Restoration By Jilly James

Title: Restoration
Author: Jilly
Fandom/Genre: Harry Potter
Pairing: Severus/Lucius, Lucius/Narcissa (sorta), Narcissa/OMC
Content Rating: Mature
Warnings: Off-screen MPREG, child abuse, miscarriage, kidnapping (fetus-napping?), violence, adult language, Dumbledore bashing.
Summary: Three years after the death of the Potters and the disappearance of the Dark Lord, Severus receives a letter from the late Lily Potter. In those pages he finds that he hadn't in fact lost his and Lucius' child in a miscarriage, an event which drove Lucius and Severus apart. Now Severus and Lucius have a battle to find their son, and see their family restored.
Beta Thanks: To the wonderful Naelany… you're my rock!
Special Thanks: To the oh so talented fanarts_series for the beautiful art to accompany this story.
Author's Note: Lucius would be about 30 at the start of this story, and Severus 24. I'm making up shit about Veela because I can. It's not clear when Dumbledore joined the ICW, or became Supreme Mugwump. For my purposes, he's already a member but not SW yet.
Word Count: 26k

1 November 1984

Severus nearly stumbled out of the floo into Lucius' study, his normal grace and economy of motion completely absent.

Lucius barely glanced up from the stack of parchment he was perusing. "I did not expect to see you so soon, Severus," he remarked almost dismissively. "You typically survive a full month before gracing me with your presence."

Barely keeping a hold of his magic, Severus only managed a strangled, "Lucius…"

Something in his tone caught his mate's attention, because Lucius looked up again, brows drawing together in concern. "What's happened?"

Severus reached into his robe pocket and pulled out the letter. He stared at the folded parchment, trying to keep control of himself.

Strong hands gripped his upper arms, then quickly jerked away at the empathic impression caused by their physical contact. "You are *enraged*," Lucius exclaimed with a note of shock in his voice. "I've never felt you like this. Not even when the Dark Lord killed Lily Potter."

The seemingly innocuous words were enough for something inside to snap and for Severus to lose control of his magic as he was consumed by a killing rage. He was caught in a maelstrom of sound and light and chaos. He was aware of Lucius grabbing him and yelling, but could not manage a coherent response. He was completely unable to gain back any control.

Suddenly everything went black.

Severus woke, not sure where he was. He cautiously opened his eyes and immediately recognized Lucius' bedroom. What used to be *their* bedroom. Before—

Forcing that thought away, he let his gaze settle on Lucius, who was seated by the bed, head down, hair a curtain around his face, a familiar piece of parchment clenched in his fist.

"You've read it then?" Severus ventured.

Lucius looked up, expression devoid of masks in a way Severus rarely saw, even when they were alone. He looked *destroyed*. "Yes." Glancing away, his jaw tightened briefly. "Your magic was…" he trailed off. "I had to stun you." Lucius offered no apology and Severus didn't expect it. "I take it this arrived today?"

Sitting up, Severus shifted so he was seated at the edge of the bed, and absently noted that his outer robe had been removed. "In a manner of speaking. A solicitor from Bates & Fairweather had arranged time to meet with me after my last class of the day. Lil—Lady Potter had a secret will. The executor was Sirius Black."

Lucius rubbed a hand over his eyes. "And the law requires a three year waiting period before a will is automatically executed unless a petition is made to the ministry."

"Which they were instructed not to do under any circumstances. And considering that Dumbledore managed to seal the primary Potter will, that was a wise precaution." Severus reached out and carefully took the letter from Lucius, smoothing it out with trembling fingers.

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31 July 1981

Dear Severus,

Today is Harry's first birthday. He's a beautiful baby, so sweet and loving. Everything a mother could wish for. But as I sat and watched him sleep, I felt my heart break, because this joy should not be mine. There are so many forces at work against us, Severus, and I no longer know which path to take.

For all that I love magic, and have been enamored with it since the day I found out I was a witch, there's a part of magic that I have come to hate. It's the cruelest twist that after a miscarriage our magic is damaged in a way that will never allow us to carry a child to term created of our own magic. How cruel was Mother Magic when she made us this way?

As I write these words, I hope that I'm strong enough to come to you in person, and that I'll do it soon. That I'll make this right. But if I'm not strong, Sev, I leave this letter with my solicitor with a secret will in the event anything happens to me, so that you will know the truth of things. I've left other things for you as well, things that you may need if you respond in the manner I expect.

I feel like I should start with an apology, because I am sorry, Severus. So very sorry. But no amount of remorse can make this right. The only thing that can possibly be any type of amends is for me to give up that which I have come to love the most. And that I don't know if I can do.

I have a tale to tell you, and I fear that you may never forgive me for what I have done to you.

Almost a year and a half ago, Dumbledore came to me about a prophecy that desperately needed to be averted. He wouldn't tell me the exact wording, but he said it was about the child of two dark wizards, one of which had to be part Veela. With you newly pregnant, he said there could be no other conclusion but that it was about you and Lucius. This child, he said, had the potential to cause the fall of the light if it were raised in a dark family.

He persuaded me that the only solution was that you and Lucius could not have that child. He said things, Sev, awful hints about what might happen, but in the end, I went along with him because I was grieving over the recent loss of my own baby.

Not only did I lose my child, but I was going to have to face telling James that we would never have a baby. I was going to have to face him taking a second wife to ensure an heir to the Potter line. And I found that I wasn't as strong as I had previously thought.

In my grief, I went along with an insane plan… to take your child and act as his surrogate, raising him as mine and James', and let you and Lucius believe that you had lost your child. James knew nothing of this. He believes Harry to be his son.

But Harry is yours. Yours and Lucius'. I named him Harry because it's the closest I could get to Harald, after your great-grandfather Prince.
--

Severus carefully folded the letter. "I can never get past the paragraph where she confirms that he's our son."

"There's little else after that of note other than a reference to a small vault she was leaving with items you may need. I take it that's the key I found in your robe?"

"Yes."

Silence hung thick and heavy between them. There was so much to say, and yet words would not come. Severus had kept away from Lucius since his apparently contrived miscarriage in the spring of 1980. He couldn't bear to take the chance that he would conceive again, knowing it would end in heartache over and over again. If Lucius had been a regular wizard, it wouldn't have been an issue, but as half-Veela, contraceptive potions notoriously didn't work consistently because of the way magic moved between a mated and bonded pair.

Of course, if Lucius were a regular wizard, there would have been no need for him to take a mate. His arranged marriage to Narcissa would have taken care of securing an

heir for the Malfoy line. But his Veela inheritance through the Bordelons, required a child born of his Veela mate, which was Severus.

He had left Lucius after the miscarriage, only allowing the bare minimum contact to keep their bond stable, even though the strain of separation was physically painful for him. He'd seen himself start to become bitter and angry, while Lucius became callous and aloof.

But while there was so much that needed to be said, at that moment, there was really only one thing that truly mattered.

Severus fixed Lucius with a hard stare. "I want my son back, and I don't care who has to be bribed or bullied, coerced or even killed. If you have to burn the wizarding world to the ground, you get him back, Lucius."

Lucius pulled Severus to his feet, and cupped Severus' face with both hands. This was the side of Lucius that only Severus was privileged to see. "You have my word that I'll do whatever it takes to bring our boy home. But you have to stay, Severus. You have to return to me. Not when this is resolved, but *now*. I swear to you, I'll fix this, but I *need* you with me."

Severus moved closer, tipping his head so their foreheads touched, breath mingling in the small space between them, the bond easing with every moment and every breath. "I'll stay. On that you have my word."

Severus watched Draco playing under the careful watch of Mimi, the Malfoy head elf. Lucius was updating Narcissa on the situation, but Severus couldn't make himself sit through the discussion.

"You may go, Mimi. I'll care for Draco."

"Uncle Sev!" Draco cried as he abandoned his toys and darted across the room, colliding with Severus' legs. "Missed you!"

As Severus picked up the four-year-old, for the first time his heart didn't clench in painful ways at the reality of something he could never have. "Hello, Draco."

Little hands framed his face as mercurial eyes peered at him intently. "Are you sad?"

He smiled faintly, wondering what Harry looked like. "A little. But I'm better now that I'm with you."

“Do you want to play with me?”

“I would enjoy that very much.”

Draco squirmed to get down, then grabbed Severus by the hand, pulling him further into the playroom. “Papa got me a new dragon you must see!” Severus lost himself in entertaining his godson, trying not to think too much about his own missing child.

After quite a bit of play, and just as Draco seemed to be fighting the urge to sleep, Lucius and Narcissa appeared. Lucius picked up Draco, talking quietly with him while Narcissa led Severus to the side.

She pulled him into a hug, ignoring how he immediately stiffened. “We’ll get him back, Severus. Lucius and I made a plan for dealing with Dumbledore in the near term. I don’t want you fretting about that manipulative old wizard.”

Lucius approached holding Draco and passed the boy to his mother. “We’ll take our leave of you, my dear.”

Draco’s chin wobbled. “But I missed Uncle Sev.”

Stroking Draco’s cheek briefly, Lucius replied, “Uncle Sev is going to be staying, so you can see him again tomorrow.”

Severus allowed Lucius to guide him from the room as Draco began chattering excitedly to Narcissa. He loved Draco dearly, though his needless separation from Lucius had given him less time with the boy. He was pleased that was at an end.

He wasn’t terribly surprised that Lucius returned to his bedchamber. It was still a little early, but Severus was quite fatigued. Though he had some doubt that any sleep would actually be restful.

They wound up seated in the two armchairs in front of the fire while Lucius briefed him on the preliminary plan. It was insanely daring, but would be accomplished in true Slytherin style. The problem was there was a lot of risk to Lucius.

When Severus raised the concern, Lucius simply shrugged. “Even with a different strategy, the risk remains. Pitting myself against Dumbledore leaves the door open for increased scrutiny into my past activities. Since we cannot eliminate that possibility, I’ll proceed with the stratagem that has the best chance of success.”

“Lucius…” Severus trailed off, not sure how to speak to Lucius of these matters. “I don’t want to be without you.”

“You’ve been without me for over four years,” he snapped, then sighed as he massaged his temples. “My apologies, Severus. I—“

“I cannot fault you for stating the truth. But you have to know that being without you is never what I *wanted*.” Before Lucius could say anything, Severus added, “Let’s delay that conversation. It feels beyond me at present.”

Lucius inclined his head in agreement, then got to his feet. “Come… the next few days will be taxing, and the magical outburst must have left you exhausted.”

Severus found himself hustled through his evening ablutions, and practically before he could catch a breath, he was in Lucius’ nightshirt with Lucius sliding into bed next to him.

“Lucius,” he whispered cautiously even as he was pulled close to Lucius’ strong firm body. The sudden complete easing of their bond caused Severus to nearly sag with relief. Unable to help himself, he wound his arm around his mate’s waist. It had been so long since he’d been truly pain free and at ease with himself.

Lips pressed firmly against his temple. “I won’t press you further, Severus, but I will not sleep alone. In time we will talk, but for now you will allow us to take comfort in one another.”

Unable to find words, Severus simply nodded and tried to eliminate any space left between them.

2 November 1984

Narcissa apparated to the gates of Hogwarts before seven on Friday morning, carefully adjusted her clothing to make sure she presented the right image, then started up the walk to the castle.

The school was already buzzing with activity and very little note was taken of her as she briskly made her way to the headmaster’s office. Once there, she fixed the gargoyle with a glare. “I’m here to speak with the headmaster about Professor Snape.”

After a few seconds, she was given entry and on the journey up, she carefully made sure nothing untoward showed in her expression.

Dumbledore managed to not look confused by her arrival, even though she knew he had to be. “Lady Malfoy, always a pleasure, though an unexpected one. How can I help you this fine morning?”

“It is I who am here to offer assistance, Headmaster. Severus is quite unwell and will be unable to attend to his classes. I received an O on my potions’ NEWT, and have kept my skills sharp. I am here to offer myself as a substitute while Severus recovers.”

Something flashed in the old man’s expression, but it was too quick for her to catch. “And what ails Severus?”

She allowed a hint of disdain to show in her expression. “It can be no mystery to you that his bond with Lucius has been incredibly strained. And a strained bond can lead to physical distress. How could you have let him continue on in such a state?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know to what you’re referring. Severus was well at lunch yesterday,” the old man replied, eyes twinkling annoyingly.

“You aren’t blind, Headmaster!” she snapped. “Severus is so pale now as to be nearly ghostly. And I swear his robes get heavier every time I see him. He’s constantly chilled! You know perfectly well how debilitating the symptoms of bond withdrawal can be. Last night he was overcome and sought out Lucius in order to stabilize himself as much as possible, but he has suffered *damage* from pressing this issue over the last few years.”

She was certain she caught of flicker of panic in the old bastard’s expression. “Then Severus should be seen by a healer immediately. Bring him back to Hogwarts and Poppy will ensure he’s well cared for.”

“Do you mean to imply that the Malfoy family healer is in some way inferior to a school mediwitch?” she sneered. “Or that something at a boarding school can in some way take the place of his mate when he’s suffering from a strained mating bond?”

Dumbledore made a placating gesture. “I meant no offense, Lady Malfoy. Though I do know some of Severus’ motivations for keeping his distance, and I’m sure he’d prefer to be back at the school.”

Narcissa glared. “That isn’t your decision. In any case, he won’t recover apart from Lucius. What portion of ‘*their bond is strained*’ is difficult for you to comprehend, Headmaster?”

“I’m sure you’re aware how concerned Severus is about avoiding any risk of pregnancy. And Veela are known for conception through wild magic. For his sake, I must insist—“

“You’ll insist nothing,” she said coldly. “There is no clause in Severus’ employment contract that gives you any right to invade his privacy or interfere with his dealings with his healer or his mate. Further, pregnancy through wild magic is exceedingly

rare, and if I find you're the one to fill Severus' head with worry about such nonsense, I promise to see you regret it." Now the avoiding contact with Lucius made much more sense to her. If Severus got it in his head that prolonged even non-sexual contact with Lucius could possibly result in pregnancy, he would have avoided Lucius at all costs. Damn the meddling old fool.

Before Dumbledore could get a word in, she held up a hand and continued on. "There will be no more discussion of bringing Severus to Hogwarts. I'm here to offer to teach his classes while he is under the healer's care. I have a young son, as you are aware, so I can only be here Monday through Friday during instructional periods. If you do not wish to avail yourself of my services, or if you wish to continue to press me about Severus, I will happily take my leave and return to Malfoy Manor, and you may sort out your staffing issues in your own time."

After several long beats, Dumbledore inclined his head in agreement. "Your assistance would be most appreciated, *Professor* Malfoy."

Narcissa fought back displaying her satisfaction. Severus was safely away from Dumbledore, but they still had eyes on the manipulative old bastard.

14 November 1984

"I thought I might find you here," Lucius said softly.

Severus continued to gaze out the window of his son's new room overlooking the grounds of Malfoy Manor. After several moments, he finally managed, "I want him here. *Now*."

Lucius sighed and moved behind Severus, resting hands on Severus' shoulders. "Everything is almost in place. I just need you to be patient a little longer."

The Slytherin in Severus knew Lucius had to play this carefully. He *knew* they had to catch Dumbledore unaware. But there was a part of him that wanted to play the foolish Gryffindor and rush in. And preferably physically beat Harry's location out of Dumbledore. Severus typically favored a good hex, but he was willing to dirty his hands in this instance. Despite some careful investigating, Lucius has been unable to find any record of Harry's whereabouts, so this insane scheme was all they had left.

Lucius had been away almost constantly making arrangements for their coup d'état against Dumbledore. It had been nearly two weeks, and the chess pieces were almost in position, but something unexpected had occurred in recent days. Castius Fidenas, a mind healer from France who consulted with the ICW, had been closeted

with Lucius in his newly restored study. Lucius had known Castius for many years, but the two were not exactly friendly, though Severus did not know the source of the friction between them.

"Why is Healer Fidenas here?"

Lucius sighed and stepped away. "It's best you don't know, Severus. You know this plan has a good chance of getting our son back, but it is also a great risk. Particularly to me. I'm attempting to mitigate that risk, and you can't testify to that which you have no knowledge of. I need you to trust me on this."

Severus continued to stare out over the meticulously tended landscape but offered a nod.

Lucius forcibly turned Severus so their gazes locked. "I'll make our move in two days. I have a meeting with Minister Bagnold before lunch, and unless something unforeseen occurs, we'll confront him when the Wizengamot session begins immediately afterward."

It felt like this had been eking along at a snail's pace, but Severus knew Lucius had called in almost every favor he was due to make this happen so quickly. And no doubt Lucius was now in debt to many people with the ICW for aiding him in setting this chess game in motion without Dumbledore's knowledge.

16 November 1984

Lucius waited with feigned patience while Minister Bagnold finished looking over all the documentation he'd handed her. He was burning a bridge today, but if it got him his son, it would be well worth it.

Finally, with a look of absolute horror, she turned her attention back to Lucius. "I don't understand. Why would you go to such extremes, Lucius?"

In response, Lucius simply raised a brow.

Bagnold flushed, parchments gripped tightly in her hands. "I would have done anything in my power to help you. You didn't need to do *this*!"

"Dumbledore took a magical child from the home where his '*parents'* were killed and placed that child in an undisclosed location, and no one made any attempt to stop him or challenge his right to do so. He managed to persuade the Wizengamot to seal the Potters' will and appointed *himself* magical guardian. He did all of this with

absolutely no legal basis for his actions or claims. There are no records of the whereabouts of the child known as Harry Potter. Who in point of fact is Harald Malfoy, stolen from my bondmate's womb by Dumbledore himself.

"He is the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and member of the ICW, and is arguably the most powerful man in Wizarding Britain. I cannot believe you actually imagine a direct confrontation would have yielded positive results. Confront him, and while you and the Wizengamot debate about whether to question the old man and the validity of my claim, he has enough time to hide the child, *my son*, in furtherance of his insane quest."

Lucius fought back his rising temper, because it wouldn't serve him in this situation. "When one of the heads of our government is utterly corrupt, I'm afraid no direct approach will do. No, this was the only way."

Bagnold slammed her hand down on the desk. "You are one to talk about *corrupt*," she nearly hissed. "We all have secrets, *Lord Malfoy*. Secrets we don't want aired in public. And you've just ensured that nothing may be able to be kept quiet."

Lucius shrugged. "I have nothing to hide, Minister. And if I did, I'd be willing to reveal it to get my son."

"We'd have gotten your son, Lucius. Maybe not as fast as you would like, but I would have stood behind you."

"It is naïve in the extreme to think you could guarantee the safety and wellbeing of my child once Dumbledore is aware that his deception has been uncovered. The die is cast, Millicent. I cannot undo this even if I wanted to."

"A fine mess you've gotten us into." Bagnold huffed and sat back in her chair. "And you have only Lily Potter's word from months before her death that she used a glamour and not a blood adoption. If she changed her mind, all your machinations will be for naught. There will be no way to prove he was ever your son!"

Lucius glared. "Is it your contention that I should have been more cautious because the outcome is uncertain? I assure you, Minister, caution is not my concern when my child has been missing for over four years."

The Minister glared for another moment before making a placating gesture, apparently recognizing that Lucius was immovable on the subject. "So you started with the Veela Council. How in the name of Merlin did you wind up with the Queen of England?"

"The Veela Council, who were outraged that this has happened to the heir of the Bordelon legacy, has close ties to the ICW. Dumbledore is a prominent member of the ICW, but not without enemies. The head of the ICW, in fact, has little use for our

Chief Warlock. I had the Veela Council and prominent members of the ICW helping within two days after Chieftain Ragnok personally validated Lily Potter's magical signature on her confession.

"With the support of the ICW, and considering that I have a title in the muggle world, it was a fairly simple matter to get an audience with the Prime Minister, and he took the issue to Her Majesty." It actually hadn't been simple at all, but Lucius would never reveal what this strategy had cost him. "And though there are those on the Wizengamot who would support me, as I already said, a direct confrontation, even in front of the entire panel, would have ended poorly, with my son possibly in jeopardy."

"So your choice was to destroy the Wizarding government of Britain?" she asked incredulously.

"That is pure hyperbole. The Queen has simply issued a writ that for a period of thirty days, which she may choose to extend, the designated contingent from the ICW and the Prime Minister's representatives are in control. You are still the Minister for Magic, nothing has changed that."

Bagnold's jaw clenched so hard, Lucius thought he heard the grinding of teeth. "I have no authority. None. The Wizengamot can operate, but *anything* can be overturned by the ICW until the Queen restores our system of government. This is too much, Lucius! Do you have any idea how long the ICW has wanted to get its slimy little hands on magical policy in Britain?"

"The bell cannot be unrung, Millicent. We all have to appear to be cooperating, or people will panic. And whether we are in attendance at the Wizengamot session in twenty minutes or not, they will proceed with taking Dumbledore into custody. I intend to be present for that, so you have my permission to harangue me further at a later date."

Lucius took his seat amongst his fellow Wizengamot members. Dumbledore was watching him closely. He knew from Narcissa that the manipulative old bastard was pressuring her about Severus, so he no doubt intended to corner Lucius at some point. Little did he know that he would never get that chance.

The Minister was the last to arrive as she'd had to stop and let Crouch know that he would be taking his orders from the head auror assigned by the ICW, and specifically not to respond to any commands from the Wizengamot.

Dumbledore returned his attention to his duties, and indicated for the Undersecretary to begin the session.

It wasn't uncommon for there to be a moderate number of people in the audience, but today there were more than usual because the ICW representatives were here, along with members of the Veela Council and the French Ministry of Magic, who were providing the majority of the auror support for Dumbledore's detainment.

The chamber already had anti-apparition wards, but he felt when the anti-portkey wards went up. As did most of the Wizengamot, including Dumbledore.

Bernard Fortier, a peer of Dumbledore's in the ICW, got to his feet and approached the gallery, giving a nod to Minister Bagnold before turning his attention to the Chief Warlock. "Dumbledore," he acknowledged.

"Monsieur Fortier, I was unaware you would be gracing us with your presence. I'm afraid we have a rather full agenda today. Was there something in particular you needed? Or perhaps I can meet you after today's session?"

Fortier pinned the Chief Warlock with a hard look. "By order of Her Royal Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, you are to be taken into custody by members of the French Ministry of Magic, deputized by this special panel of the International Confederation of Wizards. I ask that you surrender your wand peacefully."

To give Dumbledore credit, he barely reacted, though the cries of outrage from some of the Wizengamot more than made up for Dumbledore's reticence. When the furor had died down, he simply asked, "On what charge am I to be detained?"

"Kidnapping, assault, line theft, theft, multiple counts of abuse of power, and whatever else we may find during the course of our investigation. We have ample documentation of these crimes for the esteemed members of this court to review. But for now, there will be no more discussion. Please step down and surrender your wand."

17 November 1984

Severus paced the room they were assigned in the Department of Services for Wizarding Children. "How can this be taking so long?"

"Severus, I cannot get any additional information," Lucius said with an air of calmness that Severus knew to be false. The strengthening of their bond was allowing him to be more aware of Lucius' emotions, and his mate was just as

anxious as Severus. “I have no leverage with the ICW. With the Wizengamot functionally powerless, there’s nothing I can do. That was part of the price to ensure we got to bring our son home.”

Normally Severus wouldn’t allow his agitation to show, but he’d been unable to keep his Slytherin mask in place since he’d read *The Letter*. And he knew Lucius was doing as best as he was able. The man had single-handedly overthrown the British Wizarding government, albeit temporarily. Thank Merlin Severus had Draco to focus on the last two weeks or he’d have slowly gone insane.

The ICW had apprehended Dumbledore yesterday, and they’d basically heard *nothing* since. Lucius had been stalking the halls of government with no answer until he’d been told to go home. Then they’d been summoned two hours ago and left in this blasted room with no information.

At long last, the door opened and Bernard Fortier entered, looking quite serious. “I apologize for the long delay. I know you have been eager for news, but we had several complications getting the information we needed. I didn’t want to continually raise your hopes just to dash them again.

“Questioning Dumbledore yesterday yielded quite a bit of information, but not the whereabouts of your son. He confirmed he orchestrated the plan, and performed the *fetus transtuli* spell himself. There apparently was a prophecy involved in his motivation, but he took steps to protect the prophecy and the location of your son. There’s an unbreakable vow in place for that information that would rob him of his magic.”

Severus turned away, struggling not to lash out.

“I imagine that was yesterday,” Lucius said smoothly. “What have you uncovered since?”

“We’ve uncovered much information in the last 24 hours, but very little of it helped find Harry. We were afraid we were at an impasse until we decided to question those close to Dumbledore, particularly some of the staff at Hogwarts.”

Whipping around, Severus glared at Fortier. “That didn’t occur to you before?”

“When someone has gone to such lengths to secure information, leaving the information with someone else seems… improbable. However, in the course of the investigation we would have questioned them regardless. It became more pressing when we were unable to secure the location of your son from Dumbledore himself.

“Fortunately, someone else did know where your child had been placed. Minerva McGonagall. We presented her with copies of the letter and the memory of

Dumbledore's interrogation, and she revealed the child's location. He was placed with the muggle family of Lily Potter."

Severus gasped and felt his knees get weak. He braced his hands on the table to steady himself.

Lucius' arm came around him. "Severus, what has happened?"

"Petunia Evans hated magic, and she was cruel even as a child," Severus whispered. He looked back to Fortier, who looked pained. "Have you found him?"

Fortier nodded. "Yes. We retrieved him an hour ago, and have taken both the Dursleys into custody for their mistreatment of him. Their son is here in the Ministry waiting for us to determine temporary placement. Your son was taken directly to St. Mungo's."

Severus focused on his breathing for several seconds, then stood up straight and steeled himself. "We're going to St. Mungo's. Now."

"I'll accompany you personally," Fortier said. "There's more information as soon as you're prepared to hear it."

It was only a matter of a few minutes to floo to the wizarding hospital, but several minutes of confusion to find the right room, and Severus' patience was at an end. The room they were directed to had two aurors guarding the door and a man in healer's robes just emerging.

The healer nodded to the three of them. "Monsieur Fortier, Lord Malfoy, Professor Snape, I'm Healer Gaspar, I've been tending to your son."

"Is he well?" Severus inquired urgently.

"We should move to a private office for this discussion," the healer hedged, and Severus felt his temper start to fray as his worry began to mount.

With movements more impatient and abrupt than usual, Lucius made some slashing motions with his wand and a privacy ward was erected. "Speak," he demanded.

Gaspar inclined his head. "Your son is severely malnourished, as a result he's quite undersize for his age. When he came to us, he presented with a disclosed shoulder and many severe bruises. Our diagnostic scans reveal that he's had broken bones than were left untended, and likely only his magic has kept him alive at some points. His magical core is quite strong for someone his age, though there was a block placed on it, which we have already removed. At some point we'll want to vanish and regrow the damaged bones. I fear doing it now would be unwise both from an

emotional standpoint and a physical one, as his body is too fragile to bear the necessary potions."

Severus tightened his hold on Lucius' arm as he fought down the swell of magic wanting to lash out. Lucius was completely expressionless, but Severus could *feel* his mate's turmoil.

"Have you treated my son?" Lucius bit out.

"The shoulder was simple to mend, but the child is quite leery of us and we have not yet applied bruise balm to his wounds. Also, he eels away as soon as our backs are turned and hides under the examination table. I understand he was being kept in a boot cupboard?" the healer inquired, looking to Fortier.

Fortier nodded, saying nothing, while Severus felt like part of him was dying.

The healer continued, "Since the child isn't afraid of small spaces, it would likely be a source of safety he's seeking out."

Severus finally managed to ask, "Did you remove the glamour?"

"Not as yet, but as we suspected from the information that was provided, it is a glamour anchored with blood magic and not a magical blood adoption. And with the vial of blood left by the late Lady Potter, we can make the potion to break the glamour easily."

"I'll take care of that personally," Severus bit out. "Is there anything else I need to know before I go in?"

"He won't speak. My scans don't detect anything physically wrong with him in that regard, but he hasn't spoken since we brought him in, regardless of the prompting."

Severus held up a hand. He didn't think he could handle hearing any more. He just wanted to see his son. Stepping around the healer, he entered the room, Lucius right behind him.

There was no sign of Harry, but the mediwitch in the room pointed to the exam table. "He's slipped under the table again. It seemed best to let him go where he was comfortable."

"You may go," Lucius said, while Severus was staring intently at where he could just spot a bit of a tiny foot.

He slipped off his robe, passing it to Lucius, leaving him in just trousers and a button-down shirt. If Harry had been raised in the muggle world, no doubt the strange appearance of wizards wasn't helping the child's anxiety.

Severus settled on the floor next to the examination table, finally able to get a look at his son. Wild black hair, a face very reminiscent of James Potter, and wide fearful green eyes. Lily Potter's eyes. And Severus' son was much too tiny for a four year old. His little arms looked bruised in various stages of healing and painfully bony sticking out of his St. Mungo's issued patient's gown. His legs weren't much better.

Severus masked his reaction to the glamour and offered a faint smile. "Hello, Harry. I know this must all be so very strange to you, and you're probably quite frightened. Do you mind if I tell you a story?"

Harry's expression shifted to somewhat confused, but he cautiously shook his head.

"My name is Severus, which must sound like a very odd name to you." Severus' lips twitched in amusement when Harry's face scrunched up. "That man over there," he pointed to Lucius, who was seated in a chair nearby, but far enough away that Harry wouldn't feel overwhelmed, "is Lucius, which is probably another funny name that you've never heard before."

With quite a bit of hesitation, Harry gave what could be interpreted as a nod of 'yes.'

Keeping his body relaxed and his expression open, Severus continued. "You see, over five years ago, Lucius and I found out we were going to have a child." He broke off for a second and cocked his head to the side. "Does that seem strange… two men having a baby?"

With seeming reluctance, Harry eventually nodded a bit more firmly.

"Magic allows for some amazing things." Harry jerked a little and stiffened, but Severus just continued on. "I'm sure you've been told awful things about magic, but they are not true. Magic is beautiful and wonderful. Would you like me to show you some magic? I know you've seen people using wands today, but magic can do fun things, too."

Harry was still for the longest time, but eventually nodded, this time a little more assertively.

Severus summoned some empty vials from the desk and let them settle on the floor between them. He transfigured each vial into a plush animal, pushing enough magic to make the transfiguration permanent. A snake, a badger, an eagle, and a lion, very common first toys for any child on the Hogwarts roll. "That's one type of magic. It's called transfiguration, and if you put enough magic in it, it can last forever."

Harry's eyes seemed like they would pop out of his head, and he stared at the stuffed animals transfixed, a look of longing clear on his face.

“I’d like you to have those, if you want,” Severus offered, feeling his heart break a little. He had a suspicion that this little boy had few if any toys in his life.

They had a standoff for a bit, while Harry clearly looked like he didn’t know if he could trust Severus, but also desperately wanted the toys. Eventually, Harry tentatively snuck out a little hand and grabbed the green and silver snake, pulling it to his chest, but giving Severus a slightly suspicious look.

“Do you like snakes, Harry?” At the nearly panicked look on his son’s face, Severus continued on, keeping his tone carefully measured and even. “I myself am very fond of them. I have a couple in my quarters at the school where I teach, and Lucius has quite a few lovely magical snakes. Would you like to see them some time?”

Biting at his lip, hesitantly, Harry nodded – the only form of communication he seemed to be able to manage.

Severus smiled, which was something he typically only did around Draco and Lucius, so it often felt a bit stiff and awkward to him. “Magic is wonderful, Harry. Magic is what allowed Lucius and I to have a baby. But sometimes magic can be used for bad things. You see, someone stole our baby from us. And we’ve been trying very hard to find him.

“Just this morning, the wizard police, they’re called aurors and they wear purple robes and carry wands, well they figured out where our son was.” Severus was careful to describe the French aurors. They were the ones who had retrieved Harry from the Dursleys. “He’s four years old now, and he was being kept by some awful people in the non-magical world. So the aurors picked him up and brought him to this hospital and we immediately came to see him.”

Harry clutched the snake tighter and his eyes filled with tears. “Me?” he whispered.

“Yes, Harry. You’re my son. And I have missed you so very very much. More than anything, I’d like to take you to our home and get to be your Dad.”

The tears spilled over, but Harry didn’t make a sound, just buried his face in his stuffed snake. Eventually, he scooted forward a few inches, and then a few inches more, but didn’t look up.

Severus hadn’t cried since he was a young child, but the sight of his son cautiously inching across the floor to him nearly caused him to come undone. “Can I show you some more magic, Harry?”

Harry looked up, eyes still swimming in tears and nose turning red. He nodded.

“I’ll need to pick you up. Is that okay? I promise I’ll do my best not to hurt you.”

Looking relieved, Harry nodded again, so Severus reached out for his son for the first time and, snake and all, lifted him carefully onto his lap. Harry kept clutching the snake and held himself stiffly.

Severus stroked the back of his son's head. "Hello, Harry, I'm your dad," he whispered. "Your papa over there is getting his first good look at you. You want to wave to him?" Severus glanced up and found Lucius looking painfully vulnerable as he watched Harry.

Hesitating a bit, Harry finally managed to wave one little hand, then went back to clutching the snake.

"Hello, Harry," Lucius said simply, voice raspy. "I am so happy we found you."

One corner of Harry's lips tilted up, and Severus got the odd sense the little boy was trying to reassure Lucius.

"I'm going to use magic to summon that jar on the table, okay?"

Harry nodded with a bit of enthusiasm, looking quite interested.

Severus accio'd the bruise balm. "This is a magical potion that will help your arms and legs feel better. Can I try a little on your arm? I'll be very careful. Or maybe your leg, and then you can keep hold of your snake?"

Harry didn't reply verbally, but adjusted his position so his leg was sticking out straight. Severus was pretty sure he was seeing shoe marks on his son's leg, but he carefully concealed any reaction, just gently smoothed the balm on one skinny leg. Then he watched with Harry as the bruise slowly began to fade until just faint marks were left.

Relaxing his posture a little, Harry reached out and poked at his leg, then looked up at Severus with an expression of pure wonder. "Can I do magic?" he whispered tentatively.

"Yes, you are a very magical little boy, and some day—" Severus broke off as Harry stuck out his hand toward his stuffed animals with a look of intense concentration. Suddenly, the badger flew into Harry's outstretched hand.

Brows shooting up in surprise, Severus exchanged a look with Lucius, before he dropped a quick kiss on Harry's head. "That's wonderful, Harry! We have so much to teach you." Severus absolutely would not say that Harry should not have been able to do that. There was no point in telling a child that he *couldn't* do something he had clearly just done. "May I do the rest of your bruises for you?"

Harry nodded eagerly and set the badger aside, and quickly stuck out his right arm.

The process was made less painful by Harry's clear wonder at the effect of magic. Every bruise that was nearly healed seemed to help the little boy relax a little more. He even let Lucius help do his back, and Severus pretended not to notice the way his mate's hands were shaking.

Things got a little tense when it became clear they needed to treat Harry's bottom. Harry finally stood with his back to Severus, holding his snake clutched tight with one arm, and gripping Lucius' hand with the other while Severus applied the balm. Severus was glad Harry couldn't see his face, because he was having a hard time controlling his reaction as he did what he could to ease the suffering of his little boy.

When he was done and had closed Harry's gown again, Harry seemed to wobble a bit and flopped back into Severus lap, eyes heavy-lidded with fatigue. "You can sleep, Harry. I promise nothing will happen to you, and I'll be here when you wake."

Still holding his snake, Harry curled up against Severus and snuck one hand onto Severus' shirt, getting it in a firm grip. Severus barely heard the whispered, "Daddy." He closed his eyes, fighting back the emotions and held his son a little tighter.

Lucius was suddenly on the floor next to him, wrapping an arm around Severus' shoulders, and curling one large hand gently around his son's little foot.

Lucius apparated into the foyer of the manor. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, feeling his mask slip as the events of the morning nearly overwhelmed him.

"Lucius?" Narcissa whispered.

He steadied his emotions then opened his eyes. "Good afternoon, Cissy." Slipping off his cloak, he passed it to the waiting house elf.

"I received your owl that you were at St. Mungo's." She stepped close and settled her hand on his arm, leading him toward the lounge. "Tell me has transpired."

"Harry was being kept in the muggle world with Lily Potter's sister and family. They were keeping him in—" Lucius broke off, trying to contain both his grief and his anger. "They were keeping him a boot cupboard and barely feeding him. He has… injuries," he finished vaguely, unable to articulate further.

Narcissa gasped. "Oh, Lucius. How long will he be at St. Mungo's? Should we summon our healer?"

“He’ll be there only a brief time. I’ll be returning shortly to retrieve Harry and Severus. I needed to relay the situation to you, and we’ll need to prepare Draco. I would also like our family healer to examine Harry tomorrow.”

Narcissa took a seat on the settee, looking pensive. “Should I take Draco to Paris for a few days?”

Lucius shook his head. “Severus and I discussed it, and feel introducing him to Draco later could do more harm than good. Harry is very skittish, and I fear that every change could make that worse. Though if you would consult with Castius Fidenas, I would like to know if he is of the same mind.”

“I’ll floo Castius and the family healer now. Why don’t you tend to Draco and I will join you presently.”

Lucius found Draco playing quietly in his playroom. This calm Draco was only typical after his midday nap. “Hello, son.”

“Papa!” Draco scrambled to his feet and stood with his hands braced on his hips, giving Lucius what passed for his four-year-old glare. “Where is my brother?”

Lucius was both amused and saddened at the same time. “He’ll be coming home later today.”

“Yay!” Draco did a funny little dance then ran over and crashed into Lucius. “Did you tell him about me?”

Picking Draco up, Lucius felt a painful sensation in his chest at the thought that, prior to Severus returning to him, he’d been planning to teach Draco to curb his enthusiasm. To be more like a proper Malfoy. In this moment, it seemed like teaching Draco how to be *a proper Malfoy* would have been a tragic mistake. Now all he wanted was for his sons to be happy.

He settled in the overstuffed armchair with Draco on his lap. “I must tell you Draco, that Harry is going to need a proper big brother. I’m afraid the people who were keeping him were not caring for him well and he’s very scared and very small for his age.”

Draco’s lower lip trembled. “Why?”

“It’s very difficult to explain, and it’s something you might not understand yet. But know that Harry is probably going to be afraid of all of us, and we’ll have to be patient and give him time to become accustomed to being part of a family.”

“I’ll help show him how to be a Malfoy!” Draco declared.

“Mm.” Lucius felt that painful tug again. “How about you teach him how to be a good brother, and show him the best places to play? But go slow, and if you get sad or scared or don’t know what to do, you come find me or your mum or Uncle Sev. All right?”

“Yes, Papa.” Draco flung his arms around Lucius’ neck. “Does he know about me?”

“Severus is telling him, so he’ll know about you when he comes home. But I don’t want you to be frightened or sad if Harry is afraid of you, okay? It will get better.”

Draco nodded, but Lucius knew it wouldn’t be that easy. He gave himself a few stolen moments to just enjoy holding his first-born. He’d made so many mistakes, and the future had a lot of uncertainty looming. He had set things in motion that he had no control over, and all he could do was try to ensure his family would be all right regardless of what happened to him.

Severus felt subtle shifting of the child in his arms several minutes before Harry blinked awake. Severus had moved to a comfortable sofa while he waited for Harry to wake. Several people had been in and out, but Harry had slept on. They wanted him to eat something soon, and Severus was fully supportive of that agenda, but he also didn’t want to wake his son. Oddly, even in his sleep, Harry hadn’t released the snake or Severus’ shirt.

Harry stiffened immediately, casting his gaze about with a fearful expression.

“Hello again, Harry,” Severus immediately said soothingly. “Do you remember me?”

Wide fearful green eyes fixed on him for a several long seconds before Harry started to relax. “Daddy?”

Severus smiled. “Yes. I am your daddy, and we’re going to your new home soon. But first, if you’re ready, would you like something to eat?”

“I can eat?” Harry whispered, which seemed to be the only volume level he knew to use.

Severus felt infinitely sad at the question. “Yes. Whatever you like. And some day soon, you’ll be able to eat as much as you like. The healer says that your tummy,” he rested a hand on Harry’s too-flat belly, “isn’t really accustomed to much food, so we need to slowly teach your tummy how to eat again. So small amounts many many times a day. But I promise you that you will never go hungry again. Okay?”

Harry slowly nodded, but looked a little skeptical. Severus sat him up and placed him in the feeding chair. He quickly activated the ward rune to keep Harry from sliding out, then raised the tray.

Handing Harry the fork, Severus set small portions on the tray. “You have eggs, toast, applesauce and pumpkin juice.”

Harry blinked at the tray a few times. “Pumpkin juice?”

“It’s a very common wizarding drink. If you don’t like it, I’ll arrange for something else,” he gently reassured.

Looking like he was screwing up his courage, Harry reached for the juice. He made a face at first, and Severus forced back a laugh, but he tried it again and eventually appeared to be okay with it.

Watching Harry eat was like being stabbed in the heart. Every bite was tentative and he kept checking to make sure it was okay to eat. Severus was disheartened by how quickly Harry reached the limit of his appetite. He knew they needed small meals, but this was absurd.

Harry was fidgeting a little and Severus had a good idea what the problem was. “Toilet?” he queried, and smiled a bit when Harry nodded frantically.

When Harry returned, Severus picked him up, not calling attention to the brief tensing of the small body before Harry sagged against him.

“I have some clothes for you, and then we can think about going home, yes?”

“Home?”

“Mm hm. We have a lovely home with lots of space, and I… well, I prepared your bedroom because I hoped we were going to find you.” Severus encouraged Harry into trousers and socks.

Harry stared up at him, eyes wide, but Severus couldn’t quite interpret what was going through his son’s mind, so he continued dressing him, letting Harry speak when he was ready. “Us and Papa?” Harry finally managed to ask.

Severus nodded. “You also have a brother, and his name is Draco. He’s the same age you are.” At Harry’s panicked look, Severus calmly added. “Draco is very excited to have you come home. Your bedroom is right next to his. There’s also his mother, Narcissa, who is very anxious to meet you as well.” They broke eye contact for a moment while he pulled the shirt on.

Harry was clearly thrown by that and frowned a little. “His Mama?”

“That is a very complicated story, and I will tell you all about it some time. But we are all a family. You, me, your Papa, Narcissa and your brother. And we are all so happy to have you come home.” Not knowing how to set Harry at ease, Severus just kept up a steady stream of conversation, trying to draw Harry out. He bagged up the stuffed animals, assuring his son they were taking them home.

Finally, he pulled on his robe, then put on Harry’s dark green children’s robe, which Fortier had arranged to have delivered to them with the small selection of new clothes. Harry seemed rather bemused by the garment, holding it away from his body and contemplating it seriously. “What is it?”

“Robes. They’re what wizards wear in the magical world. When we go into the non-magical world, we remove them so we blend in.”

“And I’m magical,” Harry whispered almost to himself, then let go of the robe and seemed to be more at ease in his new garments.

“The healer is going to look you over one more time, and then we’ll leave as soon as Lucius returns.”

“Where’d P-Papa go?” Harry asked, stumbling a bit over ‘Papa.’

“He went to let Draco and Narcissa know that you were here and being cared for and that we’d be home soon.”

Harry nodded, but Severus got the sense that he was overwhelmed.

In deference to Harry’s reaction earlier, Severus asked, “Is it all right if I pick you up again? You see, I’ve missed you so very much and it makes me happy to be able to hug you.”

With an eager nod, Harry lifted his arms. Severus held Harry close, noting some fine tremors in the little frame.

They made it through the final exam by the healer, and Severus accepted some written instructions and precautions, though he was concerned by the lack of ability of the healers at St. Mungo’s to do anything about the scar on Harry’s forehead. The famed lightning bolt was much more prominent than it should be after all this time.

He settled in and just held Harry, waiting for Lucius to arrive. Harry was nearly boneless in Severus’ arms, hands tightly fisted in the black robes, with the stuffed snake mashed between them.

When Lucius arrived, Harry barely stirred. Severus tried to explain magical travel to Harry, wanting him to understand that it would feel odd no matter which method they tried, but there was really no way to adequately explain.

To apparate through the wards, Lucius had to take Harry until he was keyed in directly. Harry was stiff and unyielding in Lucius' arms, which caused a flash of pain on Lucius' features, quickly hidden behind the customary aristocratic mask.

No amount of warning could have prepared Harry for apparition, and the poor boy was trembling, looking around frantically when they arrived in the foyer. He immediately reached out for Severus, straining out of Lucius' arms. Lucius passed Harry over, quickly turning away.

Harry clamped arms around Severus' neck. "I didn't like it," he whispered in Severus' ear.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I know it was very strange for you."

"The house was biting me," he whimpered.

Lucius spun around, frowning. "Do you think he felt the wards?"

As young as Harry was, if he were magic sensitive, passing through any defensive ward he wasn't keyed to could be uncomfortable. He leaned back from Harry a bit so he could see his son's face. "I promise we'll figure it out. Does it still feel like it's biting you?"

"Little bit."

Lucius stroked the back of Harry's head. "Okay, let's go to the ward stone." He gave Severus a thoughtful look. "The sensitivity could be because they removed the block on his magic today."

Severus agreed and they headed down into the lowest levels of the manor. Harry had been so distressed, he hadn't even noticed the house elves that came to take their cloaks, which was a bit of a blessing because he'd forgotten to tell his son about magical creatures.

Lucius had to prick Harry's finger to add him permanently to the family ward, which Harry bore stoically, barely even flinching.

As soon as Lucius was finished, Harry sagged in relief. "Thank you, Papa," Harry whispered.

Lucius framed Harry's face with his hands, gently forcing eye contact. "I never want you to be hurting, Harry. If anything ever hurts you, I want you to find me or Severus or Narcissa and let us fix it. Understand?"

Harry nodded, looking very serious.

Dropping a kiss on Harry's head, Lucius murmured, "Let's go meet Draco. He's very excited that you're home."

They found Draco and Narcissa in Harry's bedroom, where Draco was carefully setting up a display of toys, some of which Severus was sure belonged to Draco. One large stuffed dragon being particularly notable. It also happened to move when touched, and Severus had no idea how Harry would react to magical toys.

As soon as Draco caught sight of them, he screeched, "Harry! You're here!" and ran full tilt toward them. He collided with Severus, reaching up and making grabby hands. "I want my brother."

Harry was frozen, clinging to Severus' shoulders.

Narcissa hurried forward, murmuring, "Draco, we talked about this. He's probably a little frightened. Patience, dear boy."

Draco's eyes filled with tears and his chin wobbled, even as he took a step back, shoulders slumping.

Harry squirmed a little and whispered, "I get down now."

Severus carefully set Harry on his feet, chest feeling constricted as he watched Harry wave tentatively. "Hi, Draco."

Draco smiled hugely and threw his arms around his brother, not noticing when Harry stiffened. When he pulled back, he frowned a little. "You're *small*! Don't worry. I'll be the best big brother ever. You'll see." He grabbed Harry's hand and started pulling him toward the toys. "Mama and I have toys for you. Some are mine, but you need them more right now. I brought my biggest dragon. He's named Braxy. He'll protect you."

Surprisingly, Harry did reasonably well with Draco babbling at him, and the stuffed dragon becoming animated and blowing fake fire. However, he did not do well when Mimi popped in to tell them dinner was ready. He screeched and hid behind the dragon.

Draco looked back and forth between Harry and Mimi, an expression of complete bafflement on his little face. Severus rubbed his forehead, then set out to calm his son and explain house elves.

They settled in for dinner in the informal dining room. Severus got Harry seated in the high chair and activated the rune ward. Draco, being somewhat bigger, sat in a child sized chair simply elevated to the height of the table.

Harry seemed very nervous and tense as the meal started. Severus put food in front of him, but unlike at the hospital, Harry wouldn't touch it.

"Harry, what's wrong? Are you not hungry? Because you really need to eat, son," Severus prompted. He also needed to have a nutrition potion right after he ate.

Looking nearly panicked, Harry said, "No eating at the table," then stared down at the tabletop.

Draco's fork clattered to his plate. "Where do you eat?"

Severus nudged Harry's chin up. "Where are you supposed to eat?"

"The floor," Harry mumbled looking away.

Fighting back homicidal rage, Severus forced himself to focus on Harry, but he had no idea how to handle this. *Damn Petunia*. Not only did she barely feed Harry, but she made him eat on the floor?

The ward on the high chair was deactivated and Lucius plucked Harry up and set him on the floor a few feet from the table. Before Severus could protest, Lucius grabbed his own plate, plus Harry's and settled next to his younger son. "I think we'll all join you, Harry."

Severus blinked at the image of Lucius, looking as dignified as ever, sitting next to Harry on the floor, handing Harry his fork. "You may start eating at the table whenever you like," Lucius prompted. "But until you're ready, we'll eat with you here."

Draco giggled and scrambled out of his seat. Narcissa's expression was unreadable, but she obligingly collected her plate and Draco's, then folded herself elegantly down to the floor.

Shaking off the surprise, Severus sat on Harry's other side and dropped a kiss on the wild black hair. "Better?" he asked quietly.

Harry looked up at him and Severus could see he was overwhelmed, but Harry gamely nodded. Everyone started to eat, including Harry, and after a few minutes, Harry flashed a small smile at Lucius.

The brush of house elf magic woke Severus in the middle of the night. He'd been barely asleep, so it took very little to wake him. His worry for Harry had made deep sleep impossible. The boy had fallen asleep in Severus' arms right after a bath and hadn't stirred when he'd been put down. Severus had thought about staying the night in the chair by Harry's bed, had wanted to, but Lucius had set a house elf on watch and encouraged Severus to bed.

Severus glanced at the elf peering at him from the side of the bed, more alert because it was the elf on Harry-watch. "What is it, Dobby?"

"Dobby be telling yous that young Master Harry Potter be sleeping under the bed."

Before Severus could reply, Lucius was suddenly looming and glaring at the now trembling house elf. "His name is Harald Severus Bordelon *Malfoy*, and you would do well to not remind me that the Potters had my child, Dobby!"

Severus patted Lucius' arm soothingly even as he began to get out of bed. Dobby had already been reminded a couple times that Harry's name was not *Potter*, but the little elf seemed oddly enamored of Harry and couldn't seem to hold onto the information.

They'd thought it safe to give Dobby night watch as he wouldn't be interacting with Harry, but if the elf couldn't stop call him Potter, Severus would arrange to have him banished to landscaping duty. Not only to keep his mate from the constant reminders, but himself. Also he didn't want Harry to have that buzzing in his head right now. This was not the right time for that information to be revealed to the traumatized child who had no way of understanding.

Lucius had already ordered that there be no physical punishments of any kind in the Malfoy household, but Severus could imagine many vile punishments that weren't physical if Dobby didn't stop calling his son by that name wretched name.

Severus went to Harry's room, aware of Lucius at his back. The bed was barely disturbed, but Severus was glad he'd been told where Harry was because the sight of the empty bed caused his heart to stutter.

He dropped down to the floor and peered under the bed. He could make out the shape of his son, but not much else. After casting a weakly-powered lumos, he was

able to see Harry curled up sleeping with tears on his cheeks and clutching his snake.

"Oh, Harry," Severus whispered. Fortunately, Harry's bed was small so he was able to reach out and get hold of his son.

Harry jerked awake, looking panicked.

"You're okay, Harry. I'm just getting you out from under the bed."

"Daddy?"

"Yes, it's me. Come on, baby." Severus pulled Harry out from under the bed and Lucius helped him get to his feet because Harry was on him like an octopus. "Did you get scared?"

Harry sniffed into Severus neck. "Everything's *big*."

Severus leaned against Lucius, feeling the tension in his mate's body. The reminders of what Harry had been through wouldn't be banished quickly. "You want to sleep with us?" he queried softly.

Harry just nodded and held on a little tighter.

The next morning, as soon as they entered the dining room, Severus gave a start of surprise. Narcissa had outdone herself and charmed the dining room to look like the outdoors. She had cleverly disguised a low table they could all sit at while seated on the ground. It had vines and flowers on the legs and edges so it didn't appear like a formal table, but had the function of one so they didn't have to juggle their plates. Everything was set on a smooth bed of soft grass and there were an absurd number of butterflies flitting about.

Harry ran into the room, looking around in wonder. He was listening to Draco chattering excitedly about helping his mum get ready for breakfast.

Severus exchanged a look with Narcissa and inclined his head in thanks. She offered him a smile and herded the boys toward the '*table*.'

Mimi popped in with the morning post, several letters for Lucius, one for Narcissa and surprisingly one for Severus. He cracked the seal and found it to be a note from McGonagall asking to see him when he could make the time. She wished to apologize

for any way that she helped Dumbledore. She hadn't known of his actions with Lily, but still deeply regretted her complicity in hiding Harry in the muggle world.

He was about to share the letter with Lucius, but noticed his mate frowning slightly at the parchment in his hand sporting an ICW seal. "News?"

Lucius looked up. "Fortier will be here within the hour. He wishes to witness the breaking of Harry's glamour, and they wish to record his magical signature afterward." He folded up the parchment and slipped it into his robe. "He indicated he has additional news."

A small hand tugged at his sleeve. "What's wrong, Daddy?"

"Nothing, Harry. One of the men who helped us find you wants to come for a visit after breakfast, and we have something to show you once he arrives. All right?"

Fortier arrived promptly along with a goblin, an aide and an auror from the French Ministry. The auror waited at the door while everyone was seated in the drawing room.

Harry was rather interested in the goblin, and wasn't alarmed by IronKnife's appearance after the discussion they'd had the prior night about magical races. He seemed more hesitant with the new adults in the room, though he knew Fortier from when he'd been rescued from the Dursleys'. Draco was perched on his mother's lap, curiously following the proceedings.

After all the introductions were made, Severus situated Harry on his lap so that he could see his son's face. "We're going to talk about a special kind of magic called a glamour. Watch your Papa… he's going to cast a spell on himself, and it will change the color of his hair and his eyes."

Eyes huge, Harry nodded, and twisted around to watch Lucius cast a basic glamour on himself to turn his eyes green and his hair black. Harry reared back a bit, bumping into Severus' chest. "*Oooh*," he breathed. "Papa looks like me."

Severus was surprised at how good Lucius looked with the dark hair, but turned his attention to Harry. Harry, however, kept trying to look at his glamoured father. When Lucius cast *finite,* Harry finally looked back to Severus.

"Harry, the people who took you from us, they needed to make sure you looked like them, so people wouldn't know you were a Malfoy. So, they cast a type of glamour on you, like what you saw your Papa do. But it's a special kind that will last and last

until you take a potion that lets you go back to the way you're supposed to be. Understand?"

Harry's hands went to his face. "This not me?"

"You're you. You just probably don't look exactly that way. There are no green eyes in my family or Papa's family, so I'm sure your eyes are going to be different. Papa is going to hold a mirror and we're going to sit in front of it. You'll take this special potion I made and we'll see what you really look like. Is that okay?"

Looking a bit hesitant, Harry nodded, but obligingly turned to face the mirror Lucius had conjured. Severus kept his arm firmly around Harry and held up a vial. "This won't taste good, but you only have to take it once."

"Not like the after food one?" Harry asked, making a face.

Severus laughed. "No. Just the one time."

"'Kay." Harry looked nervous. "What if I still look the same?"

Not sure why Harry was worried, Severus pondered that for a second, then thought he got the source of the anxiety. "It won't matter what you look like, Harry. You're still our son, and this is your home. We want you to look the way you're supposed to look, and if this is it, that's perfectly fine."

Nodding, Harry quickly swallowed the contents of the vial then made a disgusted face. "Bah!"

"Okay, Let's watch the mirror," Severus prompted.

Nothing happened for about a minute, then it happened all at once. Harry suddenly leaned forward, almost falling out of Severus' lap to touch the mirror. "I look like Papa and you," he breathed.

Harry did look like the perfect little blend of his fathers. He had black hair that was silky and fine, skin that was quite pale, and Lucius' silvery eyes. Mostly he had Malfoy features, but definitely the Prince family cheekbones. Severus was a bit surprised because the Malfoy hair tended to run true.

Twisting around, Harry asked, "Am I okay?"

"You are perfect," Severus replied with a smile.

Harry slithered off Severus' lap and ran up to Lucius, who banished the mirror. "Do I look like a Malfoy, Papa?"

Lucius shot Severus a quick look, then smiled at Harry. “You do indeed, Harry.”

Harry bounced a little then held up his hands, clearly wanting to be picked up. Looking rather astonished, Lucius lifted Harry, who framed Lucius’ face with tiny hands. “My eyes are like yours.”

“Yes, they are. You look quite handsome.”

Unexpectedly, Harry wrapped his arms around Lucius’ neck and gave him a hug. Severus could see how much Lucius was affected, and was glad his mate’s back was to the non-family members.

Eventually, Lucius surrendered to Draco’s demands to be allowed to see his little brother. He dropped a kiss on Harry’s head then set the excited little boy back down. Severus watched as the aristocratic mask was effortlessly donned before he retook his seat.

Fortier was smiling at Harry and Draco, but turned his attention back to the adults. “We just need to run the same tests that were run at the hospital, to verify magical signature and paternity.”

“Why is that necessary?” Lucius inquired coolly.

Fortier held up a hand. “Allow me to explain in private in a moment. We’re just taking extra precautions.”

It took a drop of blood, which Harry never seemed to mind, then a few minutes later, the goblin looked up from his parchment. “The child is the son of Severus Snape and Lucius Malfoy, identical to the paternity test run at St. Mungo’s yesterday. The magical signature is also identical.”

The goblin packed up his things, and Lucius escorted him to the apparition room where he could floo back to the bank. While he was gone, Severus prepped Harry to go with Narcissa for another small meal and then some playtime with Draco. Thank Merlin for Draco’s enthusiasm because he kept Harry from focusing too much on the tension between Fortier and Severus.

As soon as Lucius returned, Narcissa herded the boys away. Fortier dismissed his aide, asking him to wait in the hall, and moved to a chair directly across from Lucius and Severus. “Shall we dispense with the formalities?”

“I encourage you to be as direct as possible, Bernard,” Lucius returned.

“Much has happened in the last two days. The panel from the ICW is moving as quickly as we can to get the changes we need in place before our review with the Prime Minister and Her Majesty in twenty-eight days.

“As you know, Dumbledore had instructed Lily Potter to perform a blood adoption on young Harry at birth, but her own conscience prevented her from following that order and she used the blood anchored glamour instead.”

Severus looked away, fighting back the anger that if Dumbledore had gotten his way, they’d have never been able to prove Harry was theirs. Lily had left the information and blood needed to break the glamour in the vault at Gringotts.

“We’re aware,” Lucius said coolly.

“We did not inform Dumbledore of this fact, so he’s under the impression that when Harry Potter was found that it was impossible to prove Lily Potter’s claims. We don’t know what he told his solicitor, but this morning, three purportedly ‘light’ families filed for custody of Harry Potter.”

Lucius nearly snarled, and Severus clamped a hand on his mate’s arm.

Fortier made a placating gesture. “We have all the paperwork we need to prove that’s not the case, the diagnostics that were done on Harry prior to your arrival, match what was done today, and paternity was definite in both cases. But to get ahead of this, we’re going to want to proceed with trials quickly.

“There are many things I cannot tell you at this juncture, however, one critical piece of information has come to light. Right after the fall of Voldemort,” Fortier ignored the way they both stiffened at the name, “Minister Bagnold, Bartemius Crouch and Dumbledore ensured the majority of the captured Death Eaters went to Azkaban without a trial.”

Lucius exchanged a perplexed look with Severus. He remembered that Lucius had been excluded from any trials, ostensibly because it would have been a conflict of interest, but apparently that wasn’t the case. There just hadn’t been *any* trials.

“Why would Dumbledore not have wanted the Death Eaters to have trials?” Severus finally asked.

“That’s part of the information he has hidden with the unbreakable vow. But as a result, we are taking a slightly different approach. We are going to immediately commence with trials for anyone being held in Azkaban without a conviction. And, depending upon what we unearth, possibly even some who did receive one.

“At present Bagnold and Crouch are being detained and we are determining who will step in as interim Minister and head of the DMLE. To ensure accurate reporting as this situation progresses, we have passed a bill that would impose fines and possible jail time for libel. The Daily Prophet has been allowed too much latitude in its publication and it will stop before we commence with trials.”

Fortier broke off and stared at his hands briefly, before looking directly at Lucius. "The ICW panel just this morning passed another bill stating unequivocally that it is not a crime to be a Death Eater. Following a madman and getting a magical tattoo are not criminal offenses. Your actions during your time as a Death Eater, however, may have been criminal. As we discussed when you came to me for aid, I warned you there was the possibility that you would finally have to face trial."

Severus tensed and gripped Lucius' arm. They'd discussed that this might happen, but so soon?

Lucius inclined his head in acknowledgment. "How would you like to proceed?"

"I'd like to conduct an exam and preliminary interview today to determine if there's a basis for taking this before the Wizengamot. If we're going to determine what Dumbledore is hiding, we need to move quickly and efficiently."

"Are we to leave immediately, or will I be allowed time to speak with my family?"

"Take the time to see to your family, Lucius. Having you come in voluntarily rather than being arrested is the best possible scenario for both of us. But please don't try my patience and attempt to leave."

"And what about Severus? Will he be required to face an inquiry as well?"

"Possibly. There's some information that will, I believe, surprise you, but we need to conclude the business with your trial first, and then we can discuss it further."

Severus knew he honestly had no worry from a trial if it even came to that. If they had de-criminalized being a Death Eater, then there was nothing else they could charge him with. But he didn't want to lose his mate after he'd just gotten him back. Their family had been restored for less than a day.

Lucius and he never discussed their time in the Dark Lord's service, but Lucius had been his right hand. This could go no way other than poorly no matter what contingency plan Lucius had concocted. Keeping his mask firmly in place, he allowed Lucius to pull him to his feet as they went to find Harry and Draco.

As soon as Narcissa arrived at the Ministry, she was greeted by the Malfoy family solicitor, Mason Ellis. "Good afternoon, Lady Malfoy. It's always a pleasure, though I wish the circumstances were better."

“Quite,” she murmured noncommittally. “How is Lucius faring?”

Mason offered his arm to her and she allowed him to escort her through the ministry. “He agreed to be examined by a mind healer and a skilled legilimens. I was present for the examination, but the results were not disclosed. He already consented to preliminary questioning under veritaserum to an agreed upon set of queries.”

She nodded, having expected that result. There was little else they could say publicly and she didn’t trust a privacy ward in the lift, so they discussed the children until they arrived at the solicitor consultation room.

“They’ll summon us when they’re ready to begin the questioning,” Mason said as he began casting privacy wards on the room and checking for any monitoring spells.

Not one to trust easily, Narcissa did the same before facing the solicitor. “So everything is proceeding as planned?”

“Yes, my lady. They may have questions for you, but, as you are aware, your marriage vows will shield you from any dangerous topics.”

She inclined her head with a faint smirk. “And Severus? Will they wish to question him?”

“I think it likely. You’re certain he has no knowledge of this scheme?”

“He hasn’t asked, which is an indication in and of itself. Severus is anything but stupid. He knows Lucius has been working to mitigate the damage he unleashed on the Malfoy family when he summoned the ICW. Severus has been intelligent enough to not pursue the matter. So, while I’m certain he has suspicions, he has no actual knowledge.” She carefully smoothed her skirt. “And the other matter? Is the marriage contract prepared?”

“Yes. We can proceed on that at any time.”

Brows arched in surprise, Narcissa inquired, “Lucius has signed then?”

“He has. It was signed when I consulted with him earlier in the week.”

Narcissa was surprised. Lucius usually would have waited to make sure the scheme worked before committing himself. But she was quite content with his show of good faith, even if it was rather Hufflepuff of him.

An auror entered, wearing the purple uniform robes of the French DMLE. “They are ready for you, Madame.”

They were shown to a small hearing room where the panel from the ICW was seated at the bench. There were two tables and several chairs. Bernard Fortier left his seat at the bench and came to greet her. “Lady Malfoy, thank you for coming. We will be conducting the questioning of Lord Malfoy shortly, but would first like to ask you a few questions.” Fortier passed the list to Ellis, who reviewed it and passed it to Narcissa.

The questions were exactly what she expected, but she allowed an expression of surprise to cross her features. “Why would you need to ask me these questions?”

“We’re simply trying to get a complete picture before we question Lord Malfoy. There will be truth spells, of course. And if we feel we need any additional questions answered, we will consult your solicitor for approval.”

“Very well.”

She settled in the witness chair and felt the truth spells take hold.

The official interrogator asked a few preliminary questions like her name, then consulted his notes. “Have you ever obliviated your husband, Lucius Abraxas Malfoy?”

“No, I have not.”

“Have you ever cast any type of compulsion or mind controlling charm, curse, hex or other spell on your husband, Lucius Malfoy?”

“No, I have not.”

“Have you ever given your husband a potion that would alter his memories?”

“No.”

“Have you ever given your husband a potion that would subjugate his will?”

She frowned, because the wording was slightly off of the original question. “I find the question to be vague and difficult to answer. I have given Lucius dreamless sleep, and it could be argued that such a potion could subjugate his will.”

Fortier shot the interrogator a look and the man cleared his throat, before asking, “Have you ever given your husband a compulsion or mind controlling potion?”

“No,” she stated emphatically.

“In the course of your husband’s time in the service of the Dark Lord known as Voldemort, did he ever return home confused or disoriented?”

“Frequently,” she replied, and got a warning buzz from the familial magics. “I’m afraid I can answer no more questions in that particular vein.”

The panel exchanged looks before Fortier gestured for her to rise. “Thank you, Lady Malfoy.”

A privacy ward went up and the panel conferred before they indicated for Lucius to be brought in. Narcissa had known Lucius since they were young, and she could immediately see that he was not quite himself, though anyone who didn’t know him well would see nothing but the smooth aristocrat. Lucius had taken the final step to set these events in motion in a brief moment before he left the manor with Fortier, and the change in him was due to that action.

Within a few moments Lucius was seated and accepting the veritaserum. Because this was not an official trial, the questions had to be preapproved by Ellis, but interrogators were known to try to slip things by, so Ellis stood by with wand drawn prepared to silence Lucius if an unauthorized question was asked.

After the standard identification questions were asked, the interrogator asked, “Are you a follower of the Dark Lord known as Voldemort.”

“No.”

The interrogator frowned. “Were you ever a follower?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you choose to follow him?”

“It was expected,” Lucius replied in a monotone.

“By whom?”

“My father.”

“Were you compelled in any way?”

Lucius frowned and looked to be struggling.

Ellis glared at the interrogator and cast a muffling charm on Lucius so he wouldn’t be confused by the byplay. “That was vaguely worded, almost designed to cause confusion, and not on the list. No one can ever say with certainty that they weren’t compelled by some magical means.”

The interrogator made a few notes. “May I ask him if he was threatened if he didn’t join?”

“No. The panel has already ruled that being a follower was not illegal. Lord Malfoy will tell you that his father did threaten him repeatedly and that will only lead to further queries into Malfoy family issues that are not the concern of this panel.”

Before the interrogator could reply, Fortier held up a hand. “I agree. Move on.”

Ellis cancelled the muffling charm.

The interrogator continued. “I withdraw the last question, Lord Malfoy. In the course of your service as a Death Eater did you commit any crimes?”

Ellis immediately silenced Lucius who was obviously answering the question behind the silencing charm. “Objection. That was not on the approved list. This is not a trial. You—“

Fortier immediately interjected. “I agree.” He looked to the interrogator. “You’re dismissed. Auror, please detain him until I can personally question him as to why he deviated from his orders here today.” Looking to Ellis, Fortier offered, “My apologies. I will personally handle the questioning.” As soon as Lucius was ready again, he asked, “Lord Malfoy, in the service of the Dark Lord known as Voldemort, did you ever willingly kill another human being, either muggle or magical?”

“No.”

The panel stared at each other in shock, but Narcissa didn’t react.

Fortier immediately pressed, “And at any time in your tenure as a Death Eater, of your own free will, did you cast any of the three unforgivables?”

“No.”

Questions erupted from the panel, and Ellis immediately muffled Lucius, but Narcissa kept her expression clear of any reaction.

Perfect.

Severus woke feeling eyes on him and kept still, casting his gaze about the darkened bedroom. He eventually saw a shadowed head barely rising above the mattress and

two silvery eyes just visible. The eyes suddenly dropped below the line of the mattress. Harry had to have been on his tiptoes.

Getting to a seated position, Severus plucked his son off the floor. The first night without Lucius, Harry had wanted to sleep with him, but last night Draco had claimed his little brother, and Severus had thought Harry would make it through the night with Draco for company.

"Couldn't sleep?" he inquired, settling against the pillow with Harry cuddled against him. He waved his hand to dismiss Dobby who had followed Harry into the room. The elf was under orders not to restrict Harry's movement at night unless he was endangering himself. Severus never wanted Harry to feel he couldn't come find his parents.

"I want Papa to come home," Harry murmured, gripping Severus' nightshirt tightly.

"I do, too, Harry." Nothing could possibly make Severus regret anything that had to be done to bring Harry back to them, but the possibility of losing Lucius was a stab in the heart of its very own. He'd stayed away for four years, thinking it was the right thing. He'd barely had his family whole and complete before it was broken apart again.

Narcissa had spent a good portion of the first day at the Ministry, but had said nothing about what had transpired. Not that he expected her to. There had never been any doubt that Lucius and Narcissa were keeping things from him.

Tomorrow Narcissa would be back at Hogwarts for Monday classes, and Healer Fidenas would be here to evaluate Harry. He hoped he'd have some news about Lucius' trial. At some point he needed to tell Harry something other than '*Papa is going to be away for a few days.'*

"How much longer?" Draco asked with dramatic hand movements.

Severus bit back a smile. "I do not know. Healer Fidenas may need quite some time with your brother."

Draco heaved a huge sigh. "I want my Harry back." It had only been a few days, but Draco had quickly adjusted to the joys of having a sibling and didn't like to spend much time apart from Harry.

Dropping a kiss on Draco's head, Severus murmured, "You'll just have to settle for me. Now shall I keep reading?"

“Yes,” Draco replied in a beleaguered tone.

Reading to Draco was also serving to distract Severus. He desperately wanted to be with Harry, but the mind healer had felt that Severus’ presence might prevent Harry from being open. Also Castius felt he needed to establish trust with Harry if they were to make any progress.

Another chapter later and the door opened and Harry came running out. He was smiling and seemed energetic. He struggled to get into Severus’ lap, so Severus boosted him up. Draco immediately gave Harry a hug and started chattering at him.

Healer Fidenas emerged at a more sedate pace, nodding to Severus. The man was about Lucius’ age and already considered one of the best mind healers in Europe. He was tall, with dark hair and rather ridiculously attractive in Severus’ opinion.

“All right, boys, Tipsy is going to take you to the playroom for a little bit.”

The boys let the nanny elf herd them off to the playroom, while he cocked a brow in inquiry at the mind healer.

“He’s a very resilient young man. He’s not quite ready to let me see some of his memories. We’ll need to build more trust first, but he’s doing remarkably well considering what he’s been through.”

“Is Lucius’ sudden absence an issue?”

“Yes. He’s going to react poorly to change in the family structure, probably for some time. Stability and consistency are vital. That said, he also needs to be able to adapt if one of you needs to be gone for a few days. It’s important to set expectations with him clearly and try to keep any promises you make.”

Severus gave the man an incredulous look. “Lucius could be gone for more than a few days.” He had to pause a moment to get himself under control. “Should I be preparing him for that now?”

Fidenas shook his head. “I’d wait to see the results of Lord Malfoy’s trial. Harry does not understand Lucius’ absence, but he’ll understand even less that he might lose his father all together. On a different note, I’d like you to consider having his curse scar evaluated by a specialist. There’s something about it that troubles me, but I cannot quite put my finger on why.”

Severus nodded. “It troubles me as well. If you have recommendations, I would be appreciative, otherwise, I’ll consult the family healer.”

They talked for several more minutes before Narcissa's voice drifted from the doorway, having returned from her day of teaching at Hogwarts. "Healer Fidenas, what a pleasure to see you again. How was young Harry today?"

Fidenas got to his feet and executed a quick bow. The three chatted for a bit before Narcissa offered to show the healer out, and Severus returned to the boys.

Narcissa led the mind healer toward the departure room, keeping up a steady stream of pleasantries. As soon as the door closed behind them, she found herself pressed up against it, Castius' face at the crook of her neck.

"Merlin, I've missed you," he murmured, pressing kisses into her skin.

Arching under the touch of his lips, she softly replied, "And I you, love." She framed his face, guiding his head so she could claim his lips. Several minutes passed in the impassioned slide of lips and tongues.

Eventually, she broke away, struggling for breath, gripping his shoulders like a lifeline. "We can do no more, Castius. Now that you may formally court me, we must set our passions aside."

Her love's brows drew together. "Has he signed the contract then?"

"Yes," she breathed, unable to stop the smile. "I'll be the first Lady Malfoy to be granted permission to take a second husband."

Castius blinked in astonishment. "I didn't truly believe he'd honour our bargain. And if he did, it would be after he was freed."

She shook her head. It was difficult for outsiders to understand Lucius, but she had faith that Castius would come to see the better side of Lucius eventually. She wasn't blind to Lucius' faults, but his faults tended to make others blind to his attributes. "He signed it immediately. And…" she hesitated, feeling oddly vulnerable.

Castius' stiffened. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing… nothing at all." In an uncharacteristic display of insecurity, she bit her lower lip, then carefully replied, "he added a clause that I'm free to have additional children with you." She glanced away, because they'd never discussed this. "If that's of interest."

He was still and silent for so long she began to wish she hadn't said anything. He dropped a soft kiss on the corner of her mouth, then cupped her face and forced her to meet his eye. "Of course I want to have children with you. I'm just surprised… I never thought it was a possibility. I'd marry you tomorrow and begin on the children immediately if I could."

Laughing with happiness, she wrapped both arms around his broad shoulders and tucked herself under his chin. "Wonderfully appealing, but no… we must maintain that our acquaintance grew from your work with Harry. You must court me formally, my love."

Rubbing gentle circles on her back, he softly replied, "I can think of nothing I'd like better."

Harry was attentively listening to Severus' tale about the founding of Hogwarts. Normally, he'd have both boys, but Draco was a bit surly after dinner, no doubt in reaction to Lucius' continued absence, and Narcissa was spending some time alone with him.

As per usual, Harry had his snake, which he'd named Remy, in one hand and Severus' shirt fisted in the other. Severus had asked why *Remy*, but Harry hadn't been sure why he'd thought of the name.

Narcissa was pressing him to make a decision about going back to Hogwarts, and in that moment, Severus knew what he was going to do. He'd missed too much time with Harry already. He'd also missed too much time with Lucius, though he pushed the thought away at the painful tightening in his chest.

When the story was finished, Severus pressed a kiss to the silky black hair. "Would you like another story?"

Harry nodded vigorously, then peered up at Severus. "Why does Draco have a mum and a dad and I have two dads?"

Severus should have known that would come up as soon as Harry had started to feel a little bit secure in his place in the family. "This is one of those things where the wizarding world is very different from the non-magical world. Remember when we talked about magical creatures, and I told you that Papa's mother was a Veela?"

"Yes, they're the very prettiest of ladies, though I don't think any ladies are prettier than Aunt Cissy."

Laughing, *and how often had Severus done that in his life*, he replied, "You be sure to tell her that she's prettier than a Veela. She'll make sure you get extra treacle tart."

Bouncing a little, Harry offered him a sweet smile. "So Papa is half of a pretty lady?" Harry prompted, clearly wanting an answer to his question.

Severus smiled at Harry blatantly keeping him on task. "Yes, he's half pretty lady." The turn of phrase was forcing him to bite back laughter again. "When a wizard turns sixteen, they come into their full magical inheritance. When Lucius turned sixteen, his magic finished growing and it was discovered that he was part Veela. You see, Harry, a Veela has a single destined mate."

"You?" Harry inferred very quickly.

"Yes, that's me. But Lucius has two legacies that he needed heirs for." At Harry's scrunched up look of confusion, Severus explained, "That means he needs someone to take over for the Malfoy family, and someone to take over for the Bordelon family, that's his Veela family name."

"So, I'm not really a Malfoy?" Harry asked looking distressed.

"Oh, Harry… of course you are. Your full name is Harald Severus Bordelon Malfoy. The heir to the Malfoy title has to be born of his spouse, in this case his wife, which is Narcissa. Lucius' father, Abraxas, signed a contract pledging his marriage to Narcissa long before Lucius and I ever met. And those contracts are binding in the wizarding world. So the Malfoy heir had to come from her."

"And the other… Bordu, um, Bord—"

"Bordelon," Severus replied, carefully drawing out the syllables. "Veela inheritance laws say that only the child of the mate of the Veela can inherit. So your Papa needed a child with me, too."

"So I'm the Bordy air?"

Severus literally bit his lip to not laugh. "Yes. You are the Bordelon heir."

"Papa sleeps with you," Harry said thoughtfully. "Does he share the bed with Aunt Cissy, too?"

"No. Aunt Cissy and Papa care about each other, but they're just friends."

"Papa loves you?"

"Well, Papa loves us all, but his love for me is different."

Harry seemed to think that over for a bit. “Did you meet at the school?”

“We did. Lucius was in his last year at Hogwarts when I was in my first year. Since he was seventeen, he’d already come into his Veela inheritance and knew the minute I walked in the door that I was his mate.”

“You’re younger than Papa?”

“Mm. Six years younger. We had a very dramatic first meeting. When we walked into the great hall to be sorted, the Veela in Lucius immediately recognized me as his mate. Some boys were pushing me and being mean. Lucius plucked me up like a damsel in distress and hexed the two boys who were bothering me.”

Harry giggled and the sound made Severus almost unbearably happy. There was no point in telling Harry that the scene in the great hall no doubt contributed greatly to his feud with James Potter and Sirius Black. Dumbledore had wanted to punish Lucius, but a Veela protecting his mate was entitled to seek retribution. So Potter and Black just had to live with the boils for the first week of school. Severus’ only good year at Hogwarts was the year where he’d been under Lucius’ direct protection.

“We almost didn’t get me sorted because Lucius wouldn’t let anyone near me for the longest time. Lucius was very protective of me his last year at Hogwarts, and very worried about me when he graduated, but other members of Slytherin tried to look out for me. We finally got to be together when I was all grown up and had finished school.”

“And then you had me!”

“Yes we did.” Severus dropped a smacking kiss on Harry’s cheek, making him giggle again. “And you’re the best thing I’ve ever done.”

The next morning, Severus had the now customary picnic-style breakfast with the boys. During the week, Narcissa left for Hogwarts before breakfast, so it was just him and the boys when the wards alerted him that someone had flooed into the arrival room.

He left the boys in Tipsy’s care and went up to greet whoever had arrived. He was a little surprised to find Mason Ellis, the Malfoy solicitor, waiting for him.

“Good morning, Mister Ellis. Narcissa has already departed for Hogwarts.”

“In point of fact, I’m here to see you, Professor Snape. The ICW Special Panel would like to interview you at your earliest convenience.”

It seemed as if Severus’ heart stopped, but he kept his expression carefully neutral. “For what purpose?”

“They want to clear up any lingering questions about your time in the Dark Lord’s service.”

“Am I going to be placed in custody?”

“No. At this point, Dumbledore might wish he could incriminate you in some way, but in point of fact, his interrogation has given ample proof that you were working against the Dark Lord. With trials for the rest of the Death Eaters looming, they’d like to dispense with your questioning soonest.”

Severus thought through all the issues before calling out, “Mimi!”

The head elf popped in. “Yes, Master Severus?”

“I need you to fetch Narcissa from Hogwarts. Tell her the boys are well, but there’s an urgent matter that needs to be attended to.”

After Mimi popped away, Ellis offered, “You could certainly bring the boys to the Ministry.”

“No. That will not do. If they should decide to take me into custody, my sons will be in the hands of the Ministry, and that is not acceptable. Narcissa will take the boys to Paris under the guise of shopping until this situation is resolved.” He pinned the solicitor with a glare. “Harry needs consistency in his life and from his family. He will not do well if I do not come home, so I expect you to ensure I return to my sons tonight.”

Ellis inclined his head. “I believe Fortier when he says this will simply be a few questions, and then the matter will be settled in regards to yourself. But I will do everything in my power to see you returned to Harry quickly.”

Fortier met them outside the main Wizengamot chambers and ushered them into a small antechamber. “Professor Snape, thank you for coming so quickly. At this point in time, the decision about guilt or innocence in any of these trials ultimately rests in the hands of the ICW, but we are trying to work with the Wizengamot as much as possible so we will have their ongoing cooperation.”

“I take it that you mean that the trials are occurring before the Wizengamot, even though verdict and sentence are the purview of the ICW?” Severus clarified.

“Correct. Thus far, we’ve been able to persuade the Wizengamot to our point of view and have not had to overrule them. The transcript of Dumbledore’s interrogations has been given to all the members, but many of his supporters continue to insist that Dumbledore is innocent and you are somehow responsible for this. We feel that with a few simple questions, we can set this to rest. Because you’re not under arrest, this is entirely voluntary, though if we are continually pressed, we may have to become more insistent, and more official.”

“I will submit to the questioning,” Severus conceded, anxious to get the proceedings over with so he could return to Harry.

“Will you consent to veritaserum?”

“I’d like to review the questions before I answer that,” he carefully hedged.

Fortier inclined his head. “Of course. Before I give you the questions to peruse, I would like you to be examined by a mind healer and another specialist who consults with the ICW. A couple of the questions will potentially alter your perception of some of the events in your life, but I would like the healer to evaluate you first.”

Severus glanced to Ellis, who nodded his agreement. Not liking the situation at all, Severus reluctantly agreed, though he specified that he would not submit to legilimency. It wasn’t in his nature to blindly go forth, but he recognized how tenuous his position was.

The *specialist* examined Severus first, casting diagnostic spells that Severus knew were related to tracing obscure potions and atypical spell damage. Unfortunately, he couldn’t see the results of the diagnostic. He couldn’t help but wonder what they were looking for and *why*.

Next, the mind healer examined Severus with annoying thoroughness. As soon as he was finished, he too exchanged looks and nods with Fortier, then passed over some parchment.

“I would like to know exactly what is happening,” Severus finally snapped.

Fortier dismissed the healers then took a seat. Sighing, he contemplated the table top for several beats. “Why did you join the ranks of Lord Voldemort?”

Severus’ brows shot up in surprise. “Is that an official query?”

“Not yet. At the moment it’s more the opening for our dialogue.”

“I joined because of Lucius.”

“But you started spying very quickly.”

“Yes. The Dark Lord… he was clearly insane. I had no desire to truly serve him.”

“And can you tell me why you chose to stay away from your mate these last four years?”

Severus nearly physically reacted to the seeming non sequitur. “How can that be relevant to your investigation?”

“Please answer the question.”

“Because I thought I’d miscarried, and as you know, I’d never be able to carry another child conceived of my own magic. I didn’t want there to be any risk of pregnancy.”

“And the extremely slim, almost non-existent chance of a wild magic pregnancy was sufficient for you to completely separate from your mate? Isn’t that a touch convenient?”

“You’re saying my extremely painful separation from my mate was ‘*convenient*’?” Severus nearly growled with a fierce glare.

“Not for you, and not for Lucius, but it was convenient for Dumbledore. The sheer stress of the situation you found yourself in, coupled with the strain on your mating bond, would preclude a wild-magic pregnancy. But Dumbledore believed that if you and Lucius were frequently in proximity to each other, you would renew your mating bond and the risk that you would conceive again naturally was too great for him to allow. Because your successful pregnancy would have revealed his deception.”

Fortier broke off, then finally said, “And fortunately for him, he already had a tried and true means of controlling you.”

Severus sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. “And what *means* would that be?”

“Nasterias compulsion draught.”

“No.” Severus shook his head in vehement denial. “There’s no way he could have… no. I’m a potions master, I would know.”

Fortier gave him a look that was bordering on pity. “In your seventh year, Dumbledore gave you the draught and *strongly encouraged* you to join the Dark

Lord and be receptive to spying for him in the future, and also to trust him almost unconditionally. At the point at which you'd have noticed the potion's side effects, he obliviated you and replaced the memory with a discussion of your mastery training."

Severus was frozen, staring in abject horror. But it made too much sense. Severus had never wanted to join Voldemort, had almost persuaded Lucius to leave with him, and then he changed his mind. And neither he nor Lucius had questioned his reversal.

Fortier continued. "The prophecy you overheard that you relayed to Voldemort? It was all contrived. There is a real prophecy in here somewhere but we've yet to unearth the actual verbiage. Once Dumbledore enacted his plan to steal Harry from you, there were two glaring issues. One that Lily Potter would feel remorse and reveal what they'd done. And two, that you would become pregnant again.

"Dumbledore toyed with having you killed, but decided your value as a spy was higher. And for the last more than four years, he's been using his system of compulsion draught and obliviation to reinforce your separation from your mate, and encourage your belief that the risk of a wild magic pregnancy was real."

"I see." At that moment, Severus felt nothing. He had completely shut off any emotional response, lest he become so enraged he acted without thinking like the most common Gryffindor. "And the purpose of these diagnostic examinations?"

"Checking you for obliviation, altered memories and compulsion draught."

"This has to do with the questioning today, how?"

"Part of the questions will relate to your awareness of any of this or of Dumbledore's plans in general. Then I'll ask if you ever cast any of the unforgivables or killed another person. And finally if you had in fact been spying on Voldemort at Dumbledore's behest."

"And the purpose of this would be?"

"We can officially clear you of all suspicion and charges related to your activity during your time as a Death Eater. There are those on the Wizengamot who would like us to add questions about the criminal activities of Lord Malfoy and other Death Eaters, but because you are not on trial, these questions are inappropriate. Even if you were on trial, a good solicitor could get the questions stricken under the current governance of magical Britain."

Severus just nodded, mind spinning.

"I would like to ask one question completely off the record."

Arching a brow, Severus simply replied, “You may ask, but I may not answer.”

“The Malfoy family solicitor is confident it’s safe to ask you about the unforgivables. Because you were a spy, there’s some latitude in the law even if you had used them. But I’m wondering how you managed in Voldemort’s service for any time without casting those curses.”

“That’s quite easy to explain. My value to the Dark Lord was first as a spy and second as a potions master, though I was still working on my mastery at the time. He would not have risked my place by sending me on common raids, which is when the darkest curses were most frequently used. There simply wasn’t the necessity to use them.”

Fortier nodded and passed over a list of questions. “Are you comfortable answering these in front of the Wizengamot under the influence of veritaserum?”

Severus perused the list. There was little that they hadn’t already discussed. “Yes. Provided Mister Ellis is able to silence me if someone should decide to ignore the session protocols.”

“That would be fine. I have also warned all the members of the Wizengamot that there will be stiff fines for anyone who violates the order of my court.”

“Then let us proceed. I wish to return to my son.”

Narcissa knew the toy store wasn’t going to occupy Harry for much longer. He was fairly disinterested from the outset and he was getting more withdrawn as the minutes ticked by. They’d already purchased some new clothes, a few new children’s books and a toddler’s potions kit. She’d kept the toy store for last hoping it would be the most interesting and prolong their outing as much as possible.

Draco was delighted, as always, but he was remarkably sensitive to his brother’s moods for a boy of only four, and wasn’t getting as much enjoyment as usual from the excursion. He was doing his best to engage Harry, and Harry was trying, but she saw this ending in tears in the not too distant future.

“How about ice cream?” It was time for Harry to have another of his little meals, though they were getting bigger every day, and she saw no reason why this one couldn’t be ice cream.

“Yay!” Draco shouted excitedly. “Ice cream, Harry!”

She wasn't sure how Harry would do at the table, and ran various scenarios as she sent Tipsy on with their purchases. But either he was so distracted that he wasn't upset about it, he was finally adapting, or the sidewalk café environment was different enough from a formal dining setting that it didn't upset him unduly.

Draco's enthusiasm was infectious for a few minutes, but eventually Harry had his head down, poking at his ice cream rather than eating.

"Harry?" she prompted, knowing she'd have to take him to the Paris townhouse soon and just let him be upset. They'd reached the end of the efficacy of her distraction techniques.

"I w-want my da-daddy," he whispered brokenly.

Draco was staring wide-eyed, ice cream forgotten, and she feared she was about to have two very upset boys on her hands. Just as she was about to summon Tipsy to help her get them home, Severus stepped into her line of sight, looking tired and with an unusual tightness around his eyes.

He plucked Harry up from the chair, holding him close. Harry immediately burst into tears, clutching frantically at his father. She wasn't particularly surprised when Draco began to quietly cry. He'd become very sensitive to Harry's moods and didn't react well when Harry was upset.

She got to her feet, pulling Draco into her arms, rubbing his back soothingly. "Paris townhouse?"

Severus shook his head. "We should return to the Manor," he intoned softly. A moment later, they both apparated away.

Both boys were finally asleep cuddled up together in Draco's bed. Harry had been nearly inconsolable all evening, and Draco was much the same, confused and frightened by Harry's distress. The boys had eaten dinner seated on Severus' and Narcissa's laps, something Draco hadn't done in quite some time.

Harry had tried not to fall asleep, worried that Severus was going to be gone again, but had eventually succumbed to the day of worry and stress.

A snifter of brandy appeared in front of him and he glanced up at Narcissa. "Thank you, Cissy."

“Now that the boys are asleep, please tell me the outcome of the day’s questioning.”

He quickly briefed her on his initial meeting with Fortier, and the revelations about Dumbledore’s actions toward Severus over the years.

She made a very unladylike growling sound. “That manipulative old man is quite fortunate he’s safely in ministry custody. If there’s any justice, he’ll spend the next several years of his hopefully long prison term under the effects of a compulsion draught. Insufferable man.” After taking a bracing sip of her drink, she prompted. “And the questioning in front of the Wizengamot?”

In response, he pulled a piece of parchment from his robe and passed it over to her.

After perusing it, her brows shot up in surprise. “Full exoneration for any actions in the service of the Dark Lord or Dumbledore.” She looked at him intently. “This is excellent news, Severus. Is there anything else?”

“Fortier intends to have my exoneration ratified by the Queen herself. In which case, even if the Ministry should fall into corruption again, which the ICW hopes to prevent, the issue of my time in the service of the Dark Lord cannot be used against me or the Malfoy family.”

Narcissa breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh, Severus, I am so happy for you. I grieve for the abuses you’ve suffered at that man’s hands, but to see this behind you is a joyous thing.”

Severus nodded, thinking he just needed Lucius home and everything would be complete. “I need to set up time meet with Minerva. I’m not going to return to Hogwarts.”

“Excellent. As soon as you’ve met with her, I shall tender my notice, and she will hopefully seek out a permanent replacement immediately. Will you bring the boys with you when you meet with her?”

“I am somewhat reluctant, as I do not want either of them in an area that is arguably still under Dumbledore’s influence.”

Before Narcissa could reply, two sleepy boys were led in by Tipsy. “Theys be waking and not wanting to wait to find yous.”

Severus wound up with both boys as they didn’t seem to want to be separated. He fervently hoped the situation with Lucius would be resolved soon. He was afraid to hope for the best, but he wasn’t sure he could face telling the boys their father might never come home, so hoping for the best was really all he could do.

Two days later, in the late afternoon while Narcissa watched the boys, Severus met with McGonagall while setting the Malfoy house elves to packing his belongings.

She offered him a cup of tea, which he accepted, but then just let sit there. He had no doubt that he'd been potioned through his tea all these years. Severus had always been vigilant, but he believed that part of the initial compulsion was to not be suspicious of Dumbledore. Narcissa had insisted that Severus seek out the aid of a mind healer himself. If not Castius himself, then he would recommend someone.

McGonagall gave him a pained look. "Are you sure you won't reconsider, Severus?"

He shook his head. "There are matters I am not at liberty to disclose at the behest of the ICW, but when they are revealed during Dumbledore's trial, I believe you will understand why I could no longer remain at Hogwarts. But even if these things were not a factor, I finally have my child and I will not miss any more time with him."

She shook her head sadly. "I'm not sure any apology is adequate for the role I played in placing Harry with those dreadful muggles. I had no notion of what Dumbledore had done, but I surrendered my own good judgment in that matter and I will always regret it."

The polite thing to do would be to absolve her, but he couldn't find it in him yet. Perhaps some day. He settled on a vague nod of the head and excused himself. He was not going to miss dinner with his family for anything at Hogwarts.

At the manor, he greeted Narcissa and promised to fetch the boys for dinner. He paused outside the playroom, listening to the boys chatter about their toys.

"An army of unicorns or hippogriffs to protect us?" Draco asked.

"I don't know," Harry replied in a much softer tone. "What are we fighting again?"

"The army of darkness."

Severus' brows shot up.

"What's that?"

“I don’t know, but it sounds bad. And we’ll need protection from it.”

“Why can’t we use Braxy?”

There was a brief silence. “We should save Braxy for the very worst thing we’ll have to fight.”

“Like muggles?” Harry asked so quietly Severus barely heard, and the question caused him to ache for his little boy. He made a note to discuss this with Healer Fidenas. He doubted Lucius would care if Harry painted all muggles with the Dursley brush, but Severus didn’t want Harry to grow up with a skewed perspective.

“Yes! I heard Mama tell Papa that they’re *perfectly dreadful*,” Draco repeated in a fair imitation of Narcissa’s cultured tones.

Severus nearly groaned.

“What’s that mean?” Harry prompted.

“I don’t know, but mama sounded much more upset than when she talks about dark stuff. So we’ll save Braxy for the muggles.”

“And Daddy. Daddy can fight the muggles, too,” Harry said brightly, and Severus had to blink back the emotion that stirred in him. “We should use the unicorns on the army of darkness.”

Severus stepped into the room and quickly crossed to them. “Supper is ready. Are you able to leave your armies and come have something to eat?”

“Daddy!” Harry lifted his arms. “You’re back! Did you get all your stuff from the hog school?”

Draco looked a little bereft, so Severus picked him up in the other arm, earning a bright smile. Normally Draco chafed at being carried too much, but in his way he was struggling just as much as Harry with Lucius’ absence.

“I got everything, including my snakes, which I will show you both tomorrow,” he replied as he walked down to the dining room.

In the dining room, everyone settled on the charmed grass and waited for the food to pop to the low pseudo-table. They were only a few bites into the meal when Severus felt a familiar magical presence enter the room.

At that exact moment, Harry dropped his fork on a screamed, “Papa!” before he was off like a shot to where Lucius was standing in the doorway. An echoing, “Papa!” came from Draco a moment later, and Lucius barely had time to brace himself

before he was slammed into by two four year olds. He dropped to his knees and held both boys.

Severus and Narcissa both approached, Severus feeling a little overwhelmed with the relief, and grateful for Narcissa's steady support at his side.

"Are you going away again?" Harry finally asked.

"Look at me, my precious sons." When he had both boys' attention, he added, "Sometimes I will have to leave you for short periods of time, but no one will keep me away again."

"Truly?" Severus asked, not seeking a guarantee of the future like the boys, but more the knowledge that this current situation was at an end.

Lucius looked up and smiled in the way he usually only let Severus see when they were alone. "Fully exonerated."

Severus felt his knees nearly give way. "How?" he managed on a breath.

"I'll tell you later, love. And there is *much* I have to tell you about how we arrived at this day."

Like any good Slytherin, Severus knew how to be patient, but he was relieved that he would finally understand how this had come to pass.

Lucius hugged both boys again, then got to his feet and pulled Severus into an embrace. Severus clung for a moment, before getting control of himself and stepping back. Lucius dropped a kiss on Narcissa's cheek. "Shall we have dinner?"

Harry tugged on Lucius' hand. "I waited for you, Papa."

"Waited, Harry? What do you mean?"

"I waited to eat at the table so we could be together," Harry said smiling shyly and tugging Lucius' hand again.

Lucius let the boys lead him to the table, but Severus held back a moment, getting his emotions under control. It wasn't going to be perfect, but eventually their family would be all right.

Epilogue

December 1984

Severus woke to the feel of Lucius' lips grazing the back of his neck and firm hands sliding around his waist. Half asleep, he pressed back against his mate, groaning his encouragement. He was just awake enough to begin actively participating when, abruptly, Lucius pulled away and shoved a nightshirt at Severus.

"What?" Severus managed, somewhat dazedly.

"Harry is at the door and he's about to bring down the barrier ward."

Severus jumped into action, quickly pulling something on. Harry's magic could only be laughably called *accidental*, but when he was upset, there was an element that *was* beyond his conscious control.

They'd begun to set a barrier ward on their door. Harry knew he only had to knock to gain admittance, and normally he tolerated that well, but when he was upset, he tended to just tear through the ward without thinking. Granted it was a fairly weak household level ward, and they could set something stronger, but they were not trying to upset Harry at a time when he was already in distress. To be safe and give them warning, Lucius had an alarm on the door if Harry approached.

Severus was just covered and getting out of bed when Harry tore into the room with tears on his cheeks. It took him several minutes to get his son calmed down before Harry could articulate that he'd had a nightmare about the Dursleys coming to take him away.

The twenty years the Dursleys had received in the minimum security wing at Azkaban was not enough as far as Severus was concerned. He'd happily kill both of them for what they'd done to his son. Harry's persistent nightmares and insecurity continually flamed the anger he felt toward the despicable muggles.

After a few minutes in Severus' arms, Harry wiggled and reached for Lucius, who settled Harry against his chest and began telling Harry a somewhat inappropriate tale about one of his Bordelon ancestors. Severus gave Lucius a look, but it was half-hearted at best because Harry was giggling a bit, one hand firmly wrapped in Lucius' hair.

It had been three weeks since they'd brought Harry home, two weeks since Lucius had been set free, and the cost to the two was still unknown. Harry met with Castius Fidenas twice a week, and Lucius once a week.

Severus still wasn't sure how he felt about what Lucius had done to ensure his freedom. For years he'd been systematically removing anything incriminating from his mind, and having a variety of spells cast on him. A combination of Imperius,

obliviate, compulsion spells and potions, and implanted memories… it left a magical web on his mind that looked to the ICW like Lucius had been more victim of Voldemort than Death Eater.

As soon as Lucius had received the news about Harry being alive, he'd begun the final stage of removing incriminating memories. Who had aided Lucius in that endeavor over the years was unknown because their identity was obliviated. For the final memories to be removed, Lucius also used a dangerous technique with a pensieve where memories were permanently removed, rather than a copy of the memory being '*borrowed*'. When a pensieve was used in this manner, if the memory were restored, it never actually felt like it belonged, which was unsettling in a way many people were unable to cope with.

After Lucius' return from the Ministry with his exoneration, he had restored the few memories he needed, but Severus shuddered every time at the notion of Lucius living the rest of his life with memories that didn't feel like they were his own.

The methods Lucius had used were drastic and not something most could handle, because it created incredible stress on the mind to have so many memory holes and memory modifications. If Lucius wasn't such a strong occlumens, and therefore capable of carefully ordering his mind, Severus wouldn't have thought he could tolerate the mental stress. Of course, the experiences were primarily confined to a three year period, so the damage was somewhat contained. Regardless, Lucius required ongoing mind healing.

Castius Fidenas had agreed to help heal Lucius' mind, though he didn't personally care for Lucius. He had done it for Narcissa, and hadn't that been a surprise to Severus? The mind healer was formally courting Narcissa with Lucius' permission, but the two had been secretly involved for over a year.

It was a painful irony that what Lucius had done to himself voluntarily, Dumbledore had partially done to Severus against his will. They'd talked about what the former leader of the Light had done only once, and Lucius had become so angry he'd lost control of his Veela nature and shifted, something most male Veela never managed.

A little hand tugged at his arm and Severus shook off his introspection. Draco was next to the bed, rubbing his eyes and looking sleepy, clutching Harry's snake. Severus wasn't surprised at Draco being there too and lifted him, letting the sleepy boy cuddle against him. At the boys' insistence, they now shared a room, and usually slept together. Draco typically noticed when Harry was gone and always came looking for him.

Lucius was relaying something about a courtesan with purple hair when suddenly his own hair turned purple. Severus forced back a laugh. Calling Harry's magic *accidental* really was absurd. And it wasn't limited to one child. He'd been teaching Draco with the simple instruction of '*you just have to want it more, Dray*', which

shouldn't have worked, but then Draco started summoning his toys and driving their nanny elf to distraction by breaking the typical protective spells on some of his playthings.

It took several moments before Draco perked up a bit and exclaimed, "What happened to Papa's hair?"

The story telling halted as Lucius took note of the new color, then Harry was shrieking with laughter as Lucius began to tickle him. Draco quickly leapt into the fray. Seeing Lucius be so *human* with his children never failed to affect Severus. He decided to side with the boys, and the three teamed up against the purple-haired Malfoy patriarch.

Severus was helping Harry cut his sausages when he felt something odd from Lucius. He glanced up and met his mate's gaze. "What is it?"

Wordlessly, Lucius handed him the Daily Prophet, which Mimi always set out with breakfast. The headline of the front page left no doubt as to what had caught his mate's attention

SIRIUS BLACK INNOCENT, FREED FROM AZKABAN. PETTIGREW, BETRAYER OF POTTERS, ALIVE AND AT LARGE, MANHUNT UNDERWAY. DUMBLEDORE KNEW!!!

Severus' lips firmed into a thin line. It didn't surprise him. Dumbledore really was capable of anything. Lucius was still a member of the Wizengamot, but his involvement with anything surrounding Dumbledore was considered a conflict of interest. All they'd known before now was that Black was one of many suspected Death Eaters being finally given a trial. Black was the sixth so far to be freed. Though just as many were back in Azkaban with a formal sentence.

Dumbledore's trial had yet to commence as they were continually finding new things to charge the old wizard with. His complicity in sending so many to Azkaban without a trial was just the latest.

Severus was still absorbed in the article, the quality of the Prophet's reporting had gone up considerably since the ICW had passed stricter libel laws and fined the Prophet repeatedly. A piece of parchment was passed to him. He glanced up at Lucius curiously.

"Fortier wishes to see us today. He'll be here before lunch."

Delightful.

Fortier had helped them tremendously in the last month, but his visits tended to result in someone being given veritaserum, and Severus really didn't want to deal with the head of the ICW today.

Fortier was prompt as usual, and seemed amused by the wary expressions Lucius and Severus were sporting. He settled comfortably into the wingback chair. "I can understand your concern, but today I am not the bearer of bad tidings."

Severus relaxed a little, but Lucius' eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Then you must want something."

Cocking his head to the side, Fortier carefully replied, "Perhaps. But there are other matters to attend to first. To start with, we met with the muggle Prime Minister and Her Majesty. Considering the depth of corruption in the British Ministry, the ICW has been granted an additional thirty days to try to bring Wizarding Britain to a point of stability before we hand the proverbial reins back to the Ministry and the Wizengamot."

He paused to pass over two sealed packets, which Lucius took. "The Queen has signed your exonerations and they've been filed with the Ministry."

Severus felt incredible relief, though he kept his expression neutral. Until today, there was always the possibility that the Death Eater laws could be changed and the charges could be filed again. It would take the family a long time to completely recover from the actions of Dumbledore, and their own mistakes and bad choices, but at least the legal issues were behind them.

Fortier continued, "As for the present Ministry status… you're aware, several critical posts in your government are vacant. At present, you're without a Minister, a head of the DMLE, a head auror and a Chief Warlock, plus dozens of lower-ranking posts. The Wizengamot and the special panel from the ICW met today and voted on replacements. Some are permanent, and others are interim."

He looked directly at Lucius. "If any of the votes had been close, we would have solicited the votes of the few members not present for the session, such as yourself, but the margins were sufficient to not need concern ourselves."

Lucius simply nodded.

"The interim Minister will be Malcolm Greengrass, and he will remain in the post until the next election in two years. Alastor Moody has agreed to step in as

temporary head of the DMLE, and groom Amelia Bones to take the position permanently."

Severus and Lucius exchanged a look before Severus asked, "And Moody's allegiance to Dumbledore?"

"He submitted to questioning to verify that his primary allegiance is to uphold the law. He's rather disenchanted with Dumbledore at the moment. In point of fact, he was suspended from duty for two days for hexing the old wizard while escorting him to his cell."

Taking a sip of tea, Severus hid his smile behind his teacup.

"And who will be head auror?" Lucius asked after he too took a fortifying sip of tea.

"After he's undergone mind healing, and if he wishes it, several have suggested the job go to Sirius Black."

Severus was torn on the issue of Black. He would never be a supporter of the man, but he *had* been a good auror.

Fortier leaned forward a bit. "The real reason I needed to speak to you is that the Wizengamot has voted in a new Chief Warlock. The vote was by no means unanimous, but there *was* a majority. And they have voted you, Lucius, to be the new head of the Wizengamot."

Lucius choked on his tea.

"Are you going to accept the position?" Severus asked as soon as they were alone in Lucius' study. Lucius was seated, while Severus paced.

Lucius had shed his usual expressionless mask, and just looked tired. "I do not know. I'm utterly baffled, Severus." But Severus could tell Lucius was thinking over how this could be turned to their advantage.

"I gather it's a position you did not covet?"

Snorting inelegantly, Lucius replied. "No. It's too visible a role with too many expectations upon it. More so than the Minister, the Chief Warlock is expected to stand for justice." He tapped his elegant fingers on his thigh. "I doubt sincerely anyone believes I am the best candidate for this appointment."

“No. I’m sure those that voted for you did so in part to thumb their noses at Dumbledore. And it’s a sort of poetic justice. Because of what’s happened to Harry and even myself, you’re the peer most harmed by him. To give you his position in the government… yes, there’s a certain poetry in that.”

Lucius held out a hand, which Severus took and allowed himself to be pulled down to sit on Lucius lap. “What would you have me do?”

“We have to not make the same mistakes, Lucius. We will always be a dark-leaning family, and perhaps it’s time for the dark and light to once again coexist tolerantly.” Severus traced the line of Lucius’ jaw. “You could bring positive change to our world, but you must set aside your father’s notions of blood and magic.”

Looking thoughtful, Lucius nodded. “I confess that my mind is less fixed on the ideals of my father. I am uncertain how much of that is simply natural evolution, and what is attributable to the gaps in my memory.”

“Lucius,” Severus said sadly, “the best path is the one where you never again do something you must wipe from your mind. Please, love, I do not wish for you to ever consider this a viable alternative. If the best thing for you is to leave matters of government behind, that’s what should be done.”

“And if I think I can make the wizarding world better for our sons?”

Severus dropped a kiss on Lucius’ lips. “Then that’s what you should do.”

“Lucius Abraxas Malfoy!” Narcissa could be heard yelling from outside the library.

Severus glanced at Lucius. “And what have you done to incur the wrath of your wife?”

Lucius winced. “I sent the final list of suitors to her through Mimi.”

“Do you wish to apparate away?”

“No,” Lucius replied just as Narcissa swept into the library.

She glared from the doorway and Severus was tempted to apparate away himself. “Sixty-two suitors, Lucius? How could you?”

“Now, Cissy,” Lucius began, making a placating gesture, “you know I had to consider every potential candidate. Family marriage laws are clear that all offers must be evaluated on their merit.”

“I know! But sixty-two? How can I possibly manage that many? You’re entitled to reject anyone out of hand! Did you turn any away?”

“I rejected over eleven hundred applicants, my dear.”

Narcissa pulled up in surprise. “What?” she asked weakly.

“The recent spate of scandal has elevated the Malfoy name considerably, and it seems every eligible wizard in Wizarding Europe, and a few beyond, applied to court you. I had to appear to be impartial, you know this, so I had to accept everyone who is equal or better than Castius.”

She glared. “None are better than Castius.” With a sigh, she moved to sit next to Severus. “This is intolerable.”

“I take it you didn’t read the entire missive, or you might not be quite so vexed with me. Mason indicated that with more than fifty potentials, the prospective bride may reduce the field by half. And unlike me, who must appear somewhat impartial, you may make the decision however you like.”

Narcissa rested her head on Severus’ shoulder, and he patted her hand, certain that was a somewhat appropriate response. He really would have preferred to be anywhere else.

“Thirty suitors. *Perfectly dreadful*.”

Castius took the cup of tea from Narcissa with a smile, then turned his attention to Severus and Lucius. “Harry and I have discussed Yule, and he’s allowed me to see some of his memories, but there’s truly not much for me to see. Obviously, Harry has no recollection of his first Yule with the Potters. Every subsequent Yule was spent locked in the cupboard.”

Severus’ set his tea down, then his hands curled into fists. Lucius covered Severus’ clenched hand with his own. Narcissa was staring out the window, seemingly absorbed by the landscape, though the tension in her back was telling.

With a sigh, Castius continued, “The first gift Harry recollects receiving was the stuffed snake he calls *Remy*. And I realize you’ve showered him with gifts since he’s

been here, but there's a particular vulnerability around Yule, because he was allowed to see all the gifts for the other boy in the household, see how he was loved and doted on, but never given any love or care himself.

"As a result, I would recommend that you try to eliminate some of the element of surprise from this Yule. Don't hide the gifts. Don't tease. Simple and straightforward will work best. And don't overdo, or he'll just feel overwhelmed."

Severus nodded, knowing he'd have to be the voice of reason. Lucius and Narcissa and entirely different concepts of appropriate gift giving. Lucius would give Harry his own manor if he thought it would make Harry happy. And Narcissa had already bought Harry a wardrobe fit for six children, and Harry was finally starting to have a growth spurt and he'd put on some weight. At least the tailoring charms would work for a bit.

Castius cleared his throat a bit before continuing. "There are two other, possibly related issues we should discuss. I believe Harry is a parselmouth, and I believe he's hidden it because he was severely punished for hissing to a garden snake when he was younger.

"He knows you are all very accepting of snakes, but this is deeply ingrained. If he *is* a parselmouth, it needs to be confirmed soon, and then I'd recommend getting him his own snake and a tutor in parselmagic. If he were to change the colour of his wall with parselmagic, no one would be able to undo it. And that could be a tame consequence."

Severus was just staring at the mind healer. Harry a parselmouth? But it made a kind of sense. "When he's around the snakes, they're all very attentive, and he gives them looks I can't quite decipher when they're hissing."

"And what is the possibly related issue?" Lucius asked, also looking a bit stunned.

"You'd need to have this confirmed by special examination, but I believe Harry and Draco have started to share magic, in the way that we often see in twins."

Narcissa whipped around. "What? How?"

"Harry doesn't have preconceived notions of what's possible with magic, or impossible as the case may be. The lack of constraint he's placed on his own mind is largely responsible for his wandless ability. Even though he primarily uses it for summoning toys or food, or changing the color of things, it's still quite advanced. Harry told me that Draco said brothers share everything and take care of each other. I believe when Draco was struggling to summon his toys, Harry instinctively opened his magic to Draco, and Draco's magic responded in a way that's starting a twinning process.

“If they do have a twin bond in their magic, and it continues to grow, their magical gifts will twin as well. As a result, Draco could also become a parselmouth.”

Getting the boys apart was not always easy, but Draco had piano twice a week and Harry usually played with the house elves during that time. Lucius went into the playroom and plucked up his son, who giggled.

“Hi, Papa!” Harry said brightly as Lucius headed out of the room. “Where we going?”

“We’re going to go see your Daddy down in the potions lab.”

Harry bounced a little. Both boys were excited any time they were allowed to accompany Severus into the lab. “Why’s Daddy down there?”

“Well, he’s going to milk Zar.” Balthazar was Lucius’ magical red spitting cobra, one of the snakes most attentive when Harry was near. Neither Harry nor Draco could handle the complex name and had shortened it to simply *Zar*.

As they entered the lab, Zar reared up and started hissing, immediately catching Harry’s attention, who smiled. Severus was standing back a bit and softly asked, “What’s he saying, Harry?”

Smiling while waving to Zar, Harry replied, “He’s not happy because I haven’t been to visit.” Then Harry froze and his silver eyes got huge and filled with tears. “I’m sorry.” He twisted in Lucius arms, and latched onto his neck. “I’m sorry, Papa.”

Lucius rubbed Harry’s back soothingly, exchanging a pained glance with Severus. “None of that, Harry. There’s nothing to be sorry for.”

“But good b-boys don’t talk to ss-snakes,” Harry replied brokenly.

Severus stepped close and cupped the back of Harry’s head. “Harry, talking to snakes is a special magical gift, and that’s never a bad thing. Come on, sweet boy, don’t hide from us.”

It took a couple minutes of coaxing, but Harry finally emerged from hiding his face against Lucius’ shoulder.

Lucius stepped close to the tank and bounced Harry a little. “You know we’re all very fond of snakes.”

“Slytheringins,” Harry responded.

Lucius smiled, but didn't let himself laugh, though he caught Severus' shoulders shaking out of the corner of his eye. "Yes. And it's a very exciting and rare magical gift to be able to talk to snakes. Now, it's important to know that it's a family magical gift, and we don't talk to people outside the family about that, right?"

"Yes, Papa. But it's not bad?"

"No, it's not bad. Now why don't you talk to Zar for a bit and tell me what he's saying?"

Nodding, Harry leaned forward a bit and started hissing to the snake, peeking occasionally at his fathers for reassurance.

They spent about an hour with Harry relaying messages back and forth to Zar, but it was clear that Harry was indeed a parselmouth.

Lucius would need to meet with Fortier again. The ICW worked with parselmouths, and perhaps the ICW would be able to facilitate change in magical Britain. It was possible both his sons were going to be parselmouths and he would make it his mission to see his sons accepted for their rare gift.

He was now certain he had done the right thing to accept the Wizengamot's appointment as Chief Warlock. He'd either make it safe for Harry, and possibly Draco, to be snake speakers, or he'd move his family to France without a second thought.

Narcissa glared at the pile of courting gifts, earning a chuckle from Castius, who came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. "Glaring at them won't them go away, my love."

She was tempted to turn her glare on him, but they had precious little time alone and she wasn't going to waste it with petty squabbles. "I am not pleased with this courting tradition."

"You love gifts," he quickly countered.

"I was referring to the six months of posturing before I'm allowed to make my choice." In point of fact, according to the law, Lucius actually was the one to make the choice, which irked her to no end. Now that Lucius had decided to take up the Chief Warlock position, she had every intention of using her husband to make changes in how women were treated in Wizarding Britain.

Formal courtship would last for six months minimum before she could make a choice. She desperately wanted Castius in her life every day, but it was daunting to even give her suitors the most cursory attention.

Castius turned her to face him. “I don’t wish to waste our time together brooding over the gifts of your other suitors.”

She leaned up and gave him a quick kiss. “Lucius has requested that Harry’s mind healer be on hand for Yule in the event there is any emotional distress.”

Castius frowned. “I’ll come immediately, of course.”

“Yes, but perhaps it would be best if you were on hand for most of the day.”

“Oh. And whose idea was that?” Castius asked with a growing smile.

“Well, I’m most assuredly in favor of it, but it was Lucius’ suggestion.”

Castius’ brows shot up in surprise. “Your husband is becoming rather appallingly sentimental.” Despite the words, she knew he was pleased. It was simply in Castius’ and Lucius’ nature to snipe at one another.

“Yes, and if you say anything to get his back up, I promise to make it a Yule you’d wish you could forget.”

“I love it when you get threatening.”

She raised a brow and frowned.

Castius laughed. “Yes, dearest. I’ll play nicely with Lucius.”

Severus paced the length of the drawing room. “This is absurd. What can he possibly have to say?”

From his seat on the sofa, Lucius look remarkably unruffled. “Severus, you’ve been agitated since he wrote. It’s clear he wishes to discuss Harry.”

“To what end? Harry isn’t Potter’s son, so he’s not Black’s godson. He has no reason to be involved in Harry’s life.”

“Severus, please don’t work yourself into such a state. Three years in prison have no doubt had an affect on Black, but if it hasn’t, I’ll happily hex him and eject him from the wards. Come… sit. Cissy will no doubt be here momentarily with our guest.”

Severus allowed himself to be managed. Typically Lucius would have brought Black down, but Narcissa wanted a few minutes with her cousin.

A bit later, Black was seated in a chair, looking thin and pale, and too old for his years. After some awkward pleasantries, Black cleared his throat and said, “I had a difficult time believing… about Harry. But Fortier showed me Lily’s letter, and the notes. And I talked to Dumbledore and he admitted it. I just… He was the center of my world, and when I heard I was finally granted a trial, all I could think of was Harry.

“I came here today because I wanted to let you know personally that I never had any suspicion that Harry was not James’ son. And if I had known, I would have seen him returned to you. My word on that, Snape. We were never friends, but I would not have condoned what Dumbledore did to you.”

Severus accepted the words, but didn’t particularly want to discuss it further.

After a moment, Black continued. “I’d hoped I could see him… say goodbye. I know he’s not the same, I just need… I need to say goodbye to him.”

The three Malfoy family members shared looks, before Severus finally nodded his head.

“I’ll get Harry,” Narcissa offered and left the room.

Lucius leaned back, looking elegantly casual. “And what are your future plans, Lord Black?”

“I may return to the auror corps, but I will make that determination after I’ve completed my recovery.” He frowned a bit and drummed his fingers on his knee. “I’ve decided to take in Lily’s nephew, the Dursley boy.”

Severus couldn’t fathom why Black would do that. “Whatever for?”

“He’s another innocent victim of the situation, and he is Lily’s kin. His only family is… well, she’s as terrible as his parents. He’d be a horrible human being if left to her care. I feel strongly that this is the proper thing. Lily made a wretched decision when she aided Dumbledore, but she was still my family, my friend.”

“So you will raise a muggle child?”

“He’s weakly magical. Not powerful enough for Hogwarts, but more than a squib. He’ll be my ward, and in the tradition of my family, his name will be Indus Corvus Black.” Black seemed quite confident in his decision, so Severus let the matter go. He knew it wasn’t right to blame the child for the sins of the parents, but it had been easy to not let himself even wonder at the Dursley boy’s fate.

A few moments later, Narcissa entered with Harry, who seemed perplexed by the newcomer, but dutifully waved when presented to Black. Then Harry peered closely at Black, head cocked to the side and brows pulled into a puzzled frown.

“Hello, Harry,” Black said hoarsely. “It’s been a long time since I last saw you. And you look very different.”

“I know you?” Harry asked hesitantly, and Severus could tell there was a glimmer of recognition.

Black looked sad as he replied, “In a manner of speaking. I saw you frequently when you were a baby.”

“Oh. I didn’t look like me then.”

“You’re right. You look very much like your fathers now.”

Harry smiled blindingly, then seemed to consider and frowned again. “You knew me when I was stolen?”

“Yes, Harry. I didn’t know you’d been taken from your fathers or I’d have brought you back. I was an auror and it was my job to do the right thing for you.”

“I looked wrong, so you didn’t know,” Harry finally said, then wiggled a little. “Can I play with Draco now, Mum?”

“Yes, dearest.” The *Mum* was recent. The boys had announced a couple days past that they each had three parents and there’d be no more Aunt or Uncle *stuff*.

“Bye, Mister Black,” Harry said with a wave, then ran out of the room as fast as his little legs would carry him, Tipsy close behind.

Black stared at his hands for the longest time, before looking up. “Thank you.”

Severus woke to the feel of little fingers playing with his face. Without opening his eyes, he let his magic sense which of the children was doodling on his cheek. “Good

morning, Draco," he murmured. His sons' magics were feeling more alike with every passing day, but he could still easily tell them apart.

The fingers halted their motion and a giggle burst forth. Two hands settled on his chest and shook him. "Come on, Daddy, it's Yule!"

Severus opened his eyes and sat up to find Lucius sitting in a chair near the bed with Harry in his lap, the little boy clutching at Lucius. Harry's body language was typical of when he was feeling particularly insecure.

Grabbing Draco around the middle, he dropped him in Lucius lap as well, eliciting a giggle from both boys, Harry's a bit wobbly. "Try not to torment your Papa while I dress."

After he was appropriately attired, instead of going straight down to the family room, Severus led the boys over to two boxes on the table. "We'll go downstairs shortly, but we have a gift for you two, and we'll open it now, then leave it here so nothing happens to it during the day."

The two boys nodded, and even Harry seemed a little more perky.

Severus set one box in front of each boy, then tapped them with his wand to remove the glamour, revealing two magical terrariums. Inside each box was a magical colubrid breed of snake, similar to the king snake but a solid color. Harry's was a solid green, and Draco's a solid black.

Both boys babbled excitedly and started hissing at the snakes. It was just two days prior that they'd confirmed that Draco's magic had twinned enough with Harry's to allow him to speak parseltongue. It wasn't quite as natural to him as it was to Harry, but they were certain it would come in time.

Lucius and Severus helped the boys handle the snakes, until they were curled in their laps, hissing mightily. After a few seconds, Harry cocked his head to the side, a look of confusion on his face, then Draco did the same.

"What is it, boys?"

Harry bit his lip and looked up at Severus. "Is it okay if this is Draco's snake?"

Draco, being much less shy, carefully lifted up the head of the snake. "This one's Harry's."

"How are you able to tell?" Lucius asked curiously.

"Its magic wants Harry," Draco explained with a shrug.

Lucius and Severus exchanged a look. The boys shouldn't be able to read the snakes' magics so profoundly. Magical tutors were now even higher on the priority list. "It's perfectly fine. Draco gets the green one, and Harry gets the black one. Start thinking of names, and we'll let them rest while we go find your mother, and have Yule breakfast."

Severus sat next to Lucius, and leaned against his mate. The boys were finally down after a very long Yule celebration. Harry had done fairly well, only becoming overwhelmed a few times, and having Healer Fidenas present had proved useful. Narcissa and Fidenas were still down in the family room, getting a few precious additional moments together.

"The names of those snakes…" Lucius bemoaned. "We should have just named them ourselves."

"Don't be ridiculous, Lucius," Severus said trying not to laugh.

"Magical colubrids can live twenty years or more. Twenty years of asking after '*Paddy'* and '*Sir Hiss*'."

Severus laughed outright, but nudged Lucius. "If you are anything less than enthusiastic about those names…" he trailed off warningly.

Lucius held up his hands in surrender, and Severus knew Lucius wouldn't do anything to upset either boy. They stayed in silence for several minutes, just letting the stress and excitement of the day pass. Both were startled by a faint knock at the door, which was distinctly Harry.

Severus opened the door to find both boys standing there, Harry clutching Remy, Draco half asleep and Dobby hovering in the background. "You may go, Dobby," Severus murmured as he picked both boys up and carried them into the room. "What's the matter?" He settled back next to Lucius, who took Draco.

Harry just shook his head and cuddled closer.

Deciding not to press, they just held the boys until Draco drifted back to sleep and Harry was halfway there. Just when he was about to rise to take them back to bed, Harry sleepily murmured, "I love you, Daddy."

He pressed a kiss to Harry's head, closing his eyes against the emotion that welled up. "I love you, too, Harry."

The End