he had agreed to full disclosure. He did not want to be locked up for the rest of his life, but neither did he wish to be a danger to others and he had agreed that honesty was the only way to ensure this. Agito opened both documents, read them and passed them to Madam Bones.

"My compliments to Professor Snape," the Inquisitor said honestly, "some of these are very hard to trace."

Harry did not bother looking at Snape, he had too many other things to think about, like the pounding headache behind his eyes.

"Exactly what hungers are you referring to?" Fudge demanded, regaining his composure.

That was one question Harry could not bring himself to answer and he looked to Dumbledore for help. It was one thing knowing that you were reliant on certain things; it was another entirely to speak of it in front of so many people.

"Is it really necessary to discuss this matter at the current time?" the headmaster asked pleasantly. "The facts have been documented and entered into evidence."

"I believe it important," the Minister said pompously and Harry found himself staring at the floor in embarrassment and anger.

"Minister," Agito said calmly, "I believe it would be proper to move on."

Fudge looked about ready to explode and Dumbledore took the moment of the Minister's impotent fury to take over the floor.

"I put it to this Inquisition that Harry Potter has had the opportunity and incentive to kill on several occasions," the headmaster began as silence reigned over the room, "and yet he only killed those who were trying to kill him. As accounted before this assembly he has shown time after time that although he is changed, he is still human at his most basic level. We do not claim that Harry is in complete control, nor ask that he should be allowed to return to his previous position as yet, but he had been afflicted for only a week and already his abilities have improved. To lock away a young man, who has saved us all, for crimes he has not yet committed, and will never commit, is neither fair nor just. I submit that..."

"But there is crime that cannot be overlooked," Fudge was on his feet and he did not look happy about something, but the Minister appeared determined, "one hunger that Harry Potter has fed which must be answered for; one hunger which cannot be tolerated."

At that moment Harry knew Fudge was playing his last card and he knew that it had to be an ace. Every instinct in his body screamed at him to fly at the wizard and destroy his enemy, and he felt his fingers actually dig in to the surface of the chair as he held on desperately for more than his own life.

"To what are you referring, Cornelius?" Dumbledore asked in a reasonable tone, but as the headmaster touched Harry's shoulder in support, he could feel the tension running through his mentor.

"Bring him in," Fudge said shortly without looking at the door towards the back of the court.

The other two members of the bench appeared as in the dark as Dumbledore and when Harry saw who was led through the second entrance, he almost stopped breathing. There stood Wormtail and nothing could have stopped Harry as he surged to his feet, a snarl on his lips.

"Harry!" it was only Dumbledore's commanding tone that stopped him from tearing the traitor to pieces.

He managed to come to a halt a few feet from Wormtail, fangs bared and claws ready to strike; reason was only a very tiny voice in his brain and it was Dumbledore's will holding him in place not his own. He could feel the headmaster demanding of him control, and only that unwavering resolution held the monster inside at bay.

"We were led to believe that Peter Pettigrew had escaped," Dumbledore said evenly.

"He was found wandering the grounds of Malfoy Manor and brought to the Ministry," Fudge said firmly. "A wizard may kill in self defence, but what he may not do is devour a man's soul."

That shattered Harry's rage as he finally looked at the wizard in front of him. Wormtail looked at the world with cold, empty eyes and suddenly a crystal clear memory jumped into Harry's mind:

He was covered in blood and he was revelling in the kill, but his revenge was not complete; there was one more left to go. The slaughter had been efficient and bare minutes had passed since he had killed the Dark Lord, and now only one remained, and he had Wormtail's scent as he ran up the stairs. As he ran through the house and in to the open air, nothing could have kept him from his prey and he hunted the traitor with glee.

Wormtail was running along the drive heading for the front gate when he finally caught him and the wizard gibbered in terror as Harry loomed over him.

"You'll pay for everything you have done," he said with a deep growl in his voice, "you will know true suffering."

Wormtail had not even had the power to speak as Harry took him by both arms and pulled him closer. There was only one fate good enough for Peter Pettigrew; one revenge, and he let the coldness of the Dementor take over his body. As he leaned forward and opened his mouth, Wormtail was helpless and it took less than a minute as he dragged the wretched wizard's soul from his body. When all that remained was a husk, he pushed the shell away and turned back to the house; his job was done.

Snapping back to the present Harry could do little more than stare at the empty eyes of the man who had betrayed his family and his godfather. The coldness in his bones and the chill of the air around him let him know that the Dementor was in control, but he could not put it away. Looking into the shell standing before him he realised that his revenge meant nothing to anyone but him; Wormtail was as good as dead and all his actions would do was bring him down for a crime he had not remembered committing. In that moment he wanted to take back those few seconds, he wanted Pettigrew to know the torment Sirius had felt and the pain he knew every time he was reminded of his parents.

He was virtually unaware of the rest of the room, all he could see and hear was Wormtail, and he found himself moving towards his victim. Someone seemed to be trying to stop him, but it was irrelevant and he more glided than walked up to Pettigrew. Reaching out he took those empty features in both hands, pushing Wormtail's mouth open with his thumbs on the wizard's lower jaw. Caught in his own power and desire he leant forward, and with his lips only millimetres from Pettigrew's, he pushed instead of pulled and something he had not known he was holding deep inside of him moved up and out of his throat. It hurt as he let the captive soul go and he lurched back the moment it was gone, breathing hard and collapsing to the floor in pain, but it was a strangely liberating experience.

His vision was swimming and his ears were ringing, and yet part of him felt as if a huge weight had been lifted. He heard Pettigrew whimpering in terror and another part of him revelled in it, and he lurched to his feet, the Dementor gone for now, but hot anger replacing the cold creature.

"I told you Pettigrew was alive," he snarled at Fudge, "you said I lied and you tried everything not to bring him in here today because you knew it would show everyone the truth. He betrayed my parents; he framed Sirius Black for his murder; he restored Voldemort to full life. I may have dark creatures inside me, but you, Cornelius Fudge, are the monster. You have hated me since the day I told you Voldemort was back, simply because you were afraid. I saved my cousin from Dementors and you tried to have my wand broken; you put Umbridge in charge of Hogwarts and allowed her to try and ruin any chance the pupils had of learning to defend themselves, and you allowed her to victimise me for lying when I was telling the truth. You took away every adult who could help me because you feared the truth, and so Voldemort had another chance at the Department of Mysteries. You even tried to have me expelled last year when you knew the truth, when you had seen it with your own eyes. You're not fit to be a Minister, you pathetic, frightened, little man."

He all but screamed the last part and only a firm hand on his shoulder stopped him from doing anything further. He didn't care about the court anymore, it didn't matter, and all he wanted to do was go home. Turning he met Remus' eyes and the werewolf nodded at him in understanding and agreement.

"Well done, Harry," Remus whispered quietly and opened his arms.

In need of support and comfort more than he could express, Harry fell into the embrace, unheeding of whatever else was going on. Strong arms surrounded him and for a while all strength flowed out of him, Remus' comforting hold being the only thing keeping him on his feet.

"I request an adjournment," Dumbledore calm voice rose above the chatter in the room.

"Request denied," it was Agito who replied and Harry felt as if the world was falling away beneath him, "case dismissed. Harry Potter is released into the charge of Albus Dumbledore until such time as they both agree he is ready to once more take his place in the Wizarding world."

Without hesitation Madam Bones smashed her stone onto the desk in agreement and suddenly it was all over. What had happened to Fudge's vote, or Pettigrew for that matter was lost on Harry as he found himself being led towards the doors.

It was only as the outer doors opened that he remembered why they had originally come in the side entrance to the chambers. It felt like a thousand flash bulbs went off at once. The chattering of the reporters went eerily silent when they finally saw him for the first time and Harry really couldn't take it. There was a simple choice; let his darker nature have free reign and sort out his metabolism or take the simply human way out. It really wasn't a matter of options at all and, grabbing weakly at Remus, he fainted.

End of Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Harry opened his eyes slowly to find his head pounding so badly that he could hardly see. The room around his swam into focus very reluctantly and, as he blinked, the low murmur of conversation beside him stilled.

"Harry," Remus' gentle voice said and he tried to make his eyes focus on the blob that he was sure was the werewolf.

It was almost like needing glasses again, only then it hadn't hurt quite so much to make his eyes cooperate.

"How are you feeling?" his friend asked quietly.

"Like the Quidditch team if practising with bludgers in my skull," he replied blearily.

"If you can sit up, Mr Potter," Snape's cool tones cut into his head like knives, "I believe I have something which may help."

Harry was not happy about the moving idea, since the moment he tried the pounding increased, but with Remus' help he managed to make it into a sitting position. At this point, a small flask was pushed into his hand and he upended it into his mouth without waiting to be told. It burned all the way down, but, as with most of Snape's concoctions, it was efficient and it began to work immediately.

"Although not the most effective pain killing potion available," the Potions master said evenly, "I can guarantee that Mr Potter will have no adverse reaction to this one."

"Thank you," Harry said, genuinely grateful as the pounding began to reduce to a manageable level.

Now that he was upright and could use his eyes without fear of reprisal from his brain, he recognised the inside of Arthur's office at the Ministry, and everyone who had been at the hearing with him seemed to be squashed into it. He had been lying on a couch and he suspected that someone had transfigured it.

"How long was I out?" he asked quietly.

"Only about ten minutes," Remus it appeared was spokesperson, "which considering what Fudge put you through is nothing."

The cold feeling came back as Harry remembered what had happened in the court room, but this time it was internal and the Dementor did not make an appearance. The dispassionate, logical part of his mind rationalised that it was probably too weak after returning its only food source. How he had managed that was beyond Harry, and he just couldn't fit his mind round the idea.

"I didn't know," he whispered to Remus, horrified by the whole thing, "I didn't know I'd done it."

"I know, Harry," Remus said soothingly, "and if Fudge hadn't had Peter whisked off you would undoubtedly have undone it far sooner than today. That man is an idiot."

"I had him inside the whole time," Harry continued to whisper in disgust, "and I didn't know. How could I not know?"

The ideas that reliving the memory caused in him brought most of his rational thought to a halt. The Dementor had been his greatest fear for so long and that he had been capable of doing that to someone else was abhorrent to him.

"Dementors cannot give back souls, Harry," Remus said as if reading his mind, "they consume them. You took Peter's soul in revenge, but you did not consume it. That you gave it back is nothing short of a miracle."

The werewolf's words made sense, but they could not reach the core of what Harry was feeling. The horror of having to relive his kidnapping and all subsequent events was too much for him with the whole Wormtail incident on top. The darkness in him was flooded out by simple human distress.

"Please, can we go home?" he asked a little desperately and then he burst into tears.

Remus pulled him close and he sobbed into his friend's shoulder as the stress of the day poured out of him.

"Yes, Harry," Remus said gently, but firmly, "we'll take you home now."

Right then Harry didn't care how they made it back to Hogwarts; all he wanted was the safety and security of his room at the only place that was really his home. At that moment he was not some complicated Dark Creature he was just a boy on the edge of being a man who wanted to return to where he belonged.

=====

Harry was a wreck, this much he was sure of and he barely made it back to Hogwarts. Apparating was not recommended for anyone not of completely sound mind so they had flooed. Having staggered out of the fireplace in Dumbledore's office he had managed to say goodbye to everyone except Remus, without whom he tended to sway worryingly, and the headmaster, who helped return him to the corridor containing the Room of Requirement without the rest of the school seeing him. It was interesting to find out how Dumbledore managed to move around the school so efficiently; the castle made passages for him if he requested it and the route to the upper corridor was by ways Harry had never seen before.

What he said to Dumbledore he had no idea, and he barely managed to tell Jeremy to let them into the room. Only as Remus half walked, half carried him into his living quarters did some of Harry's senses switch back on and he looked up to see a very worried-looking Draco come to a halt in the middle of the room with a paper forgotten in his hand. His lover was staring at Remus warily, and it then occurred to Harry that having not been able to stay at Hogwarts over the last week, Remus was unaware of what had been going on with Draco. As far as Remus knew, Draco was a vaguely hostile victim of Voldemort who for his own reasons had chosen to call in Dumbledore, not a friend and definitely not Harry's chosen lover.

"What in Merlin's name happened to him?" Draco demanded rather shortly, and continued his progress to Harry, which pleased different parts of him for very different reasons.

The moment his lover was in reach, Harry's arm snaked out to pull him closer and, with Remus on one side and Draco on the other, he let his head fall onto his lover's shoulder. Just the smell of Draco and the feel of him so close helped calm his raging thoughts.

"He gave back a soul," Remus said eventually and Harry knew his friend sounded confused and reluctant.

"Stupid Gryffindor," Draco said pointedly, "what did you go and do that for; they could never have proved it was you?"

That made Harry's head come up again as he looked his lover straight in the face. Something about Draco's tone caught his attention.

"You knew," he said plainly, totally at a loss to explain it any other way, "how?"

"I saw you, on the way out with Mother," the Slytherin said as he looked Harry over rather worriedly.

Harry couldn't quite comprehend that.

"But you came back," he said incredulously; Draco had seen him eat Wormtail's soul and yet he'd still come back.

"I told you I couldn't explain why I came back," his lover said pointedly, "so don't ask me. Why did you give the slimy bastard his soul back?"

"Fudge dragged him into the hearing," Harry said angrily, the heat in his belly giving him some of the strength he seemed to have lost, "I looked him in the eye. What was I supposed to do?"

"Let him rot," Draco replied resolutely, "he's a coward and a liar. Voldemort brought Dementors to the Manor at times, there would have been traces; Fudge could never have proved it was you."

Something was off here, his lover's argument sounded almost personal.

"What did he do to you?" he asked a little more gently, still annoyed, but curbing his reaction with concern.

Draco pulled away, anger on his face, but Harry knew it was not at him.

"He was Voldemort's messenger," the Slytherin said shortly, obviously uncomfortable with talking about the situation with Remus present, "he would come to my room every night with Voldemort's latest offer. He was a lackey of the worst order."

The last few words were spoken with a finality that Harry recognised and he knew he would not extract any more information out of Draco, at least not with Remus there. Gathering his strength he pulled himself away from the werewolf and turned to look at his friend.

"Thank you," he said sincerely, "I wouldn't have made it without you."

"You're welcome, Harry," Remus replied, his eyes flicking to Draco, "alright if I come and see you later?"

Harry nodded.

"That would be great," he said honestly, "I'll send Dobby when I'm free if that's okay."

Remus smiled at that.

"Dumbledore has given me a room for the night," the werewolf replied, "so I'll be here all afternoon and this evening, until tomorrow lunchtime in fact. Just let me know when to visit."

Harry squeezed Remus' hand and then his friend headed for the door at which point he turned his attention back to Draco. The Slytherin's back was taught and he resonated tension; Draco's dislike of Wormtail seemed to run almost as deep as Harry's. Taking a step towards his lover, he reached out and then discovered that walking and standing up were two different things and although he had strength for the latter, he did not have for the former.

"Oh bugger," he said pointedly as his knees began to cave.

Draco turned instantly, but even with Seeker reflexes he was just that bit too far away to be of assistance. Shifting his weight on the way down, Harry managed to land on his backside, but the bounce still hurt and he growled rather loudly at himself and the world in general.

"Temper, temper," was Draco's opinion on the matter, which earned the Slytherin another growl for his trouble.

"Are you bloody going to help me up or not?" Harry demanded waspishly.

"And there I was going to be nice to you and take your mind off your awful morning," Draco said as he bent down to help drag Harry up.

It then occurred to Harry that it wasn't even lunch time and his lover was not actually supposed to be there.

"Shouldn't you be in lessons?" he asked, trying to distract the distinctly surly part of his nature that was doing its best to surface.

"I couldn't concentrate," Draco said without the slightest sound of remorse, "so I came here to wait. So far no one has tried to pry me away."

Harry snorted his acknowledgement of that statement; there would have been little point, Draco was almost as stubborn as he was. With help Harry found that standing up was much easier and it didn't take too much to manoeuvre him to the bed. He ended up on his back, staring at the ceiling and looking up at Draco who was standing over him. Gazing into his lover's intense grey eyes, Harry felt the incubus in him stir, unfortunately the desire was there, but he had absolutely no energy to do anything about it. However, Draco must have seen the need in his face because he climbed on to the bed.

"You look like you could sleep for a week," his lover said, calmly throwing his leg over Harry and straddling him, "but I won't get further than a couple of feet will I?"

That was a very good assessment of the situation as far as Harry was concerned; he had no energy, but that didn't mean that if his darker side took over completely he wouldn't find some from somewhere.

"Stay put," Draco said firmly, "let me do the work. Where's your wand?"

Harry fished in his pocket and gave his lover his wand without a second thought. Only as Draco looked at him thoughtfully and waved the wand did he realise how strange that could have seemed, since he had just given an ex-Death Eater his only weapon. As Draco spoke two words that Harry did not catch he felt magic leap at him and suddenly he was completely naked.

"What did you do?" he asked, a little shocked by the sudden lack of clothes.

"A spell Father taught me when I hit sixteen," Draco said unrepentantly. "Just don't ask me what he intended me to use it for. Your clothes are over there."

His lover pointed vaguely to the left, but Harry did not bother to look, he was more interested in Draco.

"You still have yours on," he pointed out with the usual burr in his voice that came with the incubus' arousal.

Draco pointed the wand at himself and spoke the same two words; this time Harry committed them to memory, he could see this charm being useful in the future. Suddenly they were skin on skin and he felt his power jump in response as his body and magic reacted. Energy radiated between them wherever they touched and Harry felt the lethargy falling away.

"Try and keep it inside, Harry," Draco said breathily just as Harry felt his physical body start to change.

"I can't," he replied as, in response, he tried desperately to grapple with his reactions.

"I think you can," his lover said with a smouldering smile, "just for a minute, for me."

It was like trying to hold on to water, and Harry had no idea why Draco had asked this of him, but he did his best. With efficient, but careful movements Draco pointed the wand at himself again and rattled off three charms in quick succession. The feel of the magic was almost more than Harry could take and he clung on to his more human appearance by the skin of his teeth.

"What was that?" he asked in a desperate attempt to keep at least a portion of his mind distracted.

"Cleaning, relaxing and lubricating spells," Draco said, placing the wand on the bed; "not as much fun as manual methods, but useful at times like this."

Harry groaned at the mental image that gave him.

"Not long now," his lover said playfully, "it'll be worth it, I promise."

The incubus in him wanted control, and it wanted control immediately; Harry had never fought it before and it was almost worse than the vampire as it fed off his body's reactions. He was already hard; one sniff of Draco these days and his

anatomy made itself known, and he needed to let the transition occur for his arousal to become complete.

When Draco lifted himself into a crouch and then took hold of Harry's cock in one hand he knew what was coming and he had to bite hard on his lip and dig his talon like nails into the palms of his hands to hang on to the incubus.

"Draco," he begged as thought tried to flee at the sensation of his lover slowly lowering himself on to him.

Watching Draco sink down onto his stiff erection was possibly the most erotic thing Harry had ever seen, especially as his lover made the most enticing noises, head back and eyes closed.

"I can't..." he tried to tell Draco that he was about to loose control when the Slytherin opened his eyes again and looked him straight in the eye with the most wanton expression of lust.

That was all the permission Harry needed and he let go instantly. Incubus power flowed into every cell and he felt even the smallest change as his body shifted. His torso tingled as the rows of blunt spines erupted from his skin and his senses came even further alive. It was then that he realised what Draco had been after as he felt his cock lengthen and swell; the groan and complete abandon on his lover's face as Harry changed, stretching Draco from the inside, was the answer to any questions he may have had. The Slytherin's reaction was so extreme that Harry had to reach up and steady his lover as Draco's legs threatened to give out.

The feeling of tight muscle completely surrounding him was enough to make Harry pant out his pleasure as well and neither of them moved for a long moment. Seated almost completely in Draco he felt connected as he never did at any other time and he longed for the feeling to go on forever. Dark magic moved under his skin, he could feel its currents as, woken from its sleep, it demanded to be fed. This angel crouched above him, surrounding him, was the nectar he required and he found himself growling low in his throat, almost purring. He knew how to elicit the responses he needed; the fulfilment in his lover which would shower them both in sexual energy, and he allowed the power inside him to trickle through the point where their bodies connected.

"Harry," Draco said breathlessly, whatever he was going to say being interrupted by the moan that fell from parted lips, "no more," another moan, "unless you want this over now."

He stopped the flow of power; now was too soon. The incubus wanted instant gratification and the energy Draco's release would provide, but his human side wanted this to last longer. Resisting the urge to flip them both and take over completely, Harry thrust up experimentally and the encouraging sound Draco made as his lover rode the movement persuaded him to do it again. With the dark creature in charge, strength was not a problem, and Draco's weight was irrelevant as Harry pushed himself upwards, holding his lover in place with his hands and forcing himself even deeper into Draco's body. When he found the sweet spot of his lover's prostate the explosive gasp of air that Draco expelled informed him of his success, and the trickle of energy he felt being returned was a good indication as well.

The more experienced he became with sex, the more he could feel coming back from his partner. The first time it had been all his need, his want, the second more of the same, but the last couple of times he had had enough control to

appreciate the experience for its other merits as well. He was far more aware of Draco now; he had always known how to push the right buttons per say, however, he was coming to understand more of the subtleties. The eddies of energy from Draco spoke to his instincts, but he was also beginning to understand them at a conscious level.

Draco placed both of his palms on Harry's chest, urging him to a halt. The tightness of the muscles in his lover's legs and the straining stomach muscles holding Draco in place were all adding to the sensual images filling Harry's brain.

"Beautiful," he whispered, the burr of power even more pronounced now.

This human belonged to him; he had marked him; Draco had surrendered to him; and his lover willingly came to him time and again. Yet his prize was still fragile, still vulnerable and he knew he would do anything to protect what was his; Draco had become a part of him he would never willingly let go. Grey eyes watched him from beneath long lashes and it was almost as if Draco knew what he was thinking, as if his lover understood what it really meant to be here.

"I want to know who you are," Draco said in no more than a whisper, "show me."

Slowly Harry sat up, supporting his lover with very little effort and maintaining their connection. Instinctively Draco tensed as his centre of gravity was offset, and Harry could not suppress the groan that erupted from his chest as it wasn't just his lover's limbs that tightened.

"Relax," he said breathlessly, "I've got you."

"How strong are you?" Draco asked as he did as he was told.

"Don't know," Harry replied with a small smile, and he really didn't, he'd had no reason to test his limits.

"I'm trusting you not to drop me," his lover said slightly nervously.

"I'm not going to drop you," he replied, bracing his feet on the end of the bed.

Draco opened his mouth to reply, but Harry had other ideas and moving his pelvis he experimentally thrust forward and up; whatever his lover had been about to say dissolved into a very satisfied moan.

"Okay," Draco said, placing his hands on Harry's shoulders, "you drive."

That caused him to grin and he began to move in a rhythmic manner, and all responses from Draco; physical and magical indicated that he was hitting exactly the right spot. It was not easy, but it was fun and his earlier weakness was completely forgotten as he made love to the beautiful Slytherin in his arms. Magic and sex were a heady mixture between two normal wizards and between an incubus and a wizard it did not take long for the rest of the world to fade into insignificance.

Power and arousal built in equal measure and eventually Harry could not prevent himself allowing magic to flow into his lover as they came together time and time again. The grip on his shoulders became harder and harder and Draco's eyes closed in ecstasy as they moved in harmony. The rubbing of his lover's cock against his stomach was stimulating more than just the nerves where it touched

and Harry knew that neither of them would last much longer. The energy they were generating actually began to pickle on his skin.

"What's that?" Draco voice was almost non-existent, but the Slytherin still managed to groan out his question.

It seemed to Harry that the universe was determined to surprise him at the most inopportune moments, but it made little difference as the power level shot up in response to Draco loosing all coherence. That was all that was needed to send both of them spiralling over the edge and Harry found himself clinging to Draco as their rode out their sexual high together. When they were together, Draco was never a quiet lover and the loud, shuddering cries of completion that seemed to fall, unfettered from the Slytherin's mouth filled Harry with a deep seated joy he did not understand.

His lover was holding himself away from him at arms length, almost as if he could not bear any further skin on skin contact, and possibly Draco couldn't, since power flowed between them wherever they touched. Harry wanted to crush his lover to him and flood him completely, but he also did not want to hurt Draco in any shape or form, not now, so he clung on, allowing the Slytherin his space. However, the energy coursing through his body seemed to have other ideas and as the magic crackled between them, he saw a spark arc from Draco's chest to his and back again. Grey's eyes that had closed to ride out the waves of passion opened in shock and stared down as the little bolt of lightening continued to dance across their skin. Never before had the energy transfer been visible and Harry stared as much as Draco, but he was far too enrapt to do anything other than look until the strength in Draco's arms suddenly gave out and they were too close together to see anything.

When they finally started to come down he found that Draco was sitting in his lap, rather than crouching even partially and they had slipped apart. He was breathing hard and he was buzzing with the power they had generated, but the tiredness was beginning to touch at the edges of his consciousness again. It seemed that sex could invigorate him, but it could not completely remove the lethargy which his earlier activity had caused. Draco also appeared somewhere between dazed and ready to go all over again, making Harry grin rather like a loon.

"Are you going to explain the little lights?" his lover asked eventually, his head still resting on Harry shoulder.

"Can't," Harry replied honestly, since he had no idea why or what this new turn of events meant. "You going to tell me why you seem to hate Wormtail as much as I do?"

"Oh, of course," Draco replied with a laugh, "about the same time you let me top."

The End
