

Icarus Rising  
by  
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Chapter One

Around him, a bloody war raged on. The normally pitch black sky, illuminated by the countless spells flying through the air, embraced the scene as wizards on both sides fell by the numbers. Harry couldn't stop to think about that. He had but one goal in mind. Voldemort. To find and destroy him. Only then would the killing cease. Only then would everything be over. The sacrifices made by his friends and allies would all have been worthwhile.

Bellatrix lay dead at his feet. Harry would never admit it, but he had sought her out first. Put his personal feelings ahead of his political obligations and dueled with the witch. After trading several spells, Harry finally cast *Incendio*, stumbling back to watch her burn. She screamed and moaned; it should have been music to his ears. It wasn't. He clamped his hands over his ears and looked away, sick at the very sight of what he had done.

He didn't allow himself to stay distracted for long. Locating his greater target became his immediate priority. Before he could take two steps, however, he heard a familiar scream in the distance. *Ron*. He had completely lost track of his best friend in all the chaos. "Ron! *Ron!* Where are you?"

Ron continued to scream. Harry glanced around wildly, looking for his best mate. Even with the brightened, spell-streaked sky, his visibility was limited. "*Lumos!*" Harry exclaimed, scanning the battlefield.

Something caught his eye to his right; a twitching figure on the ground in blue robes. On top of the figure sat a beast with bright white wings and long pale hair. "*Impedimenta!*" Harry yelled, knocking the creature several feet away from the fallen Auror.

Harry knelt to help his fallen friend. "Ron! Thank *god*. Are you alright?"

"What the hell is that thing?!" Ron shouted.

Harry looked at the monster, struggling to right itself on the ground. It was bare-chested, wings flapping angrily behind it. It wore no shoes, and sported fingernails sharp like talons. Long, glistening fangs shone brightly amidst a row of white teeth. The eyes were bird-like, silver-rimmed with impossibly-wide pupils; long hair flowed over its chest, so blond it shown white in the moonlight. Harry gasped. "I think... I think that's a Veela."

"*What?* That doesn't look like any bloody Veela I ever saw. For starters, it's *male*."

"I suppose there would have to be *some* male-- Ron? Ron!"

The redhead had ceased to listen, attention rapt on the animal which he stared at, slack-jawed. Brushing Harry aside, Ron began crawling towards it. "Ron! What the hell are you doing?"

"Have to... touch him..."

"Oh no you don't," Harry tackled his friend. "That's a Veela, alright. You're just reacting to him."

"I have to tell him I'm the youngest Auror in a century," Ron panted, still struggling to move out of Harry's grasp.

"This is *not* a good time, Ron."

Harry looked up then making eye contact with the creature. Something bothered him about it. Something he couldn't put his finger on. Something about the Veela seemed almost... familiar. But he'd never met a male Veela before, of that he was certain. Vaguely, he remembered learning in Care of Magical Creatures that the Veela gene lay dormant in males. Beyond physical resemblance, males with Veela blood differed little from any other wizard.

The Veela froze upon meeting Harry's eyes. It didn't make a move to attack, simply staring at the pair of them. Harry leaned down to help Ron get to his feet and the creature growled. Harry halted his movements reflexively and the growling stopped. Unfortunately, that freed Ron to start crawling back towards the Veela and Harry was forced to grab his friend and drag him further away. The beast began growling again -- a low, rumbling sound -- and stalked towards them on all fours slowly. "Draco!" a voice boomed.

*Draco?*

A breathless and worn Lucius Malfoy ran up behind the Veela, wand at the ready. "Potter," he sneered, catching sight of the young man. "What a... *pleasant* surprise. My Lord will be so pleased when I take you crawling to his feet."

Harry didn't seem to hear. He couldn't peel his eyes off the figure behind the tall Death Eater. *Draco*. There was no doubt about it, this creature was Draco Malfoy. Virtually unrecognizable, but Malfoy nonetheless. Harry kicked himself for failing to see it before. The slate-grey eyes, the silver-blond hair; the pale, flawless skin. It was all there before him. Harry had never spent much time looking at the boy while they were at Hogwarts together, but recognition flooded through him now with a startling surety.

"See something you like, Potter?" Lucius scorned.

Harry blinked, and switched his gaze to the elder Malfoy's. "What did you do to him?"

Lucius ignored the question. "Draco. Kill the other. Leave Potter for the Dark Lord."

His son didn't move, simply continued staring at Harry from his crouching position several feet away. "Malfoy?" Harry appealed. "Malfoy, do you know who I am?"

Harry was grateful Ron had stopped squirming, having stopped to watch the interaction with wide, focused eyes. Draco blinked and cocked his head, peering at Harry and absently sniffing the air. "Draco!" Lucius boomed. "What's the matter with you? I gave you an order!"

Cursing his questionable instincts, Harry took a step towards the Veela. Draco tensed but otherwise made not a move. "Malfoy?" Harry tried again, walking slowly. "It's me, Harry Potter. I'm not going to hurt you." The lie tasted bitter on his tongue. One threatening move and the Veela would find himself at the wrong end of Harry's wand. Something told him that Draco wasn't exactly in his right mind at the moment and Harry had not been trained to take chances.

He came to a halt directly in front of the Veela, noting that the wings collapsed back at his approach. Extending a trembling hand, Harry reached out to touch the top of Draco's head. The moment his fingers made contact with the pure silk of Veela hair, the eyes closed and a low groan emitted from Draco's chest that sounded suspiciously like a purr. *Do Veela purr?* Harry thought, wildly.

Draco rubbed his head against the outstretched palm, fangs and talons receding before Harry's very eyes. "Harry?" Ron inquired behind him.

He didn't have the chance to answer. With a roar, Lucius Malfoy aimed his wand at Harry and attacked. "*Crucio!*"

Ron leapt to defend his friend, but before either Auror could move, Draco shot to his feet, wrapped Harry in his arms, and turned them around. The curse dissolved into nothingness, absorbed by his large, outstretched wings. The blond collapsed to the ground in pain. "*Stupefy!*" Harry screamed at a shell-shocked Lucius. Falling to his knees, Harry attempted to rouse his unlikely protector. "Malfoy, are you okay? Malfoy!"

"Harry, what the hell just happened?"

"I have no idea. Malfoy's hurt."

"Which one?" Ron gawked.

"Which one?! This one!"

"Draco? Who the hell car--" Ron stopped as he looked down at the Veela, promptly reaching out to touch him.

Draco growled and moved closer to Harry. "Ron, stop looking at him, it's messing with your head!"

"Right. No touching Malfoy. Got it. Could I just--"

"No! Go find Snape! He'll know what's going on here!"

"Yes, find Snape. Going. Right now."

"Stop ogling Malfoy and go!"

"Okay, okay!" Ron ran off.

Harry looked over to where Lucius lay on the ground, at a loss as to what to do. He rested several feet away, weakened and unable to defend himself, while his only child was little more than a mindless animal on the ground before Harry. Of course, it would be at that precise moment when Harry would finally spot Voldemort, cutting a swath through the ensuing violence directly towards him.

Draco, seemingly recovered, clutched Harry's arms in his hands and began nuzzling Harry's neck. "Malfoy! Get a hold of yourself! Voldemort's coming!" Draco pulled him closer. "Malfoy, stop! Let me go!"

The Veela froze and released Harry instantly. Harry blinked at the sudden change, but didn't spare a moment to question it as he shot to his feet, wand gripped tightly in hand, pointed unerringly at the approaching figure. Malfoy rose by his side, wings fully outstretched, watching with him as Voldemort neared. "Draco," the Dark Lord hissed. "Why aren't you attacking this boy? Don't you know who this is? He's against us, Draco." Voldemort looked down at the prone form of his top lieutenant. "Look what he's done to your father."

Malfoy said nothing, instead positioning his body directly between Harry and his enemy. Harry uttered a sound of protest, stepping out from behind a feathered wing in frustration. "Malfoy, move. Let me handle this."

"Eviscerate him, Draco," Voldemort rumbled. Harry glanced sideways at the Veela, who gave no acknowledgment of the command beyond the narrowing of his eyes. "Fine," Voldemort spat. "Avada--"

Harry leapt to push Malfoy out of the way, but his hands fell on empty air. Before he could even duck the curse, Malfoy had charged the Dark Lord, pinning him viciously to the ground. Harry bolted over, grimacing at the sight of Malfoy's clawed hand buried wrist-deep in Voldemort's gut. The Veela's fangs had descended once again, giving every bit the appearance of the wild animal Harry had first taken him for. "Malfoy! Malfoy, stop!" Draco froze instantly. "Move," Harry directed.

The Veela did as Harry ordered. A savaged Voldemort looked up at the green-eyed wizard and grinned through bloody teeth. "Ever... the hero..."

Harry put his boot down on Voldemort's chest and aimed his wand at his head. "You killed my parents. I should kill you the same way. As you've killed so many."

"Killing Curse," Voldemort snarled, blood beginning to pour from his grimacing mouth. "Don't have it... in you..."

Harry smiled a slow, unnerving grin. "I know. *Congelo!*" Voldemort barely had time to blink before his body froze over in an impossibly hard shell of ice. The cold continued seeping into his flesh until his insides themselves began to harden. Voldemort's eyes stared wildly at Harry as the boot on his chest rose to hover over his head. "This end's here," Harry swore, bringing his foot down on the face of the man who had started it all.

The head shattered into a million pieces. Aiming his wand, Harry uttered one final curse, exploding the remaining corpse into a shower of debris. The rain of ice quickly turned into a rain of blood as the spell ended and the scattered

pieces of Voldemort returned to flesh and bone. Carrion covered the two still standing. Exhausted in every sense of the word, Harry fell to his knees, head bowed. Malfoy sank down beside him.

Without warning, Harry felt a rough tongue licking the blood off his cheek. "Malfoy!" he gasped, jumping away and rubbing his cheek.

Malfoy simply watched him, a curious look in eyes. Harry scrambled to his feet, Malfoy immediately following, prompting a gesture from Harry for the Veela to halt. To his left, Harry could see Snape and Ron approaching at breakneck speed. "Harry! Harry, are you alright?" Ron was hollering. "You're covered in blood!"

"It's not mine," Harry replied absently, wiping off his glasses.

Something squished beneath Ron's boot and he made a face. "What the hell is this?"

Harry glanced around. "This was Voldemort."

"What happened?" Snape demanded, overwhelmed with the implications of this moment.

"Well, Malfoy sort of... gutted him and then I--"

That's when Snape noticed Draco to Harry's left. He reached out to touch the Veela's hair, but Harry stepped between them first. "Professor, don't look at him. He's a Veela."

Snape shook himself out of it and turned his glare to Harry. "I don't know what the hell has been going on here, Potter, but I hope to Merlin you have a good explanation."

"Can it wait?" Harry queried, yawning. "I'm feeling rather... tired..."

Malfoy grabbed Harry's arms as the smaller man began to sway on his feet. Ron moved immediately to take Harry from him, but Malfoy growled and lifted the drowsy man up into his arms. "Malfoy!" Ron shrieked, deliberately not looking at the blond. "Put him down this instant or I'll hex you into next year!"

The Veela stood stagnant, unmoved by the outburst. Snape, meanwhile, had begun poking around at what little remained of his former Lord, inelegantly nudging large chunks around with his foot. "Weasley, get someone to... scrape this up."

"What?!"

"Be glad I'm not making you do it, Weasley!"

Ron gulped. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take Malfoy into custody."

"I don't think he's going to let go of Harry any time soon, sir."

"Not that one." Snape pointed to the ground, a few feet away. "That one."

Ron glanced over at the unconscious Lucius. "What about... the other one?"

"Draco's... not himself. I have no idea what exactly has been done to him, but for now he appears to be pacified. Go now, things seemed to be quieting down."

Ron looked around. Snape was right. Death Eaters were scampering frantically in every direction, toppling over beneath the binding spells of the Light. He breathed a sigh of relief. Voldemort was dead. Harry had killed him, just as

he was meant to. The war was over. Ron didn't want to think of the casualties yet. Every sibling he had but one was on the battlefield, not to mention his parents. Not to mention Hermione. *Hermione...*

"Move, Weasley!" Snape barked.

"What? Oh, right!" Ron took off to find the first member of the Order he could.

Snape cast a binding spell on Lucius in the event he revived before they could put him behind bars. Purposefully keeping his eyes on the ground, Snape walked back over to the creature that had once been his favored pupil and godson. "Draco," he spoke softly. Unthreateningly. "Put Potter down." Draco didn't budge. Snape tried again. "What do you want with him?" Silence. "Can you even understand what I'm saying to you? Put Potter *down*." Snape raised his wand. "I don't need to look at you to hex you."

Draco growled, tightening his grip on Harry. Before either could make a move, chains shot out of a wand behind the Veela, wrapping around his wings and arms. Draco cried out, falling to his knees and dropping Harry to the ground. Harry blinked, rousing fully in alarm. McGonagall approached them slowly from behind, wand still pointed at the Veela. Draco bucked and thrashed trying to get loose, as Harry scrambled back away on instinct.

This seemed to cause Draco even more pain. "Malfoy!" Harry reached out. "Calm down! It's okay. Don't resist." Draco's body stilled instantly. "That's it. No one's going to hurt you." Draco looked up at Harry, his eyes pleading and uncertain. "Everything's over," he continued evenly. "You don't have to fight anymore."

"*Stupefy*."

Draco slumped forward in his chains, eyes closing. Harry turned to glare at Snape. "Why the hell did you do that? I had him under control!"

"Potter, he's a *Veela*. Only one person could ever really have him under control."

"What do you me--"

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed, running up together with Ron.

Harry looked at the pair of them, overwhelmed with relief. "Hi, Hermione."

"Are you okay? Is that *Malfoy*?"

"Sort of."

"Don't look at him, Granger," Snape snapped, just as she took a step in his direction.

She shook herself as if coming out of a trance. "What... what was that?"

"He's a *Veela*," Harry explained. "You know, we really should make a sign for him to wear."

Snape didn't dignify the quip with a response. "He'll have to go to Azkaban with his father."

"What?!" Harry leapt to his feet. "He saved my life!"

"*Malfoy saved your life*?" Hermione gasped.

"What do you propose be done with him, Potter?" Snape sneered. "He's too dangerous for St. Mungo's."

Harry conceded the point. "I suppose you're right. Just be careful. There's something off about him."

"Thank you for that brilliant observation. It's obvious he's become little more than an animal."

Harry opened his mouth, but McGonagall cut him off before he could protest. "This is neither the time nor the place, Mr. Potter. All three of you should be helping to collect prisoners. I'll see to Mr. Malfoy."

Nodding, Harry took one final glance at the unconscious blond before following his two best friends back into the open wound of a battlefield, infested with the dead and dying.

## Chapter Two

In the midst of war, Harry had never dared contemplate what life in the wizarding world might be like after Voldemort. Not much actually changed in the end. People continued working their jobs and children kept attending school. Despite the many empty chairs at the collective dinner table, the wizarding population as a whole proved remarkably resilient in the wake of Voldemort's devastation. Everything seemed to feel normal again. Feel good.

Harry wished he could say the same about himself. Some would say he deserved to feel good more than anyone. An idea he would quickly and uncomfortably shirk, even when it came from the mouths of those closest to him. In Harry's eyes, he had finished a job. A job Voldemort himself bestowed upon him when he was just a baby. Nothing particularly special about spending half your life a walking target. Getting the people you love most into trouble. Getting a few of them killed.

Harry tried to be happy in the weeks following Voldemort's demise, he really did. He wasn't *unhappy* exactly. Many families had indeed lost members to the struggle, but most of his friends were still alive and relatively unscathed. Ron remained living at the Burrow, saving up for his own flat in the city. Together, he and Harry were Aurors-in-training, side-by-side as they always had been. He trusted Ron more than anyone. They had saved each other's lives more times than he could count.

When Harry thought about how close he came to losing Ron at the hands of a crazed Draco Malfoy, he almost couldn't bear it. He would have killed the Veela, of that he was certain. Just as he had killed Bellatrix. And just like with Bellatrix, he would have had one more dead soul on his already over-burdened conscience. He was an Auror. He was trained to use deadly force when the circumstances called for it. But he had killed Bellatrix out of revenge. Just as he would have killed Malfoy had he been unable to stop the assault on Ron.

He wasn't sorry that Bellatrix was dead. He only wished she had died sooner. Before... before she had taken something so irreplaceable from him. He hadn't been able to save Sirius. But he hadn't lost Ron. And Malfoy... Malfoy was not Bellatrix. Harry didn't know *what* to think of Malfoy, but he could discern enough from the few minutes he had spent with him that this was no typical Death Eater bent on murder and mayhem.

The Draco Malfoy on that battlefield cared nothing for "purifying the wizarding race" or putting Voldemort up on some invisible throne. Snape had called him an animal and, while the idea left Harry feeling rather disgusted, he couldn't exactly say the man was wrong. The Veela appeared beyond normal communication. A mindless beast. By the orders sent his way from his father and Voldemort, it was clearly expected that Malfoy obey their commands without question.

Yet he had not. He had stepped between Harry and a curse thrown his way by Lucius Malfoy. He had *attacked* Voldemort with no apparent regard for who the man was or what business he had with Harry. Malfoy had protected him at the sake of his own life. Harry knew that. Had accepted it as truth. He just didn't understand it. *Why* had Draco done it? Why had he not only ignored two direct orders to attack, but saved his leader's enemy as well? It simply made no sense.

Before Malfoy disappeared from Hogwarts in the middle of their sixth year, the tension between he and Harry had reached a fever pitch. Malfoy made no secret of the fact that he blamed Harry for his father's "wrongful" imprisonment, going out of his way to instigate conflict with the Gryffindor and his friends at every available opportunity. Their final Quidditch match against one another ended in a stalemate as the two Seekers eventually abandoned the pretense of the game in order to engage in a brutal fistfight high up in the air.

Later, when the two houses held their make-up game in order to ultimately decide the winner, Harry faced Malcolm Baddock in the air. By then, Malfoy had been missing for five weeks. The match wasn't even a contest. Gryffindor defeated Slytherin 210-60. There was no way of knowing if Malfoy's absence had affected his team's morale, but it became quite clear that Slytherin was less of a powerhouse at the sport than they had been before with him as Seeker. Even if Malfoy's father really had bought his son's way onto the team, Harry figured it was still probably the best investment they'd ever made.

It proved impossible not to notice that Malfoy was gone. His disappearance served as spectacular fodder for the gossip machine at Hogwarts. Rumors surrounding his prolonged absence -- most of which seemed to originate in Ravenclaw, strangely -- varied from illness to defection to death. Some conjectured that Malfoy had transferred to Durmstrang so as to better acquaint himself with the Dark Arts, preparing to take his father's place in Voldemort's

inner circle. A few of the younger years (mostly Hufflepuff girls) suggested that the only Malfoy heir had fallen in love with a muggle girl, choosing to run away with her rather than face the obvious disapproval of his parents and peers.

Harry didn't listen to the rumors. Not only were they largely absurd, the fact remained that no one had a clue what had happened to Draco Malfoy. And as time went by, fewer and fewer people cared. Even the Slytherins managed to pick up and carry on without him, replacing him on the Quidditch team with Baddock and in their power hierarchy with a rather uninspiring Theodore Nott. Nott did his best to continue Malfoy's legacy of torment, he just wasn't very good at it. He lacked Malfoy's scathing wit, and what insults Nott could come up with seemed half-hearted at best. Unlike his predecessor, Nott's hatred for Harry didn't appear to be personal.

Lying in the infirmary after the first Gryffindor-Slytherin match, with a broken nose and a lacerated lip, Harry thought nothing could ever make him any angrier at Malfoy. Their in-flight scuffle had been peppered with all the typical slights toward friends and family, Harry giving back as good as he got. He made rather derogatory (and admittedly unfounded) remarks about Malfoy's mother, and Malfoy retaliated by insinuating Harry's mother's blood was dirty for more reasons than just her muggle heritage. That was when Harry blackened his eye, consequently ensuring the boy a bed in the infirmary at the opposite end of his.

Except Harry had been wrong. Despite the intensity to his wrath at that time, it couldn't begin to compare with how he felt when Malfoy vanished. Unlike his schoolmates with their fantasy gossip, Harry was fairly certain he knew exactly why Malfoy disappeared. Two weeks prior, Lucius Malfoy had disappeared from Azkaban. Apparently, the elder Malfoy had plans to resume his former allegiances and Draco's inclusion was some sort of bargaining chip to get him back through the door. That was Harry's conclusion, anyway.

Harry shared only with Ron and Hermione what the Order had told him about Lucius Malfoy's escape. Somehow, the Ministry managed to keep his emancipation out of the papers, but naturally Harry was notified of having one more Death Eater at large than previously thought. Eventually, the story did break and everyone became aware of the news, but at that point Draco had been missing for several months and few thought to connect the two events. Not many people thought about Draco Malfoy anymore.

Harry thought about Draco Malfoy. His ruminations trickled to a stop as time passed, of course, as memories faded and new problems arose. But in the beginning, it was hard for Harry to ignore just how... *betrayed* he felt. How *disappointed* he was in Malfoy. Which was stupid, really. He'd never suspected for even a moment that Malfoy was an unwilling participant in his father's cause. Never once doubted that Malfoy's hatred for him and all he stood for was genuine.

Even so, Malfoy's disappearance made Harry recognize that he just didn't believe anyone to be completely beyond redemption. As much as Malfoy bothered him, Harry's subconscious still held out hope that there could be a way to get to him. To make him see reason. To prevent himself, Harry, from having to meet one more familiar face on the battlefields ahead. He didn't like Malfoy. But he was still just a boy. A boy Harry's own age, with potential and dreams. Snuffing out his life would have been infinitely more difficult than ridding the world of cold-blooded killers like Bellatrix Lestrange and Tom Marvolo Riddle.

But Harry never saw Malfoy at any battles. The years went by and he, like his classmates, forgot about the boy. Malfoy was just one of many casualties in a long and painful conflict. Harry couldn't afford to stop and mourn the dead any longer. The time for self-indulgence had passed. He had a war to win, friends to keep alive, an enemy to defeat. He had a job to do. What came after, Harry never stopped to consider. Maybe some part of him never thought he would actually live to see the sun rise on a peaceful world. When he did, and Voldemort died in his stead, Harry realized with a disconcerting clarity that all meaning to his life had died with him.

It should have been enough for Harry to live for himself. He had good friends, friends that were like family. He had the job he'd always dreamed of, or would when his training was complete. His attempts at finding love never amounted to much, but he always chalked that up to having higher priorities. Still, he was free now to pursue his own interests. He had triumphed at his greatest task and should be proud of it, proud of himself just for surviving. Of fulfilling his destiny. Of being everything everyone always said he was.

He should be. And sometimes he was. Other times, it just wasn't enough. Having lived so long with a mission on his mind, Harry needed something new to live for. Some new cause, some purpose to fulfill. He needed to feel needed. Harry was a good Auror. He knew that. But he also knew he was no better than Ron. Or Tonks or any of the other Aurors, both in training and in station. Harry had gotten used to feeling special, even when he didn't particularly want to be. And to suddenly be so *normal* again took some serious adjustment.

Perhaps it was this need to do something that inspired him. Maybe it was even a little guilt. Guilt over another life he couldn't save. It made no sense to feel so. By all appearances, Malfoy had made his choice, had unequivocally chosen a side. Even when it counted the most, Malfoy had slighted him, falling prey to his own blind loyalty. It had been Malfoy, then, refusing the handshake between them. Not that Harry ever truly extended it. Rarely could he remain cool-headed around Malfoy long enough to see him as any more than Daddy's little Death Eater-in-training. It wasn't until Malfoy's vanishment that Harry felt his influence on the world as that of an actual human being's.

Perhaps it was simple nostalgia, a wistful remembrance of a younger age not so long ago, that brought him to the Ministry that day. Feeling sentimental over the loss of your childhood rival seemed altogether silly. Reality was Harry didn't know why exactly he first decided to visit Draco Malfoy in his temporary cell at the Ministry's war headquarters. When he told Hermione of his intentions, Harry claimed morbid curiosity. Hermione, ever the practical one, warned him from becoming the proverbial doomed cat. This curiosity could quite literally kill him should it ever get the chance.

Harry assured her that Malfoy was safely tucked away behind thick bars and a dozen guards, and regardless Harry had every confidence in his ability to protect himself from the Veela. Truthfully, Harry didn't believe Malfoy *would* hurt him even if they were standing together with nothing between them. Harry didn't know why Malfoy had protected him on that battlefield, couldn't fathom what the Veela was thinking or if he had been thinking at all, but it didn't really matter.

Malfoy had saved his life. And foolish a notion as it may have been, the hero in Harry wanted to save Malfoy's life right back.

Getting into the room proved ridiculously easy. He was Harry Potter, after all, not a door in the wizarding world ever shut in his face. Besides, he was an Auror-in-training, well within his rights to interrogate a prisoner of war even when he had not been directly assigned to do so. Harry would later come to learn that there was no Auror assigned to the Malfoy case. In the Ministry's eyes, his upcoming arraignment was little more than a formality. Malfoy was a Dark Creature and a servant of Voldemort to boot. There was no future in the world for a being like that.

Harry wasn't exactly sure what to expect when he walked up to Draco Malfoy's cell. The guards warned him not to expect much response from the prisoner. Sometimes the Veela prowled his cage like an agitated animal, sniffing out and touching his surroundings until a new tray of food was brought in, which he would attack with all the desperation of a starving dog. Most of the time, Malfoy stayed in the corner, huddled in on himself as though waiting for a blow that would never come.

So he was when Harry saw him again, prison robes torn to shreds over his body where his talons had ripped through them like paper. Head lolled to one side, mouth slightly open, the image belied the reality of the Veela's existence with a look of preternatural innocence. Asleep then, Harry determined. Harry took a step towards the cage, stopping when a guard laid a steady hand on his arm. "Don't get too close, sir. It sent Jenkins to St. Mungo's last week."

"How?" Harry blinked.

"Daft git tried to touch the thing. We're all taking anti-toxin, but it doesn't seem to work as well against male Veela. It's a major problem for anyone lacking in considerable willpower."

"No worries," Harry tried to smile, but it came out forced. "His powers have no affect on me."

"One of the perks to being you, I suppose, sir," the guard chuckled.

Harry laughed along to a mirth he didn't feel before turning back to the cell. Now wide open, a pair of piercing grey eyes stared right through him. Harry swallowed as the Veela rose with an eerie grace and approached him. He came to a halt in the middle of the cell, glancing suspiciously at the two guards accompanying Harry. The dark-haired wizard followed his gaze and took the hint. "Could you leave us, please?"

The guard looked alarmed. "With all due respect, sir, that isn't advisable. The creature's unhinged."

Harry maintained Malfoy's stare with his own. "I have every confidence in the structure of your jail. He can't come near me. And I'm well-capable of taking care of myself."

"Our orders are strict--"

"Who is your supervisor?"

"Silverstone. Jonathan Silverstone."

"I'll talk to him once I leave here. You won't be in any trouble."

The guards shared another dubious glance, but nodded just the same. "The cell is warded, so he can't summon even natural magic, but if you should need anything--"

"I will call you straight away, of course. Thank you."

Harry watched out of the corner of his eye as the guards exited. Now that he was alone with the Veela, however, he wasn't quite sure what to do. He'd never thought this far ahead when initially considering such a visitation. Malfoy was watching him with a shining look in his eyes, cautious and yet strangely hopeful at the same time. "They're gone now," Harry ventured. "It's just you and me. I won't hurt you, understand?"

Malfoy's only acknowledgment of this statement was to finish his walk to the bars, gripping two of them in pale, fine-boned hands. The look on his face was both plaintive and desperate. Harry couldn't remember ever having seen so much emotion cross Malfoy's face at one time. No emotion that wasn't rage or fear, that is. "Will you talk to me?" Harry asked.

No answer. According to the guards, Malfoy had not spoken once, never uttered so much as a word. Still, it was worth a chance. "It's okay if you don't want to talk to me," Harry continued. "I'm not here to question you. This is strictly unofficial business."

Malfoy cocked his head, curiously.

"To tell you the truth, I'm not entirely sure why I'm here. I guess... I guess I mostly want to know why you did what you did. Why you saved me. Your father..." Harry trailed off at the pinched look in the Veela's eyes. "Do you know who I'm talking about when I mention your father? Do you even understand what I'm saying?"

The grey eyes trailed off.

"Just... nod if you do."

Slowly, the blond's head moved up and down. Harry breathed an inner sigh of relief at this small amount of progress. "Your father is also imprisoned and will soon be put on trial for his crimes, as will you. Do you understand what that means?"

Malfoy seemed to ponder this for a moment before shaking his head. "You were witnessed attacking an Auror. I witnessed it. Your list of crimes is nothing like your father's -- no one knows where you've been or what you've been doing -- but you *were* fighting for Voldemort and the Ministry expects you to answer for that. Did you even..."

"Did you have a choice? I mean, what did they *do* to you?"

Malfoy glanced down at his nails, which were, at the moment, short. He gave a small shrug, tilting his head and eyeing Harry through his long, blond hair. "You were transformed when I saw you last. You had... wings. You look much more... like yourself now. I think you're a bit taller than I remember. Do you remember me at all? I mean, from before that night?"

The Veela frowned and looked down, shaking his head subtly. "They made you forget who you are," Harry breathed. "If you didn't know me, then what made you want to protect me?"

Malfoy's mouth fell open slightly, but words continued to fail him. Instead, he reached his hand through the bars and held his palm out towards Harry. Instinctively, the Auror took a step back. "No," he snapped,. "You won't touch me."

Malfoy's arm fell instantly, eyes glossing over with painfully raw emotion. "I'm sorry," Harry heard himself blurting. "We're just not sure what you're capable of yet, or what you want."

The Veela moved his hand to the lock on the gate and rattled it dispiritedly. "I'm not here to release you, Malfoy. Even if it was in my power, I wouldn't."

Malfoy didn't appear to be listening anymore, turning away from Harry and shuffling to the back wall, dejected. Harry sighed, frustrated with the step back. "Look, I... Don't be that way. You must realize on some level that it's not safe for you to be around people. Yet," he qualified, quickly. "This is for your own protection as much as theirs. No one knows if you're in control of your own actions, or -- if you are -- then why you might choose to do what you've done."

"You came to fight for Voldemort, but you attacked him to save me. I still don't understand. Why? Do you even know why?"

The Veela turned pitiful eyes in his direction, head cocking in quiet affirmation. "Why?" Harry repeated.

But Malfoy only turned in on himself again and looked away. Harry stepped toward the cage, annoyed. "I won't talk to your back. Come over here."

In a flash, the Veela reappeared in front of Harry, as close to him as the bars would allow. The green-eyed wizard took a step back, startled. "Did you just...? Malfoy, touch your nose."

The blond gave him a look but complied, nonetheless. "Stick out your tongue."

Again, Malfoy did as he was told, although he glared at Harry as he did it. "Err... sorry. I'm not trying to humiliate you or anything, I just... You will do anything I say?"

The Veela nodded sharply. "Why?"

Once more, Malfoy reached out to Harry. Harry considered the outstretched hand -- the same one he had refused so many years before. For a second time, he declined to take it. "No, Malfoy. You're not allowed to touch anyone."

The former Slytherin's face fell and he returned to his corner. If Harry told him to come back, he supposed the blond would obey, but the idea seemed cruel. He didn't know why Malfoy obeyed him, but he wouldn't take advantage of it. Deciding they had both had enough for one day, Harry left Malfoy alone in his cell without another word. The Veela made no move to stop him, didn't even acknowledge his departure, and when a scowling Harry left the holding area, the guards wisely refrained from asking him how things had gone.

Harry tried not to think about Malfoy when he went to work the next day. He tried not to think about Malfoy when he went out with his friends for dinner. And he absolutely *refused* to think about Malfoy when he laid down to sleep at night. He didn't want to think about Malfoy again *ever*, but all he could see in his head when he closed his eyes was the hooded gaze of a soul confined.

He went back three days later.

The guards reported that the Veela had been even less responsive than usual, keeping mostly to the corner, only venturing out to snatch the provided food from its tray. Harry didn't know what to expect from a second encounter. He certainly had not expected the blond to throw himself against the bars of his cell at the sound of Harry calling his name. The Veela looked frightened and... apologetic? Why would he be apologizing?

Harry ran a hand back through his hair, sighing. "You're not too good at answering questions. I get that. You also appear -- for Merlin only knows what reason -- to obey my every command. So I'll tell you what. You and I will make a

deal. Fair enough? I'll talk, you listen. That's the deal. I won't ask you any more questions you can't answer, and you won't go sulk in your corner just because I won't touch you, understood?"

The blond nodded uncertainly. He started to reach out through the bars, then seemed to remember himself and retracted his arm.

"I still don't know why I'm here," Harry admitted. "I'm not sure why I wanted to see you in the first place, and since I have, I can't stop thinking about you." He paused, laughing. "Okay, that totally came out the wrong way. I just... I don't know who you are anymore. I shouldn't even *care*. But what you did for me... I owe a Wizard's Debt to you now. I don't know what that means while you're in there and I'm out here, but I... I'll see to it that you receive a fair trial and that people know what you did to help defeat Voldemort."

Malfoy blinked owlishly.

"I... Don't you hate me anymore?"

The Veela looked confused. "Maybe you don't remember," it dawned on Harry. "I mean, if you've forgotten me, then you wouldn't know about... everything else. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Things are different now. I don't know how or why, they just are. I wonder if... Has a medi-witch been to see you? You know, a healer?"

Malfoy shook his head. "You should be looked at immediately. We don't know what's been done to you or how. Maybe there's some way to help you remember, to help you speak again. Then you could tell me... why you saved me. Then you could tell me why I so badly need to know." Harry leaned back against the wall, and looked up. "I'm not who you knew in school, Malfoy. And I think it goes without saying that you're not who I recall either.

"Do you remember Hogwarts? No, I don't suppose you do. It's still the most amazing place I've ever been. The students there are separated into four houses. I was in Gryffindor and you... you were in Slytherin."

And so Harry talked. About anything and everything. About Hogwarts and Quidditch and Hogsmeade. About his first trip to Diagon Alley, where he met the very first wizard his own age. A pale boy in a robe shop, eager to start the new year. Harry neglected to mention the specific contents to their conversation. He didn't see the point. The pair of them had never shared a single pleasant moment, so Harry never mentioned any of their other interactions either. It seemed wrong somehow to remind Malfoy of flaws he could no longer remember possessing.

Harry still wasn't sure what to make of this new Malfoy. He was quiet, of course; no one had heard him speak since he was first brought into custody. He was also expressive in a way that the old Malfoy had never been. The Veela's eyes shimmered with feeling and interest in everything Harry had to say. He even smiled, though his smiles were usually tinged with a sadness Harry could never quite identify. Despite the few details trickling down through the Ministry regarding his involvement in Voldemort's cause, Malfoy's past remained a mystery to Harry as much as it was to himself.

Harry returned to see Malfoy again. And again, until he was using up his lunch break every day to meet with the young man. Some days he spent talking about his friends, confiding in the Veela how he suspected Ron was in love with their bushy-haired friend, but too amusingly chicken to do anything about it. Other days, he talked about Voldemort. About what killing him had done to Harry. How the thing that scared him the most was the fact that he didn't feel more guilty about taking the lives that he had.

Harry never talked about Sirius or Bellatrix. And he certainly never mentioned Narcissa Malfoy. As word came through from the Aurors interrogating Lucius Malfoy, the details of her death quickly spread. Harry wished he had never heard about it. According to the elder Malfoy, the remains of his wife's body had been buried in pieces. No, Harry never mentioned any of Draco's relatives. Even if the blond didn't remember any of them, it was still too weird.

Malfoy appeared to anticipate his arrival at times, waiting at the front of his cage for Harry to come. His eyes lit up at the sound of Harry's voice and, when it came time for Harry to leave, the Veela's countenance would collapse in on itself as he pushed his head forward as far as the bars would allow, watching the green-eyed Auror go. Every day, Malfoy seemed to get both better and worse. He was increasingly responsive to Harry's presence, but as a consequence he seemed all the more devastated by his absence.

Somewhere around his eleventh visit, Harry came into the room only to find Malfoy unconscious on the floor with Snape standing over him. "What the hell is going on?!"

Snape spared him an irritated look. "Mr. Potter. What a surprise."

"What did you do to him? Tell me now or I'll call the guards."

Snape very nearly rolled his eyes. "I'm taking a blood sample from Mr. Malfoy for the new anti-toxin I'm developing. I can't very well do that while he's awake, can I?"

Harry relaxed a little. "I could have gotten you the sample. There was no need to knock him out."

"Really. And what makes you think this creature would allow you to do such a thing?"

"I... I visit him sometimes. A lot, actually. He's familiar with me. He... trusts me."

Snape raised a curious eyebrow at that. "I won't ask what you think you're doing by fostering a... relationship with Mr. Malfoy. You're a Gryffindor; any reasons you have are not likely to be either good or logical. However, I feel compelled to warn you that he is not a human being like you or I. He cannot be controlled. It is questionable how much of his mind even remains."

Harry shook his head defiantly. "He understands every word I've said."

"I see. And does he understand why he is behind these bars? What he has done in Voldemort's name?" Harry flinched and faltered. "Lucius Malfoy has been telling Aurors what an efficient killing machine his son was. Or should I say, *is*."

"Forgive me if I don't believe a single word that man has to say."

"Understandable. However, he will be under Veritaserum at his trial. He will not be able to lie then."

"Draco is not his father," Harry insisted stubbornly.

"No," Snape agreed, walking out of the cage and locking the door behind him. "He's much, much worse."

Snape's robes snapped behind him as he turned and left the room. Harry found himself crouching in front of Malfoy's cell, hands wrapped around the bars, waiting for the blond to wake up. When he did, it was not with the slow, confused recovery that marked most victims of the *Stupefy* curse. Malfoy's awareness came immediately and his reaction to Harry's presence was electric. For the first time since his incarceration, Draco was within touching distance of Harry.

Malfoy's hands darted out at lightning speed, grasping Harry by the front of his robes and pulling him forward until his glasses clanged against the metal between them. Harry struggled to get away, but the Veela proved impossibly strong. Reaching for his wand, Harry halted abruptly at the feeling of a hand in his hair. Eyes widening, he stared at Malfoy. The Veela wasn't looking at him, however; he was looking *all over* him. At Harry's neck, Harry's chin, Harry's scar. The hand in his hair caressed him gently.

A galvanic reverberation passed through Harry's body at the touch and he wondered distantly if he really were so immune to the Veela's charms after all. The charge did not inspire any lust in him, but he did feel an overwhelming buzzing sensation flood his body from the roots of his hair to the tips of his toes. The blond's attention fell rapt on him and he appeared more content than Harry had ever seen him. He seemed almost *happy*.

Taking advantage of Malfoy's relaxed grip, Harry yanked himself away, scrambling back into the wall behind him. His hand flew to his neck, where Malfoy's touch had quickened his pulse to an exaggerated beat. The Veela himself looked positively desolate at losing contact with Harry, arms falling limp to his sides, head leaning heavily against the bars that kept them apart. Eyes slipping closed, a burdened sigh escaped his lips. The Veela seemed so tired suddenly. So tired and so hopeless.

Harry shot to his feet and ran out of the room. He didn't tell anyone what had transpired. He lay awake all night thinking about it, thinking about Malfoy, until his lids grew too heavy and he succumbed to the weight of his own ruminations. In the morning, he woke with more questions on his mind than answers. It took him three hours to decide whether or not to visit Malfoy again. When he did, he found Malfoy waiting for him in his cell as if Harry had never even left.

This time, it was Harry who reached out his hand.

### Chapter Three

Lucius Malfoy's trial lasted longer than that of any other. As the highest ranking Death Eater still alive, it came as little surprise to anyone. The man was proud and mighty, even as he sat upon the witness stand in defense of himself. Never once did he falter as he was examined and cross-examined by both his lawyer and the prosecution. Even wearing the rather drab clothes marking a prisoner of Azkaban, Malfoy managed to look dignified and haughty.

Harry sat in on the trial every day, but it wasn't until the third day's cross-examination that he truly became interested in the words of the defendant. Minister of Justice, Arthur Weasley, stood strong and steady in front of Malfoy as he questioned him. "Voldemort manipulated magical creatures to serve his purposes, did he not?"

"Yes," came the tight response.

"What types of creatures were you personally involved in commanding?"

"Vampires, Red Caps, Banshees, Veela. We attempted to use werewolves but they proved too unpredictable and often attacked our own ranks."

"Yet you managed to tame Veela."

"We didn't *tame* Veela. We developed serums to suppress their will when necessary so that they could be used against the enemy. Those of us who had contact with them ingested an anti-toxin to ward off their allure."

"You developed an anti-toxin specifically for male Veela, is that correct? An anti-toxin the other side did not have in their possession."

"They were not aware that we had a male Veela in custody. We did not introduce him to battle until the one in which he was captured."

"Yes, your son. Draco Malfoy, correct?"

"Yes."

"And how is it young Mr. Malfoy came to be such a powerful Veela?"

"My late wife carried the Veela gene. Draco is -- was -- one-eighth Veela. That was enough for the Dark Lord's potion masters to... activate."

"As I understand it, your son is little more than an animal now, right?"

"I object," Malfoy's attorney stood.

"I apologize," Arthur interjected quickly. "Let me rephrase that. Mr. Malfoy, if you could describe your son's current state of mind, please."

Malfoy gritted his teeth under the weight of the Veritaserum in his veins. "My son has no state of mind. He is a Dark Creature. His genetics have been purified to the point where he no longer resembles a common wizard. Male Veela do not naturally display the same characteristics as females beyond their appearance, but Veela traits can be brought out of them with the proper... coercion. Such creatures are extremely rare and highly coveted. We knew the opposing forces would have no defense prepared and, subsequently, would fall to his feet in submission."

"What happened?"

"I don't know," Malfoy admitted. "Something obviously went wrong. He stopped responding to direct commands. Veela are extraordinarily hard to control, but never before had he so deliberately ignored a direct order. He even seemed to... to *defend* Potter."

"From you."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I could not say. Draco stopped speaking whole words months ago, but you're welcome to ask him."

Harry gripped his nails into his palms until they ached. Remus sat calmly beside him, a comforting arm around his shoulders. Harry barely even heard the rest of Lucius Malfoy's testimony, he was so furious. How could a father *do* such a thing to his own son? The idea was unthinkable to Harry. And Draco *idolized* the man, everyone had known that right up until Draco had disappeared from public sight.

The following week after the trial was Draco Malfoy's arraignment. The being in question was seen as unfit to attend the proceedings, a bitter irony as that was precisely the issue to be decided concerning his trial. Harry found himself on the witness stand this time, keeping his gaze focused on the friendly face of Arthur Weasley so as not to get too unnerved by all the unwelcome attention inevitable with his position.

"Could you explain to the court exactly what happened the moment you came upon the younger Mr. Malfoy, please, Mr. Potter?"

Arthur smiled and Harry tremulously smiled back. With deliberate precision, Harry described the events of that night, from saving Ron from Malfoy to the final moments of Voldemort. The courtroom sat still and silent as Harry spoke, hanging on every word he said. The official version of what had taken place had already been released to the press, of course, and most of the members of the court were aware of what had happened even before that, but it was quite another thing to hear the tale from the mouth of The Boy Who Lived himself.

"Given the state of mind Mr. Malfoy appeared to be in, do you see him fit to stand trial?"

"I... yes."

"Why?"

"He... he responded to me. When I spoke to him, he listened. There was understanding in his eyes."

"Why do you think Mr. Malfoy would choose to listen to you?"

"I don't know, sir. But I clearly saw awareness on his part. To imprison him without a trial would be unjust."

"You do realize, Mr. Potter, the extent to the genetic damage that was inflicted upon Mr. Malfoy. He cannot be released into society. He is a dangerous entity."

"I understand that."

"And yet, you believe he can be responsive and communicative enough to present a case on his own behalf."

"I think if the facts are examined as to his involvement in Voldemort's cause, then there would be reason enough to decide that Azkaban is not the proper place for him."

"In other words, you believe he is not a criminal."

"I believe," Harry stated carefully, "that as evil is done, so it can be undone."

"You believe the human part of Mr. Malfoy can be reached."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I... I have communicated with him since then."

Gasps echoed through the courtroom. "You have visited him in prison?"

"Yes, sir."

"His guards indicate he is unresponsive and mute. Is that how you typically find him to be?"

"No, sir. He does not speak, that much is true, but he is very receptive to my presence."

"How so?"

Harry paused, thinking. "He seems to know when I'm coming before I enter the room. He stands at the cell gate as though he expects me to let him out. When he realizes that I'm not moving to unlock the door, he reaches out for me from inside his cell."

"Do you let him touch you?"

Harry shifted in his seat. The question sounded so lascivious. "Not at first I didn't, no."

"But you do now."

"I... it was an accident. The first time. I got too close to the cell and he grabbed my robes."

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, sir. He did pull me to the bars, but once I was there all he did was..."

"Was what?"

Harry blushed and looked down at the floor, mumbling.

"Excuse me?"

"Pet me," Harry spoke louder, utterly humiliated.

Titters resounded throughout the courtroom until the magistrate struck his gavel and put a stop to it. "Could you expand on that, Mr. Potter?"

Harry could feel the heat in his face and neck. "He just likes to touch me, okay? I don't know why."

"And you let him. Why?"

"Because... because when he touches me, it feels like an electric current jolting through my body. I can't move. I have no inclination to move."

"It feels good."

Harry closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. "I suppose so, yes."

"Did it not occur to you that he is a Veela and could easily subdue you with his charms?"

"His powers don't work on me. At least, I don't think they do. They didn't on the battlefield, and even now I feel no desire to jump him or anything."

"Have you ever touched him in return?"

"Yes. Just his hair a few times."

"Why?"

"He is most responsive when I touch him. He'll look me in the eye and I just know he's trying to tell me something. Last time I touched his hair, he..."

"He what?"

"He *cried*."

"Why do you visit him, Mr. Potter? Why testify on his behalf when he is a known accomplice to Lord Voldemort?"

"He saved my life, sir. I don't know what he may or may not be guilty of, but I think he deserves the same treatment as everyone else."

"Thank you, Mr. Potter."

Gratefully, Harry slunk off the witness stand and returned to his seat next to Remus, hoping never to have to go through that experience again. Snape ascended the stand after him and -- between his testimony and Harry's -- the magistrate deemed Malfoy fit to stand trial, setting it for the following week. In the meantime, Lucius Malfoy was sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban. As the Dementors had been destroyed during the war, the Kiss was no longer an option and the wizarding community had long since abolished the death penalty.

Harry was a wreck for the entire week preceding Draco Malfoy's trial. He visited him every day, striving to express to him what lay ahead, both his trial and the potential sentence. If the court determined Malfoy to indeed be a Dark Creature rather than a Dark Wizard, wizarding law stated that he could be executed. It was the same law that almost took Buckbeak's life, ironically. Harry tried to explain everything he could to Malfoy, but the Veela never seemed to quite grasp what was happening beyond his cage.

The day of Malfoy's trial, the courtroom was packed. Mercifully, the magistrate had banned the media from the room, declaring that his court was not a 'freak show.' But every witch or wizard who could manage entry came to see the

spectacle that was Draco Malfoy. Many in the room had never before been so close to a Veela. Even fewer had ever seen an active *male* Veela. People everywhere seemed determined to catch a glimpse of this aberrant beast created by Voldemort and subsequently defended by the famous Harry Potter.

The minute three guards brought Malfoy chained into the courtroom, Harry knew he had been sedated. Not only was he calm and complacent, but few in the courtroom reacted to the pronounced presence of a male Veela. Malfoy's wings remained retracted into his back, and there was no sign of his talons or fangs. His hair fell in front of his face in a tangled mess as his head hung low. No one had dared come near the Veela with a pair of scissors.

Unlike his father, Malfoy did not have his own attorney. Arthur Weasley was meant to act as more of a moderator than a prosecutor in this special case. While the Malfoys and the Weasleys had openly feuded for generations, Arthur Weasley was widely respected as a fair and just man, and no one questioned the magistrate's decision to allow this unconventional measure. A wizard had not been tried as a potential Dark Creature since werewolves were determined a danger to the community centuries earlier.

Malfoy's escorts guided him to the witness stand where he sat down placidly, never raising his head in recognition of his surroundings. Arthur approached him cautiously, clearing his throat. "Mr. Malfoy. Mr. Draco Malfoy, my name is Arthur Weasley and I am here to ask you some questions. Can you understand what I am saying to you?"

No response was forthcoming. "Mr. Malfoy," the Minister continued. "Do you understand that you are currently on trial for crimes committed during The Second Great War?"

Still nothing. Arthur decided to switch tactics. "It is my understanding that Mr. Potter has explained to you several times what would take place here today, as well as what is at stake." Malfoy's head lifted slightly, enough for Arthur to take note of the reaction. "Do you recognize Mr. Potter in this courtroom today? Can you point out Harry Potter?"

At the sound of Harry's name, Malfoy's head shot up, eyes darting around wildly. The expression on his face softened as his eyes rested on Harry, sitting in the front row between the werewolf and the youngest Weasley son. Malfoy opened his mouth to speak but made no sound. "The court is aware that you have trouble speaking, Mr. Malfoy, but do you think you could point out Mr. Potter?"

Malfoy's eyes shone, mouth working soundlessly, as he stared at Harry. The Veela became frustrated and furious all at once, arm twitching in his lap but refusing to move. He cocked his head at Harry in silent plea. On impulse, the Auror shot to his feet, feeling every pair of eyes in the courtroom switching to his figure. Arthur turned as well, looking expectantly at Harry to do something. The green-eyed wizard colored under the sudden swell of attention, but kept his eyes trained on the blond. "Malfoy," he spoke, the deep tones of his voice reverberating loudly. "Do you know Harry Potter?"

Malfoy nodded. "Point him out," Harry ordered. Malfoy's arm raised instantly, aiming straight at Harry's chest. Murmurs arose from the audience.

The magistrate banged his gavel. "Mr. Potter, what is the meaning of this?"

"He, umm... he does what I tell him to do. Sir."

"And when, pray tell, were you going to enlighten the court as to this information?" Harry fidgeted, feeling stupid. "Perhaps," the magistrate continued, "it would be more prudent for Mr. Potter to examine the defendant, as he seems to be the only one to whom Mr. Malfoy will respond."

"*What?*" Harry gaped.

Arthur took him by the elbow, eliciting a growl from the defendant that neither missed, and guided Harry through the small gate onto the courtroom floor. "It'll be alright, Harry. Here's the list of questions I've prepared. Stick to them and you should be fine."

Harry suddenly found himself thrust in front of a very agitated Veela. "Umm... Malfoy, how long have you known you were part-Veela?" Malfoy kept his eyes fixed on his, saying nothing. Harry tried another question. "When did your Veela powers first manifest themselves?" No response. "Speak," Harry attempted to command. Malfoy's eyes watered as he scrubbed his face with dirty hands.

Harry looked plaintively at the magistrate. "It won't work, he can't speak."

"Let's see if we can't get through the yes-or-no questions first, Mr. Potter."

"Oh, yes, of course. Draco, for as far back as you can remember, have you always known you were part-Veela?" A nod answered him in the affirmative. Good, Harry smiled, they were getting somewhere. "Were you a willing follower of Voldemort?" A thoughtful pause followed, and then a hesitant nod. Harry frowned. "Did you ever kill at Voldemort's behest?" Another nod. "In battle?" Draco shook his head.

"In the final battle, did you attack Ron Weasley with intent to kill?" Yes. "By Voldemort's orders?" Yes. "Both Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy ordered you to attack known Aurors, is that correct?" Yes. "Did you mean to obey?" Yes. Harry blinked. "But you didn't attack, err... me or Ron. Why not?" Malfoy looked frustrated. "Sorry, that wasn't a yes-or-no question."

"Let's try again. When you saw me, did you still want to attack me?" No. "Do you want to attack me now?" No. "Do you still want to attack Ron Weasley?" No. "Professor Severus Snape?" No. "Professor Minerva McGonagall?" No. "Lucius Malfoy?" Harry tried. YES, came the adamant nod. "Lucius Malfoy," Harry repeated, pleased to be getting somewhere. "Because he hurt you?" No.

Malfoy reached out his hand. "Do not touch the defendant," the magistrate ordered.

Harry eyed Malfoy's hand, speculatively. "It'll be okay," he said, almost to himself. "He won't hurt me."

For the first time, their skin made contact as Harry took hold of Malfoy's hand, feeling the familiar jolt run up his arm. This time, however, it was accompanied by a distant voice. *Harry?*

"I can hear him!" Harry exclaimed. "I can hear him in my head."

The audience erupted into loud whispers, inciting the judge to strike his gavel yet again. "Please explain, Mr. Potter."

"Draco," Harry started, excitedly. "Why do you want to hurt Lucius Malfoy?"

*He tried to hurt you.*

"Because he tried to hurt me," Harry echoed aloud, confused. "I don't understand, I thought you were ordered to kill me. You indicated that you intended to kill me."

*That was before*, Malfoy mouthed, as Harry parroted the words out loud.

"Before what?"

*Before I saw you. Before I smelled you.*

Harry blinked and omitted repeating the last part. "Draco, what did you feel when you saw me?"

*Calm. Release. Happiness. Love.*

Harry yanked his hand away as he heard the final word, alarmed. Frowning, Malfoy held his hand out and reached to take it back. "What did he say, Mr. Potter?" the magistrate wanted to know.

"He said he..."

Tentatively, Harry took the proffered hand in his again. *Draco?* he tried, forming the words in his mind. *Can you hear me?*

Yes.

*You... love me?*

Yes.

*Why?*

*You are my match.*

"Mr. Potter!" the magistrate boomed. Harry jerked, realizing that to everyone present it appeared as though he and Malfoy were doing nothing more than holding hands and staring into each other's eyes. "What did he say?"

"He said I am his match," Harry whispered, uncomprehending.

His voice carried just far enough to be heard in the front row and, from there, the news spread quickly to the back, sending the courtroom into an uproar. The magistrate banged his gavel, but to no avail. "Recess!" he roared.

"I don't understand," Harry was saying, looking into Malfoy's naked gaze. "What does that mean?"

Abruptly, the pair were wrenched apart. Malfoy began to struggle and was immediately Stupefied. Harry wrestled against the arms that held him back. "Wait! What are you doing to him? Would someone please explain to me what is going on?!"

"Not here, Potter," he heard Snape growl behind him.

"Malfoy!" Harry yelled, but the Veela hung unconscious between two guards as they drug him out a side door. That was the last thing Harry saw before a softly whispered spell hit him and he tired, abruptly falling completely asleep.

## Chapter Four

Consciousness returning, Harry groggily pulled himself up into a sitting position from where he lay, recognizing his surroundings immediately as those of his home at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. The only thing out of place was Dumbledore, who sat in a chair at his bedside watching him with a twinkle in his eye. "Harry," he greeted.

Harry swallowed and ran a hand back through his eternally messy hair. "What happened?"

"What is the last thing you remember?"

"The trial," he answered after a pause. "Malfoy. He said--"

"Yes, I myself was not present at the trial, but Severus has filled me in on the details."

"Malfoy said that I'm his match. Then everybody panicked."

"Quite a stir, indeed. I am sorry you two were separated in such a disconcerting manner, but the court feared for your safety. Matched Veela can be... unpredictable."

"But what does that even mean?"

Dumbledore reached in his robes for a tin of hard candy, offering one to Harry who declined. "What do you know about Veela, Harry?"

"Just what was taught in school. They're powerful, bird-like creatures with the ability to seduce you to do their bidding."

"Hmm. You said you were immune to Mr. Malfoy's charms, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you never wonder why that was?"

"Well, sort of. I mean, I thought maybe Veela power was an extension of the Imperius Curse in which case I would be able to throw it off."

"Yet Mr. Malfoy is not the first Veela to have crossed your path, is he?"

"No, sir."

"Did the last Veela... affect you?"

"Yes," Harry said, thoughtfully. "At first."

"Hmm," Dumbledore repeated. "Well, you're not wrong, Harry. Veela charms are related to the Imperius Curse, just not in the way you're thinking."

"Please explain, sir."

"Veela mate for life. They can recognize their mate by scent, sight, or touch."

*I saw you... I smelled you...*

"A Veela mate can be witch or wizard, muggle or pureblood, male or female. It matters not. The match is one between two twin spirits. Heart halves, if you will."

*You are my match.*

"Wait," Harry stuck out his hand. "Wait, just a minute. Are you saying that he... that Malfoy and I are..."

"Match, mate, companion, twinstar. These are all words used in connection with the intense bond between a Veela and her -- well, in this case, *his* -- intended."

"And that's me?"

"Harry, please understand. You are not obligated to Mr. Malfoy in any way. You can choose never to see him again. You have the option of loving whomever you please."

"But what will happen to him?"

Dumbledore smiled at Harry's inherent selflessness, before growing serious. "I'm afraid it is not so simple for him. Mr. Malfoy will never love another. He did not choose to love you and he cannot choose not to. Most Veela who experience unrequited love fall into a deep depression and never recover. They live half-lives. Mr. Malfoy, in his current state, would most likely go mad. If he is not half-mad already. He will die, Harry."

Harry's heart nearly thudded to a stop in his chest. "There must be something that can be done. Some... middle ground. I mean, I... I don't want to marry the guy. I don't even *know* him, and when I *did* he hated me. But there must be something I can do. I've been working with him lately. In prison. I think his mind is beginning to come back from whatever dark place it's been confined in. He responds to me, he *reacts* to me."

"He reacts to you because you are his mate. He will do whatever you -- and only you -- command him to do. To the best of his abilities, at any rate."

"So that's how it's like the Imperius Curse," Harry concluded with dawning horror. "Only I have *him* under the spell, not the other way around."

"Exactly."

"Isn't there any way to break the spell?"

"Only when love is returned and affection reached on equal ground will Mr. Malfoy be free from your control."

Harry collapsed his head into his hands. "Well, seeing as how *that's* not likely to happen anytime soon, do we have any other alternatives?"

"I am sorry that you are burdened with this, Harry. You have been through enough already."

"You're sorry for *me*? Draco has his mind raped by his own father, his body altered, his will destroyed. Now he's in prison and the only person who can save him from a brief lifetime of pain and misery is *me*! Who he *hates*!"

"He doesn't hate you, Harry. He probably never really did."

"Why didn't this ever come up in school?" Harry groaned.

"The... person whom Mr. Malfoy has become was never meant to be. His wasn't a natural development."

"In the middle of sixth year," Harry thought back. "He just... disappeared. But he was never seen at any of the Death Eater meetings by Snape, nor at any of the raids or battles by the Order." Harry considered something else. "He said he killed people for Voldemort. Is that enough to convict him?"

"Yes, Harry. By his own admission, Mr. Malfoy is a Death Eater. I do not know the circumstances under which he killed, but the killings themselves would be enough to sentence him to Azkaban. If not..."

"...execution," Harry finished.

"Yes."

"But Lucius Malfoy himself admitted that Draco's will had been impaired!"

"Lucius Malfoy stated that he was aware *some* Veela were given such a serum, but he never witnessed it. He cannot attest to whether Draco was among those Veela or not."

"Professor, Draco *saved* my *life*. Surely that's worth something."

"It can be, Harry. That all depends on you."

"What do you mean?"

"Veela are allowed to kill by law under one circumstance. To protect their mate. If the courts believe everything Mr. Malfoy ever did was to get back to you, to keep you safe, then his crimes will be excused. In order to convince the Ministry of this, you would have to testify to coming into contact with him at an earlier date than you actually did."

"Either way, I have blood on my hands," Harry sighed. "If I testify on Draco's behalf, I have the deaths of everyone he ever killed on my head. If I don't... then I have Draco's. I don't know what to do."

"I don't know if this will help you come to a decision, Harry, but it is my belief that Mr. Malfoy's instincts were being compelled to kill. That he had little choice in the matter."

"You've seen him," Harry deduced.

"I have."

"Do you think he could still kill?"

Dumbledore looked thoughtful for a moment. "For Mr. Malfoy right now, there are two types of people. Those who are friendly to his mate, and those who are not. He will viciously protect the one, and viciously defend you against the other. You will have the power to control his actions, but make no mistake. To help him would be no small undertaking. He is completely dependent on you right now. Emotionally, psychically, physically--"

"Physically?"

"He will require touch, Harry. He will never force himself upon you, or do anything else that might hurt you, but -- now that the bond has been initiated -- he cannot abstain from contact with you for long without becoming sick. This need will abate with time, but in the beginning it can be quite demanding."

"But a simple touch will do, won't it? I mean, I wouldn't have to..."

"A simple touch will do," Dumbledore assured. "Small touches here and there when you can afford them should suffice. He will be grateful for whatever attention you give him."

"You make him sound like a puppy."

Dumbledore cleared his throat, uncomfortably. "To be honest with you, Harry, I do not know how much of the human in Mr. Malfoy is left. I know you spoke to him in your head, but he may never grow beyond that. He may never speak again, nor desire anything independent of a world with you in it."

Harry's expression fell desolate. "No. I won't believe that. The way he looks at me, the way he... touches me. There's someone in there. Someone more than the Veela. If I can just bring that out of him, maybe... maybe he can go on to live a normal life. A life of his own."

Dumbledore refrained from saying anything that might dampen Harry's faith. "Once the charges are cleared, he will come to live with you here at Grimmauld Place. You can give him a separate bedroom and see him only at mealtimes, if you so desire. That is up to you. Or you may choose to continue your instruction, help him become as human as he possibly can. Be aware that the Ministry is unlikely to allow him a wand. Beyond what powers he possesses inherently as a Veela, any magic on his part may be considered a breach of his parole. That will be up to the judge."

"What about wandless magic? I've become much better at it lately, maybe I could coach him a little. Just simple domestic spells, of course."

"I cannot endorse anything that contradicts the magistrate's final ruling, Harry. That said, I believe the more Draco is submerged in the way of life he was accustomed to before, the better his chances are of recovering the self he has since forgotten." He leaned forward, winking conspiratorially. "What the Ministry doesn't know..."

"God, I can't-- I can't *do* this. I'm just one guy, I have no idea how to take care of someone so brutally scarred. Even if I *were* allowed to teach him basic spells using wandless magic, *Malfoy can't speak*. How do I work with that? I just don't think I'm qualified to--"

"Breathe, Harry. Calm down. Let me first reassure that you are the *most* qualified person for this position. If you recall, he is not currently responding to anyone else. More than that, Harry, I have trust in you. You have carried great burdens in your lifetime and prevailed through them all. It is possible this effort may prove to be less the hardship you anticipate and more a rewarding endeavor."

"Professor, this is someone's *life* at stake here. *His* life. I can't go into this looking for my own reward. This isn't about what I might get out of it, this is entirely about what's in Draco's best interest."

"And your concern for that is yet another reason why the assistance he requires would best come from you."

Harry sat silently ruminating. Running over every conceivable consequence of his decision. Whatever he ultimately chose, Harry decided, he needed to be completely sure. There was no room for half-hearted regrets where someone's livelihood was concerned. Trembling with uncertainty, Harry whispered, "And if I can't help him?"

"Take it slowly," Dumbledore suggested. "Some days will be better than others."

"He won't hurt my friends, will he? Should they come to visit?"

"As I said, he will not attack anyone unprovoked. But should a situation arise, you can always tell him to stand down. He will listen to you. I must also tell you that wards will have to be placed around your house alerting the Ministry

should he try to leave the property. Mr. Malfoy will essentially be under house arrest until he is no longer perceived to be a threat. He cannot leave Grimmauld Place, even with you, or the Ministry will rule that an escape attempt on the part of a Dark Creature."

"So, basically, I'll be under house arrest too."

"Not necessarily. You can tell him to wait patiently for your return and he will obey. He may seem like a puppy at first, but I promise he will not chew on your furniture."

Harry snorted at that, feeling his previous insecurities vanish in the wake of a sudden, overwhelming confidence.  
"Okay. I'll do it. I can't *not* do it."

"It pleases me to hear the conviction in your voice, Harry. I will, of course, help you in any way I can."

Harry smiled to himself, already at ease with his own determination. "I guess there's only one more thing to decide then."

"And that would be?"

"Who's going to tell Ron."

## Chapter Five

"I can't *believe* you're going through with this!"

"Ron, for the last time, Dumbledore and I came to this decision together and we believe it is the right one. There is no reason for you to be here."

"The hell there isn't! He could be here any minute, tearing you limb from limb with his razor-sharp claws! I want to be ready to hex him into next century if he tries!"

"He won't hurt me, Ron. And as much as I appreciate your sentiment, I am capable of taking care of myself."

Ron looked slightly abashed. "Well, of course you are, Harry. I just meant, you know, friends should have each other's backs and stuff."

"Is that why you didn't want Hermione to come?"

"Are you crazy? Like I'm letting her anywhere near that gorgeous Veela!" Harry snickered. "Oh Merlin, I did it again! I called Malfoy gorgeous!"

"That reminds me, did you take your anti-toxin before coming here?"

"Yes."

"The one for males?"

"Yes, Harry, I'm not stupid."

"I know you're not."

"Hermione gave it to me and everything," Ron grumbled.

Harry smothered a grin. Before he could respond, a loud knocking sounded from the front door. Nervously, the pair moved to open the door for their guests. Two large Aurors held a handcuffed Malfoy between them. The Veela appeared to be subdued, head down in a restrained position. "I appreciate your assistance. You may release him," Harry instructed.

Draco's head jerked up at the sound of Harry's voice, a huge grin spreading across his face. Harry found himself smiling back. The Aurors glanced at each other, hesitantly banishing his binds and letting the blond go. Everyone waited with baited breath for Draco to make a move, but he didn't budge, simply stood still, staring at Harry. Shrugging, one of the Aurors said, "He's all yours," before they both Disapparated from the house.

The minute they were gone, Draco lunged forward and wrapped Harry up in his arms. The shorter man struggled within the strong embrace. "Draco, let me go!"

Immediately, the Veela drew back and stood at a more appropriate distance away from Harry, looking at him expectantly. Harry took a moment to catch his breath and glanced at Ron, who had his wand drawn and aimed at an oblivious Malfoy. "How did you *do* that, Harry?"

"I told you, he does whatever I tell him to."

"Make him do something funny. Like dance in a circle on one foot."

"I will not! Ron!"

"Oh, come on. How many times during school would we have died to get Malfoy in this situation?"

"This isn't funny, Ron. He can't control himself. How would you like being under Imperius twenty-four hours a day?"

"Yeah, alright." Cupping his hand around his mouth, Ron yelled, "Sorry about your brain, Malfoy!"

Harry spared his friend a glare. "Honestly, Ron, he's not deaf. He hears and understands everything we say."

"Everything? So... do you think when you get him back to normal, he'll still be mad about that dancing in a circle bit?"

Harry rolled his eyes and reached a hand out to Draco, who clasped it at once. *I'm sorry about Ron*, Harry thought at him. *He means well.*

Draco smiled. *He doesn't bother me.*

Harry smiled in return. *I'm glad.*

"Hey, I know you guys are thinking about me!" Ron protested.

"Are you hungry?" Harry asked aloud. Draco nodded. "For anything in particular?"

Draco looked a little embarrassed. *Meat.*

"Oh right. Dumbledore told me about your diet."

"What about his diet?" Ron wanted to know.

"He'll need to eat a lot of meat for awhile. The rarer the better."

"Gross," Ron made a face.

"Let's go into the kitchen and see what I can dig up."

Draco reluctantly let go of his hand and followed them into the kitchen. Ron stopped him in the doorway. "Just so you know, Malfoy, I'm here in case you get any funny ideas about hurting Harry."

Draco scowled at him, lightly touching Harry's elbow. *Does he live here too?*

Harry laughed out loud. "No, he doesn't."

"I'm right here, you know!" Ron protested.

"Well, stop antagonizing people if you don't want to be talked about."

"Hmph," Ron groused, plopping down at the kitchen table.

A wicked gleam appeared in Draco's eye as he reached out to run his hand through Ron's hair. The redhead leaned into the touch and closed his eyes contentedly, until his senses came over him. He flew out of the chair, back against the wall. "Harry! Keep your Veela away from me!"

Harry frowned thoughtfully, tossing a few frozen bangers into a pan. "I guess you'll have to tell Snape that the anti-toxin for male Veela isn't strong enough yet."

"Bloody right it isn't strong enough! Stay away from me, Malfoy!" Ron yelled, sitting down at the opposite end of the table. "I don't see what the point to all this is, obviously he's still *Malfoy*."

"He is and he isn't," Harry sighed.

"Aren't you going to scold him or anything?"

"For what?"

"For touching me!"

"What would you have me do, Ron? Spank him? I'm not his mother."

"Ugh, no! Just... send him to his room or something."

"He's hungry."

Draco nodded seriously, sitting down across from Ron and staring at him until the redhead was forced to look away, grumbling. "Stop looking at me, Malfoy. You're making the hairs on the back of my neck stand up."

Shrugging, Draco turned in his chair to watch Harry prepare his food. After a few minutes of light frying, Harry had a whole plate of various meats ready for him to eat. Placing the dish in front of Draco, Harry sat down beside him. "You could try making conversation, Ron."

"How am I supposed to make conversation with a guy who can't speak?!"

"Touch his hand, then you can hear him in your head."

"God, no!"

Draco looked at Harry and shook his head. "What, it wouldn't work?" Draco shook his head again. "It only works with me?" Harry guessed. Draco nodded. Harry looked back at Ron. "Looks like it only works with me. Sorry, Ron."

"Yeah, I'm *really* sorry I don't get to have your Veela mucking about in my head."

"Stop calling him my Veela, Ron, he's not a thing."

Draco seemed too satisfied by the food on his plate to care that they were talking about him. "He eats like one," Ron muttered. "They're called forks, Malfoy! Welcome back to the world of the civilized!"

"Ron!" Harry barked, handing Draco a fork. "Here, try this."

Draco looked at it like he had forgotten its purpose. Grabbing it in his fist, Draco speared a sausage and resumed eating. Ron made a face. "I don't get it. He can speak to you telepathically but he can't remember how to use a fork?"

Harry favored Ron with a long-suffering look. "He operates on instinct, primarily. He can speak to me because somewhere in his mind he remembers language. The fork, on the other hand... Merlin knows how Voldemort was feeding him. Probably threw chunks of meat at him through a cage."

"That's *vile*."

Harry could only nod his agreement and decided to change the subject. "So, everything all prepared for my big surprise birthday party?"

"You aren't supposed to know about that, Harry."

"Know about what?" Harry smirked.

"Yeah, well, just act like you're surprised, okay? Hey, maybe you'll actually get something new this year. Something non-sweater-shaped, perhaps?"

"I'll be excited to see Hedwig bring whatever it is."

"Hedwig? You're not coming to your own party?"

Harry shook his head. "I can't leave Draco so soon, and he can't leave the house. I've taken time off from work, you know."

"Maybe we could have the party here instead? Mum wouldn't mind."

"I don't think Draco could handle being around so many people at once. One wrong move by someone and we'd have angry, protective Veela all over the place."

"Damn. You're a right pain you are, Malfoy."

Draco looked up at Ron but otherwise showed no reaction. Harry reached out mindlessly, running his fingers over Draco's long hair. "Maybe we should give you a haircut today," he mused.

Draco's fork clattered to the plate as he leaned into Harry's hand. "Harry!" Ron barked. "You're touching him!"

"What?" Harry jumped, pulling his hand away. "God, you scared me. I'm supposed to touch him."

"Yeah, but... do you have to make him purr?"

"He was purring?"

"Yes."

Harry shrugged as though it couldn't be helped. "I guess he does that sometimes."

"Not around me, he doesn't!"

Draco pushed his empty plate away. "Do you want anything else?" Harry inquired, standing to put Draco's dish in the sink. The blond shook his head.

"Thank Merlin! Watching him eat is worse than watching Bill and Charlie fight over the wishbone!"

"Ron, really, you could be less critical."

"Since when do you care if I'm critical of Malfoy?"

"Do I really need to answer that question?"

"No, don't. I don't want to know. This is all so insane."

Draco extended a tentative finger and touched the back of Harry's hand. *Tired.*

"Of course. Ron, wait here while I take Draco up to his room."

"What? No way am I leaving him alone with you!"

"You're going to have to leave eventually, Ron, you can't stay here forever."

"Yeah, well. I'll go when I have to go."

The three walked up the stairs into the second room on the right, decorated in pleasant blues and ivories. Draco paused as he entered and sniffed the air. Reaching out, he took Harry's hand in his. *My mother spent time here.*

"You can still detect her scent?"

"Whose scent?"

"His mother's."

*She and Aunt Andromeda would visit every summer, but Aunt Bella couldn't come because she didn't get along with their cousin.*

Harry's face darkened and he wrenched his hand out of Draco's grip, not wanting to hear anymore. Draco looked pained at the inexplicable reaction. Confused, Ron glanced between the two of them, waiting for someone to move. When Draco did reach out to Harry, the dark-haired wizard pretended not to notice. Instead, he opened up the closet,

displaying a rack of robes, shirts, and trousers. "Hermione selected your new wardrobe, so you'll have her to thank the next time you see her. You're about the same size as Ron so they should fit."

Draco looked at Ron, bewildered by the sudden change in mood, but Ron could only shrug. "Everything you need should be here or in the connecting bathroom. You don't have a wand, so you won't be able to use magic to help with anything. Unless you know any wandless magic. You don't, do you?" Draco shook his head. "I didn't think so. Make yourself at home. Ron and I are going back downstairs."

Draco looked after them agonizingly as Harry and Ron left the room, shutting the door behind them. "What was that all about, Harry?" Ron wanted to know as they descended the stairs. "Did you see what you did to him? He looked like someone just gave him a dozen kittens for his birthday and then you went and drowned them all."

"It's nothing, Ron. He just... said something. Something I didn't want to hear."

"What?"

"Something about Sirius. And Bellatrix."

"Did Malfoy even know Sirius? I mean, I know they were related and all, but..."

"I don't know. But I don't ever want to hear that woman's name mentioned in this house again. This is *Sirius'* house."

"Er, not that I'm trying to stick up for the git or anything, Harry, but do you think it's possible he doesn't know she killed Sirius?"

Harry plopped down on the settee in the parlor and scowled. "I don't know. I don't really care. I just can't stand to hear that bitch's name."

"Okay, Harry, okay. Why don't we play some wizard's chess to get our minds off things."

"Yeah, alright," Harry yielded.

A few hours later, Harry finally talked Ron into going home. Still mumbling about crazed Veela, Ron left Harry with an amused grin on his face and a lighter mood. Dragging his tired feet up the stairs, Harry walked down the hall to his room and shut the door. Tugging his clothes off, Harry slipped on a pair of pyjama bottoms and fell into bed. Only when he turned his head did he notice the blond already asleep there. "Draco," he nudged. "Draco, wake up."

The Veela's eyes shot open and he flew off the bed, falling back into Harry's armoire. "Whoa, Draco, it's okay. I didn't mean to startle you."

Harry instinctually extended his arm out to comfort the frightened blond, and Draco grabbed his hand immediately. *Harry, I'm so sorry. Whatever I did, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I would never hurt you.*

Harry blinked at the sudden onslaught of apologies. "Draco, it's alright. You didn't hurt me. Something you said just reminded me of something I didn't want to remember."

*What? Tell me what it is so I won't make the same mistake again.*

"Maybe later," Harry yawned. "Draco, what are you doing in here? How did you know this was my room?"

*I'm really sorry. It just... it smelled so much like you, and you were so mad... I could sense how mad you were, and I just wanted you to not be mad at me.*

"Wait, you can sense it when I'm mad?" Draco nodded. "Then you can sense that I'm not mad now, right?" Tentatively, Draco nodded again. "Good, then you can go back to your own room and sleep there."

*It just... it smells so much like you in here. Can't I stay? I swear I won't touch you!*

Harry groaned. "It's your first night here and already you're in my bed?" Draco looked sheepish. "Alright, climb in. But you stay on your side of the bed or I'm kicking you right back out."

Draco nodded sharply, momentarily releasing Harry's hand to scramble under the covers, before grabbing it again. *Thanks, Harry.*

"Draco, I'm not going to sleep with you holding my hand." The Veela looked aggrieved. "Stretch your arm out." The blond did as he was told, rumbling happily as Harry laid the back of his hand against Draco's arm. "There. Now go to sleep."

The Veela managed to keep quiet for two whole minutes. *Harry?*

Harry opened an indolent eye. "Yes?"

*Why are you doing this?*

"Ask me some other time when I'm not so exhausted."

Draco tucked in his chin. *Harry?*

Groaning, Harry slapped the covers with his free hand. "What, Draco?"

*I love you.*

Harry choked on his own response. "... okay."

If the Veela felt distressed that Harry didn't return the sentiment, he gave no sign. Instead, Draco snuggled deeper into the sheets and promptly fell asleep. Harry, on the other hand, was suddenly and uncomfortably wide awake.

## Chapter Six

To the surprise of all who knew them, Harry and Draco managed to settle into a simple routine fairly quickly. Harry always woke up first -- Draco seemed to need more sleep -- and always the blond Veela would be in the bed next to him. It didn't start out that way. On a number of occasions, Harry could talk Draco into falling asleep in his own room. Invariably, however, the former Slytherin would sneak back into Harry's before the night was through.

Eventually, Harry resigned himself to sharing his bed on a more permanent basis. It wasn't so terrible, really. Draco kept his hands to himself, although seemed immensely relieved whenever Harry would willingly touch him. It was as though Draco walked around taut as a coiled spring all the time and only when Harry touched him could he become untangled. Harry would reach out to touch the Veela's hair, or encircle his wrist with his fingers, and Draco would be putty in his hands.

Touching Draco came to be such second nature for Harry that he began doing it even with company around. Ron never got used to it no matter how often he stopped by but he bit his tongue. Hermione, on the other hand, nearly fell out of her chair the first time she visited and saw Harry lay a hand on Draco's knee while she was talking to him. She was equally as surprised when Harry said Draco wanted to thank her for his new wardrobe.

Remus' visit had been altogether different. Draco could smell the werewolf in him immediately and wouldn't let the man come anywhere near Harry. Despite Harry's numerous assurances that Remus was harmless, Draco wouldn't release his tight grip on Harry's hand. Such an overt gesture of possessiveness on the part of the Veela unnerved Harry. Draco was becoming more and more emboldened when it came to expressing his feelings. Harry made a mental note to mention his concern to Dumbledore in his next owl.

When Dumbledore came, Draco appeared much more relaxed. While his memories of life before the war proved sketchy at best, Draco apparently retained enough knowledge to perceive the elderly man as a non-threatening entity. To Harry's increased consternation, Dumbledore didn't appear at all alarmed by the arm Draco snuck around Harry's waist or the way the former Slytherin nuzzled his face into Harry's neck right in front of him until Harry pointedly told him to cut it out so that he could have a talk in peace. Draco pouted blatantly, but obeyed nonetheless.

"He seems quite attached to you, Harry," the Headmaster commented with a glint in his eye.

Harry leveled him with a baleful look in response. As if the man should act surprised! This had all been his idea to begin with, Harry felt sure no one else could have talked him into this insane way of life. Well, Draco wasn't *that* bad. Not all the time. He quickly relearned how to play wizard's chess and Exploding Snap. He made for good company while watching old muggle movies on the telly Harry had bought during his last trip into town.

Draco, strangely enough, seemed fascinated by all things muggle. The telly was only the first thing he couldn't stop toying with. The next week, it became the microwave; the week after that, Harry's electric toothbrush. Harry's new computer was nearly Draco's undoing. The blond didn't understand the machine at all and Harry gave up trying to explain it to him. He could follow the idea that it was an apparatus on which one could read documents but Harry lost him with the entire concept of the internet.

Most of the items Harry bought -- including the proper food stock for a perpetually hungry Gryffindor and his carnivorous Slytherin flatmate -- had to be delivered to the house. The first time Harry tried leaving Draco alone ended in disaster. Despite Harry's repeated explanations that he would return shortly and Draco could bide his time trying to decipher the stereo system while he was away, the Veela was a complete and utter wreck by the time Harry returned.

Dumbledore had been right. Draco didn't chew on the furniture. Instead, he simply sat on the floor of the den, teary-eyed, with holes ripped out the back of his shirt where his wings had sprouted. Feathers littered the floor around him from so much nervous molting. It was as though Draco couldn't remember that Harry was coming back. In some ways, he was still so *Malfoy*, and yet in others he was like a child learning everything for the first time.

Then Harry came up with the perfect solution. Or what he thought was the perfect solution. Leaving Draco under Ron's wary watch, Harry dashed out long enough to buy Draco a gift. A small, furry, puppy-shaped gift. A three-month-old Belgian Shepherd. The minute Harry let the dog loose on the floor in front of Draco, it was love at first sight. The two adored one other. Draco seemed to relish the role of being the needed one for once, and Harry congratulated himself for a job well done.

That is until that night when Harry woke up to the puppy crying. Apparently, there were a lot of things about puppies that Harry had never taken into consideration. Like the fact that they needed to be taken outside at least once during the night and several times during the day. They had to be on a special diet or the messy results would be all over the floor. The puppy shed horribly all over the house and, unlike Draco, she was not above chewing on the furniture.

But she made Draco happy. Every night, the puppy slept with them on the bed, typically snuggled up to Draco who was ever trying to snuggle up to Harry. Harry could leave Draco in the house for hours at a time now thanks to the pup, who kept the Veela as happy and entertained while he was gone as Harry himself could have. Draco couldn't take her out for walks since he was confined to the house -- that, like every other responsibility, fell to Harry -- but he took such pleasure in playing with her, Draco often forgot about Harry entirely.

Harry would never admit it to anyone -- *could* never -- but the neglect left him feeling just the slightest bit bereft. Then Draco would all but tackle him upon his return home and Harry would find himself wondering what had possessed him to let the hyperactive Veela move in with him in the first place. Draco was so demandingly tactile. It was one thing when they were watching a movie together and Draco had his head in Harry's lap while the latter stroked his hair. It was quite another for Draco to sit at Harry's feet and lean against his leg possessively while Harry had company over.

Case in point, Ginny and Molly Weasley. After asking Harry to thank the older woman for bringing them a roast, Draco set about ignoring Mrs. Weasley in favor of glaring at Ginny, who shifted uncomfortably beneath the weight of his gaze. Whether that was because Draco made her nervous or lustful, Harry didn't even want to know. Snape's anti-toxin was still far from perfect and those not possessing the strongest of magical constitutions could still fall victim to Draco's appeal, particularly when he chose to exercise it.

Ginny Weasley was no exception. As Draco tightened his grip around Harry's ankle, Harry felt decidedly certain that she was squirming in her chair because Draco was glaring daggers at her. Harry tried to pacify his companion by lightly touching the top of his head, but all he received in response was a low, rumbling growl. When he reached out with his mind to ask Draco what was wrong, the Veela's answer was a discomfiting, *She wants you. I can smell it all over her.*

*Don't be ridiculous, Draco,* Harry was quick to reply. *Maybe she used to have a crush on me, when we were younger, but that was a long time ago. If she's lusting after anyone in this room, it's you.*

Draco would not be appeased. *It's not just lust,* Draco sniffed. *It's mixed in with emotion. Affection. Conflict.*

*Are you sure?* Harry looked at Ginny with a different eye.

Yes.

Harry patted the top of Draco's head. *Don't worry, all-powerful Veela*, he teased. *I'm not going anywhere. I'm stuck with you.*

Draco said nothing, but rested his head against Harry's knee. Harry declared victory and continued his chat with the two ladies opposite him. Their visit turned out not even to be the most complicated one. Ron and Hermione were virtual non-threats in Draco's eyes, as were Dumbledore and McGonagall. Snape had been an interesting visit; Draco seemed to recognize his godfather to some degree and managed to disassociate himself from Harry long enough to talk with the man (albeit through Harry).

Seamus, unfortunately, couldn't come near Grimmauld Place. A fact which Harry found more hilarious than anything else considering the fact that Seamus was as straight as a board and could in no way be a threat to Draco. Fred and George merely irritated the Veela, who took quickly to ignoring them and their antics. Neville and Dean were similarly negligible, and Luna simply unsettled the blond with her idiosyncrasies.

By far the most fascinating visit was with Tonks. Draco leapt to his feet the moment she walked in the door, reaching out to clasp her hand in his, a huge grin on his face. Tonks, of course, took it all in stride and laughed. Harry was astonished. Draco never touched *anyone* but him. Well, him and the dog. But Harry saw Draco feel something when he touched his own flesh and blood that Harry had never seen on his face before. A connection to his roots.

Harry had forgotten up until that point that other than Tonks, her mother, and Draco's imprisoned father, the blond had no family left. Everyone was dead. It made Harry feel strangely closer to Draco. Voldemort had killed Harry's parents, but with Draco's family, everything was much more complicated. His cousin Sirius had been murdered by his aunt Bellatrix, who in turn was killed by Harry, his intended companion. And his mother... Harry shuddered under the recollection of how she had died.

After Tonks' visit, Harry asked her to return some day with her mother, Draco's aunt Andromeda. The next Sunday, the pair called on Grimmauld Place, much to Draco's infinite delight who once again reached out to touch his kin. Andromeda commented that she had not seen the boy since he was small when he had been quite different. Solemn and haughty, raised to be the perfect clone of his father. Andromeda remarked aside that she liked this gentler, quieter Draco better.

There turned out to be a downside to Andromeda's visit as well: the mountain of questions it brought to the forefront of Draco's mind. His aunt came bearing memories to share, memories Draco seemed to bathe in happily. Draco even managed to relay memories of the house which he had sensed since moving in with Harry, memories that Andromeda herself had long since forgotten. Draco went to bed that night, mind occupied with newly-acquired remembrances, but even more questions on his tongue.

*Harry?*

The green-eyed wizard smiled and tugged on Draco's newly shortened locks, playfully. "Yes?"

*What happened to my mother?*

Harry blinked, the query taking him off-guard. "She died, Draco. Don't you remember?"

*No. I can barely recall her face except what it looks like in the recollections of this house. Tell me how she died.*

"No," Harry's voice was firm.

*Why not?*

"Because it will cause you pain. I don't want to see you hurt."

*Did my... did my father kill her?*

Harry looked back at him, candidly. "No, Draco."

The Veela breathed a sigh of relief, moving closer to rest his head on Harry's shoulder. The puppy squawked between them and resettled at their feet. Harry absently stroked his hand up Draco's arm. *Did you ever meet her?*

"I saw her once. Fourth year. She was very pretty." Harry honestly didn't know what else to say about Narcissa Malfoy.

*I know. So was your mother.*

Harry looked startled. "How do you know that?"

*I looked through the photo album you keep on your desk. I hope you don't mind. I was just curious. My cousin Sirius and the werewolf are in there too.*

"Do you know that Sirius was my godfather, Draco?"

*No. Did I know that in the past?*

"I don't know. He meant a lot to me, Sirius did. This was his house. He gave it to me. And not a day goes by when I don't wish he was here for me to give it back."

Draco's mind was still for some time. *I like that you loved him, Harry. It makes me feel good to know that you were loved by someone in my family. And that you cared about him too.*

"Don't forget your aunt Andromeda and your cousin," Harry reminded. "I care about them. They're good people. And I... I care about you, Draco."

Yes. His inner voice sounded resigned.

"You don't believe me?"

*You are very kind, Harry. But I know that I am here because of Dumbledore. I know that he wanted you to help me, though why I can't be sure.*

"You're wrong," Harry swore. "You're here because I want you here. Because I take pleasure in your company. I enjoy being near you. Can't that be enough?"

*Of course, Harry. Whatever you want is enough.*

Harry hated the defeated tone in Draco's voice. It was so very unlike a Malfoy. Harry never imagined in a million years he would miss it, but he wanted Draco's arrogance back. His confidence, his self-assured poise. The way he used to walk around, head held high, as though the world owed him an infinite number of favors and he had come to collect. Here I am, he seemed to say, now get out of my way because I'm coming through.

Harry was determined to get that Draco back. Even if that Draco hated him all over again. Even if it meant losing every fragile thing they had built together since reuniting. Draco had saved his life and in so doing had helped save the entire wizarding world. The least Harry could do was save him back. Maybe there was some middle ground, Harry decided, between the bold and snobbish boy of yesterday and the sweet and clingy person of today.

Harry's fingers skittered over the soft skin at Draco's throat. Warmth filled him and he found himself wondering for the millionth time if he weren't actually susceptible to Draco's charms after all. Every touch between them was a spark, every caress a lightning rod of feeling. No one else seemed to experience quite such an acute sensation when Draco touched them. He had asked. Only with Harry did the Veela exchange this charged pulse. Every time Draco came into contact with him, Harry felt as though his heart had been shocked and restarted to throb fresh, erratic beats.

Harry's lungs constricted at the thought of Draco in pain. Yet he knew that pain was inevitable if only through the questions Draco continued to press. It had been easy when all Draco wanted to know was the day on which his birthday fell -- Harry had gone to the Ministry of Birth Records for that -- or why Ron always looked at them funny when Draco needed Harry to touch him -- *He's just jealous*, Harry had insisted.

But Harry knew Draco's inquiries would only get more complicated. Questions about his mother were just the beginning. Draco somehow knew everything Lucius had done to end up in Azkaban, but couldn't recall exactly what he himself had done to earn his own imprisonment. Draco couldn't understand why he and Harry hadn't been friends in school, and Harry didn't know how to begin explaining it to him. "Because you were cruel and snotty and resented me terribly," amazingly enough sounded awful to Harry's ears. He would be damned before he'd say that to Draco.

Harry was spared the embarrassing things. For instance, Draco knew where babies came from and, according to the Veela books Harry had gotten his hands on, possessed an almost inherent knowledge of what to do with one's lover behind closed doors. Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry asked the blond one night whether he could remember preferring boys or girls in school. *What do you mean?* had been the bewildered response. *I've only ever loved you.*

Most of the time, Harry thought that even Draco recognized the falsity in that idea, but then other times he wondered. If Draco wanted to believe he had always loved Harry, who was he to take that away from him?

For a short time, Draco stopped asking questions. Harry breathed an inner sigh of relief, praying that the worst was behind him. That Draco would be content not knowing the things he couldn't remember and simply continue acquiring new information every day from his own experiences. Harry was wrong. Draco had simply stopped asking *him*. It was much later that Harry learned the blond had been cleverly slipping queries into conversations with their guests.

Draco learned quickly that Ron was not someone he could be subtle with. The redhead simply did not understand the tact. On one occasion, as Ron and Hermione were visiting, Draco took advantage of Hermione's brief departure into the kitchen with Harry to grab a pad from Harry's desk. Scribbling his words down on the paper, Draco shoved it in front of Ron's face. "Malfoy, you can write!" Ron exclaimed, genuinely impressed.

Draco tapped the paper impatiently. Ron squinted as he read the words. "How did Narcissa Malfoy die?" it read in big, blocky letters.

Ron looked up at the Veela, wide-eyed. "You don't know?"

Shaking his head furiously, Draco flipped the pad over to the next sheet and wrote some more. "Harry won't tell me."

Ron jumped to his feet. "Then I'm, uhh... pretty sure he has a good reason for that."

Draco grabbed Ron's arm sharply, indicating he wanted the truth immediately. It was only the second time Draco had ever touched Ron since attacking him and, anti-toxin or no, the youngest Weasley son nearly gave in to the blond's whims right then and there. "Uhh, Harry?" he croaked, pulling away.

The Veela became enraged, nails and fangs descending, wings pushing out from his shirt and flapping behind him. "Harry!" Ron called out again. "Look, mate," he ventured steadily. "I know you won't hurt me, so why don't you just call off the fireworks, okay? Harry's not going to like finding feathers all over his floor."

Draco stamped his foot angrily, but did not disprove the redhead's words by laying another finger on him. Harry and Hermione came skidding back into the room. "What's going on?" Harry demanded.

Draco sent him a murderous glare before throwing the pad into the fireplace and storming out of the room and up the stairs, his wings skittering along the walls behind him, knocking picture frames askew on their hangings. Harry tore after him immediately, slowing as he came upon the blond sitting at the end of their bed, head clutched in his hands, doubled over. "Draco!" Harry knelt as his feet. "Draco, what's going on?!"

Harry's presence didn't appear to register. Purposefully placing both hands on Draco's knees, ignoring the charge that instantly flooded between them, Harry tried again. "Draco, talk to me. *Please*."

*I can't remember, Harry! I can't fucking remember anything!* Harry blinked at the expletive. He'd never heard Draco swear in his mind before. *I try and I try, but nothing comes to mind! And no one will tell me anything! Why won't anyone just answer me?! I'm not some child that needs protection!*

"Of course you're not," Harry appealed.

*I think if I could just find something of hers, hold it in my hands, then the memories might come back. But everything in Malfoy Manor was sold off when my father went to prison. I somehow know that, but I can't remember my own middle name!*

"It's Vicare. Your name is Draco Vicare Malfoy."

*I have nothing of theirs, Harry! Nothing! Do you understand what that's like?*

"Yes," Harry swallowed. "I do. I have nothing of my mother's and only my father's Invisibility Cloak, a photo album, and the remembrances of an old werewolf to tell me they ever even existed. I have no memories of my parents besides my mother's scream as she died."

Draco calmed somewhat. *I just want to know how she died, Harry. I deserve to know that much.*

Harry sighed, looking into Draco's grey eyes imploringly. "Can't you trust me when I say you're better off not knowing? Don't you know by now that I'd never let anything hurt you?"

Draco's head fell defeated against Harry's shoulder, who responded by encircling Draco's waist tightly in his arms. *Harry*. The voice in his head sounded small and piteous.

"Listen," Harry mollified, stroking his back. "It'll be okay, you know? We don't have them anymore, but we have each other. We'll make our own memories."

*I don't even know who I am.*

Harry's hand wove itself protectively into the blond's soft, fine hair. "You're exactly who you're supposed to be, Draco."

He could feel the Veela's breath hitch a few times, before calming into a steadier pattern. *Thank you*, Draco exhaled, kissing the skin beneath Harry's ear.

Harry froze. Draco had never dared kiss him before. He decided to let the act slide. This time. Obviously, Draco was distraught and therefore not of his right mind. While Harry was still considering the best plan of action to deal with this latest development, Draco pulled back away from him, yelping. Swivelling around, he glared at the animal tugging on his wing with her sharp teeth. The wings retracted immediately. *See who's sleeping in the bed tonight*, he grumped.

Harry laughed, relieved that Draco mood had been alleviated, and stood. "Come on," he smiled, pulling on the blond's hands. "I think you owe Ron an apology."

Draco rose to his feet and looked down at Harry, pitifully. *Do I have to?*

"Yes, you have to," Harry chuckled. "March."

Together, Harry and Draco made their way down the stairs and back into the parlor where Ron and Hermione waited anxiously. They stood up as soon as they saw the pair come into the room. "Is everything okay, Harry?" Hermione asked, concerned.

"Everything's fine," Harry squeezed Draco's hand in his.

Draco stubbornly kept his gaze at the ceiling. *Tell Ron I'm sorry.*

Harry grinned. "He says he's sorry, Ron."

Before thinking better of it, Draco extended his hand out in Ron's direction. "Um, I accept your apology and everything, mate," Ron began. "But if it's all the same to you, I'd rather leave the touching thing to you and Harry. You kind of make my brain go in wrong directions. No offense."

Draco smirked and lowered his arm. "Oh, for heaven's sake, Ron," Hermione piped up. "He can't help that he's a Veela."

"Oh yeah? Why don't you give him a hug then, if you're so eager to be friendly?"

"No, thank you," she declined, politely. "I'm catching quite enough vibes from here."

Harry laughed, relieved, but stiffened perceptibly as Draco began nuzzling his face in Harry's thick hair. The green-eyed wizard allowed the contact, even though it embarrassed him a little for his friends to see him behave so intimately with Draco. He didn't know why exactly. He was only allowing it because the Veela needed to touch him. Nothing Harry could do about that. All the same, Harry decided, he'd rather Draco touch him only when no one else was looking.

Ron and Hermione seemed to get the idea, leaving to carry the food from the kitchen into the dining room for dinner. Harry turned to chide Draco for running off their friends, when the Veela suddenly wrapped his free arm around Harry's waist and pulled the smaller man against his chest. Harry ran his hand up Draco's arm, moments from pushing him back, when he felt another soft kiss under his jaw. "Um," Harry managed weakly.

*You smell good.*

*What do I smell like?* Harry genuinely wanted to know.

*Like autumn. Cinnamon and spiced apples. Like... new memories.*

Harry's eyes closed, involuntarily. "Draco..."

"Harry?" Hermione called from the other room. "Are you two coming to eat?"

Harry abruptly sprang apart from Draco, severing any contact between them. He looked up at the blond, aching with some sort of need he couldn't begin to define. Draco just smiled at him, sadly. Harry blinked, confused. Before he could investigate the Veela's feelings deeper, Draco walked out of the room. Only then did Harry raise his hand to his neck, feeling the heartbeat there pulsing twice as fast as normal.

Note - "Vicare" is Etruscan for "Icarus."

## Chapter Seven

"I think I've done something awful," Harry declared to the floating head in his fireplace.

"Really? And what awful thing have you done today?"

"I'm serious. I think I made a huge mistake."

"Tell me," Remus beckoned.

"I let Draco kiss me," Harry admitted in a rush. "Twice."

"I see. On the mouth?"

"No," Harry hastened to reassure. "Once on the neck, once under my chin."

"And you're worried about this... why?"

"Because I think I've opened a floodgate for Draco to think it's okay for him to... to do that now."

"And it's not," the werewolf deduced.

"No, it's not," Harry insisted.

"Hmm."

"What?"

"Have you tried discussing this with Draco?"

"No! I mean, it would... it would break his heart. I couldn't bear it," Harry looked away.

"Well, Harry, you know as well as I do that is what will happen if you, even accidentally, lead him to believe there is something between you when there is not."

"But there *is*, that's what I can't figure out. I just don't know what's real and what's... Veela."

"You know his charms can't work on you."

"Yes. Why is that again?"

"Because you are his mate. The love you are required to feel for him in order to lift the spell must be genuine. Whatever your feelings for him are, they are your feelings, Harry. He can't manipulate you in any way."

Harry rubbed the bridge of his nose beneath his glasses. "That's what I'm afraid of."

"That you may love him?"

"No. Yes. Maybe. I don't know," Harry admitted quietly.

"Would it be so terrible if you did?"

"Yes! I mean... I won't take advantage of him. He's not himself."

"Not himself?"

"He just thinks he loves me, he doesn't really. He doesn't even *like* me. And the minute... I mean, if the spell were to ever break, he'd go back to hating me and I... I couldn't stand it."

"Harry, I know you and Dumbledore have discussed this. Draco will never stop loving you."

"But he's practically under Imperius!"

"Imperius, maybe. A love spell, no. He's a Veela. And he's found his mate. He will never let you go. The only way to rid yourself of him at this point is to order him to leave you alone."

"I don't want him to leave me alone," Harry mumbled.

"Of course you don't. Harry, you can rest assured, the love he feels for you is as sincere as love can be. Your soul matched with his because you are compatible. Because you satisfy and complete one another. Every quality you would look for in another's love is there. Veela simply have a more direct way of locating their mates than muggles, or even most witches and wizards. You should consider yourself lucky, Harry."

"I do. He thinks I hung the moon. Naturally, it makes me feel good."

Remus nodded. "Where is he now?"

"Upstairs," Harry answered. "In... bed."

"It is quite late, perhaps we should continue this discussion at another time."

Harry eyed the man suspiciously. "Dumbledore knew this would happen, didn't he."

"That what would happen?" Remus returned, feigning innocence.

"That Draco and I... that we'd..."

"Ah," he smiled. "He knew you were broken, Harry. And Draco was broken. Sometimes two broken pieces fit together."

Harry shook his head, amused. "Just please tell me he's not in the habit of playing matchmaker with all his former students."

"Dumbledore had no part in this, Harry. The Fates divined your partnership."

"Yes, yes. Good night, Remus."

"Good night, Harry. Send Draco my regards."

"I will."

The floo connection closed and Harry stood up, stretching his stiff muscles. Clomping up the stairs, Harry fell into his room and scattered the floor with his clothes. Slipping on a fresh pair of pyjama bottoms, he walked into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and finished getting ready for bed. Standing in the doorway between the bedroom and the bath, Harry looked over at his blond companion.

Draco was lying on his stomach, snoring softly, one arm at his side and the other flopped carelessly over the dog. Harry smirked and shook his head. Lifting the dog out from under Draco's hold, Harry moved her to her bed on the floor, ignoring the yips of protest. She'd be asleep in an instant, he knew. Sliding under the covers, Harry took the puppy's place under Draco's arm. Trailing a hand over Draco's hair, he smiled as the blond shifted and purred beneath his touch.

Harry leaned over and brushed his lips across Draco's cheek, experimentally. The Veela came awake at once. *Harry?*

"Yes?"

*Where have you been?*

"Floo chat with Remus. He sends his best."

Draco nodded, yawning. *I'm glad you came to bed. I missed you.*

Sleepily, the blond pulled Harry into his arms. Harry collapsed against his chest, laughing. Draco seemed content to go back to sleep, so the green-eyed wizard edged a tentative thigh between the Veela's legs. Draco looked down at him, confused. *Harry?*

"Do you love me, Draco?"

Yes, he answered uncertainly. *I love you very much.*

"I'm glad. I don't want anyone else to love me but you."

*Harry...*

With a burst of Gryffindor courage, Harry rolled completely on top of the blond. Leaning down slowly, he settled his lips atop Draco's, moving softly against them. After a moment, Harry eased his tongue between Draco's pliant lips and sought refuge in his mouth. Draco came alive under his touch, wrapping his arms tightly around the man above him, rolling them until he pinned Harry to the bed. Draco scattered Harry's face with kisses, delighting in his mate's every subsequent chuckle.

*Harry, the Veela gasped. My Harry. I love you so.*

"Show me how much you love me, Draco," Harry breathed, pushing up against the warm body over his.

Draco kissed a trail down Harry's chest, pausing only to suckle a nipple in his wake. Harry moaned and writhed beneath him. Draco continued his descent down Harry's body until he reached the rim of his pyjama bottoms. Harry lifted up long enough for Draco to pull them down to his knees. Draco gently nuzzled the soft curls surrounding Harry's turgid cock, purring contentedly at the new feel of his mate in his hand as he grasped it.

Harry's hands reached down to tangle themselves in Draco's hair. As Draco swallowed him whole, Harry could swear he felt the Veela's fangs tickling either side of his prick. An expert tongue snaked out to lick the underbelly of his cock as Draco's mouth moved up and down, over and under. Tender fingers fondled his tightening balls, gliding down to caress the skin behind them, finally ending up at the puckered hole, rubbing soothingly.

Harry knew he wasn't long for this world; it had been too long since he was brought off by anyone other than himself. Jerking up against Draco one last time, Harry groaned and came, shooting hot come down his lover's eager throat. Caught in the final throws of orgasm, Harry barely felt Draco pull back from his waning erection and sink his fangs into the skin just above his hip. Draco held Harry down as he bucked, drinking down a little bit of Harry's blood to mix with the come already in his mouth.

Withdrawing, Draco licked over the wound until his saliva sealed it. Pulling Harry's pyjama bottoms back up his body, Draco crawled up until he was face-to-face with his companion. The dark-haired wizard still had his eyes shut tight and his teeth clamped down on his bottom lip. Draco licked a line up Harry's neck, stopping to teasingly bite at an earlobe. Harry wrapped his arms around his lover's back and turned to kiss the Veela deeply. *Mine*, he heard in his head.

"Mmm."

*Mine*, it repeated.

"Where did you learn...?"

Draco shook his head. *Never done that before.*

"Really? At Hogwarts, I thought maybe--"

*No, I mean... I've never done that before... with you.*

"Oh god, Draco," Harry gasped.

Reaching down between them, Harry slipped his hand inside Draco's pyjamas and wrapped his hand around the Veela's burgeoning erection. From the feel of things, Draco was ready to go. Stroking up and down, Harry mewled pleasurably as Draco rocked against him. Sucking on Harry's neck, Draco pushed into Harry's hand until he too was coming, spurting all over both his and Harry's stomachs. The blond stilled and sprawled over his body heavily. Harry ran his hand through the stickiness between them and brought his fingers to his mouth.

"Draco," he paused.

*Hmm?*

"Your... it's... *iridescent*."

*Is it?* he sounded amused.

"Is that... normal? For Veela?"

Draco nodded, content.

Harry snorted beneath him and proceeded to lick his fingers clean. "I don't think I've ever come so hard in my life."

*I'm happy I make you feel good, Harry*, the blond thought as he snuggled against him.

"You made me feel good alright. What was that last thing you did right after I lost it?"

*I bit you.*

"Oh. Wait, *what?*"

*I marked you*, Draco clarified.

Harry pushed the Veela away, tumbling him off to his side in a grumbling heap, and peered under the covers. Sure enough, right above his hipbone were two jagged teeth marks. "Will that scar?"

*Oh yes*, Draco relished, caressing the wound. Harry fell back on top of the bed, groaning. *Now everyone will know you're mine.*

"Everyone? Who's going to be looking at my naked hip?"

*Well, no one*, Draco conceded. *But should it ever happen, they'll know that you're strictly hands off.*

"Property of Draco Malfoy," Harry breathed.

*Just Draco. Your Draco.*

"My Draco," Harry echoed.

Draco crept back up Harry's body and settled in his arms. *My Harry.*

"You know, I think it's only fair that since you marked me, I get to mark you in return."

*You did mark me.*

"I did? Where?"

*Here*, Draco pointed to his chest. *Inside. It's there. You're inside me all the time.*

"Remus was right," Harry pulled strands of blond hair away from his lover's face. "I am lucky."

*Very lucky. Veela make for excellent pets.*

"I already have a pet. She's sleeping on the floor in our bedroom."

*You put Baby on the floor?!*

"She's *fine*. She's in her bed. Honestly, you'd think you loved her more than me."

*Well, it's a close call.*

Harry grabbed a pillow and smacked Draco over the head with it. "Take that back, you prat!"

*Okay, I surrender!*

Draco pinned Harry's arms back behind his head. Harry stuck his tongue out childishly. The blond above him leaned down as if to bite it, kissing Harry deeply instead. "Yes," Harry gulped when Draco let him up for air. "I can see there are definite perks to having a Veela lover."

*You'll see, Harry. I'll make it so good for you. I'll make you feel so good.*

"You already do, Draco. Every day. Don't you know that?" The blond collapsed against him, whimpering slightly. "Hey. Draco, it's okay. I'm not going anywhere."

*You don't know what this feels like. To suddenly be whole. Completed.*

"I think I might," Harry ventured.

*Please never tell me to go away, Harry, I'll die if I have to leave you.*

"I never want you to leave me. You're mine, remember? No one else's."

Yes.

"I won't give you up. Not ever."

*Harry, I adore you. I adore you so much.*

Before Harry could respond, the puppy jumped up on the bed and began licking their faces. "Argh! Baby, get off!" Draco cuddled the puppy in his arms and wrestled with her. "What kind of name is Baby anyway?"

*A perfectly good name*, Draco insisted, leaning back against Harry's shoulder.

Harry reached out to scratch the puppy's furry head. "I guess she'll have to do. Since we won't be having any of our own."

*You really don't know much about Veela, do you.*

"What?"

## Chapter Eight

Draco tugged uncomfortably on his turtleneck, frowning at his reflection in the mirror. At least it was black, he granted. Lucky for him, Hermione had the good sense to refrain from picking out any of the more unbearable hues like eggplant or ochre. Black was definitely his color. Black shirt, black trousers, black boots. He looked... handsome. "You look handsome," a voice spoke up behind him. "Now shove over, I need the mirror."

Draco scowled but stepped aside. He watched as Harry straightened the collar of his dark green silk shirt and ironed out the wrinkles with his hands. Draco placed a palm at the small of Harry's back. *I don't think you need to look that good*, he complained.

Harry laughed. "Afraid someone's going to steal me away?"

*Not funny, Harry.*

"Is the big bad Veela actually *jealous*?" Harry turned and wrapped his arms around Draco's neck. "Don't worry, if anybody tries anything, I'll just show them my new tattoo and they'll know to leave me alone."

Draco looked down at the man in his arms and grinned. Sliding his hand down Harry's body, he pressed where the bite mark would be under Harry's trousers. His lover let out a little gasp. "Draco," he whined. "Don't. Still sore."

*But sore in a good way, right?*

"Right. Sore in a good way. Every step I take I'll still be able to feel your teeth inside me."

Draco growled and reached down to grab Harry's ass, pulling him more tightly against him. Leaning down, he devoured Harry's mouth with his own, eating up Harry's every moan. *Mine*, the word reverberated across their link.

Harry pulled away, panting. "Come on. We don't want to be late."

Yes, *we do*, Draco insisted.

"No," Harry chuckled. "We don't. It's not right to be late for Hermione's birthday party. Not with all the preparations Molly's been making. Besides, aren't you excited? This is the first time you've been out of the house in two months!"

*I don't care about that. Everything I want is right here.*

"Now we can go places *together*. The Ministry's finally convinced you're not a wicked, scheming creature trying to have your sinister way with the one and only Harry Potter."

*But I am a wicked, scheming creature trying to have my sinister way with the one and only Harry Potter.*

"Come on, Draco," Harry pulled on his hand. "Crate Baby and let's go."

Draco dug in his heels. *She's not coming?*

"Of course not, you can't take a dog to a birthday party."

*I don't want to crate her. She hates that. She cries. I can't stand it.*

"She'll be fine. We'll be back home before she knows it."

*If you're sure...*

"I'm sure," Harry pecked him on the lips. "Now move it, Malfoy."

Ten minutes later, the pair Apparated together to The Burrow. Draco paused anxiously outside the door. While he had already been around most of the people inside on an individual basis, he had never been around so many at one time. The thought unnerved him. How could he protect Harry from so many potential dangers? Most of the Weasleys seemed fairly innocuous, but who knew about their guests? No, too many hazards. Had to go back home. The dog needed them.

"Draco?" Harry held on to his hand. "Draco, are you alright?"

*It's not safe for you here, Harry. We should go back home.*

Harry rolled his eyes. "That's just the Veela in you talking. Everyone here is perfectly harmless, you *know* that."

*Yeah, but what about the other people invited? They could be maniacs.*

"Don't be so melodramatic, now come on. One step at a time, that's it. The hard part's almost over."

Fred Weasley met them at the door. "Harry! Malfoy! Get in here! George is just about to show off our latest invention! Two words: insulting spatula."

"Can't wait to see it," Harry chuckled, dragging a reluctant Draco into the house.

The former Slytherin found himself assaulted by a sea of red hair and freckles. All the Weasleys looked alike to him. Fortunately, those he had met before remembered to keep their hands off Harry, and those who were new to him had been forewarned. Raucous laughter and cheery voices met them everywhere they stopped to greet. Everyone was used to Draco needing contact with Harry, no one batted so much as an eyelash at the sight of them holding hands.

There was one uneasy moment when Draco recognized a very pregnant Fleur Delacour (Fleur *Weasley*, Harry reminded himself) as one of his own. The air filled with tension as the two seemingly sized each other up. "What the--" Harry protested as he was suddenly jerked behind Draco. He peeked over his mate's shoulder to see what had gotten him so worked up. "Oh, hi, Bill! Fleur."

"Bonsoir, 'Arry. I'd love to take your hand and kiss your cheek, but you know Veela." She didn't take her eyes off of Draco. "So possessive." Draco's lip curled. Fleur leaned back against Bill, grinning. "My, ze is newborn, non? Two, maybe three years grown? 'Ow ever did you manage to collar him so soon?"

Harry could feel Draco's hand slipping from his and he gripped down on it, tightly. *She's just teasing you, Draco. Don't make a scene.*

"Ze looks a bit... comment vous dites, 'fractured'?" she continued.

Harry scowled. "Fleur, I would think you of all people could appreciate the abuse inflicted upon Veela during the war."

"Oui," she acknowledged solemnly. "Je suis désolé, vraiment." To Harry's great relief, Fleur turned to begin a conversation elsewhere, apparently satisfied with whatever she had been trying to size up in the other Veela.

Grateful for the reprieve, Harry pulled a still-grumbling Draco behind him to greet the birthday girl. "Harry! Draco! You made it!"

"Of course we made it. It's not every day you turn twenty-one. You old crone."

Hermione made a face. "Sure, laugh while you can, we all know you're right behind me. Ron! Harry and Draco are here!"

The redhead trotted over to them. "Hey, Malfoy! Broke out of jail, did you? What's it like being a free man?"

Draco smiled genuinely. *Scary.*

"Scary," Harry repeated.

"I'll bet," Ron laughed. "Well, there's food in the kitchen and pumpkin juice on the table over there, but I don't recommend it. I've seen Fred and George hovering around that area, who knows what they've done to it."

"Where do we put our gift?"

"Oh, give it to Mum. She's got a pile going somewhere."

"Hi, Harry. Malfoy," Ginny met them.

Draco tensed. Harry reached over with his free hand and lightly rubbed Draco's arm. "Hi, Ginny. Where's Lucas?"

"Couldn't come. Charlie and I are both flying solo tonight."

"Charlie's here?"

"Over there, behind you. Ogling Malfoy's arse, I think. Careful, Malfoy, Charlie has a special fondness for dragons."

*Keep the charm down, Draco,* Harry instructed.

*I already was! That guy must be really desperate or something.*

*To want you? Are you trying to say something about me?* Harry smirked.

*What? No!*

"Okay, you two are clearly doing the inner-talking thing right now, so I'm just going to go help Mum in the kitchen," Ginny smiled, departing.

*She was pleasant enough.*

*Hm. I think we should show her your new tattoo.*

Harry laughed and leaned over to kiss Draco's cheek. *There's that Veela spirit.*

Draco looked somewhat pacified by the display of affection. "Why don't you go give Ron's mum the present, while I have a word with Hermione," Harry spoke aloud.

*You can't be serious! I'm not letting you leave my sight!*

*Consider it a test. To see how long we can be apart.*

*Nice try, but I have no desire whatsoever to figure that out.*

*Please, Draco? I would really like to speak to Hermione. In private.*

*Is it about Ron?*

*Umm, yeah. It's about Ron. And she'd be embarrassed if I talked about them in front of you, so go on. Molly's nice. You like her. I'll meet you back here in just a few minutes.*

Draco eyed him warily. *A few minutes?*

"Two minutes," Harry promised.

Draco let go of Harry's hand reluctantly, already loathing the lack of communication. Harry fondly watched him walk away, until he was ripped away from his reverie by a very stern hand on his arm. "Hey!" he squawked, recognizing his attacker as the very person he meant to speak with in the first place

Hermione pulled him into a vacant hallway roughly. "I saw that kiss, Harry Potter," she whispered. "Half the room saw it! What is going on?"

Harry looked around them distractedly, dragging her into the empty downstairs lavatory. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course I can, but somehow I doubt this secret is much of a secret anymo-- *Harry!* What in Merlin's name are you doing?"

"Hush! Shut-up, Hermione!" he ordered, unzipping his pants fully and lifting his shirt up so she could see his hip.

"Harry, really, this is-- What is that on your hip?"

"That's what I'm trying to show you!"

"Are those... teeth marks?"

"Yes!" She reached out to touch the reddened flesh, inciting him to jerk back. "Don't touch it! He might smell you on me and completely freak out!"

"Oh, Harry, tell me you didn't. *Please* tell me you didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"You did! And you let him *bite* you!"

"Yeah? So?"

"You let a Veela bite you! Don't you know what this means?" Harry shrugged. "It *means* you can never be with anyone else *ever*. He'll kill anyone who lays a hand on you! He's *claimed* you. You're his now, Harry."

"I was already his, Hermione."

"Yes, but you always had the option of backing out if you found somebody else. Now you're stuck with him!"

Harry frowned. "I don't want to find anybody else. I want to be stuck with Draco."

"I know this looks like a little love bite to you, Harry, but Veela are dangerous creatures. Especially one as potent as Draco. He nearly ripped Fleur's head off for smirking at him and Ginny's taking her life into her hands just coming near you!"

"So he's protective. I happen to like it."

"He's not just protective, he's *possessive*. As far as he's concerned, you belong to him."

"Good." Harry crossed his arms. "I don't get it, Hermione, I thought you liked Draco."

"Oh, Harry, I do. I do like Draco. I just didn't want you to rush into anything. This is *for life*."

"I didn't rush. I talked to Remus first and everything."

"You talked to Remus about this," she echoed skeptically.

"Sort of. He didn't seem too alarmed. And anyway, wouldn't you like to be together with Ron *for life*?"

"I... I don't know. If he ever wakes up, maybe."

"Well, if you're not too young to settle down, then neither am I."

"Somehow I don't see 'settle down' and 'Draco Malfoy' getting on well together."

"Come on, Hermione, I thought you of all people would be happy for me."

"I will *always* support you, Harry, you know that. I'm just worried. For the both of you."

"Yeah, okay. Wait, Hermione, you won't tell Ron, will you? I mean, he'd lose it."

"I think you underestimate him, but if you want to be the one to tell him, I won't say a word."

"Thanks," Harry breathed a relieved sigh.

"Oh, button up your trousers already, you troublesome boy. Before Draco bursts through the door and strangles me where I stand."

"Draco... Dammit! I'm late!"

"Late? For what?"

"I'm supposed to meet Draco back in the den," he replied, hurriedly shoving his shirt back into his trousers.

"You made a *date* to meet in the den?"

"Err, yeah."

"Impossible. You're both impossible."

"Hey, Hermione," Harry grinned evily.

"What?"

"Did you know Veela males have substantial--"

"Don't want to hear it!"

"--life spans?" he finished, breathless with laughter. "Why, what did you think I was going to say?"

"Harry, I swear--"

"Can Veela males really get pregnant or was Draco just teasing me?"

"Ooh, get out of here, you!" she shoved him out the lavatory door.

Harry found Draco waiting impatiently in the middle of the den, pointedly ignoring the stares of one Charlie Weasley. As soon as the green-eyed Auror came into view, Draco grabbed his hand and pulled it tightly to his side. *Don't ever leave me again!*

*Why? What happened?*

*Charlie-bloody-Weasley won't stop following me around, for one. Plus, there's some former Gryffindor girl over there whom I'm sure I don't remember drooling over me like I'm a plate of rather succulent beef.*

*You are a plate of rather succulent beef, Harry squeezed his thigh.*

*Harry, are you mental? Don't attract any more attention to us than necessary!*

*Embarrassed to be seen with me?*

*Of course not!*

*Then prove it. Kiss me. Right here, right now.*

*You mean you... You want me to... You're not ashamed of me?*

Harry sobered, startled. *I could never be ashamed of you, Draco, or of us. Charlie Weasley can watch us go at it right here in the middle of the room for all I care, if that's what it takes to get it through his dragon-loving head that you're mine.*

The Veela grinned wickedly. *Well, when you put it that way...*

Draco pulled Harry close, wrapping strong arms around his waist, and kissed him in front of all and sundry. Harry returned the kiss eagerly, tilting his chin up to better receive it. Draco swallowed down every reciprocal moan, bunching his fists into the fabric at the back of Harry's shirt. The two kissed for some time until a loud throat-clearing drew them back into the present. Ron stood nearby with a rather large knife in his hand.

"If you two are finished, Hermione would like to cut the cake now."

Harry, quite adorably, blushed.

## Chapter Nine

*That was nice.*

"I should hope so," Harry chuckled, rubbing his foot up Draco's naked calf.

*Not that. Of course that was nice. I meant the party. At the Burrow. I enjoyed talking to Hermione, she knows a lot of things. She told me that some muggle cities have trains running under the ground like worms. Can we go find one? And Ron said the next time we visit, he would show me his father's artifacts.*

"I'm glad you had a good time," Harry repressed a grin, sighing happily instead. "It means a lot to me that you get along with them now."

*Didn't I always?*

Harry looked away. He refused to lie to Draco. "No, you didn't. You called Hermione names and made fun of Ron for being poor."

*Oh. Draco was silent above him. I suppose I should apologize the next time I see them.*

"That's very thoughtful of you," Harry shut his eyes blissfully, as Draco began nuzzling his neck. "You're such a gentleman."

*They're important to you, Draco mouthed Harry's neck. So they're important to me.*

"Oh," Harry breathed, pushing his hips up against his lover's. Draco reached between them and took both erections in hand, rubbing them over with slick pre-come. "Mmm, yes," Harry encouraged. "Touch me right -- *aah* -- there."

The blond rocked against him, sliding his own cock over Harry's. Pumping them more forcefully, Draco grazed his fangs down Harry's neck as urgent hands scrambled for purchase on his own sweaty back. Harry had discovered that the Veela's shoulder blades were particularly sensitive and he took deliberate care to massage them in his palms. Draco shuddered against him and worked their cocks harder in his grip.

Harry trembled and came, Draco following right behind him. Wetness spread between them, but it was warm and gratifying. "Draco..." Harry moaned, as the blond nipped at his ear.

*God, Draco whimpered, burying his face in Harry's neck. Harry, I...*

"Yeah. I know." Harry turned his face to kiss Draco's cheek.

*I need you so much, it hurts.*

"No, it's good," Harry soothed. "Everything's good."

A satisfied rumble reverberated through Draco's chest, prompting Harry to soft laughter at the purrs escaping his mate's throat. Draco continued scraping his fangs against Harry's neck, following the trail with an eager tongue. "Mmm. Did you bite me again?"

No, Draco shook his head. *As much as I enjoyed marking you, I don't need to do it again. Once was enough to brand you as mine.*

Harry smoothed his palm down Draco's back, coming to rest over his lover's hip. "I wish I could mark you too."

Draco grinned, pointing to his own shoulder at the blunt but distinct teeth marks there.

"I did that?"

Draco nodded. *When you came. It won't scar, but it'll be nice while it lasts all the same.*

Harry leisurely licked the shallow wound. "Do you regret not having another Veela for a lover?"

*What?* Draco looked at him, surprised.

"I mean, you'd probably be more compatible. A Veela lover could bite you back and would be as, um, proficient at... you know, all this stuff as you are."

*Harry, no one on earth is better suited for me than you. That's why you're my one companion. And I don't love you because you make me feel good during sex. My skin is very sensitive to your touch, yes, but there are a million other things in you I respond to first. Your goodness, your heart. Your mind and spirit. I love you. There is no other and there is no better.*

Harry nuzzled his nose against Draco's pale cheek. "This is so crazy. I mean, that this could ever happen..."

*Is it really so unbelievable?*

Harry thought of the small, superior boy in Madam Malkin's robe shop. He recalled a second year duel and a third-year Slytherin playing at Dementor in a cruel attempt to scare him. "Yes," he admitted.

*We really didn't get along?*

"No, we didn't."

*I'm sorry,* he offered.

"Don't be. If anything had been different, we might not be where we are today."

*I'd still love you, Harry.*

"Perhaps, but you probably wouldn't be such a... *virile* Veela."

Draco snorted, mouthing Harry's collarbone. *I want to buy you something*, he announced randomly.

Harry laughed at this apparent non sequitur, lightly stroking Draco's backside with his hand. "With what? The non-existent allowance the Ministry pays you for servicing me sexually?"

The blond shook his head. *I know I'm not wealthy, but Arthur told me tonight that I have a safety deposit box at Gringott's. He gave me the key and everything. My father probably filled it with all sorts of questionable, yet valuable items.*

"So you thought you'd hock them all and spend the pay-off on me?" Harry asked, clearly amused.

Draco shrugged. *I have no need for Dark Arts treasure. I'd rather use what I have to buy you gifts.*

Harry snickered, trailing his knuckles over Draco's cheek. "You're awfully sweet for such a Dark Creature."

*A domesticated Dark Creature*, came the easy correction. *So can we go tomorrow? To Diagon Alley?*

"Gringott's is closed tomorrow. But we can go the day after that if you like."

*I would. I want to go to the stationery store and buy my own parchment and quills too.*

"Who are you going to write?"

*My father.*

Harry froze beneath him. "Draco, you can't."

*I want to go visit him in Azkaban.*

"Draco, you must realize the Ministry will never let you near your father."

*They might if you're with me.*

"But *why* do you want to go see him?" Harry implored. "After what he did to you..."

*I am not angry with him for what has been done to me. Although I cannot forgive him for trying to harm you. Still, he is the last link to my past. He can tell me about my mother. About my life before I came to be this... thing.*

"You are not a thing," Harry snapped. "Don't listen to anyone who tries to tell you otherwise."

*I could feel it tonight at the party, Draco continued darkly. The way people were watching me, like they wanted to own me. Possess me. I don't mind feeling like I belong to you -- I do, you're my mate -- but when other people look at me like that... it makes me feel like an empty, hollow shell.*

Harry looked startled at the admission. "Draco, it's just your charm. They can't help staring at you any more than you can help being stared at. We just need to work on honing your Veela appeal until it's as restrained as possible." He looked up at the ceiling, sighing heavily. "Though you're likely to get gawked at if you plan on going out in public with me anyway."

*Why?*

"I'm somewhat, ah... well-known in the wizarding world. I guess I don't notice the stares anymore, but if they really make you uncomfortable, we could always cast glamours on ourselves before going anywhere."

Draco's arms tightened around Harry. *I don't like the idea of anyone looking at you but me.*

Harry chuckled. "Now you know how I feel. I can't even take you to the Burrow without causing a stir. People have some nerve, ogling you right in front of me."

Draco purred, kissing Harry's chest directly above his heart. *I thought you said they couldn't help themselves.*

"Well, they can't," Harry allowed. "Doesn't mean I have to like it."

*Would people recognize me in Diagon Alley?*

"Probably. Veela or no, you kind of stand out."

*How come?*

"You come from a very prominent pureblood family. The way you look is definitely distinctive."

*I guess we could dye my hair,* the blond proposed morosely.

"I think a glamour charm should suffice. Not quite so permanent. I like your hair the color it is naturally."

*Will we have to glamour over your scar?* Draco wondered.

"Definitely, why?"

*I like it,* the Veela leaned up to kiss the mark in question. *I don't like that Voldemort branded you, but the scar itself is so unique. So Harry. You wouldn't be you without it.*

Harry's skin tingled under Draco's warm lips. "And now I have another one."

*I did that,* he gloated.

"Yes," Harry laughed, patting his hip. "You did that. Hermione belittled it as a simple 'love bite,' but I think she's just jealous."

Draco stilled above him. *She saw it?*

"Err..." Oops. "Yeah, I showed her in private. You're not mad, are you? I'm just, kind of... well, excited about it, I guess. I wanted to show someone."

*Oh. That's okay then, I suppose. She didn't touch you, did she?*

"Hermione?" Harry laughed. "She was curious about it. But no, no touching occurred. I didn't think you'd like that too much, even though you know perfectly well how she feels about Ron. I'm entirely safe in her company."

*What did she say?* Draco wanted to know.

"She... well, to be honest, she was really worried."

*Worried? Why? She knows I would never hurt you, right?*

"Of course she knows that. She was just concerned we were getting too serious too fast. She worries that we're rushing things, err... *did* rush things. But she's happy for us, really."

*She's right,* Draco acknowledged. *This is serious. But, well... I don't remember much about my past, and I don't want to wait before starting the rest of my life. That means not wasting a single moment I have with you.*

Harry knew he should probably feel smothered by the force of Draco's emotional convictions, but all he felt was joy. He never imagined anyone would ever want him so badly, need him so desperately. Not for his magic, his name, or his money. But for Harry. Just Harry. Draco made him feel so *loved*. "I don't want to waste a single moment with you either," Harry smiled demurely. "You perfect my days."

Draco snickered into Harry's ink black hair. *So romantic, Harry.*

"Well, I wonder where I get it from, you gushy brat!" Harry retorted, affronted. "You make me ramble on like a schoolgirl!"

*I'm glad you're not a girl. It's easier to know how to please you this way.*

"Somehow I have no doubt you'd be able to wing it even if you had been mated to a female."

*Maybe. I still like that you feel like me.* Draco reached down, running his fingers through the slippery mess between them, and caressed Harry's balls.

"No one feels like you, Draco," Harry writhed.

*There you go again,* the blond smiled into his lover's neck. *Going on like a lovesick--*

"Don't you dare finish that sentence, Malfoy," Harry warned.

Draco's finger circled Harry's entrance leisurely, probing it open gently. Harry tensed beneath him, gripping his thighs tightly around Draco's hips. *Open up for me, Harry.*

The dark-haired wizard made a point of relaxing under his lover's delicate ministrations, allowing a single digit to slip inside his quivering body. "I've just... I've never..."

*No one's ever touched you here before?* Draco guessed.

Harry shook his head. "N-no," he croaked, throat parched and dry. "Not there."

*Where have you been touched? Who have you let touch you?* Draco asked intrigued, finger exploring inside.

"I... There was Cho. All we did was kiss. Then sixth year, I dated Hannah... but we never -- *ohh* -- went so far as to have sex. And she certainly never touched me..."

*Here?* the blond finished, crooking his finger just so.

Harry nodded feverishly. "Fooled around with Justin Finch-Fletchley a few times during seventh year, but I was too confused to make things public with him and he broke it off."

*Confused?* Draco slipped another finger inside Harry, as if the man wriggling underneath him might not notice.

He did notice, hissing sharply behind his teeth. "He was a boy. And I was a boy. I didn't think people would understand..."

*You had never been with a boy before?*

Harry gripped Draco's biceps tightly as the Veela's long fingers continued to move within him. "Once, in the... the Gryffindor Quidditch locker room... I let Oliver Wood go down on me. He never tried anything again after that, so I - *uhn* -- figured he got what he came for..."

*Hmm. So technically, you're still a virgin.*

"I guess," Harry colored slightly.

Draco licked across the blush on his cheeks. *Don't be shy, Harry. I'm glad you've never been with anyone before.*

"Of course you're glad," Harry's breathing hitched. "Possessive bastard."

The blond chuckled above him, fingers pumping inside Harry's body, reaching for that sweet spot. He knew the exact moment he found it, when Harry jerked up beneath him. "Uhn, GOD. Draco... What was...?"

*Like that?* Draco purred.

"God. Ahh... yes... don't stop. *Please.*"

*I won't stop. I won't leave you.*

Harry mewled pleurably. "Ooh... that's... I'm going to..."

Draco massaged the nub inside him with one hand as his other stroked Harry's cock. *Come for me, Harry.*

Harry's thighs quivered around Draco as he bucked and came for the second time that night. The Veela slipped his fingers from Harry's body and slid down to lick the come from Harry's belly. The green-eyed wizard's hands moved over Draco's soft locks, stroking gently. An eager tongue cleaned Harry thoroughly until there was little evidence left of release. Draco nuzzled his way back up Harry's body and settled into the arms waiting for him there. *I love the way you taste.*

"It doesn't glow like yours does."

Draco slipped his tongue between Harry's lips in response, letting the other man taste for himself. Harry crushed his lover's heavy body to his, relishing in the taste of his own come in Draco's mouth. *Mine*, the Veela growled.

Harry returned the sentiment mentally, not wanting to pull away from the kiss in order to speak. *Only you can make me feel like this.*

*I just want everything to be good for you. Pleasuring you is my honor and my privilege.*

Harry blinked for a moment, processing that, as a warm smile slowly spread across his face. Leaning up first for a deep, amorous kiss, Harry relaxed back into his pillow. *I think Hermione liked our surprise.*

*Your tattoo?*

"No," Harry laughed, switching back to spoken language as Draco settled sleepily against his chest. "I meant the book you helped me pick out. Remember? *Famous Freethinking Feminists: Witches With Beauty, Brains, and Brass.*"

*Oh, that. Sounded like her cup of tea.*

"Yes, definitely better than your first suggestion: *Breaking in Your Pureblood: How to Marry Into an Old Wizarding Family and Still Maintain Your Fabulous Muggle-Born Style.*"

*It's a big book. I thought maybe she could hit Ron over the head with it, so he might get a clue.*

"Hmm. Maybe I could use that book."

*To hit me with?*

"To read."

*You don't need any such book. I'm bonded to you against my will.*

"Poor baby," Harry coddled. "Forced to pleasure me for the rest of our natural-born lives. What a horrible existence."

*Not really, Draco yawned. You smell good. You taste good. There's really nothing about you I don't like.*

"How fortunate for me," Harry grinned.

Draco was silent for some time. *Ron was angry. When he saw me kiss you.*

"He'll get over it," Harry promised, combing his fingers through Draco's hair.

*I don't want him to be upset with you because of me.*

"Hey, it's okay. Really. He was pretty taken aback for a minute there, yeah, but Ron's a good guy. After the planets in his solar system realign, he'll realize it's not that big of a deal."

*Not that big of a deal?*

"You know what I mean. We're not hurting anyone by being together, least of all Ron. Sometimes it's just hard for him to separate who you are now from who you used to be. Ron is very protective of the people he cares about, and he's my best friend."

*He wouldn't like the... old me being with you?*

Harry mulled over the best response to that. "Let me put it this way: he would have been highly suspicious of your motives. The old you never gave any indication that you could like me for... well, for any reason, really."

Draco shook his head. *I can't believe that. How could I not--*

"Don't worry about Ron. He didn't even really act that surprised, come to think of it, I suspect he just didn't like being kept in the dark. Once I explained to him that I had been in the dark myself until very recently, he seemed somewhat appeased."

*I didn't mean to... I mean, I wouldn't have... Are you sure you don't mind?*

"Mind?"

*People knowing. That you... that we...*

"Draco, I told you already. I'm not ashamed of you. How could I be?" Harry smirked. "Everyone else wants you too."

*They don't care about who I am. They care about what.*

"Only because they don't really know you. It's very easy to care about you, Draco."

Draco smiled and snuggled deeper into Harry's arms. *My mother always said I was supremely lovable.*

"She did? You remember that?"

*No, Draco conceded. But I like to think she might have. I like to think that she loved me and that she would love you too.*

"She did love you, Draco. She used to send you sweets and gifts from home all the time. Sometimes you'd make a big production out of it, selecting a few choice people to share your goods with. Other times, you'd slip the packages into your robes and open them later, away from the Great Hall."

*You noticed all that?* the former Slytherin grinned.

Harry flushed. "Well, it was kind of hard to miss. You put on quite a show."

*Did you ever want me to share my sweets with you, Harry?*

"I wanted a mother of my own to send me things," he hedged, evading the question entirely. Truthfully, he never would have trusted anything passed off from the hands of Draco Malfoy, but he didn't want to say that now.

*Harry... If I could--*

"I know. Things are how they are. And right now, things here with you are good."

*Then I must keep things that way. I will love you and protect you. And be on hand at all times to supply you with many gratifying orgasms.*

Harry chortled. "Well, you certainly do that."

*Maybe tomorrow morning we could have breakfast in bed.*

"You think so, do you? Think I'll bring a plate of bangers and eggs right to your lap?"

*I didn't mean that kind of breakfast.*

"Oh. *Oh!*" Harry snickered. "Well, whatever it takes to satisfy your highness."

*You satisfy me,* Draco purred, contented.

"I do, don't I," Harry pondered in amazement. "I satisfy the insatiable lust of a full-blooded Veela. That's pretty impressive, if I do say so myself."

*Very. Best rest up now, while you can.*

"As you wish."

## Chapter Ten

Harry and Draco Apparated to Diagon Alley on a bright and clear Monday morning. Witches and wizards bustled to and fro, taking little notice of the handsome couple in their midst much to Draco's surprise and delight. His hair had been glamoured black and his eyes green; Harry, for the time being, had become a scarless, blond-haired, blue-eyed wizard without glasses. The pair hadn't really intended to look so much like the other, but they were quite amused to realize that was the end result.

A few people glanced conspicuously at their joined hands -- and, of course, the Veela's pull never entirely abated -- but Draco was in too good of a mood to care. They headed to Gringott's first. Draco palmed the small key excitedly as the small goblin led them to the appropriate safety deposit box. Harry shook his head, smiling at Draco's giddy fervor, curious himself to see what Lucius Malfoy had left behind for his only son.

The goblin left them alone in a small, curtained-off room, the box ready to be opened on a table before them. "Well, are you just going to stare at it all day?" Harry teased.

Draco nodded to himself and let go of Harry's hand long enough to unlock the box and sift through its contents. *I don't understand.* Harry placed a hand on his back, as Draco frowned. *There isn't anything from Father in here.*

"What is it?" Harry peeked over, intrigued.

The Veela lifted a chain out. *A cameo of my mother. Some old letters. And... oh. My mother's promise ring.*

"Promise ring?"

Draco brought the jewelry to his nose and sniffed it. *Her scent. It's all over it. I can feel her,* he gasped, amazed. *Take my hand.*

Harry did as Draco asked, a flood of emotions pouring through his mind at first touch. Devotion between two love-struck teenagers. Nervous fingers sliding the ring onto a smaller, more delicate hand. Kisses shared during a stolen moment between classes. An anxious touch in front of the common room's fireplace. A dance at the Yule Ball. The curved, coral lips of a young girl with her hair pinned up, blonde ringlets framing her face. The eyes of all in the room trained on her; her own affectionate gaze saved for one boy alone.

Lucius Malfoy and Narcissa Black.

Harry took a deep breath as Draco pulled away from his mind. "How did you do that?" he marveled. "Nevermind. Nothing you do surprises me anymore. Draco, those were your *parents*."

Draco smiled. *Yes. She loved him.*

"He loved her back."

*My father didn't leave this stuff here for me at all. My mother did.*

"Didn't Arthur tell you your father left this box for you?"

*No, I just assumed. I'm glad I was wrong.*

"Of course you are." Harry wrapped strong arms around him from behind. "These things are much more valuable than any Dark Arts objects could be."

Yes, Draco agreed. *Though I'm afraid I don't have anything to sell now in order to buy you things.*

Harry laughed. "Are you still on about that? My money is your money, Draco. We can squander it buying each other gifts for all I care."

*Come on, the Veela squeezed the hands at his waist. Let's collect this stuff and go shopping.*

"Don't you want to read the letters?"

*Later.*

Harry re-clasped Draco's hand once the contents of the box were safely tucked away in his lover's robes. Upon leaving Gringott's, the two took their time going from store to store, browsing the items for sale at their hearts' content. Harry bought Draco his new stationery and quill, and Draco bought the puppy some new toys at the Magical Menagerie. Against his better judgment, Harry let Draco drag him into Ollivander's where he gazed wondrously at all the many kinds of wands. *I miss magic*, he confessed.

"I know."

*I don't even remember exactly what it is I'm missing, I just feel like a part of me is gone.*

"Yeah." Harry squeezed Draco's hand. "Why don't we get you a broom?"

*Harry, the former Slytherin grinned. I don't need a broom anymore.*

Harry blinked. Veela... wings... right. He mentally smacked himself in the forehead. Draco could fly. "We should race sometime," Harry proposed.

*Any day.*

After grabbing some ice cream at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor -- the Veela devouring his own treat in record time, then swiping his tongue over Harry's when he thought the other man wasn't looking -- the pair rested on a bench. Sniffing the air with renewed interest, Draco came to his feet, bringing Harry with him. "What? What is it?"

*Something smells familiar.*

"Well, yeah. You've been here a million times before today."

No, Draco shook his head, turning them around a corner. *Down here.*

"Draco, this is Knockturn Alley."

*I've been here before.*

"So have I. Let's not go back."

*Wait, I just... Something...*

Draco pulled him into Borgin & Burkes, eyes sifting curiously over the goods. Smelling around the shop, he paused in front of a seemingly innocent-looking crystal paperweight. *This was my father's.* He held it carefully in his palm. *We came here to sell it when he first began to worry about the Ministry snooping around the Manor.*

"What does it do?"

*It absorbs a little of the magical essence of anyone who holds it. There's a spell that conjures the magic back out into the conjurer at will.*

"Isn't it absorbing some of your magic now?"

*No, I'm a Veela. My magic is too dark even for this item. I repel it.*

"Is your father's essence in there?"

*My father had the clever habit of wearing gloves, even in our own house,* Draco replied distantly, trying to chase that brief recollection in his mind.

"Come on," Harry rubbed Draco's arm with his free hand. "Let's get out of here. I don't like this place."

*I won't let anything happen to you here.*

"I won't let anything happen to you either. But Knockturn Alley gives me the creeps. And Mr. Borgin is staring at us, probably wondering why I appear to be talking to myself."

*Okay, Harry. We'll go.*

They walked past a line of hanging shrunken heads, Harry eager to leave the dismal side street. Before they could make it back to the light and warmth of Diagon Alley, a voice called out toward their direction, halting them immediately "Malfoy! Draco Malfoy!"

The Veela froze, gripping Harry's hand protectively. In his head, he heard his lover gasp, *That's Zabini.*

*I... I think I know him.*

Blaise Zabini, one of the few known associates of Voldemort to have escaped persecution on a technicality. Little more than a lackey, Zabini never received the Dark Mark and could not be placed at the site of any crime. Harry hadn't thought much of Zabini's license to live freely before, but now, with Draco's hand perspiring in his, Harry cursed his inability to ensure the incarceration of every known Voldemort confederate.

Zabini was peering at Draco with amused eyes. "Thought you'd slip into Knockturn Alley unrecognized, did you? Sorry, but we fooled around with enough glamour charms in our day for me to be able to identify you a mile away, black hair or no. Who's your friend?" Zabini eyed their joined hands with interest.

"He can't speak," Harry supplied.

"Oh right, now I remember. Still not talking, Draco? That's too bad. You had a really nice voice." It was a slippery compliment and Harry hated it. "I see they let you roam free now. That's an improvement. Rumor had it you shackled up with Harry Potter. That must have been awful while it lasted. Let's hear it for the stupidity of the Ministry of Magic, eh?"

Draco simply stared at his former friend stonily. Zabini glanced down at their hands again. "So I take it you won't be wanting my new address?" he grinned. "You may not be able to speak, but from what I recall, you wouldn't really need your voice for anything we used to get up to anyway." Zabini sure had some nerve, Harry growled. He was standing right there!

At once, Harry got a wicked gleam in his eye. Two could play at that game. "Actually, maybe you could... join us?" he propositioned.

Draco turned stunned eyes on Harry. *WHAT?!*

Harry ignored him. Zabini reached out and touched Harry's elbow. "Really? You're pretty cute too, I wouldn't mind sharing Draco if he doesn't mind sharing you with me."

Draco was starting to growl ferociously, but Zabini seemed too preoccupied with Harry to notice. "He doesn't mind, do you, Draco?" Harry looked up at his mate, already shaking with fury. "We're quite in the habit of... sharing, if you will."

Something in Draco's mind stilled. Good, Harry thought, he realized his mate was toying with Zabini and not actually proposing to the former Slytherin. "I never would have dared suspect Draco Malfoy of being a one-man kind of guy. Still have excellent taste, I see," Zabini commented, brushing Harry's bangs away from his face directly over where his scar was hidden.

That did it. Draco grasped Zabini's wrist in his fist, yanking it away from Harry's forehead. "Ooh, possessive," Zabini looked entertained. "If bringing out the Veela in you has improved your skills in bed even twice-fold, the three of us have a lot of fun ahead. What do you think, Draco? Should we be gentle, or tie him to the bed and--"

The Veela's other hand shot up and wrapped around Zabini's throat, shoving him back into the stone wall behind him. "Damn, Malfoy! When did you get to be so uptight? It's not like you're married to the guy."

Wow, Zabini was really stupid. Harry watched him squirm under Draco's grip with a detached gaze. "You've upset him," Harry stated plainly.

"What did I...? Hold on, you're Harry Pot-- *arck!*" Draco's clutch on his neck tightened.

"I don't think he likes you saying my name."

"You're his mate," Zabini choked, hands reaching up to pull at Draco's iron-firm hold. "Potter, are you *insane?! Call him off me! He'll kill me for touching you!*"

"Really?" Harry looked over at Draco's fixed countenance. "You think so? I'm not sure, really. Most people know better than to go putting their hands all over me, so his Veela instincts have never fully been tested."

Zabini kicked out as Draco raised him up off the ground. People were beginning to stop and stare. "Potter!" Zabini coughed, flailing. "*Please*. Tell him to let me go. You're the only who can."

"I wonder," Harry mused idly, "how many people begged to be let go at the feet of your former boss."

Draco's talons extended into Zabini's neck, cutting the skin, little rivulets of blood weeping from the wounds. "He was Malfoy's boss too!" the terrified man protested.

"Draco was manipulated by Voldemort. He had no control over what he was doing."

"Yes, he did!" Zabini insisted.

"Liar," Harry spat.

"Malfoy," Zabini appealed directly to the infuriated Veela. "Don't you remember? All the muggles? Your mother?"

Harry gasped, horrified. "That's enough, Draco," he barked. "We're making a scene. Let him go." Draco didn't move. "I *said* let him go."

"Why isn't he obeying you?!" Zabini yelled. "He's a Veela! He has to do what you say!"

Harry panicked, alarmed at his inability to budge Draco in the slightest. Why wasn't he complying? Didn't Draco have to obey him? Harry racked his brain trying to recall the last time he had inadvertently ordered Draco to do anything. Without warning, Dumbledore's words washed back over him. *Only when love is returned and affection reached on equal ground will Mr. Malfoy be free from your control.* And Hermione's warning: *He'll kill anyone who lays a hand on you!*

*Oh god, Harry realized. I can't stop him.*

"Potter!" Zabini begged.

"I can't... I can't stop him."

"What?!"

"I love him," Harry whispered. "I really do *love* him."

"Potter, you idiot--!"

Harry positioned himself firmly between Draco and Zabini. "Draco. Put him down. Please. That's not an order. I'm asking you." Harry wrapped his arms around Draco's neck and murmured in his ear. "Do it for me. Because you love me." Draco's face contorted, his mind conflicted between the impulse to protect his mate and the desire to appease him. "*Please*, Draco. I love you. Let's go home."

Zabini collapsed to the ground at their feet as Draco released his bloody grip. Exhaling a heavy sigh of relief, Harry Apparated them back home.

## Chapter Eleven

The very second they popped back into their den, Draco began pulling away from Harry, extremely distressed. "Oh god, what have I done?" Harry scrambled to hold his lover's arms down to his sides. "Draco? Draco! Come back to me, please. I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry. I didn't realize... I never would have played around like that had I known..."

The Veela thrashed in his arms, bucking away from him. Draco's hands clamped down over his ears as if to keep out the warring voices in his head. *Protect Harry. Please Harry. Protect Harry. Please Harry.* The two commands were not supposed to conflict! Brilliant, white wings ripped through the back of Draco's robes, completing the pure Veela look along with his talons and extended fangs. The abruptness of the transformation left him crying out on the floor.

*Draco!* Harry grabbed his mate's arm, switching to mental communication. *Talk to me, please!* Draco stopped flailing as Harry's voice slipped into his mind. *That's right, it's me, Harry. I'm here. Everything's okay. He's gone. No one is hurting me. No one hurts me with you around.*

Feverishly, the Draco wrapped his arms around Harry, leaning his head against Harry's own, inhaling his scent deeply. Harry petted and soothed him in his embrace, sending strong streams of love his way as best as he knew how. For awhile, Draco appeared content nuzzling and touching his mate. *That's it, Draco. See? No harm done.*

As Draco's nose moved over Harry's forehead, he detected the faint odor of Zabini's touch, working him up all over again. He tackled the smaller man, clawing at his robes. "Draco?" Harry pressed, feeling the first twinge of fear since coming into contact with the pale Veela.

Draco shoved Harry's robes up to his chin and set to work on his trousers. "W-wait, Draco..." Pushing Harry's trousers down to his knees, Draco flipped the man over and started untying his own trousers. "Draco, listen to me. You don't want to do this. I don't want to hurt you."

The Veela seemed beyond hearing. "I'm sorry," Harry murmured, twisting his palm behind his back and aiming it at his mate's chest. "*Impedimenta!*" he spoke, clearly.

Draco rocketed away from him, his body flying back into the wall, head hitting the mantelpiece. The impact seemed to knock the Veela to his senses. He gasped, staring wide-eyed at Harry, as his lover stumbled to his feet, tugging up his trousers. Once his clothes were back in place, Harry turned to hold a hand out to Draco. "I didn't want to have to do that, but you weren't yourself. Everything's alright now."

The Veela's mouth worked soundlessly. Before Harry could speak again, Draco shot to his feet and bolted up the stairs. Harry sighed, following him intently. Upon reaching their bedroom door, he turned the knob, announcing, "I'm coming in, Draco."

Harry peered into the room, squinting into the shadows when he couldn't find Draco at first. Then he heard the puppy panting and shifted his eyes to the corner by the right side of the bed. Draco had curled up within his own clutches, wings large and looming around him, Baby sitting at his feet with her tail wagging. Calmly, Harry walked over to the distracted Veela, reaching out to touch the top of Draco's head. The minute his skin made contact, Draco jumped to his feet and fled to the other side of the bed.

"I want to talk to you." Draco shook his head adamantly, thrusting a hand out in front of him as if to keep Harry at bay. "Fine. I'll talk, you listen. What happened down there... was not your fault." Draco looked at him like he was crazy. "It *wasn't*," Harry repeated. "I did something I shouldn't have. Zabini made me mad and I took advantage of your instincts to teach him a lesson. I never meant to use you like that."

"You're a Veela. You have the impulse to protect me at all costs. I... exploited the situation to make it appear as though Zabini was a threat to me. He wasn't. He can't take me away from you. No one can. You're stuck with me forever. What that means is I have a responsibility to us both not to lead you to believe there's danger when there isn't. When we came home... you weren't yourself. I thought I could control you, but I was foolish. You aren't to be controlled.

"You are my lover. You deserve to have me be honest with you and not manipulate your instincts at my every whim. I forgot that. I won't forget again. I want you to know that I'm not angry with you. Nothing happened." Draco gestured wildly with his hands. "Yes, something could've happened, but I put a stop to it. I know you would never purposely hurt me. I trust you when you say that to me. Now I need you to trust me when I say it back.

"You can trust me, Draco. I won't do what I did today ever again. That's how I know you will never again try what you nearly did. I won't provoke you. There is nothing to worry about. You can control your impulses. You always have before. You've never been anything but gentle and caring with me. Because you're not just a Veela, you're a *person*. Voldemort may have attempted to remove the humanity in you, but he failed. It's the part I love. It's the part *I'm* mated to."

Walking slowly around the bed, Harry stood in front of Draco. "I'm going to lay my hand on you now. I want you to talk to me."

Draco flinched as Harry touched him, but didn't back away. Instead, he closed his eyes and turned his head. *How can you stand to touch me?*

"Look at me, Draco."

The Veela blinked the tears from his soggy eyes, gazing weakly at Harry. *I'm a monster.*

"You are *not* a monster."

*I nearly--*

"You didn't."

*Because you stopped me!*

"Draco--"

*Get away from me, Harry. You're not safe around me.*

"You're wrong. I couldn't be safer with anyone else."

*I'm a thing! An evil, loathsome thing! I don't deserve to be near you.*

"Alright, Draco, shut-up. Just... shut-up. Did you not hear a word I just said?" Draco looked back at him, feebly. "I am *not* going to repeat myself simply because you're being your stubborn old self."

*I'm not--!*

"Are you kidding me? You're the most stubborn person I've ever met! You always have been! It used to be so infuriating. You were so hellbent on getting me into trouble, teasing me and mocking me at every turn. Just remembering it drives me crazy." Draco blinked at him, surprised. "You are not about to turn around and use that obstinacy against me again. I want that selfish, maddening Draco Malfoy back here right now, refusing to leave my side for no other reason than because he damn well *doesn't want to*."

*Harry...*

"Sorry," he breathed. "I got a little carried away."

*Harry, Draco tried again. You're better off without me.*

"Don't be daft, Draco. We both know I couldn't be rid of you now even if I wanted to be. *Which I don't*. A fact that seems to continually evade your attention. We're really together now. We're in this for the long haul. That doesn't mean we won't have problems. In a lot of ways, we're just like any other couple. And like any other couple, we can learn from our mistakes and move on. I want to move on with you now."

*Blaise said--*

"You're going to listen to that git?!"

*He said I knew what I was doing when I killed those people.*

"And you believe him?"

*I don't know what to believe! I can't remember what I did!*

Harry firmed his resolve. "Then we'll just have to go see the only person who can tell us."

*Draco froze. My father...*

"I'll talk to Arthur about getting us passes to Azkaban. It'll be difficult, but if anyone can get us past the red tape, he can."

*Okay, Harry.*

Draco backed up instinctively as Harry moved closer. "Draco, I'm going to hold you now. It's part of the making-up process."

Nodding uncertainly, Draco sighed as Harry wrapped firm arms around his back, rubbing small circles into his flesh with loving fingers. The Veela hesitantly accepted the gesture, resting his cheek on Harry's shoulder. *Harry...?*

"Yes?"

*I can't retract my wings.*

"Oh," Harry pulled back. "Come sit on the edge of the bed."

Draco allowed Harry to sit him down, watching over his shoulder as Harry knelt on the bed behind him and carefully massaged the middle of his back between the soft appendages. Relaxing under the gentle touches, shivers ran down Draco's spine at the sensitivity of the flesh there. Slowly, the broad wings collapsed in on themselves and retreated into Draco's back. Harry enveloped the slackened body in his arms, pulling Draco back against his chest and kissing the nape of his neck. "There now. That wasn't so hard."

*I love you, Harry.*

"I know. Come on, let's go back downstairs. Baby needs to eat, and so do we. I had some filets delivered to the house yesterday, I'll cook yours just the way you like it."

Draco smiled, squeezing Harry's hands over his chest. *Okay.*

Much later, the two found themselves comfortably snuggled into bed together. "Draco," Harry pushed his lover's hair back behind his ear, happy to have his blond Veela back now that he had removed the glamour charms. "Why don't we read one of your mother's letters?"

Nodding, Draco reached over to the night-stand where he had left the weathered parchments earlier. Selecting one at random, Draco sat up and opened it. Harry pushed up as well, settling against Draco's side, and began reading aloud.

*Darling Lucius,*

*How has your summer been? Mine is dreadfully boring, thank you for not asking. Andy is still on vacation in France and Bella is off on her honeymoon. You would think at least one of them would ask their baby sister to come along, but no. You are lucky not to have any siblings leaving you behind to take care of a fretting mother who's convinced her youngest daughter's Veela instincts are about to blossom at any time.*

*Little does she know.*

*I mentioned your name at the supper table yesterday and received the most interesting response. 'Malfoys!' Father tutted. 'Vain, self-obsessed wizards, the lot of them!'*

*'But Father,' I said. 'They are purebloods.'*

*'That Abraxas Malfoy is nothing but an egotistical, overbearing fool!'*

*'But Father,' I said. 'They are awfully rich.'*

*'Narcissa,' he said, sternly. 'You haven't been associating with Malfoys, have you?'*

*'Why, of course not, Father,' I said. 'That Lucius Malfoy is nothing but a spoiled bully who calls me names and pulls my hair.'*

*'Narcissa!' Mother exclaimed. 'You two are about to become seventh-year Slytherins. You can't tell me he still teases you.'*

*'But he does, Mother,' I insisted. 'He never leaves me alone. If I don't pay him any mind he storms off disgruntled, probably plotting his next devious scheme to get my attention.'*

*Mother looked at me suspiciously, but I offered her my most charming smile and finished my plate like the obedient daughter I am. Never associate with Malfoys, they say. I think they are entirely correct. I fully intend to volunteer the same advice to all the other girls in Slytherin upon my return to Hogwarts. After all, I believe it is only fair that I give them some advanced warning. It simply wouldn't do for one to attempt anything, only to find you already bear the mark of a fully-matured quarter-Veela.*

*You know me, Lucius. Always thinking of my fellow students first. I will warn all of my Slytherin sisters to tell their children to stay away from any future generations of Malfoys as well. However, I fear it may be impossible to keep anyone from such an attractive combination as a part-Veela Malfoy. I look forward to warding off the teenagers as our children grow into maturity. Knowing you, you'll probably have eligible purebloods from all over Europe waiting to marry into our family. Knowing me, all of our children will disappoint you and run off with their appropriate mates whether you like it or not.*

*Either way, I eagerly anticipate the ensuing fireworks display. Raising Malfoys can only be the torment my parents insist it is and I whole-heartedly accept the challenge. I may not possess the kind of foolhardy courage so celebrated in Gryffindor, but I do believe I am brave enough to tackle your troublesome offspring. In the meantime, I will occupy myself by relishing in your relentless attentions. Although I remain, as ever, most dissatisfied that you are immune to my Veela charm.*

*I will try to write you again before the summer is out, but in case my owl gets lost, I will see you onboard the Express after your Prefects' meeting. I'll be the girl with the trail of misfortunate boys following her from car to car. It really must be awful to lust after a mated Veela. I might feel bad about it, if it didn't amuse me so. It must be your wicked sense of humor corrupting me. What's that you say? I was wicked before I met you? Well, remind me to pinch you for that the next time we're alone together.*

*In closing, I must say that I miss you terribly. Every day I spend without you wears away at me. I lay awake in my bed at night, wishing we could be together, wondering if you think of me half as much as I think about you. I am lucky to have found you, Lucius, and yet I am forever condemned to a life of pining after your silly soul whenever we are apart. I can only hope that you suffer as I suffer. Somehow, knowing we're both miserable makes it all worthwhile. We will be together again before you know it. I love you.*

*Ever yours,  
Narcissa.*

## Chapter Twelve

*Lucius Malfoy*

*P.S. You needn't worry about those other Slytherin girls. This lover's bite you've left me with should serve as a proper warning to anyone with the most basic survival instinct that I am officially off the market. Not that I intend to walk around the common room nude anytime in the near future. We Malfoys do share a striking virtue.*

*You may stop laughing now.*

Proud and superior even under the most dismal circumstances, the most infamous prisoner of Azkaban received his visitors with all the anticipation of a hungry cat inviting two mice to tea. "This is a surprise," he said by way of acknowledgment. "I'm curious, Potter. Did you have to smuggle him in, or is this visit courtesy of Minister Weasley?"

Harry ignored him. "We're here to ask you some questions, Malfoy. Answer them or don't, it's up to you. Either way, you owe it to Draco to listen."

"Owe it to him?" Lucius glanced at his son inquisitively. "Just what is it exactly that you think I owe him?"

"How about an explanation for one," Harry growled. "How could you abuse your own son this way? You're his *father*."

"Why do I get the feeling that's one of *your* questions, and not one of Draco's." Harry took a menacing step towards the cell, but Draco reached out a hand and held his arm, shaking his head. "You know, Potter, when I first heard about what happened at Draco's trial, I was so disappointed. I thought to myself, what an opportunity we had missed! My son, one of the Dark Lord's most valuable weapons, mated to none another than The Boy Who Lived.

"If only we had known, we could have taken such advantage of the situation. But really, who would have ever thought? Draco *hated* you so. You should have heard him go on about how detestable he found just the mention of your name to be. It was as if the very thought of you was poison in his veins. And yet all along, all that rage, all that revulsion, was really just a cry for your attention. I suppose it all worked out in the end."

"You can't get to me, *Malfoy*," Harry swore, troubled by the sudden disquiet in Draco's mind.

"Strange, isn't it? That you can say a name with such loathing in one breath, and yet murmur it with so much affection in the next?"

The elder Malfoy watched with interest as Draco took Harry's hand in his and the two began a heated mental discussion. After several minutes, they turned back to the prisoner. "He wants to see your mark," Harry explained. Lucius began rolling up his sleeve. "Not that one. The other one."

Lucius eyed his son's mate speculatively, before smirking. "I'll show you mine if you show me yours." Draco stepped in front of Harry, eyes flashing dangerously. "I apologize, that was uncalled for. I have forgotten what Veela are like around their mates. It has been over a year since I last saw my late wife," Lucius offered by way of explanation. He waited for Draco's reaction, but none was forthcoming.

Sighing, Lucius stepped up to the bars of his cell and began unbuttoning the front of his shirt. Pulling one side away, he exposed his left breast where the scars of two tiny tooth marks still remained. Draco reached out as if to touch them, but Lucius backed away quickly. "I don't think so, Draco," he responded, buttoning up his shirt.

Draco's arm fell limp at his side. He turned back to Harry as his dark-haired lover rejoined their hands. "Draco wants to know when you received the mark."

"The night of the Leaving Feast, 1971."

A pause as Harry listened to Draco. "How long before your parents knew about it?"

"A year."

Another pause. "What was their reaction?"

"Are these really the questions you two came all the way here to ask me?"

Harry sneered. "You must understand, Malfoy. He knows very little about his past."

"Ah, yes. His perforated memory was an unfortunate side effect to the procedures that were done to him. Among... other things."

"How can you be so cavalier about this?!" Harry snapped. "About the pain you've caused him?"

Lucius cocked his head. "He looks alright to me now. I'm the one on the other side of these bars."

"As well you should be," Harry snarled.

"Don't act so indignant, Potter. The two of you might never have discovered your 'true love' had we not interfered. You got yourself a devoted partner out of the deal. Frankly, I should think you would be thanking me."

"Thanking--!" Harry squawked, stopping suddenly as Draco whispered in his mind. "He wants to know if you loved her."

"Of course I loved her. I let her bite me, didn't I? What kind of foolish question is that?"

"It isn't easy to believe you are capable of love, Malfoy, if you don't mind me saying so."

"Curious that people used to say the same thing about my son. And look where he is today. On the arm of the most famous wizard in the world."

"Cut the crap."

"Sounding familiar, am I?"

Harry hissed. He *hated* this. It was like being thrown back into a time when Draco abhorred him, before Harry knew what true happiness tasted like. Father and son were so *similar*. Or had been, at any rate. Now Draco was different. Now Draco was *his*. And he was not about to stand there and let Lucius Malfoy pick apart his mate one scorched layer at a time. They didn't deserve this. Neither of them. They had come too far.

That's when Draco asked of him the one thing he'd been dreading since they walked into the room. "*Don't* make me ask that question, Draco, *please*."

The Veela only continued to implore him with his gaze, as Lucius watched the pair with renewed interest. "He just ignored a direct order."

Harry turned away from Draco's pleading eyes to scowl at his mate's father. "Yes?"

"That could only mean--"

"That I love your son, yes."

The prisoner abruptly began to laugh. "What's so funny?!" Harry demanded.

Lucius' chuckles trickled to a stop as he eyed them. "This is just unexpected, that's all. His love for you is compelled, insinuated upon him by his own heritage. You, on the other hand, love him of your own free will."

"Why is that so difficult to believe?"

"Harry Potter, the twinkle in the wizarding world's eye, falling in love with Draco Malfoy, the son of a known Death Eater and associate of the Dark Lord? Surely you can see that tale is one for the history books. Operas are written about that kind of love, Potter. They never end happily."

"If you're quite finished--"

"What is it my son wants you to ask me?"

Harry once more begged Draco not to press the question, but his companion just nodded him on. "He wants to know," Harry spoke between gritted teeth, "how Narcissa Malfoy died."

Lucius' face lost all expression. "You don't remember, Draco?" The blond shook his head. "Nobody has told you?" Again, Draco shook his head. "I understand why Potter has chosen to withhold this information. He's probably grateful I'm here to describe the unfortunate event to you instead of him."

"Just tell him, Malfoy!" Harry barked, clamping down tightly on Draco's hand.

Lucius looked directly into his son's intense gaze. "You killed her."

Harry shut his eyes against the litany of denials running through Draco's head. "Explain to him what happened," Harry ordered.

"She went down to the dungeons to set you free. But you were too far gone by that time. You didn't recognize her at all. She never stood a chance."

Draco turned into Harry's waiting embrace, moaning softly against his shoulder. *Draco. Draco, listen to me. Your mother loved you. She wanted to help you. She would not have blamed you. She would know that you could not be held responsible for your actions. They had abused you past the point of recognizing your own flesh and blood. They hurt you so badly, you lost the ability to communicate. You can't condemn yourself for this one horrible memory. I won't lose you to this. I won't let them take you away from me.*

*Harry... What if someday I forget everything again -- turn back into what I was -- and do the same to you?*

*Never going to happen. Not on my watch. You're a human being, Draco, not an animal. We can move past this. Together. You and I. You're too strong to lose this fight to them now.*

Ask him--

*No more questions, Draco, please.*

*Ask him if I knew what I was doing when I killed those people.*

Sighing deeply, Harry looked back at Lucius Malfoy. "Draco wants to know if he was aware of what he was doing when he... when he killed."

"No," the man replied after a heavy pause. "He could not have known. His mind was gone. We locked him in a room with the muggles we captured and his survival instincts took over the rest. Nothing about the creature we produced resembled my son, until he saw you on that battlefield."

*Draco, did you hear that?*

...yes.

*You had no free will. You are not responsible.*

*I...*

*Then you saw me and you came back. I brought you back and I'll never leave you. Everything is alright now. You're a normal person.*

*Not normal,* Draco protested.

*Well, with a few added perks. Super strength, gorgeous white wings, the love of a devastatingly handsome wizard.*

Draco smiled into his neck. *Yeah.*

*Let's go home now. We'll eat a good meal, take a warm bath together, then settle in for some late-night telly. All the things we always do. I'll prove to you how normal we can be.*

Draco nodded and allowed himself to be guided towards the door. "Potter, wait," Lucius spoke up, his arm extended through the bars of his cell.

Draco instinctively reached out to take the outstretched hand, but Lucius wrenched his arm back inside his cage before he could. "No, son," he shook his head.

"Is there something else we can do for you, Mr. Malfoy?"

"I want... I want to tell Draco that I don't regret my choices in life. I did what I felt was in the best interest of our family and our kind. I gave up my only son to the cause. You never even questioned what we were doing. You trusted me and went along with whatever was done to you. I want you to live knowing I could not have asked for more from my child. You were everything I ever wanted in an heir. I didn't... I didn't know your mind would go.

"My only lament is that your mother's gone from me. Worse yet, she's gone *because* of me. Living without her every day, knowing that, is worse than anything they could ever do to me in here. I'll never know peace again. Losing one's mate is the sunset on your life. Protect yours unto death. Nothing is more important. No cause, no mission, no system of belief."

Harry and Draco stared at the man, stunned silent. The Veela nodded once, gazing solemnly into his father's eyes, before turning once more to leave. This time, the imprisoned man made no attempt to stop them.

Once back home, the two followed the same routine that Harry had predicted. They ate a dinner of leftover ham and vegetables, fed the dog, and stepped into the bath. Harry sat behind Draco, rubbing over his hunched back with a soft washcloth, entranced by the arced silver lines that marked the exact places where Draco's wings broke through his skin. Harry wondered not for the first time if it hurt when they came out. He had never asked.

*Harry...?*

"Yeah?" Harry kissed the top of his lover's spine.

*Did I really hate you as much as he said I did?*

Harry sighed, face pressed against Draco's back. He'd been worrying that question might arise ever since they got home. Pulling the limp and pliant body back against his chest, Harry rested his cheek against his lover's wet hair, whispering honestly, "I don't know."

*Did you hate me that much?*

"I... no. You were a royal pain in my arse, that much is true. But I saved all my hate for Voldemort and Wormtail and... Bellatrix."

Draco didn't react to his aunt's name. *I wish I could remember. I wish I could go back and love you like you deserved.*

"You love me now," Harry kissed his shoulder. "That's enough."

Draco reached his arm back and cupped the nape of Harry's neck in his palm. *Thank you for taking me today. I know you didn't want to go.*

"That man has inflicted a lot of pain on the people I love. Seeing him, even in prison, brought me absolutely no pleasure. But I'm glad I could do that for you. I would go back a dozen times if you needed me to."

*Who else has he hurt?* Draco wanted to know.

"What?"

*You said he hurt the people you love. Who else has he hurt?*

"He... it was because of him that Ginny ended up in the Chamber of Secrets."

Draco couldn't remember any details about that event. *You loved Ginny?*

"As a friend. I still do. You needn't get all fluffy about it. She'll always just be Ron's kid sister to me."

*Fluffy?* Draco snickered.

"You know how you get when I'm around her or Remus or Fleur. Your hair kind of fluffs out and you look like an angry cat."

*I do not!*

"You do. It's rather amusing, really."

*How do you get me to... un-fluff?*

"That's easy. I just touch you here" -- Harry caressed down the side of his lover's neck -- "or here" -- the curve of his belly -- "or here" -- the hilt of his cock -- "and you melt."

*I don't remember you ever touching me there around any of them, Draco squirmed.*

"No, I do have some restraint after all. But I think about it."

*You do?*

"Yeah. Sometimes we'll have company over and I'll be nodding my head along with the discussion, but what I'm really thinking about is the feel of your dick in my hand. The way you're always so responsive when I touch you. So hard, just for me. Me and no one else."

Yes... Draco's breath hitched as Harry began stroking his stiffening erection.

"I think about how it feels to go down on you. The way you buck and strain beneath me, your hands fisted in my hair as I suck you off. How your cock belongs to me and no one else gets to see you writhe in pleasure. It makes me feel good to know the sight of you wrestling with your own orgasm is for my eyes alone. I'm the only man in the world who gets to watch you come and it makes me feel like the luckiest person on earth."

Draco's hands gripped his lover's thighs tightly as Harry brought him to swift release. Kissing the supple, shivering shoulder under his mouth, Harry held onto Draco as the Veela's course of pleasure waned. "Come on," he murmured, lips moving against damp skin. "Let's get you out of here and into something warm. Then I'll see if we can't find an old black-and-white film on the telly."

The blond nodded weakly, standing on wobbly legs as Harry pulled them both out of the tub and dried them off. *I like that Cary Grant*, Draco admitted faintly.

Harry laughed and tied the sash of Draco's robe around his waist. "I know you do."

He kissed his lover lightly, pulling him by hand into the den. Together, they curled up under a blanket and settled in while Draco fiddled with the remote. He had become pretty good with the muggle machinery they owned, but could still be adorably befuddled about some things. Chuckling softly, Harry took the contraption from his lover's hand and turned to the right channel. Resting his head comfortably on Harry's shoulder, Draco yawned.

He fell asleep before the credits rolled.

## Chapter Thirteen

Harry awoke to an excited Veela straddling his hips. With the arm that wasn't pinned down, he felt about for his glasses on the bedside table. Shoving them back onto his face, one-handed, Harry blinked up at the fidgety blond above him. "Draco? What time is it?"

His mate leaned down and bit Harry's ear playfully. *Time to get up. We don't want to be late.*

"Wha...?" Harry yawned. "We're not expected at Hogwarts 'til noon. It's..." he glanced at the clock. "Seven-thirty! Draco, what's got into you? Get back into bed and let me sleep!"

The Veela grinned wolfishly and ducked under the covers, sliding down Harry's body. *I'm so glad we decided to start forgoing night clothes,* Harry heard in his head.

The dark-haired wizard tried to formulate an appropriate response but an eager mouth closed over his cock and short-circuited his brain. "Ooh... Mmm, yeah. That's... *yeah.*"

Two orgasms, a very long bath, and a quick breakfast later, Harry found himself dashing around their bedroom, trying to get ready. "I can't *believe* we're going to be late," he moaned.

Draco snagged his elbow as he walked by. *See, it wasn't too early to wake up at all.*

"Well, if I had known to pencil marathon sex into our schedule this morning, I might not have been so slow to get up."

*Oh, you want to have sex?* the voice was amused. *Okay then.*

Draco pushed Harry back onto the bed and climbed into his lap, licking his neck. "Oh no. Don't even think about it. We're late enough as it is."

*Are you sure?* his lover pressed, rocking up against him.

"No... I mean, yes! Yes! Off!"

Grumbling, Draco pulled away and moved to stand, helping Harry up. Harry straightened his rumpled robes, leaning over to kiss the pouting Veela, before ushering Baby into her crate with the promise of a biscuit. Together, they walked downstairs and Apparated to Hogsmeade. There wasn't time to stop in any of the shops, but before they could pass The Three Broomsticks, Draco drew them to a halt and paused to smell the air.

Pulling his cloak hood up over his head, Draco set down the path towards the Shrieking Shack. "Draco, we don't have *time* for this," Harry appealed.

Draco lingered in front of the old, dilapidated building. Harry put a hand at the small of his back. *I was talking to Ron,* Draco slowly recollected. *I was... attacked...*

"Err, I threw mud at you."

*But I didn't realize it was you. How...?*

"I was wearing my Invisibility Cloak. You couldn't see me."

Draco walked inside the house, touching the walls gingerly. *Sirius... Remus... Severus... James Potter...*

"You can sense all that?"

The blond nodded, awash with confusing, overlapping images. Crouching down, Draco felt the floorboards with his hand, sensing a struggle. *Wormtail.*

Harry squeezed his shoulder. "Come on. Dumbledore's expecting us. I'll tell you all about this place later."

Draco rose gracefully to his feet and took Harry's hand, allowing himself to be led out the door, back down the diverted path, and up to Hogwarts. They met few students on their way to the Great Hall, most already sitting down to lunch. Breathing deeply, Harry pushed open the grand doors to the room and the pair of them walked inside. A slow murmur fell over the students as the famous Harry Potter and his cloaked companion approached the head table.

Dumbledore smiled down at them. "I was beginning to fear you might not come."

Harry scratched the back of his head, grinning haplessly. "We got held up."

"Indeed," Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Why don't you two take a seat and enjoy the food. We can talk when you're finished."

At the first step towards the table, Draco's hood slipped off from the top of his white-gold head. Gasps emitted from every table. Several Gryffindors shifted uncomfortably in their seats and a lone Hufflepuff girl fainted dead away. *Oops*, Harry winced. The students would not exactly have been given any anti-toxin before their visit. Overwhelmed by the sudden rush of attention, Draco quickly brought his hood back up over his head. This seemed to help ease the situation a little.

*Draco, it's okay*, Harry soothed. *Just focus on me. Focus on what I'm feeling. Forget about everything else.*

The Veela nodded uncertainly, leaning heavily against Harry as the couple made their way to the end of the table. The din in the room settled somewhat, but Draco found himself still too uncomfortable to do more than push his food around his plate once it was served. Harry tried his best to eat left-handed -- his right being firmly clasped in Draco's left -- ignoring the stares and pointed whispers they were generating.

After an agonizing half hour, the students began to disperse for their next class. Dumbledore peered down at them and indicated with a brief tilt of the head that they should come to his office whenever they were ready, before he too stood to leave. Draco's declining mood hovered oppressively in the back of Harry's mind, and he steeled himself for the long trek out the room. The blond kept close to him as they walked through the doors and into the hallway towards the Headmaster's office.

"Harry!" a voice came up behind them. "Harry!"

Draco tensed as Harry turned around and greeted the student. She was a petite girl, with long brown curls and bright blue eyes. "Natalie," Harry smiled.

"It's so good to see you! It's been awhile," she beamed. Her eyes strayed to Draco.

"It has. This must be your last year, right?"

"Yes. I've been studying medi-magic under Madam Pomfrey and I hope to take the healer's exam next June."

"That's great! I'm sure witches and wizards everywhere will be healthier under your care."

Natalie blushed prettily, her eyes dilating a bit as she reached out to touch Draco's arm. Harry gently pushed her hand down, shaking his head. Seeming to come back to herself, Natalie's hand flew up to her mouth, embarrassed. "Oh! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean--!"

"It's okay, Natalie. We understand."

"Still, I--"

"It was good seeing you again, but we really must be meeting Dumbledore now."

"Of course, I don't mean to keep you. Bye, Harry! Malfoy..."

Turning on her heel, she abruptly ran away. Harry looked over at Draco to gage his disposition, but the tall Veela only appeared distracted by the young girl's departure. Tugging at his mate's hand, Harry pulled him down the hall and up the stairs, feet swift as they approached the familiar gargoyle guarding the secret entrance to the Headmaster's office. Harry frowned as he realized he had no idea what the password was, then relaxed when the staircase opened on its own accord as if the statue had been expecting them.

Once inside, Draco seemed to unwind some, letting his cowl fall back to his neck once more. Dumbledore stood by Fawkes, petting the bird's crimson feathers. "Please," he welcomed them. "Have a seat. I'm glad to see you both. Draco, my boy, how are you doing?"

The blond offered a tentative nod in response. "I'm glad to hear that," Dumbledore smiled, seeming to understand. "I invited you here at the request of Auror Shacklebolt. He was curious as to when you might be returning to work, Harry."

Harry scowled. "I was under the impression that my employment at the Ministry was only temporary during the course of the war. After all, I had no time to complete the three years of training required to fully earn my rank."

"No," Dumbledore acknowledged. "Exceptions were made for you and Ron Weasley both. Mr. Weasley now seems content to continue his job while he is trained. Are you not interested in taking up a similar offer?"

"It's not that," Harry shifted in his chair. "I've wanted to be an Auror since fourth year. But Draco..."

"Mr. Malfoy still requires your full attention."

Harry hedged the assumption by not addressing it. Theoretically, he believed Draco could survive just fine without him during the day. Harry simply felt no inclination to leave him. He was quite happy spending all of his time with the blond. There always seemed to be plenty of things with which to occupy their day. Some things Dumbledore really didn't need to know about. "I'll go back to work eventually," Harry promised.

"I see."

"With all due respect, sir, why didn't he contact me about this himself?"

"I suspect Kingsley was hoping I might be more effective in persuading you to return. Alas, I fear he underestimates your commitment to Mr. Malfoy's care," Dumbledore replied, eyes twinkling.

"Err, yes."

"He will be disappointed, of course, but I will relay your response."

"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all. Lemon drop?"

"As much as we would like to stay and talk, I fear spending time around so many people unaccustomed to a Veela has been taxing on Draco. He's having a little difficulty controlling his charms."

"Of course. Next time you visit, we'll choose a less public place to meet." Harry nodded gratefully, rising to his feet. "Before you go though, do call on Severus. I believe this is his off-period. He will be expecting you."

"Yes, sir."

The two left Dumbledore's office, heading straight for the dungeons. To Harry's relief, Draco seemed too preoccupied with the halls to take much notice of the stares they received from passing students. Harry rapped solidly on the door to Snape's office, having come to a halt before it. "Come in," an unwavering voice barked.

"Professor," Harry acknowledged. Snape had never asked him to call him Severus, despite their time working together during the war after his last year at Hogwarts. Harry suspected he never would.

"Potter. Malfoy," Draco smiled genuinely, extending his hand to shake his godfather's. Snape shook his head, declining the offer. "I'm afraid I haven't taken any anti-toxin today, Draco. Touching you might prompt an unwelcome response on my part."

Draco frowned but let his hand drop. "That brings me to one of the reasons I wanted to see you today. I would like you to accompany me to the hospital wing so that Madam Pomfrey might take another sample of your blood. I feel I am closer to finding an unequivocal anti-toxin against male Veela, but I am out of vials."

The blond nodded hesitantly. "I was also curious," Snape continued, "as to your progress. It has been several months now since you first came into contact with Mr. Potter. How much closer do you feel you are to leading a normal, independent life?"

*There is no life for me without Harry.*

Harry relayed Draco's thoughts to their former professor.

"I am aware of that. I meant, have you been venturing out into public at all?"

"A few times," Harry answered for him. "Some days are easier than others. Today... well, you saw what happened."

"Yes," Snape scowled. "It was utter foolishness on the Headmaster's part to have you come at such a crowded time. Does that mean you are no closer to controlling your powers?"

*Sometimes I can, sometimes I forget or get distracted.* Again, Harry repeated his thoughts aloud.

"Has any of your lost memory returned to you?"

*Very little.*

"Very little."

"I was wondering if a Pensieve might help. You could record what you do recall and keep the remembrances safe, as though in a journal. Catalogue as much of your life as you can."

"That is a good idea, Professor. Thank you."

"Because we can't be sure what specifically caused the memory loss, there is no way of knowing if the memories might ever return."

"But they could come back, right? I mean, someday he might remember... who he is."

"Draco knows who he is, Potter."

"I *know* that, I just meant--"

"Some or all of his memory could return, yes. It may happen at any time with no apparent provocation."

"Good. I mean, that's--"

"Good?" Snape raised an eyebrow. "That could create many difficulties for him, you realize. The younger Draco was hardly your biggest supporter. It would be unpleasant to wake up one day to suddenly find yourself loving someone whom you don't particularly like, don't you agree?"

Harry shot a startled glance towards Draco, whose gaze was fixed resolutely on the floor. "But he's-- I'm--"

"Oh for god's sake, Potter. He won't leave you. I'm just saying it might be hard for him to handle all at once. Hopefully, his memories will return slowly, over time, as he becomes better equipped to deal with them."

Harry nodded, swallowing thickly. Snape turned his attention back to Draco. "Are you able to inhibit your transformation, even when provoked?"

*More or less*, the blond muttered.

"Yes."

"Do you still crave rare meat?"

Draco brightened, grinning wickedly. *I get all the protein I need from Harry.*

Harry blushed to the roots of his hair, glaring at his lover. *Draco!*

*Sorry*, came the unrepentant reply.

"I'll take that as a no," Snape frowned, looking between the two of them then down at their joined hands. "I also take it you still require tactile support from Potter."

"Difficult to say," Harry responded. "He needs to touch me in order to communicate with me, so naturally we touch all the time."

"Hmm," the Potions master murmured, though he did not seem as disconcerted by the idea as Harry would have expected. "Still not a word?"

"No. Dumbledore feels, at this point, it is unlikely Draco will ever speak again."

"That is unfortunate."

Harry shrugged. "We've adapted."

"Yes, I've noticed." Snape stood up from behind his desk. "At the risk of invoking the wrath of your mate, I must confess to the obvious and say I've never had much use for you, Potter."

"Err... okay."

"When I first saw him obey you on that battlefield, I hoped it was a fluke. I refused to believe the Fates would see fit to make Draco's already miserable life that much worse by mating him to someone who could never love him. I never voiced my suspicions to the Headmaster as to your connection before that spectacle at his trial. However, seeing him now... I am glad you have been paired with him. I can think of no one better to have brought Draco back from the torment he suffered."

"Thank you, sir," Harry replied, astonished by the unexpected compliment.

"It's the pigheaded, bleeding heart Gryffindor in you. You just can't help bringing home strays."

Harry glowered. "He's not a--"

"Let's go get that blood sample," Snape interrupted.

The three of them made their way to the hospital wing in silence. Madam Pomfrey took several vials of Draco's blood -- her hand lingering a little longer than necessary on the Veela's arm, in Harry's opinion -- and soon Snape took his leave of them to go teach his next class. "Feel free to explore the halls, Mr. Malfoy," the man said before departing. "You may find yourself recovering quite a few missing memories of your own."

"Do you want to walk around some more?" Harry suggested once they were alone. "Go down to the Slytherin common room, perhaps?"

Draco shook his head. *No. I've already come across three places where you and I fought in this hallway alone.*

"Wow," Harry tried to make light of it. "And we haven't even been out to the Quidditch pitch yet."

*Take me home. I don't want to remember anymore.*

Harry caressed his hand over Draco's hair, smiling softly as the blond leaned into the touch. "Of course. We'll go home now. We can stop at Honeydukes on the way out of town, if you like. Buy some of that expensive, imported chocolate you love so much?"

*You don't have to try to make me feel better, Harry.*

"Yes, I do," Harry grinned, turning to envelop Draco's waist in his arms. "Anyway," he continued lightly. "You misunderstand my intentions. I happen to know from experience that too many sweets make you giddy. And a giddy Veela is an eager-to-please Veela. This is all part of my larger plan to get you into bed and never let you out again."

There. The tiniest of smiles. Harry congratulated himself on getting a favorable reaction out of the other man. "Come on," he kissed his lover's jaw. "Let's get some candy and spend the rest of the day feeding it to each other in front of the fireplace."

*You're so hopelessly sentimental, Harry.* Draco settled his cheek against his lover's messy hair.

"Don't act like you don't love it," Harry ran his palm over his lover's backside.

*Harry!* Draco jumped. *There are impressionable, young students around!*

"And if anyone could corrupt them, we could."

Draco shook his head, amused. *Let's go home now. I don't like so many people staring at me.*

"I don't like so many people staring at you either. It's like they don't realize you're mine."

*You always say they can't help it.*

"Hmph."

On their way back to Hogsmeade, Harry's mood dampened as he found himself plagued with worry over Snape's words. Sensing his mate's distress, Draco spoke up. *I won't hate you, Harry. If I remember. I can't imagine that I ever hated you.*

Harry didn't know what to say. He didn't want to crush Draco's beliefs, but... "Draco, we weren't--"

*It doesn't matter now. Whatever I thought then doesn't matter. I couldn't have known you then, not like I do now. I love you, Harry. And I rather like you as well.*

Harry chuckled and squeezed Draco's hand. "I rather like you too. Not so bad on the eyes. Not really the spoiled brat you tried to trick us all into seeing."

Draco was silent for some time, scowling. *I hate myself for hurting you. To know -- even without actually remembering -- that we used to fight--*

"Does it really bother you so much that we didn't always get along?"

The Veela mulled over this. *The thought of you being unhappy makes me feel wretched. To know that I used to be the one making you unhappy makes me feel even worse.*

"It wasn't really as bad as all that. You kept me on my toes. I learned a lot of good dueling spells because of you."

*I hurt you... I hit you...*

"So? I hit you back. We were just boys, Draco. Boys scuffle. It doesn't have to mean everything."

*I know that. But it still feels wrong.*

"It feels wrong *now* because we love each other. We weren't ready for that yet then. We had a lot of growing up to do." Harry rubbed his free hand up Draco's arm. "You know, I've never told anyone this -- not even Ron, *especially* not Ron -- but after you disappeared during sixth year? I kind of missed you."

Yeah?

"Yeah. I didn't have to spend time looking over my shoulder for a certain tenacious, quarrelsome Slytherin anymore. No one was around to sabotage my potions or antagonize me into defending my friends. Things were boring and I got lazy. I swear, if the war hadn't come along, I'd probably still be moping around Hogwarts, dying to know what ever happened to my little arch-rival."

*I'm not little*, the Veela protested.

"Well, no, not anymore. But you used to be. Somehow you managed to outgrow me. Very unfair, if I do say so myself."

*What, don't you like it that I could lift you up over my shoulder and carry you off to have my wicked way with you? Harry colored brightly. I think you enjoy it when I get all manly.*

"That's not manly, that's Veela-y."

*But you like it all the same.*

"Maybe," Harry conceded, grinning perversely.

*I think you like to be spread out before me like a Yuletide buffet as I ravage you with my insatiable need.*

"Could we finish this conversation at home?" Harry requested weakly.

*We can do more than talk once we leave here,* Draco promised.

"Mmm, yeah. Draco?"

Yes?

"Race you."

## Chapter Fourteen

Harry waited patiently for Draco to fully open his eyes as the blond began to rouse. The Veela stretched and grumbled, reaching out to his side for Harry and freezing when he didn't find him there. Draco jerked up abruptly, at once relieved to see Harry sitting calmly at the foot of their bed. The blond blinked, confused. Harry obligingly held out his hand and Draco grasped it at once. *Harry...?*

"Yes, love?"

Draco's cheeks colored endearingly. *What are you... What's going on?*

"Don't you remember what day it is?"

The Veela frowned. *Friday?*

Harry rolled his eyes, amused. "It's your birthday, Draco. Today, you're twenty-one years old."

*Oh.*

"You asked me when your birthday was and I found out for you, remember?"

*I guess I forgot. Why are you wearing pyjamas?*

Harry crawled forward to straddle Draco's lap over the covers. "I thought maybe I'd give you the pleasure of unwrapping your first present."

*My first present?*

"Yeah," he replied, grinning wickedly. "Me."

Draco smiled, reaching to unbutton Harry's top. The dark-haired wizard placed his hands on his lover's shoulders as Draco slipped eager hands inside his shirt, rubbing up and down his sides. *Harry?* Draco ventured, nuzzling his face into the soft neck before him. *Not that I don't appreciate the sentiment, but how is this different from any other morning when I wake up with you? Besides the clothes, I mean.*

Harry tilted his head slightly to land a kiss atop Draco's fine hair. "Today is different, Draco. Today's special."

*Special?*

"Today you get to ask me for whatever you want and I'll give it to you. Anything."

Draco froze, arms wrapped around Harry's chest. *Anything?*

"Anything. Just tell me what you want."

*What I want...*

"Tell me, Draco. I only want to make you feel good."

The Veela buried his face in Harry's shoulder, overwhelmed. *I want... You know what I want.*

"I want you to ask it of me."

*Why?*

"So I can make your wish come true, of course."

Draco shivered in Harry's embrace. *I want to... to make love to you the way you deserve. To pleasure you. I want...*

"Yes..."

*...to be inside you. I want to be inside every part of you. I want you to be inside every part of me. That's what I want more than anything. Is that... I mean, is that okay?*

"Gods, Draco, it's more than okay," he shifted pleurably against him, pyjama top fluttering down to his waist. "It's what I want too."

*Really?*

"Of course. Come on, make me scream your name for all the world to hear."

Draco growled, bucking and pulling Harry under the covers with him. *So good... I'm going to make this so good for you...*

"I trust you, Draco."

*God, Harry... I die a thousand deaths every day just being near you, and now you're letting me... I mean, I just... I never thought you'd love me enough to...*

"Neither did I," Harry admitted breathlessly. "Never saw you coming. Never expected such a gift to fall in my lap. But you're here and I'm here and it's wonderful."

*Harry... My Harry...*

Draco rocked against him, hands gripping the smaller man's hips desperately. Harry moaned as Draco sucked and nibbled across his neck, hands buried in the Veela's fine silvery-blond hair. Licking a trail down his lover's chest, Draco took his time moving down Harry's body, massaging his mate's flesh with skillful fingertips. The former Slytherin swiftly divested him of his pyjama bottoms, maneuvering straight to Harry's blushing cock.

Taking his time, Draco laved the organ with his tongue, mindful to suck at the tip and swipe under the foreskin with doting leisure. Harry shuddered and cried out under the careful ministrations, legs quivering and falling apart to grant Draco better access, body taut and trembling like a stringed instrument only Draco knew how to play. No one had ever touched him like Draco touched him. Not only in the literal sense, but in the spiritual as well. The blond seemed to know just how to affect him at all his deepest levels.

Slipping his hands beneath Harry's thighs, Draco gingerly pushed them back until the green-eyed wizard's knees rested against his chest. Opened up and eager as Harry was, the Veela in Draco felt driven to the edge with need. Need to fuck and possess, yes, but also to please, to pamper. To lavish Harry with all the attention and appreciation he deserved. Harry was his, mind and body; he bore the Veela's mark on his flesh. But similarly did he own Draco, the weight of his lover's soul heavy in the palm of his hand.

Rolling Harry's balls once, twice, with his tongue, Draco licked down to his lover's puckered entrance and pressed inside. Harry jerked and writhed at the feeling, rumbling contented murmurs along their telepathic bond. Draco made love to Harry with his tongue, probing and exploring until the satisfying sensation of lapping at his lover was permanently branded onto his brain. A finger slipped in to join the tongue, stretching the flesh around it with care.

Nuzzling Harry's cock with his nose, Draco crawled up his lover's body and kissed him deeply, hands running up and down Harry's spread thighs between them. Harry reached down to grasp Draco's ass in hand and arched up against him wantonly, insinuating with his body what he wanted Draco to do in ways words never could. The blond rubbed his own aching erection against Harry's, eagerly. *Want you so much...*

With a heavy, lidded gaze, Harry pushed Draco back just far enough so that he could squirm and turn over, his own legs pinned to the bed beneath him. Draco seemed to shudder above him, running worshipful hands up and over his huddled form reverently, kissing a tender line down Harry's spine. "In the... in the drawer..." Harry managed.

Leaning over, Draco pulled a tube of lubricant out of the bedside table. After spending several minutes stretching and preparing Harry, he moved his hands up and down Harry's back in several slow, soothing strokes. Knees braced on opposite sides of his lover, Draco quickly rubbed lube over his own aching erection, gripping Harry's hip in one hand and his own cock in the other. Harry clutched at the sheets as Draco slowly -- so *slowly* -- eased himself inside. All conscious thought fled when the blond pulled out until only the crown of his cock remained inside, then plunged back in to the hilt.

Harry let out a choked gasp as Draco's length filled him, the Veela's fingers digging almost painfully into the flesh of his hips. Eyes shut tight, Harry tried as hard as he could to relax. Draco was a tight fit inside him -- an agonizingly tight fit -- and Harry couldn't be entirely sure one wrong move wouldn't split him in twain. Instinct begged Harry to push back, but he fought it with every ounce of control he had, feeling like he might die if Draco didn't stay exactly where he was.

Finally, Draco began to move. Leisurely at first, then faster as he got a steady rhythm going. Every time Draco returned, Harry cried out afresh, rubbing his own erection into the uncaring sheets beneath him. Seeming to sense his lover's anguish, Draco wriggled a hand under Harry's body to seize his cock, stroking it in time with his thrusts. Harry bit his lip bloody at the sensation, sobbing his enjoyment into the pillow under his head.

The Veela's purring echoed loudly through the room as he pumped harder and with more fervor. In time, Harry's body slackened beneath him, welcoming his lover upon every re-entry. He was tight and scorching hot around Draco's cock, but the way had been paved for the former Slytherin to move within the man he loved with little resistance. The muscles around him were clenched no less firmly, however, and instinct took over as Draco bucked, continuing to work Harry's shaft in his sweaty hand.

Before long, Harry was tumbling, falling away from the world and everything in it, as he drowned in a turbulent orgasm. Howling his lover's name, Harry ejected stream after hot stream of release over Draco's grip and across his own belly. Sliding his free hand to the small of Harry's back, Draco offered one final shove before he too was coming hard and fast, erection pulsing inside his lover until every last drop he had to give was drained.

Crumpling against his mate's back, Draco took deep gulps of air into his lungs, hips still slowly rocking forward even as his orgasm trickled to a stop. Harry was panting desperately beneath him, sheets bunched and twisted in his tight grip, eyes screwed shut as if to better shelter himself from the onslaught of emotion that filled the very fiber of his being.

Reluctantly, before Harry could recover enough to notice him still there, Draco slipped out from his lover's body, the head of his cock sliding out easily. Harry whimpered at the sensation, suddenly sore and unhappily bereft of the feeling of being satisfied from the inside out. He wanted that cock back, filling him, completing him. Rubbing that sweet spot within him that was almost too incredible to be real.

Harry could feel Draco mouthing the back of his neck, spilling words of adoration into his mind and caressing his quivery thighs with all the gentleness Harry had come to expect. Then that mouth was gone, as was the gratifying weight of Draco's body against his back. Harry had only a moment to wonder where the Veela had gone before once again feeling an insistent tongue at his entrance. Draco's tongue cleaned him with such caring intimacy that Harry felt dizzy with love and appreciation.

He felt himself being turned over and a satisfied Slytherin settled between his bent legs. The green-eyed wizard welcomed him with open arms, stroking the Veela's shoulder blades and squirming comfortably beneath his heavy form. Harry's hands lent a comforting presence to Draco as he laid against him, mind scrambling to gain perspective on what they'd just done.

*I knew it could be good... that it would be good with you... But I never... God, I'm with you, Harry, I'm with you and I'm home.*

"With me is where you belong," Harry rasped, panting with exhaustion.

*Only you make me feel this good, Harry. I know that only you ever has or ever could. You have this power to brighten the lives of everyone you touch, and to think you'd choose me to... to...*

"I couldn't even imagine being with anyone else. I thought I was doing you a favor by welcoming you into my home, yet here you are, allowing me the pleasure of knowing you, loving you. I couldn't be more humbled or happy."

*Harry... I want you so badly. I almost... I can't...*

Harry closed his eyes, running contented hands up and down his lover's back. Minutes turned long as they lay together, warm and comfortable. After a time, Harry reawakened from a light slumber to the feeling of his mate nuzzling the side of his face, hands making their way down his naked body. Harry sighed and pressed a kiss on top of the blond head. "Draco, I want..."

*I know.*

"You don't even know what I was going to say," Harry chuckled.

*I do. Because it's what I want too.*

Draco reached between them, stroking Harry's dick to erection. Harry rolled them over until he was leaning forward between Draco's legs. "I want to watch you this time. To look into your eyes. I want to see my reflection in them as you come."

*Whatever you want, Harry.*

Harry recovered the lubricant from where it had been carelessly tossed on the bed and used a copious amount to prepare Draco. Draping the Veela's legs up over his shoulders, Harry carefully slid home. The pair moved in perfect synch, kissing and tasting, touching and learning. Their bodies melted into one another, mounted desire fusing them together until it was impossible to tell where one ended and the other began. Release came almost too swiftly, resigning them to the fact that sex would never last as long as their desire for it did.

"Arry..."

The whispered word struck like a lightning bolt across an otherwise still and cloudless sky. Harry froze atop his lover, one hand touching the Veela's alabaster cheek almost reverently. "Draco?"

The blond gazed up at Harry, mouth working furiously to repeat the sound. No more words were forthcoming, but Harry was too distracted to care. "Draco, you *spoke!* You said my name! Say it again!"

Draco scowled, baffled as he could produce no more noise. Harry merely laughed. "Oh gods, Draco, you spoke! This is so wonderful. And unexpected! I thought that... But who cares what I thought, you spoke to me!"

Draco smiled tremulously. *I love you, Harry. And I love my birthday present.*

"The first of many, I promise. Merlin, this is amazing. I can't wait to tell Hermione! Oh, we had better get up soon. She and Ron are coming over early to help prepare for the party."

*Party?*

"Your birthday party, of course. Couldn't let this day go by without using it as an excuse to see everyone we love, now could we?"

*Harry, I... Thank you.*

The green-eyed wizard laughed merrily. "Up with you, my dear Malfoy. I fully intend to have some fun in the bath and time is of the essence."

Draco grinned. *Heaven forbid I ever keep you waiting.*

Some time later, the clean and contented pair descended the staircase to overhear two hushed voices already deep in discussion. "I just don't see why *Snape* has to come," one was saying.

"Don't be ridiculous, Ron. *Snape* is Draco's godfather. Of course he'll want to see him. Knowing *Snape*, he'll come over just long enough to have a five-minute conversation with Draco before Disapparating away lest anyone notice his presence. He's never struck me as one much for crowds; it speaks highly to his feelings for his godson that he would even come at all."

"Hey, Harry! Malfoy," Ron greeted as they came into the room.

"Happy birthday, Draco!" Hermione chirped, moving to hug Draco before stopping herself at the last minute. "Sorry, sometimes I forget myself," she grinned.

Draco smiled and sat down at the table across from Ron. Harry moved past him to get some juice from the fridge. "I see you two made yourselves at home in my kitchen," he quipped.

"*Someone* had to start getting things ready, Harry," Hermione reprimanded. "Not all of us have the luxury of lying about in bed all day."

"Don't have the luxury or don't have any reason to?" Harry smirked, returning the juice carton and taking a sip from his glass.

"Rub it in, why don't you," Ron grumbled. "Not all of us have Veela dying to mate with us, you know."

Harry raised an eyebrow at Ron's choice of words, fighting back a snicker. "You don't need a Veela to fall in love, Ron. I happen to know of several available witches who'd jump at the chance to go out with such a *dashing* Auror as yourself." He looked pointedly at the back of Hermione's head, but Ron didn't seem to notice.

"Don't even think about it, mate. The last bird you set me up with from work turned out to be a raving loon."

"Ron, that was a year ago! And I hardly think her wanting to meet your family makes her loony."

"I'd say it does. Honestly, Harry, what kind of girl wants to meet a bunch of nosy older brothers? She was stalking me, I tell you."

"I love your brothers," Hermione mentioned casually.

"That's because they think of you like a younger sister. You're special."

"Of course she's special," Harry agreed. "Our Hermione is a prize catch."

"I'll thank you not to talk about me like a possession to be won, Harry James."

Harry looked suitably chagrined. He walked over to stand behind Draco's chair, fingers caressing the back of his lover's neck. A wicked gleam entered his eyes. "Draco wants to know if you're both so miserable being single, then maybe you should try going out with each other. You know, just to make sure you're not missing out on anything really great."

Draco whipped his head around and glared. *I said nothing of the sort, Harry.*

*Run with me here, love.*

"I'm sure Ron would rather--"

"As if Hermione would ever--"

Ron and Hermione stopped and looked at each other. "I never said I would *never*--"

"You mean you would--"

"Maybe I would. Since neither one of us is currently attached--"

"Well, don't do me any *favours*, Hermione."

"I wouldn't dream of it, *Ronald*."

Harry sighed and rolled his eyes, figuring he better cut off this line of debate before someone got hexed. "Draco and I have some really incredible news," he announced nonchalantly, sitting on the edge of Draco's chair.

Hermione grinned widely. "Oh, are you *expecting*?"

Ron choked, coughing. "*What?!* What the devil are you on about, Hermione, Draco can't be--"

"Veela males can get pregnant," Hermione interrupted, winking at Harry.

"You're joking, right? If this is a joke, Hermione, I'm not laughing."

Harry chuckled, deciding to let Ron off the hook. "Relax, Ron, nobody's pregnant."

"So what's the news then?" Hermione wanted to know.

Harry took a deep breath, leaning back against his lover. "Draco said something this morning. He spoke my name!"

Hermione gasped, amazed. "That's wonderful! I mean, how amazing! Dumbledore will be thrilled when he hears this, even he never expected..."

Ron smiled, relieved he wouldn't have to worry about any little half-Veela Potters running around. Right?  
"Congratulations, Malfoy! Always knew you had it in you. And on your birthday too."

Harry leaned back and kissed Draco's temple, suddenly overwhelmed with pride. "Draco never ceases to amaze me."

Hermione smiled, amused, as they slipped into their own private world together. Ron tapped his fingers against the tabletop, nervously looking anywhere but at them. Chuckling, Hermione kindly resolved to help relieve her friend's discomfort. "Would you two like to see the cake?"

Harry turned back to face them. "Oh yes, we would."

Carefully pulling the box top off the cake on the table, Hermione turned it around to face her friends. The round cake appeared to be buttercream with sweeping shells of icing looping around the edges. It was decorated plainly with a simple 'Happy Birthday, Draco' scrawled across its face and a small, sleeping dragon underneath. Hermione touched the soft icing of the dragon's back gently and it roused to turn and re-settle at the bottom of the cake. "Never tickle a sleeping dragon," she laughed.

*That's... Draco swallowed. I love it.*

"Draco really likes it," Harry relayed. "Did you bake it yourself, Hermione?"

"Oh heavens no. Commissioned it from Honeydukes. When I mentioned whom it was for, the owner laughed and came up with the design right away. Said something about imported chocolate and blood-flavored lollipops. I take it you two have been there before?"

Harry grinned. "Maybe once or twice."

Draco reached forward to touch the dragon and Hermione batted his hand away playfully. "Don't tickle it too much or he'll go into hiding on the side of the cake. Ron already learned that the hard way."

"It's a cake!" Ron exclaimed. "Where does he think he's going?"

"Looks delicious," Harry declared.

Draco's arms tightened around Harry's form as he leaned in and pressed a wet kiss to the back of his lover's neck. *You taste better.*

The green-eyed wizard squirmed, laughing, as the kiss was followed by several licks and nibbles. "*Draco*," Harry chuckled. "S-stop."

"Yes, please," Ron spoke up. "Stop."

Draco ignored them both, turning Harry in the chair, one leg laid over his. The Veela buried his face in his mate's neck, inhaling his scent deeply. As kisses were peppered over Harry's neck and jaw, the younger man couldn't help but bury his hands in Draco's hair. The former Slytherin seemed to spend forever memorizing the taste of Harry's flesh beneath his lips. *Draco*, Harry managed. *You're embarrassing me.*

Draco looked past him. *How's that? They're not in here anymore.*

Harry looked back to note that Ron and Hermione had indeed left the kitchen. "Shame on you," Harry chided lightly. "Chasing away your guests like that."

*So I want a moment alone with you*, Draco mused, running his hand through Harry's bangs. *Is that too much to ask?*

Harry leaned into him, arms around his neck. "I guess not. You are the birthday boy, after all."

Draco pressed more gentle kisses along Harry's face, beginning at the edge of his jagged scar and ending at the soft flesh at the corner of his mouth. Harry closed his eyes and sighed, fingers twisting in the hair at the nape of Draco's neck. "Ooh, that's... Draco?"

*Yeah?*

"Can we go back upstairs now?"

The hands at Harry's waist gripped his sides tightly. *I'm afraid you saw to it that we would have company for the next several hours. Think you can wait that long?*

"I... no. Need you now."

The lips on Harry's neck paused, thoughtful. *I suppose we could ask Ron to cover for us while we... took care of urgent business, Draco rubbed the hard denim over Harry's crotch.*

"Yes... I mean, no! We can't ask Ron to cover for us, he'll know what we're doing."

*I think he'll be too happy that we're not doing it in front of him to care.*

"Mmm... No. Must be strong. Plenty of time for privacy later."

*I could just bend you over and take you right here on the kitchen table.*

Harry audibly groaned. "Don't tease," he begged. "Please."

*Who's teasing? You think I wouldn't make love to you in our own house just because there are people in the next room? Let them wait. You're the only one on my mind right now.*

The dark-haired wizard shivered in his arms. "Draco... I... that's..."

*You like it when I talk about all the things we could do, Harry? His lover nodded dumbly. How, if I wanted to, I could have your knees up behind your head, right here on this table, company be damned? Did you like it when I took you this morning? We could do it again right now, if we wanted to. All you'd have to do is... move a little...*

Harry was panting, openly. "So help me, Draco Malfoy, if you make me come in these jeans, I'll..."

*You'll what? Fall to my feet and return the favor? Would you like that? Getting down on your knees for me? Or maybe you'd prefer me getting on my knees for you. Moaning as you grab my hair and--*

"That's it," Harry pulled away with no small effort.

Dragging Draco forcefully out of the kitchen by hand, past the questioning gazes of their friends in the parlor, up the stairs, and into their bedroom, Harry shoved him roughly onto the bed, face first. *Going to take me now, Harry? Draco's voice resounded in his head, amused.*

"You're the birthday boy," Harry replied. "I'm just here to deliver your spankings."



## Chapter Fifteen – Epilogue

"This looks to be as good a spot as any."

The sun shone brightly overhead as Ron laid a blanket out for their picnic lunch. The April day provided plenty of warmth, while a light breeze ensured a pleasant afternoon. Between jobs and routine responsibilities, the four did not have as much time to get together as they once did, so they took advantage of every weekend they could. Even if this particular weekend did include babysitting duty for Ron. Bill and Fleur had traveled to France for their anniversary, leaving daughter Laurel behind in her grandparents' care.

In return for making the bulk of the picnic food, Mrs. Weasley had convinced Ron to take Laurel on the picnic with him. A fun outing for the three-year-old, particularly since it would include her favorite person in the world, Draco Malfoy. To the comprehension of few, Laurel idolized the older Veela, following him everywhere she could like a duckling would its mother. At first, Draco felt unsure about how to react to such exuberant attention, more used to the general wariness he instilled in most people. But it wasn't long before he returned her adoration many times over.

"Draco, sit with me!"

"Okay," the blond softly replied. Her little palm was warm in his and he smiled as she climbed into his lap.

"My niece likes you better than she likes me, Malfoy," Ron grouched, smiling.

*It's because I'm prettier,* Draco quipped blithely.

"That's hardly fair," Ron complained, once Harry passed on the retort. "You have vibes. Which my niece better never pick up on when she becomes a teenager, by the way."

"I think her future self's virtue is safe from Draco, Ron," Hermione chuckled, setting out the picnic dishes.

*I could never be interested in anyone but Harry,* he concurred. Harry smiled, rubbing circles into the small of his lover's back. *He's the only person who can keep up with me.*

"He says... Draco, *shut-up!*" Harry hissed, embarrassed.

The former Slytherin could barely contain his laughter at the near slip. Hermione eyed the two mischievously, deciding it was probably best not to know.

"Don't be thinking dirty things around my impressionable niece."

"She can't hear him, Ron," Harry said, scowling at his mate as he nodded in false seriousness.

"I'm starved, what did my mum make for us?"

Hermione set out making a plate for Laurel first. "Sandwiches, crisps, chocolate frogs..."

"Frogs!" Laurel clapped.

"...a blood-flavored lollipop for Draco."

"That was sweet of her," Harry smiled.

"I think Malfoy's charms have gone to Mum's brain. She thinks he's her adopted son-in-law or something."

*I am.*

"He is."

"Never thought I'd be related to a Malfoy," Ron shook his head. "Not so terrible, I suppose. When he's not sending vibes at me."

"Don't tempt him," Hermione admonished, handing Draco a napkin with which to wipe the crumbs from Laurel's face.

"Oh, Harry, are we still on for the Cannons game next weekend? I tried to call you yesterday, but your floo was closed."

"Err, yeah, sorry about that. We're still on. Yesterday... well, Draco and I were having a, um, serious discussion so I temporarily closed it."

"You two were *fighting*?"

"We weren't fighting, it was just... an argument."

"It was s-stupid!" Draco blurted out. *Harry's being stubborn!*

"Imagine that," Hermione pondered wryly.

Harry sighed, smiling despite himself. "Draco wants to get a car."

"A *car*? We're wizards, Malfoy, what do you need with a car?"

"I think he just wants to add it to his 'muggle artifacts' collection," Harry smirked.

*It's not that!* Draco glared.

"I swear, Malfoy, you and my father have way too much in common."

"Actually, I think it makes perfect sense." All eyes turned to Hermione as she spoke. "Your speech gives you difficulty navigating the Floo network and you're still not allowed to Apparate."

"A restriction that will be lifted shortly, if I have anything to do with it," Harry growled.

"You can hardly fly from place to place, broom or no. A car seems a reasonable solution to me, it would at least enable you to get out more."

Draco nodded, beaming that someone saw things his way.

"Hermione," Harry interjected, staring at her meaningfully. "I really don't think Draco should go into muggle areas by himself, do you?"

*I'm not crippled!*

"What you are," he assured, "is *amazing*. That's not the point. If you were to loosen control over your charms even the slightest, you'd have muggles following you down the street. It worries me when I'm not with you."

Draco scowled, but let it go, resettling the squirming toddler in his lap. Hermione eyed Harry speculatively, before turning to her fidgeting niece. "Laurel, I see some ducks in that pond over there. Would you like Uncle Ron to take you to feed them?"

Ron glared at his girlfriend, put out with her avid willingness to offer his assistance. And the way she turned and winked at him was not cute *at all*. Not even when it made her nose scrunch up a little and her cheeks tint pink with barely-concealed mirth. Grumbling in token protest, Ron squeezed Hermione's hand as it found his on the picnic blanket before taking the bread from the basket and standing to go. "Let's go feed the ducks, Laurel."

"Draco, come," the child insisted, pulling excitedly at the Veela's hand. Pleased at the request for his company, Draco rose to his feet, tugging playfully on her hair. She giggled at the light touch, darting for the pond with Draco trailing after her sedately.

Hermione watched Harry's wistful eyes follow the departing trio. "He looks well," she mused.

"Mm," he concurred absently.

She waved a hand in front of his face, smiling in amusement. "He's not going far, you know."

Harry swatted her hand away, good-naturedly, and turned back to face her. "Yeah, yeah. How is it I've become the one with separation anxiety?"

Hermione chuckled, patting his hand. "It's okay. Spending time apart is unusual for you."

"He's started his potions apprenticeship with Snape already, did you know? I take him to Hogwarts on my way to work, every other day."

"Oh yes! I think this is a wonderful development, Harry. Snape will be patient with him -- as patient as Snape can be with anyone, I suppose -- and Draco's always been interested in the subject matter. It's a perfect opportunity for him to gain more confidence and a stronger sense of purpose."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "I just worry about how he gets on without me there. He might need me and I wouldn't know it."

"How's his speech coming along? I know it's been a slow progression, but he rarely talks in front of anyone besides you."

"Draco's embarrassed because he stutters and can't always sound out every syllable. It makes him feel handicapped."

"Well, not being able to speak *is* a disability, but that doesn't mean he has anything to be ashamed of. He knows Ron and I wouldn't judge him for trying, right?"

"He knows. Draco just doesn't like appearing weak in front of anyone, even me. I suspect he could speak more than he does now if he pushed himself harder."

Hermione pondered this for a moment. "It could be that attempting anything without some probability of success makes him feel like he's setting himself up for failure. He was such a perfectionist at Hogwarts. I don't know. You would understand him better than I."

"No, that sounds right. He can utter single words, or even small sentences if he concentrates hard enough, but most of the time he doesn't bother. Talking in his head is easy and familiar. Who knows, maybe that's for the best. Would it really be right for me to push him to do something he's not comfortable with?"

"I think being able to communicate independently is an essential part of his recovery. Right now, he talks mostly to you -- or to us *through* you -- and that's fine, but it's not enough for him to feel secure in going about on his own."

"I've tried working with him one-on-one, but he gets frustrated with himself and closes off. How can he feel self-conscious in front of *me* after all this time?"

"He cares about your opinion of him very much. Oh, I have an idea! Why don't you ask Remus if he would be willing to work with Draco? He's a great teacher and would understand the complexities of walking through life as someone a little more than human."

"But Draco *really* doesn't like being around Remus."

"No, Harry, he really doesn't like Remus being around *you*. It's a territorial thing, I'm sure. He still perceives Remus as much more of a physical threat to you than the rest of us."

"I've tried talking to him about that, but it just doesn't sink in. He's going to keep disliking Remus no matter what I say."

"That's exactly why he'd be perfect. Draco will probably drive himself to speak sheerly so that he can tell Remus off more readily."

Harry grinned a bit at the imagery, eyes moving to the distant form of his blond lover watching after the toddler. "I'll see what Remus thinks. He may have his own reservations. The last time he came to our house, Draco spent the entire evening being suspiciously pleasant. It wasn't until later that I found out he had compiled a list of forty-seven different ways he could 'dispose' of Remus *without* the use of weapons, and *slipped it in his coat pocket*."

Hermione smiled wryly. "That sounds more like the Malfoy I remember."

"Needless to say, I was not amused."

"Oh, I'm sure you stayed mad at him for half an hour, at least," she snickered.

Harry flushed. "You're funny. I just don't like having to be angry if there's a better way to get my point across." Hermione's hand clamped over her mouth, quick to stifle the raucous laughter that threatened to bubble forth. Harry stared at her a moment before comprehending. "I didn't mean it like that!"

"Mm-hmm."

"Change of subject," Harry stressed irritably, glancing back over at Draco now resting serenely against a tree. A smile stole across his face unbidden at the sight of the blond in such calm repose, disturbed only by the sound of a brief sneeze. Harry frowned, concerned. "Maybe we should have stayed home today. He's still getting over the flu. You know how he hates being sick. Shamelessly monopolizes my attention, of course, but I don't really mind doing things for him."

"On the contrary," Hermione smiled. "I think you enjoy it."

Harry reddened and looked away. "I guess. It's nice. Being someone's one and only. There isn't much I can do for him anymore that he can't do for himself."

"No wonder you always seem so happy when Draco's feeling under the weather," she teased.

He looked at her sharply. "I don't *want* Draco to be unwell, Hermione."

"You know I didn't mean it that way. I just recognize that, as he's been getting out more lately and you've gone back to work, the two of you don't get to spend as much time together as you have in the past. You must miss that."

Harry looked down, picking at the grass beneath his fingertips. "It's not that I don't want him to be entirely independent, I *do*. Every day he gets better is another miracle. I just... sometimes I miss feeling like he really needs me. It's selfish, I know."

Hermione's hand moved to cover his. "It's *love*. And Draco does need you, Harry, more deeply I suspect than any of us could possibly imagine. Don't mistake his growing autonomy for distance. You are still the sun in his solar system."

Harry's eyes rose to meet Hermione's. "I should feel guilty for how good that feels to hear."

"Harry, no--"

"I should, but I don't. Because he's the sun in mine as well."

"I'm so pleased that you're happy, Harry, you can't know how much. You *deserve* to be happy."

"So do you. So does everyone. Speaking of which," Harry grinned slyly. "How are things with Ron?"

Hermione blushed cutely. "Good. *Great*. We haven't told anyone yet, but we're looking at flats."

"Hermione, that's great!"

She tucked a lock of wavy hair behind her ear, smiling. "One step at a time. I know my parents would rather we were married first, but this is how we want to do things."

"Molly's going to positively sob when she hears," Harry grinned. "Her last little boy leaving the roost. And him leaving to be with you is like a dream come true."

"I think you're exaggerating things just a bit, but... Ron and I are very excited. It's scary, you know? But it's nice being scared together."

"I can attest to that."

"It's funny. I didn't expect any of this, and yet it feels like there was never any other way for things to turn out. My whole life has been building up to this one moment. And tomorrow, it'll have built up to a different moment. I'm just... really looking forward to tomorrow."

Hermione blushed, suddenly self-conscious. Smiling fondly, Harry leaned over and hugged her, speaking softly in her ear, "I can attest to that as well." He pulled back, wiping away the wetness from Hermione's lashes with a tender thumb. "He's lucky to have you. And he knows it, I promise."

The moment ended suddenly as a flash of blond ran onto their picnic blanket, falling over in rambunctious laughter. Ron jogged up behind her, breathing heavily from trying to keep up with the child. "She just won't stay *still*," Ron bemoaned, collapsing next to his girlfriend. Little Laurel climbed to her feet, as if to escape, but Ron caught her first, pulling the giggling little girl down into his lap.

"I'm too old for this," Ron continued piteously. "I can catch criminals no problem, but taking care of little kids is just too much."

Harry and Hermione shared a look, rolling their eyes fondly. Squinting into the bright sun, Harry turned to look for Draco just as a shadow fell over him, blocking out the glaring light. He extended a warm hand, grinning as he pulled the blond down to the spot next to his. Draco didn't relinquish Harry's hand upon sitting, holding it clasped between his own instead, while the two listened to Ron and Hermione's light-hearted verbal tussling. Harry's thumb caressed the softness of his lover's skin as the ever-present tingling at their contact hummed pleasantly.

The dark-haired Auror leaned his forehead against Draco's shoulder, sighing. Draco smelled so sweet. He wondered if the scent were obvious to everyone or just to him, as the Veela's companion. He rather hoped it was the latter. *Laurel really likes you*, he chuckled, glancing at the tiny girl beginning to fall asleep in Ron's lap.

Draco smiled. *It's because I'm Veela. She instinctually senses a kinship between us.*

*I think it's your irresistible charm. When you smile at someone, it's like the sun is beaming down just on them.*

The former Slytherin colored despite his best efforts to appear unaffected. *I think you're the only one who feels like that, Harry.*

*You underestimate yourself. If you wanted, you could have the whole world eating out of the palm of your hand.*

A lengthy pause.

*That's what my father said to me right before my final treatment.*

A moment crawled by before the full implication of Draco's statement hit Harry and, when it did, he felt as though a cold tsunami of gloom had just washed away the warm day's bliss. Harry pulled back abruptly, gripping Draco's palm in his until it began turning white. Startled, Draco turned to question the sudden change in his lover's mood. *Harry, what--*

"We'll be right back," Harry announced aloud, jumping to his feet and pulling Draco with him. He dragged them both behind a large tree several meters away, grateful for any small bit of privacy it could afford. Clutching Draco's arms in an insistent grip, Harry breathed shallowly, rasping, "How long have you been remembering things?"

*I've always been remembering things, little by little. You know that.*

"No. I mean, how long have you been remembering *those* things. How long have you been remembering your... your treatments."

Draco's hands gripped the front of Harry's jumper nervously. "Some time," came the scratchy whisper. "Didn't want to t-tell."

"What?!" Harry gawked. "Why *not*?! Since when have we been hiding things from each other?"

The Veela blanched, eyes focused at their feet. *It's not like that, Harry. I just... I just didn't--*

"You just didn't *what*?"

*I didn't want you to worry. I'm still doing okay. Really. It's important than you believe that. I couldn't bear it if... if you looked at me with pity.*

Harry stared at his lover in dawning comprehension, exhaling heavily as he recollected his thoughts. Palms damp with anxiety found their way to Draco's face, sketching over the softly defined cheekbones with worshipful fingertips. "God, Draco."

*Harry?* he blinked.

Calming down, Harry pressed his face against the blond's cheek, his mouth moving to scatter feather-soft kisses across Draco's jaw. Trembling fingers threaded through Veela hair of pale silk, reassuring him of the other man's presence in the world. *My breath is fogging up your glasses,* Draco smiled gently.

Harry pulled back only far enough to remove his glasses, letting them slip from his fingers to the grass below. "I want to tell you something, Draco. Are you listening?" The answering nod came close enough to scatter his own bangs. "You don't *ever* have to hold back from telling me something important like this out of concern for my feelings. I'm strong. I can take it. And you're strong too, I know that. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't make our burdens easier by sharing them with one another. You and I are a team."

*A team with two Seekers?* Draco smiled.

"We're in this together," Harry continued, unabated. "Together meaning *not alone*. Yes, I hurt when you hurt. But I'd rather hurt *with* you than know either one of us is hurting apart. Do you understand? This is the best I know how to help ease your pain. You *have* to let me do this for you -- and for *me* -- even if you think you can handle it on your own. I need you, Draco. I need you like I need the air in my lungs. And I need you to need me *back*."

Draco's expression softened. *I do need you, Harry. There is no me without you.*

"Don't say that. I have to know you're with me because you want to be, not because you're driven to be."

Draco grazed the backs of his fingers down Harry's cheek. *How can you still not know? How often must I tell you?*

"One more time. Like always."

"Arry," Draco began, coughing as his voice cracked. Not to be discouraged, he started again. *Harry. I was born on that battlefield where you found me. The sights and sounds of death were all around me; everything was dark and confusing and painful. Then suddenly you were there. This blazing, bright light. I had to get to you, had to touch you. Only you could make things good again. Only you could bring me peace. Instinct compelled me to you. To protect you, to hold you.*

*But it's love that's kept me here. You opened up your life to me, let yourself love me in a way no one ever had. A way I never thought anyone could. Sometimes... sometimes I think about the person I was before the war and it frightens me to think I might have missed out on having this. That you might be with someone who isn't me. Someone else seeing you smile. I... I don't care what I had to go through to get here, there isn't anywhere else in the world I'd rather be.*

"But--"

*And I know if the... the me from before knew then what I know now, he'd feel exactly the same. I know he would want you too. You're everything I could ever want. I was born with you pulsing through my veins.*

"You're older than I am," Harry pointed out shakily.

The Veela shook his head. *I never lived until I knew what it was like to love you.*

Harry sucked in a sharp breath. "You didn't need me to find your way."

*I think I did. I was Icarus and I was falling and you caught me. You saved me from drowning. You taught me how it feels to fly.*

Harry buried his face in Draco's neck, overwhelmed. Draco's arms tightened their grip around the man in his arms, laying his cheek against his lover's hair. "Harry," he sighed. "I..."

His companion leaned back, smiling fondly. "You...?"

"I th-think..." Draco turned his head suddenly and sneezed, rubbing irritably at his nose. *I think I'm still a bit sick.*

Chuckling, Harry reached down to grasp Draco's hand in his, squeezing it affectionately. "Is that your way of asking me to bring home some more of Molly's soup?"

Draco made his best show of looking offended. "No, Harry."

His lover's smile only grew. "Because it would be alright. If that's what you're trying to ask me."

The Veela bit his lip, glancing sideways in seeming contemplation. *You do like that soup*, he settled on finally. *If that's what you want for dinner, then I'm happy to have it again.*

Snickering badly despite his noblest intentions, Harry bent to retrieve his glasses, pushing them back onto his face with his free hand. "The sacrifices you make for me."

Draco tilted his head, looking down at Harry in warm appraisal. *I would sacrifice anything for you. Even blood-flavored lollipops.*

"Even those, huh? It must be love."

"Yes." *Definitely. Definitely love.*

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- The Icarus Myth: In Greek mythology, Icarus was a young man imprisoned on an island with his father, Daedalus. Daedalus concocted a scheme to free the two of them, by making wings so that they could fly away. He built the wings using feathers, thread, and wax. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high lest the sun melt the wax or too low lest the damp of the sea clog them. Upon escaping, Icarus did not heed his father's warnings and flew too high, causing his wings to fall apart and Icarus to plunge into the ocean.
  - I wrote an mpreg easter egg to Icarus Rising for those of you who hoped Draco and Hermione weren't just teasing poor Ron. Go to my username directory to find it.
  - Thanks for reading, I hope you enjoyed it. I really appreciate all the wonderful feedback.