

Harry stood motionless, his breathing shallow and uneven as he stared at the empty spot where Greyback had just disappeared. His fists were clenched at his sides, and tremors of barely restrained rage kept coursing through him. He chided himself in his mind, feeling like a fool for his oversight.

"How could I be so stupid?" Harry muttered under his breath, his voice shaking with frustration. He turned sharply, glaring at the ground as if it might yield answers. "I should've seen it coming. I should've destroyed that damn portkey. I should've – damn it, I let him escape!"

"Harry," Amelia said sharply as she stepped forward. "Focus. We've won the battle here, but there are still things that need to be done. Losing your head now will only make things worse."

"Worse?" Harry shot back, spinning to face her. "He's gone, Amelia! Greyback's out there somewhere, and who knows what he'll do now. More people will die because of my failure!"

"You're not the only one fighting this war," Amelia said with steel in her voice. "You've done more than anyone could have asked of you. And you're not the only one who made a mistake. We overlooked this too. If you keep beating yourself over it, you'll lose sight of what we've achieved here today."

Harry opened his mouth to retort, but Nym stepped in, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. "She's right, Harry," she said gently, trying to make him see sense. Her strawberry blonde hair was streaked with grime but her eyes were full of warmth. "You can't save everyone, and you're not perfect. None of us are. But what you've done today – what we've done – means something. You've stopped Greyback's pack from wreaking havoc on this village. That's no small thing."

Harry shook his head, his jaw tightening as he glanced down at the scorched earth beneath their feet. "It's the second time he's escaped after killing so many. No matter what we've done today, this doesn't feel like we've done enough."

"It never does," Amelia said, her voice softer this time as she stepped close, cupping his cheek lovingly. Her eyes softened as she continued, "But the only way forward is to accept that and keep fighting."

Harry stared at both the women for a long moment before he released a sigh. He gave them a nod, earning matching smiles from the women. However, before he could speak, a panicked voice pierced the tense air.

"Harry!" Daphne's shout rang out, her voice alarmed and filled with urgency.

As one, their heads shot to where she was. They stood frozen for only a split second before they took off toward the source of the shout, with Harry leading the way with his wand drawn. They crossed across the clearing strewn with werewolf carcasses to find Daphne and Fleur crouched near the professors. Aurora and Septima were on the ground, unconscious and their faces twisted in pain.

"What happened?" Harry demanded, skidding to a halt beside them.

Daphne turned to him, her face pale and stricken. "It's some sort of dark magic. Professor Vector and Professor Sinistra were hit during the fight. Professor Babbling was trying to heal them, but..." She trailed off, her eyes flicking to the two stricken women.

Harry's stomach dropped as he saw the effects. The two professors' skin was darkening unnaturally, patches of it blackened and rotting as if decaying from the inside. Through their skin, he could see tar-like tendrils writhing in their veins, spreading the corruption with every passing moment.

"We've been trying to slow it down," Fleur said, her voice tight with worry as she held her wand steady over Septima, a faint silver glow emanating from its tip. "But whatever this is, it's resisting every counter-curse I know."

Unconscious, Aurora let out a shuddering gasp, clutching her arm as the black tendrils seemed to thicken and twist beneath her skin.

"It's... the blood," Bathsheda whispered, casting a numbing charm on the arm where the tendrils flared once again. "It's spreading..."

Harry crouched down, his mind racing. "Did this come from Greyback's pack? One of the werewolves?"

"No," she replied through gritted teeth as she pressed her wand to Aurora's wrist, trying to stem the flow of dark magic. "This is something else. Much darker than the lycanthropy curse."

Amelia knelt beside them, her face grim. "We need to move them. Now. If this spreads too far, we'll lose them both."

"Lose them?" Bathsheda's voice was sharp with desperation. "No. There has to be a way to stop this."

"There is," Fleur said, her tone tight. "But we'll need advanced help—immediate help. This is beyond battlefield healing."

Harry stared at the darkening skin, his chest tightening as Aurora let out another pained moan. He knelt down beside her, looking closely at the darkening veins and tar-line tendrils. Clenching his fists, he closed his eyes and let out a slow breath, focusing inward.

This was not the first time he was forcing himself to delve into Voldemort's twisted memories but the experience was no less nauseating. The disgusting pull dragged him down, and for a moment, Harry was no longer himself.

He was in a dark, flickering chamber lit up by green fire. He found himself standing over a writhing man, his pale arm stretched outward as he kept his wand pointed at him. The thrill of casting the Cruciatus curse was coursing through him as he gazed at the pitiful man. A soft incantation left his mouth with venomous glee and a black curse flowed from his wand, striking his victim and embedding itself, spreading like poison in no time.

*"Anchor it within their flesh, let it rot them from the inside... Bind the body, command the will."*

The words were poisonous and the thought sickened him but it brought Voldemort immense pleasure. With another pang of disgust, Harry focused on the counter-curse that came to him instantly, a whisper of words and precise wand movements burning in his mind. Without waiting for even a second, Harry wrenched himself from Voldemort's memories, blinking.

"I see," he muttered as he raised his wand over Aurora.

"Harry?" Daphne asked in concern, gazing at him.

"Hold her still, you all. This is going to take precision," he said firmly.

Fleur and Daphne moved instantly, securing Aurora's arms and legs respectively as they kept her prone on the ground. Harry immediately began to cast the counter-curse, his wand dancing through the air and his voice a sharp whisper as the spell poured out of his wand. The tendrils of dark magic thrashed violently, resisting his efforts, but he pressed on.

They watched with bated breath, their eyes fixated on the tendrils. Their eyes widened when the black veins slowly began to fade, eventually receding into a single darkened patch on Aurora's forearm. Although it did not recede entirely, the rot eventually stopped spreading.

"It's stable," he said. "But this isn't over. I believe Nat will fully treat this."

Bathsheda knelt beside her, her hands shaking as she reached out. "She's alive," she whispered, her voice breaking. "You... you saved her. T-Thank You!"

"No time for thanks yet," Harry replied, glancing toward Septima. "We've got another problem."

Septima's face was pale as she lay on the ground, drenched in blood and sweat. Blood seeped through her clothes, pooling beneath her despite the healing efforts of all the witches. The dark magic in her wounds refused to yield to their spells.

"The Werewolf curse has not taken hold," Fleur said, gazing closely at the sealed wounds on her shoulder where her clothes were shredded apart. "But there's something else that's been fighting us. That same black tar-like magic."

Harry nodded. "Just how and when did those curses hit them?"

"I don't know," Bathsheda whispered. "It was all so chaotic."

Color was slowly returning to her face as Amelia had administered Blood Replenishing potion to her in the very beginning, and she gave Harry a firm nod.

Harry refocused on the rolling dark magic festering in Septima's wounds. He began to cast containment charms, using his magic to create a proverbial cage around the dark energy. It fought back viciously, sending flares through her skin, but

Harry kept at it. Slowly, just like Aurora, he forced the dark magic into a single, isolated spot.

“Done,” he said softly

Septima’s breathing was shallow but steady as color properly returned to her skin. Relief spread across Bathsheda’s face and she threw her arms around Harry’s neck, clinging to him as tears streamed down her face.

“You really saved them,” she whispered emotionally. “We were losing them, Mr. Potter. Miss Greengrass, Miss Delacour, and I... we couldn’t... We tried, but...”

Harry wrapped his arms around her and squeezed gently, returning the hug. “Don’t sell yourselves short. You kept fighting while you treated them. You kept the Lycanthropy Curse at bay and bought enough time for me to act. That is no small feat.”

Bathsheda nodded slowly as she pulled back, wiping her tears away.

“Professor, you’re coming with us,” Harry suddenly said, his voice firm as he gazed at her.

“W-what?” Bathsheda stammered, startled.

“Nat will treat them so they’ll be going with us,” Harry explained. “You’ve done enough already. We’ll handle things here. I’m sure you’d like to be with them when they are treated.”

Bathsheda looked undecided for a moment before she nodded faintly. “Okay.”

Amelia got to her feet, looking every bit the Head of the DMLE as she addressed the group. “Harry’s right. Nym and I will coordinate the cleanup here. You all go back home. Take them to Nat and explain everything.”

“Thanks, Amelia,” Harry said softly, earning a firm nod from the redhead.

She handed the portkey over to him which Harry accepted, holding it out. He glanced over at Lucius’ unconscious and battered form and sneered.

“You’re coming with us, dipshit,” he summoned him over, uncaring of his injuries. Together, they all grasped, and vanished in a swirl, leaving Amelia and Nym behind to oversee the aftermath of the battle.

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The moment the group materialized in the familiar living room of 12 Grimmauld Place, Harry unceremoniously dumped the unconscious body of Lucius Malfoy on the floor with a dull thud.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” Daphne said, casting the Patronus Charm, and sent it with an urgent message to Nat. Just as her patronus phased through the wall, the door creaked opened and Cassie stepped in, her eyes widening at the sight in front of her.

“What—?” She began, her eyes flicking from the injured professors to the unrecognizable form of Lucius Malfoy.

“Long story,” Harry remarked as he sighed, nodding at Narcissa and Andromeda who entered the room behind Cassie, their eyes also widening at the sight of them. “Dobby!”

The diminutive elf appeared with a loud crack, his green, tennis ball sized eyes widening at the sight of them. When his gaze fell on Lucius, however, his jaw dropped and his eyes bugged out.

“Master Harry Potter sir!” Dobby exclaimed, pointing a finger at the unconscious man. “That... that is bad Malfoy!”

The newcomers’ eyes widened and as one, they turned to look at the unconscious man.

“That’s Lucius!?” Narcissa asked in shock, her eyes filled with disbelief. The man’s entire face was disfigured, his clothes in tatters as he bled on the floor. He looked like a corpse more than a human, and the furthest thing from whatever came to her mind when she thought of Lucius Malfoy.

Beside her, Cassie and Andromeda also stared with the same look of disbelief, the same thoughts rushing through their minds.

“Yeah,” Harry replied, glancing at them. Turning to Dobby, he said sharply, “Dobby, take him to one of the Black cells in the dungeons and make sure he is secured. I’ll deal with him later.”

“Yes, Master Harry Potter sir,” Dobby nodded, his ears twitching. He bowed low before snapping his fingers, and vanished alongside Malfoy’s body with a crack.

“Where did you find him?” Cassie asked with a stoic look on her face.

“He was working with Greyback,” Harry replied. “He’s been turned. Greyback was not... let’s say... too courteous with him.”

“We can imagine,” Narcissa replied dryly, looking entirely apathetic to his fate. Harry gazed at her for a moment before he nodded.

“What happened out there?” Andromeda asked.

“Not now, Andi,” Harry replied, motioning to the three professors, two of whom were unconscious while the third was looking around with a surprised gaze. “We need to focus on them first.”

On cue, Nat appeared at the doorway, striding into the room with an air of authority about her. Her sharp gaze fell on Aurora and Septima, narrowing at the sight of their injuries.

“Daphne, Fleur, bring them over to the couch,” she instructed, moving over. As the two young women levitated them over to the couch, Nat turned and looked at

everyone else. "You all come as well. If you've been exposed to any kind of dark magic —"

"We're fine, Nat," Harry said reassuringly. "None of us were hurt in any manner. Please look them over."

Nat's eyes lingered at him, her concern evident, but Harry merely nodded. She sighed before nodding reluctantly. "Okay. But if anything changes, you tell me immediately."

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The tension in the living room of 12 Grimmauld Place was palpable as Nat worked meticulously, her wand moving over Aurora and Septima's unconscious forms. The black tendrils that had been contained earlier still writhed beneath their skin, however, they no longer spread thanks to Harry's intervention. Everyone watched with bated breath as she examined the wounds, her brows furrowed in concentration.

"You did well containing this," she said, glancing up and smiling at Harry. "The corruption would have spread beyond salvaging if you hadn't acted when you did."

Bathsheda, who had not left her friends' side since their arrival here, looked up and gave him a grateful smile, her eyes red-rimmed from crying but filled with relief.

"What exactly happened out there?" Andromeda asked in concern as she gazed at the unconscious women. Harry, Daphne, and Fleur also showed signs of battle, with dirt and blood splatters on their clothes.

Harry's jaw clenched as he gazed at the fireplace and began explaining, "Greyback's pack attacked a village up north. The assholes targeted vulnerable people thinking there would be no auror force to guard it."

"Thankfully, Amelia has ensured all wizarding settlements have regular patrol. When we arrived, those two were already like that and Professor Babbling was fighting while also shielding them. You really did a brilliant job, Professor," Daphne said.

Bathsheda gave her a tight smile.

"We killed all the werewolves that attacked," Fleur took up the explanation, only for Harry to interrupt her.

"Not all. Greyback managed to escape," he gritted out, cutting her off. They all eyed him as he continued, "Because I was too stupid to keep an eye on him. It doesn't matter what we did today. He'll just gather more werewolves, create more monsters, and we'll be right back to where we started."

"That's not true, 'Arry," Fleur said softly, stepping closer to him. "We killed a huge chunk of his forces today. That's more werewolves eliminated. Yes, he may go

and gather more werewolves, but at least they'll be fewer than they would've been if we didn't kill them."

"Also don't forget that we saved so many lives today, Harry," Daphne joined Fleur, taking Harry's hand in hers. "Dozens of lives. Dozens of families who won't be torn apart."

"For how long, Daph?" Harry asked with a tired sigh. "Werewolves are just cannon fodder to Voldemort. He doesn't care how many will die. He'll just have Greyback create more of them, turn more people. It's an endless cycle, and it will end only when he is dealt with. But he managed to get away once again."

"Excuse me?" Bathsheda's sharp voice cut through his tirade and everyone turned to look at her. She stood up from her seat beside Nat who glanced over in concern for a moment before she refocused on her task.

Bathsheda's eyes flashed as she walked over, coming to a stop in front of Harry. "Are you suggesting what you all did today was useless? That saving so many lives, saving us three, was useless?"

Harry blinked, taken aback by both her words and the intensity of them. "What? No, of course not—"

"Then stop this already!" She said firmly. "You saved all our lives today, Mr. Potter. You arrived when we would've been killed. And when no one could find a way to stop that curse, you managed to do it. Aurora and Septima would've died already if you hadn't done something about it. Do you think that is useless?"

The room was enveloped in silence as everyone stared at Bathsheda.

"No," Harry said finally, his voice quiet as his shoulders slumped. "No, it doesn't."

Bathsheda's glare softened and she placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Greyback escaped today. But he won't escape next time. And in the meantime, two of my dearest friends are alive because of you. That matters, Mr. Potter. It matters more than you know."

The silence that enveloped the room was suffocating, broken only by the whispered incantations of Nat as she kept working. Bathsheda gave Harry's shoulder a comforting squeeze before she pulled back, taking her place by her friends once again. On Harry's either side, Daphne and Fleur gazed at him in concern, squeezing his hands supportively.

"I'm sorry for how I've been acting about this," he said softly. "It's just... it's frustrating."

"We understand, Harry," Daphne smiled gently. Together, she and Fleur pulled Harry over to the couch and sat together.

“Speaking of matters that need addressing,” Narcissa began, joining them. Her eyes glinted dangerously as she gazed at Harry who looked up, raising an eyebrow. “What do you intend to do with Lucius?”

Harry glanced from her to Cassie, noting how they both stared at him with the same stoic expressions on their faces. “I’d like to know your thoughts first.”

“He is nothing to us, as you well know,” Narcissa said, her voice dripping with venom. “That man ceased to be anything to me the moment he showed his true colors to me. Right when my Cassie was born. Do you know what he said to me when he saw her, Harry? Do you know what he said to me that night? He called my Cassie an abomination. Said she was a stain on the Malfoy bloodline that needed to be... cleansed.”

Cassie’s eyes hardened at those words, but Narcissa’s expression grew even colder, her fury even more terrible. She was breathing heavily as she gazed at Harry while everyone else stared at her with wide eyes.

“He would’ve murdered my girl in her sleep, all for his precious quest to gain a male heir who would continue the Malfoy bloodline. He’s a monster who wrapped himself in the trappings of nobility while plotting the murder of an infant. It was only when he was told that I can’t bear another child that he relent.”

Narcissa’s voice shook with rage.

“And that is not even counting everything else he’s done. Everything that you already know. You want to know our thoughts? Listen well, then. He must suffer for everything he’s done. He must rot in that cell until there’s nothing left of his sanity. He must see himself losing everything that he has ever called his. And then he must rot some more.”

The room had gone deathly quiet, everyone staring at Narcissa with wide eyes. Even Nat had paused in her work, her wand held aloft over Septima.

Cassie reached out and took her mother’s hands, squeezing them comfortingly. Narcissa looked at her and allowed her to wrap her in an embrace.

Turning to Harry, Cassie said firmly, “I think that is enough.”

Harry kept his eyes on his betrothed for a long moment before he gave a firm nod. “He’ll face justice,” he promised. “But first, I’ll extract whatever information I can from him. Don’t worry. He will suffer. I will make sure he does.”

Cassie nodded as Narcissa pulled away from her and stood up, walking over to the side where she stood by the exit door, stoically leaning against the wall beside it.

Meanwhile, Nat’s wand kept moving over both Aurora and Septima’s unconscious forms, tracing silver and gold patterns over the concentrated tendrils on their bodies. The tendrils twisted and writhed as they resisted her magic.

"The containment you performed gave me the opening I needed," she murmured, her eyes never leaving her patients as she worked. "That's how I can target the curse directly without it spreading further."

"I got the counter from the memories," Harry told her. Nat glanced at him for a moment before she turned away.

"Makes sense," she said softly.

The black tendrils fought back viciously, causing both Aurora and Septima to whimper, but Nat pressed on relentlessly. Finally, after so many efforts, the last of the dark magic dissolved into nothingness. Aurora's breathing evened out, her face relaxing.

"One down, one to go," Nat muttered, moving her wand over to Septima.

"Will there be any lasting effects?" Bathsheda asked in concern, her hands trembling as she reached out to touch Aurora's healed arm.

"No," Nat replied, working on Septima. "They'll both need rest, and there might be some residual weakness for a few days, but they'll make a full recovery."

Bathsheda bit her lip as she watched Nat heal Septima, tears spilling down her cheeks. When the black tendrils slowly lightened until they finally dissipated, she broke down completely, relief flooding her.

"Thank you," she sobbed, reaching for Nat's hands. "Thank you so much. I don't know what I would've done if something had happened to them. They're not just my colleagues, they're my closest friends, and I—"

"Shh," Nat soothed, squeezing her hands gently. "You don't need to explain. I understand completely. They're going to be fine, I promise you. They just need rest now."

Fleur stepped forward, placing a gentle hand on Bathsheda's shoulder. "Come, let us help you to your room. You need rest as well."

"But I should stay with them," Bathsheda protested weakly, even though exhaustion was clearly written across her face.

"Nat will monitor them, Professor," Daphne assured her, moving to Bathsheda's other side. "You've been through so much today. You need to take care of you as well."

Bathsheda hesitated, her eyes lingering on her two friends before falling on Nat who gave her a reassuring nod. Biting her lip, she finally relented, allowing the two younger witches to help her to her feet. As they guided her out of the room, she cast one final grateful look at Nat, her eyes brimming with tears. The beautiful huldra gave her a warm, reassuring smile in return.

She turned around and called out, "Andi, Cassie, help me out with them, will you?"

They nodded and walked over to where Nat was sitting. Before she could speak though, Narcissa pushed off the wall and said quietly, "Harry."

He turned to look at her, and so did the others, no one missing the unusual tone of her voice.

"Yeah?"

"I need to speak with you. Privately."

Without waiting for a response, she turned around and walked out of the room, her heels clacking on the floor. Harry's brows furrowed as he gazed at the exit. Her tone told him that it was not a usual request. There was something going on in her mind, and he wondered what it was.

He turned to the others who shrugged helplessly, and with a sigh, he got to his feet and briskly walked out of the room. He found her out in the hallway where she had been waiting for him.

"What is it?" He asked softly.

"Come," she said and began walking, leaving him with no choice but to follow. She led him up the stairs and turned toward the family wing, leading him further ahead, and Harry's surprise grew when they passed all the rooms and came to a stop in front of the master bedroom – the room that belonged to him.

"Narcissa?"

Narcissa entered without hesitation, pushing the door open, and turned to face him, her expression unreadable. She stepped aside, silently asking him to enter, and once he did, she stepped away, moving further into the room.

"Close the door, please," she said softly, although there was unmistakable steel beneath the gentleness of her voice.

Harry silently complied, curious more than confused, and he pushed the door shut. The latch clicked softly, echoing in the silence of the room, as the door locked.

For a long moment, the two stood still where they were, gazing at each other. Neither Narcissa moved, nor did Harry until finally, she stepped back and sat down on the edge of the bed, patting the spot to her right. His lips pursed, Harry walked over and joined her, turning to gaze at her grey orbs that shined with some unspoken emotions.

"What do you want to talk about?"

Narcissa glanced up at him, biting her lower lip, and Harry could not help but let his eyes linger.

"I want to ask you something," she began, making him take his eyes away from her lips to properly look at her.

"What is it?"

“Do you have any concrete explanation on how this bond works?”

Harry’s eyes widened slightly. She had never brought up this topic in these settings before, and he was curious as to what suddenly changed. He asked as much, and to say that the answer shocked him was an understatement.

There was nothing but silence in the room once Narcissa finished explaining what she was feeling. Harry stared at her with his mouth open in surprise.

“I know how depraved this sounds,” she whispered. “Trust me, it took all I have to tell you this... but... I just... I can’t help but feel this strong urge to do this... I have no idea if there’s something seriously wrong with me or if it’s the bond at work, but I’ve never had such thoughts before, so I want to believe that it’s because of the bond.”

“Please hold on for a moment,” Harry raised a finger, taking a few deep breaths as she watched him. He stared down at his lap for a long moment, his fists clenching and unclenching. Finally, he looked up at her and Narcissa almost shivered at the look in his eyes.

“I don’t know if it’s really the bond,” he said gruffly, and to her surprise, he reached out to stroke her cheek with the back of his hand. He tucked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear, and Narcissa shivered under his touch.

“You don’t?” She asked, her voice soft as her lips quivered.

“No,” he continued in the same tone. “But I can tell you for sure that there’s nothing wrong with you for having such a... wish. What you should be thinking right now is... what are you going to do about it?”

Narcissa’s eyes darkened, realizing that they both were on the same page. Slowly, her lips curled up into a smirk and she whispered, “You seriously need me to spell that out for you? My being here right now isn’t enough?”

Harry’s smirk widened and he whispered, “More than enough.”

They both moved as one, and the beast in Harry’s chest roared in triumph as their lips collided in a furious kiss, taking their breaths away.

Down in a desolate cell, the broke form of Lucius Malfoy lay crumbling.

To be continued...