

Broken, Beaten, Scarred

by phoenix

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This fic was inspired by watching the Maximum Movie Mode on the US release of Deathly Hallows Pt 1. Jason Isaacs added such a wonderful level of insight on Lucius Malfoy and has really embraced the character. It really motivated me to take a look at the depth of despair Lucius Malfoy released from Azkaban only to be imprisoned in his own home and utterly emasculated would feel. I don't usually write in first person, but since this story is such a head game it really has to be done this way to appreciate where Lucius is in Deathly Hallows.

There is one scene that has liberal use of the f-word as a general profanity and as such, I've kept it at T.

There will be some limited use of dialog out of the book, but I'm trying to keep it away from scenes we have seen as much as possible. But as there are only about five canon scenes involving Lucius and with him having limited lines in those scenes, it will be easy to work around and you will see more description of what's going on in those scenes and where his mind is.

This fic is a companion piece to my New Beginnings fic that I hope to finally get finished. A lot of real life has happened since I started that one and I lost my muses for a long time.

Once again, huge thanks to Jason Isaacs and whoever (likely JKR) filled in those blanks. In some cases visuals from the movies have been added because at times JKR was light on the visual description of what was going on and the movie depiction is so wonderfully perfect.

The title comes from a Metallica song of the same name. Lyrics at the end of the story for those interested.

Home. But not home. Yes, it is my house, but one I am no longer master of. But at this moment, I find I don't care. I'm tired, so very tired. I have just spent more than a year

in Azkaban and I need rest. Everything can be sorted out, understood later. My dear Narcissa escorted me back from prison and is now leading me to our rooms. It was so good to see her, even if my outward appearance did repulse her. She tried to hide it, but I know her well enough that I saw it. There are no mirrors, but I can imagine how I must look, and I would repulse myself, too.

She tries to tell me things, in quick, hushed tones, but I find I cannot focus. I'm too tired. Finally she realizes this and just gives up. Rather than the bed, I am escorted to the bath. I'm too weak and pathetic to undress myself.

Gently she guides me into the bath and goes about washing the stink and grime of Azkaban off of me. It feels wonderful and for the first time in what feels like forever, I begin to relax.

"What have they done to you, my love?" she asks softly.

I don't want to talk about it, but I know that she wants to hear my voice. "Does it matter? It's over now. I'm here, with you, with Draco." I place my hand over hers.

She washes my hair and beard, and I don't know that I have ever felt anything so wonderful and let slip a quiet moan of appreciation.

All too soon the bath is over, though I know to prolong it would leave me in danger of drowning. After drying and dressing, she leads me to our bed. After tucking me in, she moves to leave. I gently grasp her hand. "Stay with me?" I don't want to be alone, not now, not after Azkaban.

"Of course," she replies as she kicks off her shoes and climbs into bed. She presses her body against mine and wraps her arms around me as I wrap mine around her.

As I hold her, everything crashes, and I find I can no longer control the tears. "I'm so sorry," I say as I sob into her. "It's all my fault."

She holds me, rubbing my back. "No, Luce, it's not. What happened would have happened with or without you being gone."

I know she's trying to make me feel better. The Dark Lord quite likely would have chosen the Manor anyway. After all, it is the best residence in Britain, but Draco, poor Draco. "Draco's Mark is my fault." I hold her tight knowing how close we came to losing our son.

"He would have taken the Mark at seventeen," she reassured.

"But Dumbledore..." I whisper.

She places her fingers gently on my lips. "It matters not. What matters is that Draco survived, and he did not do the deed."

I look into her eyes and feel that I do not deserve her. I have destroyed our family with my hubris. "Narcissa..."

"Shh. This is the time for rest. We can talk later," she says gently.

My mind will not allow my body the rest it so desperately needs. "What will we do?" I ask, terrified for my, our future, or most likely lack thereof. Once I was one of the most influential wizards in Britain. Now... Now I am nothing. A failure. A pathetic shell of my former self.

"Tomorrow, Luce," she says insistently.

"Cissy, please. I've missed so much."

She looks lovingly into my eyes as she presses her hand against my cheek. "Yes, you have. I need you to rest so that you can have a clear mind. Please, Luce. We'll talk later. Just rest and heal." She gently rubs my back and sleep finally comes.

When I wake I can tell it has only been a few hours. It's still light out, late afternoon. Cissy has gone. Looking around the room, I see her standing at the window. I ease from bed, longing to feel her, to know that she is real, that I am really here and not having another delusion in my cell. She jumps when I touch her.

"Oh, Lucius. You startled me," she says before wrapping her arms around me.

"It was not my intent. What has your mind so preoccupied?"

"You're home," she replies quietly. "I wasn't sure that I would ever see you again."

I close my eyes to hold back the tears, for I had had that same thought. As I languished in Azkaban, I was sure that I would be spending my last days there. I had failed the Dark Lord and failure was always swiftly and severely punished. Even now, I fear that he will deem the year I spent in Azkaban was not sufficient punishment. "What now?" I ask again as I look into her eyes, my voice barely a whisper. We cannot run, but even if we could, I could never leave my home to the Dark Lord and his ilk. I may not be in Azkaban, but I am still a prisoner. I am lost.

"We endure," she replies just as quietly. Finally releasing me, she leads me to the sitting area and calls for a house-elf to bring something to eat.

I feel slightly better as we eat, but I see no future path before me. "How do we endure when we have lost everything?" My place was made clear upon my arrival. My favored place was gone. My presence is indulged purely for the contents of my vault. My influence gone.

"Everything is not lost as long as we have each other. Surely there will be a way for us to regain favor. The Mafloy name is one of the oldest and most revered. I cannot see that the Dark Lord would let us languish. We just need to show him that we are still loyal, that we are worthy, that what happened was an error in judgment that will not be repeated," she says optimistically.

I try to smile, but my heart is not in it. She may have that hope, but I know better. The message has been sent that he is willing to sacrifice our family name and all the prestige that has gone along with it for centuries. A choice made in my youth has brought ruin to our family, and there is no escape.

Shortly after my return, the faithful are summoned for a meeting with the Dark Lord. We are there, but we are not seated prominently, and the others do nothing to hide their distaste for my presence. There are a few who are worthy of being in my home, but most are the sort of filth that would never cross my threshold.

Levitated above the table is Charity Burbage, the I'm sure former Muggle Studies professor from Hogwarts. I cannot bring myself to look at her. Draco has a hard time looking away from her. The expression on his face pains me. He never should have been here. He should still be an innocent youth, but Narcissa was right, he would have been pressured to take the Mark at seventeen, just as it had been for me.

I try to focus on the meeting, keep abreast of what is planned. I know that Pius Thickeness is being placed and controlled to assume the position as Minister of Magic. Severus reports on the plans to safeguard Potter before his seventeenth birthday. A mission that I once would have been a part of, but I have no doubt my previous failure will prevent my involvement. My place now is to sit in silent support.

"I shall need, for instance, to borrow a wand from one of you before I go to kill Potter," the Dark Lord's last statement has my full attention. To borrow another wizard's wand... It's unheard of. Wands are highly personal. I know that I join the others in hoping that I will not be the one chosen.

"No volunteers?" says the Dark Lord as he begins to walk around the table. I cringe as he walks by me. "Let's see..." I dare not show relief as he passes me. He turns back to face me. "Lucius, I see no reason for you to have a wand anymore."

I force myself to look up. In a hoarse voice, I ask, "My Lord?"

"Your wand, Lucius. I require your wand," he insists as he holds out his hand.

"I..." I glance sideways at Narcissa. She is staring straight ahead, quite as pale, though trying her best to mask her emotions. Beneath the table her slim fingers close briefly on my wrist. We both know I have little choice, and with trembling hands I draw my wand, passing it along to the Dark Lord, who holds it up in front of his red eyes, examining it closely.

"What is it?" he asks as he eyes it.

"Elm, My Lord," I whisper, wishing I sounded less terrified than I was.

"And the core?"

"Dragon...dragon heartstring," I stammer. Now that he has my wand, I am truly helpless. I wonder if this is to be my last moment on earth, whether he will test my wand's effectiveness on me. I close my eyes momentarily, awaiting my fate.

"Good," says the Dark Lord as he snaps my wand free of the snake head of my cane.

It does not appear as though he means to strike me down with my own wand, and I open my eyes. He draws out his own wand and compares the lengths. My hand twitches before I can control it.

The gesture is not missed by my master, whose eyes widen maliciously. "Give you my wand, Lucius? *My* wand?"

Some of the throng snigger, and I begin to wish that I were still in Azkaban, but at least he does not seem inclined to kill me at this moment.

"I have given you your liberty, Lucius, is that not enough for you? But I have noticed that you and your family seem less than happy of late." He pauses as he regains his seat. "What is it about my presence in your home that displeases you, Lucius?"

"Nothing...nothing, My Lord!" I force myself to answer. He must never know the truth, not if we are to survive.

"Such *lies*, Lucius..." he says as though he has seen into my soul.

I hear movement under the table, movement that can only be that ruddy snake. Soon it emerges from under the table and climbs onto the Dark Lord. I look away, unable to face this monstrous serpent.

"Why do the Malfoys look so unhappy with their lot? Is my return, my rise to power, not the very thing they professed to desire for so many years?" the Dark Lord asked.

"Of course, My Lord," I reply quickly. I wipe the sweat from my upper lip as I realize my life is not in immediate danger and notice that my hand is shaking uncontrollably. "We did desire it...we do." Once I desired it, but that was long ago. This time... everything had been so different. The wrong sort were being given positions of influence and power. This was not at all as I had imagined it would be, as I was led to believe it would be.

To my left, Narcissa nods awkwardly in agreement, her eyes averted from the Dark Lord and the snake. To my right, Draco, tears his gaze away from Burbage, glances quickly at the Dark Lord, but returns his gaze to the table, not willing to make eye contact.

"My Lord," says Bellatrix, her voice constricted with emotion, "it is an honor to have you here, in our family's house. There can be no higher pleasure."

I am relieved that she is drawing our master's attention away from me. She prattles on, and I'm only vaguely aware of the conversation. While I have been completely emasculated, I am still alive. Though this may be a fate worse than death. There is some magic that can be done wandlessly, but very little. I am now little more than a Muggle to the other Death Eaters.

After the meeting we adjourn to our rooms, and I breakdown in tears as soon as I cross the threshold. I fall to my knees and feel Narcissa wrap her arms around me, trying to comfort me.

"Shhh. Lucius, you still live," she says reassuringly.

"Don't you see?" I hiss. "I am not even worthy of him killing me. He thinks nothing of me." I know she won't understand, but at that moment the Dark Lord made clear to the others how unimportant I am. Even Wormtail is more important than I.

"That will change. We will change that," she says, obviously trying to lift my spirits.

"And how, pray tell, am I supposed to do that when I have no wand? A wizard is nothing without his wand. I couldn't protect you or Draco if my life depended on it. I am useless."

She kneels down in front of me and puts her forehead against mine. "I still have my wand. We are not powerless. And surely there is another wand to be found here somewhere."

I look at her in wonder as she suggests this small act of defiance. After all the Dark Lord had said I had no need of a wand. Of course he had not specifically said I could not have one, but with Ollivander imprisoned in the cellar and me confined to the manor, there was no way to purchase a new wand. I smile weakly at her. My witch has suggested defying the Dark Lord, something I have dreamed of since my return from prison. "Perhaps," I reply noncommittally.

For the last month, discreetly I have searched the wretched manor for a wand that one of my ancestors might have secreted in case of emergency. If one had been, it had long since been retrieved. I'm still utterly powerless and at the mercy of everyone. Narcissa tries to keep my spirits up by reminding me that I am still being kept alive, but I know that it is only because I am too unimportant to bother with killing.

I pour another glass of Scotch and watch as the last drops fall from the bottle to the glass. I throw the empty bottle into the fire and am rewarded with a satisfying smash of glass and small burst of flame from the residual alcohol in the bottle. This is my only escape, my only way to bury the pain of my existence. To forget everything that has been taken from me.

Draco has returned to Hogwarts to finish his education. From what I know of those who will be teaching, I don't know how much of an education he will receive. I know that Severus will protect him, but I still cannot help but fear for Draco. But at least he is out of the manor and away from the Dark Lord for the time being.

I have been ignored other than on those occasions when there is the need for more gold. But that suits me. I would rather be ignored than made to feel less than human.

I hear her footsteps lingering in the door. Perhaps if I ignore her she will go away.

"Lucius..." she says softly, and I can hear her approaching me.

"Go away!" I snap. I know why she is here, and I don't want to have this discussion yet again.

She tries to take my glass, but I keep it from her long enough to drain it. The burn the Scotch makes going down my throat lets me know I'm alive.

She gets the glass from my hand. "We need to talk."

"No we don't," I reply as I unsteadily rise to my feet and shuffle towards the sideboard in search of more libations.

She moves to block me and places her hand on my chest. "Yes, we do. This is no way to live."

"Of course it's no way to live. My house our house has been overrun by mongrels, by filth, and that, that..." Even into my cups I know better than to say what I now think about the Dark Lord.

"That's not what I mean and you know it," she says sternly.

I push past her and pour myself another drink. I think it's cognac, but I'm not sure and it doesn't matter. It is something that will dull the pain.

She places her hand over my glass before I can drink from it. "It's the drink. For weeks you have been drinking yourself into a stupor."

"And what the fuck else am I supposed to do?" I snap at her before pulling my drink away from her.

She is stung by my verbal assault. "Be a man!" she shouts back.

I down my drink and then turn back to her and growl, "And how precisely am I supposed to do that? I have no wand: I have been emasculated, made a fool of in my own home. I command zero respect from anyone, and it's merely a matter of time before house-elves begin laughing at me. I am the fucking laughing stock of the Death Eaters. I wish that I had been left in Azkaban," I say bitterly.

"You don't mean that."

"No? At least there I knew my place. Here..." I wave my hand across the room, "it's a miserable fucking existence. I'm teased with the knowledge of what I once was."

"But our son," she protests, trying to get through to me.

"And what of our son? He will be sacrificed as readily as I was. He is only alive to torment me. As soon as it's convenient, the Dark Lord will have him killed, just as he tried to do last year, or have you forgotten? We are nothing!" I reach for the bottle, but find that she has banished the contents of my sideboard. "What have you done?" I growl at her.

"It's for your own good," she replies as she takes a step back, her wand held at the ready.

I take a menacing step towards her. "Bring them back," I say as I point at the now empty sideboard.

She takes a step backwards. "No," she replies firmly.

I take another step forward, and she brandishes her wand. "You would attack me?" I ask incredulously.

"For your own good," she replies, though her voice is losing conviction.

Even though I have been drinking heavily, I lunge at her and am able to catch her wand hand before she can unleash a spell on me. I press her against the bookcase. "I will not tolerate that sort of insubordination from you, wife" I snarl. I take her wand from her hand and with a flick of my wrist, my sideboard is restored. Carelessly I toss her wand out of my study. "Get the fuck out of my sight," I order.

Tears fill her eyes. "What happened to you, Luce?"

"What happened to me? I'll tell you what the fuck happened to me." I grab hold of my left cuff and pull my shirtsleeve up, the cufflink flying off in the process as it tears through the shirt. "This is what happened to me! This fucking Mark and all that goes along with it! And now your lovely sister has invited the bestower of this Mark to take up residence in my home. Now leave me the fuck alone and let me live my life how I want."

After a few seconds, she runs from my study, unable to control her tears. I don't care and pour myself another drink. Soon the pain will be over for another day.

I wake, slumped over my desk, with what tastes and feels like a week old sock in my mouth. Just one more miserable part of my miserable existence. The bottle on the desk is empty and I go to retrieve another, but they are all empty. I notice a small bottle with a note attached. I try to focus on reading the note, but it is difficult with the throbbing in my head.

'Drink this and meet me for breakfast,' it says. It is Narcissa's handwriting.

Seeing as I have little choice, I drink it and almost immediately feel the fog begin to clear from my mind. As it does, I recall the events of the previous evening. Dear Merlin, what I have I done? I treated the one person who still cares about me horribly.

When I enter the breakfast room I see her seated at the table, her eyes puffy and red. I don't know what to say. Finally I begin, "Cissy..."

She interrupts me. "Have a seat and have some tea," she commands.

Contritely I do as I'm told. I open my mouth, but she holds her hand up before I can say anything.

"Thank you for joining me," she says in an overly polite tone.

I long to apologize, but I know she does not want to hear that right now. "You're welcome."

"How are you feeling this morning?"

This small talk is extremely out of place. "Much better since I have taken the potion you left me. Thank you for that."

"Well, it is difficult to have a serious discussion if one of the parties is hung over... or still drunk," she says reproachfully.

I look into my tea, unable to meet her eyes after the verbal slap she has just given me.

There is a long silence before she speaks. "Luce, what has happened to you?" she asks gently.

I cringe at that question as I recall parts of my answer from the previous evening. I fall to my knees at her feet and cannot control the tears. "Cissy, I'm so sorry. So very, very sorry. I never should have yelled at you."

She begins stroking my hair, saying nothing, waiting until the tears are gone. I finally look up into her eyes. "I have never wanted to hurt you," I say quietly as I reach for her cheek.

She smiles sadly at me. "I know that."

I don't know what to say at this point. I no longer know who I am, so how can I tell her what has happened to me?

She puts her hands on my cheeks and holds my head so that I look into her eyes. "What has happened to you?"

"I don't know," I reply as I start to sob uncontrollably again.

She hands me a napkin.

"I don't know who I am anymore. It's all been taken from me," I say as I fight back the tears, trying to regain some semblance of control.

She kneels before me on the floor. "Drinking won't help you find that answer," she says softly.

"But it dulls the pain, makes it go away," I say, trying to justify my behavior though I know the words sound hollow.

"Only for a little while. You need to find the answer." She gently strokes my cheek.

"How? I am nothing. Even here I am a prisoner." Even I can hear the desperation in my voice.

"Then we must find a way for your importance and value to be recognized. Despite what has happened, you are still an intelligent and powerful wizard. You have skills and knowledge that the others do not. We must make them remember that."

I start sobbing again. I know that I do not deserve someone as wonderful as her. I have failed her, failed Draco, failed my heritage.

"Lucius, look at me," she orders and I do as she says. "We will survive this, but only if you can pull yourself together. I cannot do this alone. You made mistakes. They are in the past and cannot be undone, but they can be atoned for. We must change with the times. Yes, you are not who you were before Azkaban. Neither am I. Neither is Draco. But even before Azkaban, you were not who you were when I met you. We constantly change and evolve and you must continue to do so. If you try to hold on to what you had in the past, it will chain you there, keep you out of the present. We have a vast library, and in that library is knowledge that you can use."

I understand what she is saying. I know she is right. Since my release I have focused on everything I have lost, forgetting what I still have. I nod. "Yes, yes there is. And I can't very well make use of any of it if I'm a drunken sod, can I?"

She smiles at me and gives me a hug. "No, you can't. Though perhaps bathing should be your first order of business."

"After thanking you." I give her a deep, passionate kiss, which she reluctantly returns. "Perhaps I can more properly thank you later?" I offer, knowing that I must smell wretched as I cannot remember the last time I bathed.

"If you decide to be my Luce again, then you may," she says as she gently strokes my cheek.

"I will try to find him for you," I reply before releasing her to retire to my room and start finding myself again.

I have tried to do my best to find some way to prove my worth. Yes, I have a vast library with many obscure books, but unfortunately the Dark Lord spent decades before his first rise to power studying obscure dark magic, and I have been unable to find something that is both useful and that he has no knowledge of. The complexity of these ancient skills means that they are of little use to most of my Death Eater brethren.

As I stare out the window, watching the snow fall gently from the sky, I can feel the despair threatening to return. The snow covered grounds are peaceful, and I can almost convince myself of the normality of my life. But there is no normality, and I can't see that there ever will be again. We have been denied our usual holiday decorations the Dark Lord does not approve of such frivolity.

I hear gentle footsteps entering the library and I know that it can only be Narcissa. I wait for her to approach to hear what she has to say.

"I received a letter from Draco," she says softly.

I know there is more to come. She has always believed in breaking news gently. "And how is he?"

"He is well."

There is long a pause. I know that Draco cannot tell us the truth about what he thinks is being done at Hogwarts. But I know there is more she wants to tell me. "And?"

"He has decided to spend the holidays at Hogwarts."

Even with what Hogwarts has become, I cannot blame him for his decision. I wish that I could be spending the holidays anywhere but here. But it also feels like a personal affront, that he does not wish to spend time with me. Not that I can blame him. Before he left for school, I had the definite impression that he held me responsible for what had befallen him the last year. And he was not wrong. Had I not let my hubris get the better of me, I never would have been bested by a group of half-trained teenagers. But I had been too arrogant, too sure of myself, and we had paid the ultimate penalty for that. "I see."

She wraps her arms around my waist. "It's not us, not you. It's..." After a pause she continues. "I'm sure that he can be convinced to join us for the Easter holidays. I told him about... the lack of decorations and with that and our... guest, well, he just preferred to stay at school."

I know she's saying this to make me feel better, to keep me from losing myself again. But how else can I feel when my own son does not want to be around me? I turn to face her and try to make my expression look as pleasant as possible. "Of course."

It looks like Christmas will be lonely this year. Of course, that makes it no different from any other time since my release. There have been no social events. Oh, there have been a few invitations, but it was made clear that even though I was given my freedom, that I should remain here, at the manor, at my master's beck and call. Even if I wasn't, those invitations have not come from families I would normally socialize with. They were from families who naively held out hope that associating with the Malfoys would raise their standing with our master.

For this holiday season, the best I can hope is that the Dark Lord will find something elsewhere to occupy his time. He has not been a constant presence, but he has spent enough time here that I feel like the manor is no longer mine, that I am nothing more than a tolerated house guest. At Narcissa's behest I will continue my research in the library, though I am becoming less and less convinced that I will find anything of any use as the Dark Lord has shown no interest in my vast collection.

The Easter holidays are upon us. Narcissa has gone to London to fetch Draco. Mercilessly the Dark Lord left four days ago and has not returned. While I can still feel the oppression of my manor being used as his headquarters, for the time being my house is once again mine.

Narcissa has tried to her best to keep me from falling into despair. She has tried to engage me on the running of my business empire, but there is little good news. Though I am not alone. Commerce has come to a near standstill as Muggleborns and half-bloods have gone to ground, eager to avoid confrontation. I was able to make a recent trip to Diagon Alley and many businesses were either abandoned or boarded up, though the same could not be said about Knockturn Alley.

The Dark Lord's followers like to pretend that everything is normal, but it is far from that. Fear permeates everything. And I am not immune to that fear. I fear for the future,

wonder from one day to the next whether it will be my last. There are times when I do wish for it to end, but that is the coward's way out.

Narcissa has tried to talk to me about the future, but I see nothing to look forward to. She keeps telling me that once Potter is dealt with, things will get better, but I don't see how. The Dark Lord is a mad man, a megalomaniac, whatever happened to him has changed him. I don't think he has a vision for the future. He has focused on gaining control of the Ministry, purging the Wizarding World of its impurities, but he has no thoughts as to how we will continue, how we will survive. Delicately I have tried to bring this subject up, to discuss how the lack of commerce is hurting the faithful, but I am told only to bide my time and that his plan will be revealed when required. This tells me there is no plan.

I am alerted to Narcissa's return by the enchantments of the manor. I know she will join me in the drawing room shortly, and I set aside the book I have been attempting to read and rise to me feet.

"Draco, it's good to see you again," I say in the most cheerful voice I can muster.

"Father," Draco replies simply, barely meeting my gaze before slinking into his favorite chair.

I can understand how he feels. He is every bit as broken as I am. Narcissa summons a tea set and goes about playing hostess, trying to foster conversation. Her behavior is so normal that I can almost push from my mind the horrors we are experiencing. Almost.

She tries to pry information about how everything is at Hogwarts, but he is interested in giving nothing more than one word answers. He is every bit as downtrodden as I.

Finally she sets her tea cup down. "Draco, your father and I know things have changed. We need to talk about it. There is no one here but us."

I give an uncontrollable nervous laugh when she mentions change. "That is the understatement of the century."

"Lucius," she chides.

I set my teacup down. "No. He deserves to know. He is of age now, and all of this," I wave my hand at the room, "will one day be his. Of course that presumes we survive." I cannot control the sarcasm in my voice, because I have yet to divine a way out of our current predicament.

"I will not have such talk," she says sternly.

"We need to. You and I have been skirting around this since my release from Azkaban. You try to pretend that everything will be fine, that everything is normal. Well, it most definitely is not." I turn my attention to Draco, treating him as an adult. "Son, you deserve to know the truth. You have no doubt surmised that my favored position is gone. That our family is merely tolerated for the content of our vault. I have been working to find a way to demonstrate that our family still is a valuable ally and asset to the Dark Lord. It is something that will require all of us to work together."

He raises his eyes to meet my gaze. "Doing what?"

Narcissa scoots to the edge of her seat. "That has yet to be determined, but we are not giving up. We are Malfoys. I have already seen the house of Black fall. I will not see this one join it."

For several hours we brainstorm on what the future may hold, discussing scenarios covering what might happen the longer Potter remains alive to even what might happen should the Dark Lord be defeated. Unfortunately none of it looked good for us. If we could be instrumental in delivering Potter to the Dark Lord, it would help us regain our standing, though given the fact I was confined to the manor, I had no idea how we would make that happen. Draco offered to leave Hogwarts, but Narcissa and I convinced him he was needed there in case Potter should choose to return, though none of us could come up with a reason why he might do that.

In the end it was good to be together as a family, but it only strove to drive home the bleakness of our future.

As I sit in the drawing room, lost in the dance of the flames in the hearth, I hear a commotion in the entry.

"What is this?" I drawl as I see a group of Snatchers forcing a trio of prisoners into the room.

"They say they've got Potter," said Narcissa's cold voice. "Draco, come here."

I stare at the dark haired youth as Draco rises from his chair to examine the prisoner. Greyback grabs the presumed Potter and shoves him under the chandelier so Draco can get a good look. "Well, boy?" rasps the werewolf.

I watch eagerly as Draco examines the young man. If this truly is Potter, our fortunes could be turning. This is exactly the break we need to return to the Dark Lord's favor. If we deliver Potter to him, the mistakes of the past can be forgiven. I look at the huge, shiny, pink, distorted face and try to see if I recognize anything of Potter. The last I saw of him was nearly two years ago and other than the color of the hair, I see nothing familiar. "Well, Draco?" I ask eagerly. "Is it? Is it Harry Potter?"

"I can't...I can't be sure," replies Draco, doing his best to keep away from Greyback and scarcely looking at the presumed Potter.

I rise from my seat and walk over to Draco, putting my hand on his shoulder, scarcely able to believe our good fortune. "But look at him carefully, look! Come closer!" I gently pull him closer to Potter. "Draco, if we are the ones who hand Potter over to the Dark Lord, everything will be forgiven..."

"Now, we won't be forgetting who actually caught him, I hope, Mr. Malfoy?" interjects Greyback menacingly.

"Of course not, of course not!" I reply impatiently, trying to placate the mongrel. I move closer to Potter, examining him closely for any familiar feature. "What did you do to him?" I ask Greyback. "How did he get into this state?"

"That wasn't us."

I search my memory for something that could have caused this kind of swelling. "Looks more like a Stinging Jinx to me." I shift my gaze to his forehead, looking for the telltale scar. "There's something there," I whisper, "it could be the scar, stretched tight. Draco, come here, look properly! What do you think?" I'm beginning to wonder if I am imagining the scar.

"I don't know," Draco replies before walking away toward the fireplace where Narcissa watches.

"We had better be certain, Lucius," Narcissa calls to me in her cold, clear voice. "Completely sure that it is Potter, before we summon the Dark Lord. They say this is his," she looks closely at the blackthorn wand, "but it does not resemble Ollivander's description. If we are mistaken, if we call the Dark Lord here for nothing... Remember what he did to Rowle and Dolohov?" she cautions.

"What about the Mudblood, then?" growls Greyback as he shoves the prisoners around so a young woman is now facing us

"Wait," says Narcissa sharply. "Yes, yes, she was in Madam Malkin's with Potter! I saw her picture in the Prophet! Look, Draco, isn't it the Granger girl?" she asks excitedly.

After a quick glance, Draco replies, "I... maybe... yeah."

"But then, that's the Weasley boy!" I shout as I walk around the prisoners to examine the ginger. My heart is almost pounding out of my chest. "It's them, Potter's

friends...Draco, look at him, isn't it Arthur Weasley's son, what's his name...?" Weasley had so many sons I could not recall the name of the one who was Potter's best friend, but I was certain we had Potter and his compatriots in our drawing room.

"Yeah," replies Draco again, his back to the prisoners. "It could be."

My attention snaps as the drawing room door opens and Bellatrix strides in.

"What is this? What's happened, Cissy?" she asks as she slowly circles the prisoners, stopping in front of the Granger girl. "But surely," she said quietly, "this is the Mudblood girl? This is Granger?"

"Yes, yes, it's Granger!" I cry ecstatically. "And beside her, we think, Potter! Potter and his friends, caught at last!" This is exactly the stroke of luck we need. If we deliver Potter and his friends, it will restore my position. I will once again be respected.

"Potter?" shrieks Bellatrix, and she backs away, the better to take in Harry. "Are you sure? Well then, the Dark Lord must be informed at once!" She drags back her left sleeve, preparing to use her Mark to summon our master.

I was not about to let her have the glory of informing our master, and I grip my hand around her wrist. "I was about to call him!" I stare into her eyes, knowing that this act will save my family. "I shall summon him, Bella, Potter has been brought to my house, and it is therefore upon my authority..."

"Your authority!" she sneers, attempting to wrench her hand from my grasp. "You lost your authority when you lost your wand, Lucius! How dare you! Take your hands off me!"

I will not see her emasculate me any further. "This is nothing to do with you; you did not capture the boy..."

"Begging your pardon, *Mr. Malfoy*," interjects Greyback, "but it's us that caught Potter, and it's us that'll be claiming the gold..."

"Gold!" laughs Bellatrix, still attempting to throw off my grip, her free hand groping in her pocket for her wand. "Take your gold, filthy scavenger, what do I want with gold? I seek only the honor of his...of..." She froze as her eyes lit upon one of the Snatchers.

With Bella no longer trying to summon our master, I pull up my sleeve, prepared for the glory I'm going to receive.

"STOP!" shrieks Bellatrix. "Do not touch it; we shall all perish if the Dark Lord comes now!"

I freeze, my index finger hovering over my Mark.

Bellatrix strides to the Snatcher and points at the sword stuck in his belt. "What is that?" she demands.

"Sword," grunts the Snatcher.

"Give it to me," she demands.

"It's not yorn, missus, it's mine, I reckon I found it," the fool says defensively.

In the blink of an eye, Bella draws her wand and Stuns the Snatcher before grabbing the sword.

The others react angrily and one draws his wand. "What d'you think you're playing at, woman?"

"*Stupefy!*" she screams. "*Stupefy!*"

The fools were all subdued and Greyback frozen in a kneeling position, his arms outstretched. Purposefully she strides over to him, the blood having drained from her face and shoves the sword at his face. "Where did you get this sword?" she whispers menacingly as she pulls his wand out of his unresisting grip.

"How dare you?" he snarls, his mouth the only thing that can move. He bares his pointed teeth and demands, "Release me, woman!"

"Where did you find this sword?" she repeats, brandishing it in his face. "Snape sent it to my vault in Gringotts!"

"It was in their tent," rasps Greyback. "Release me, I say!"

I'm puzzled by this exchange. I have no idea why this sword might be so important, why Snape would send it from Hogwarts to Gringotts.

She waves her wand, and the werewolf springs to his feet, but appears too wary to approach her. He prowls behind an armchair, his filthy curved nails clutching its back, and I glare at him for besmirching my home.

"Draco, move this scum outside," says Bellatrix, indicating the unconscious men. "If you haven't got the guts to finish them, then leave them in the courtyard for me."

"Don't you dare speak to Draco like..." says Narcissa furiously, but she is cut off when Bellatrix screams, "Be quiet! The situation is graver than you can possibly imagine, Cissy! We have a very serious problem!"

Bella examines first the sword before turning her attention to the prisoners. "If it is indeed Potter, he must not be harmed," she mutters to herself. "The Dark Lord wishes to dispose of Potter himself. But if he finds out... I must... I must know..." Returning her attention to Narcissa, she says, "The prisoners must be placed in the cellar, while I think what to do!"

I have let this go on long enough. "This is my house, Bella, you don't give orders in my..."

"Do it! You have no idea of the danger we are in!" shrieks Bellatrix, hanging onto her sanity by a thin thread and a thin stream of fire issues from her wand and burns a hole in the carpet.

Narcissa hesitates for a moment, then addresses the werewolf. "Take these prisoners down to the cellar, Greyback."

"Wait," said Bellatrix sharply. "All except... except for the Mudblood."

Greyback gives a grunt of pleasure.

"No!" shouts Weasley. "You can have me, keep me!"

Bellatrix hits him across the face; the blow echoes around the room. "If she dies under questioning, I'll take you next," she says. "Blood traitor is next to Mudblood in my book. Take them downstairs, Greyback, and make sure they are secure, but do nothing more to them...yet."

We are waiting in the drawing room for our master to appear as Bellatrix tortures the Granger girl, though I am no longer sure if it is for information or pleasure. Unfortunately it was Bellatrix who was the one to summon him. She seems quite smug that she has found a way to discredit Snape over the presence of the sword, a sword I have to admit I can discern no reason why it is so special. I hear a loud crack coming from the cellar. "What was that?" I shout over the din of the Granger girl being

tortured. "Did you hear that? What was that noise in the cellar?" No one answers. "Draco...no, call Wormtail! Make him go and check!"

Wormtail answers that all is well but doesn't immediately return. I am contemplating seeing what is keeping the toad when the Weasley boy rushes up from the cellar and shouts, "*Expelliarmus!*"

Bellatrix's wand flies into the air and is caught by Potter, who was following close behind.

I wheel about, unsure of what to do when Potter yells, "*Stupefy!*"

There's a ringing in my ears and I'm having a hard time focusing. I appear to be on the floor. Narcissa is by my side, helping me to my feet. "What...?" I begin to ask and then start to remember. "Potter!" I look around and see no sign of the boy or his friends, but there is a great deal of destruction, including a very expensive chandelier.

"Gone, my love," Narcissa says, as she cradles Draco, tending his wounds with her wand.

"Helped by that no good house-elf of yours," Bella spits in my direction.

I surmise she is referring to Dobby. "He's no house-elf of mine," I growl. We were so close and once again it's being taken from me.

Bella is pacing frantically. "We need a plan. Quickly. The Dark Lord will be here in moments."

Moments? Ah, yes, she had summoned our master right before we were attacked. "The truth," I say simply. There is no way we have time to devise a convincing lie. "What happened to Wormtail?"

Greyback emerges from the cellar. "Dead. Strangled by his hand."

"Strangled by his hand?" Bella replies, confused.

Greyback shrugs and turns to leave.

"Where are you going?" Bella demands.

"This is no place for me. You wanted the glory, you deal with this," he says before hurrying out of the drawing room before anyone can stop him.

Narcissa looks up from tending Draco. "We lay the blame on Wormtail for the escape. We did nothing wrong. We tell him Wormtail summoned the house-elf to help Potter and apparently was strangled by his own hand for his act of treason."

There was no time to debate our strategy as our Master appears in our midst. He turns his attention to Bella, and I am relieved that she was the one to summon him and not me.

"Why have you called me back?" he asks angrily, taking in the destruction in the room

She does her best to look contrite. "My Lord, we had captured Potter and his companions, but your...Wormtail aided their escape."

"Where is Wormtail?" the Dark Lord asks, looking around for his traitorous servant, sparks issuing from the end of his wand.

"Dead, My Lord," replies Narcissa as she rises to her feet. "He summoned a Hogwarts house-elf to aid them in their escape and the hand you created for him strangled him."

"And Potter?" he hisses menacingly, clearly trying to determine upon whom he would vent his wrath. I know that I should be the spokesman, but fear roots me where I am.

"We don't know. Once free of the cellar, they were able to Disapparate," answers Narcissa.

He cries out an otherworldly shriek of anger and destroys my favorite armchair. After composing himself, he says. "It matters not. He will come to me."

None of us dare disagree. For now we consider ourselves lucky he did not vent his formidable wrath on one of us. After a few moments, he disappears again, and I breathe a sigh of relief.

I turn to Draco. I know this is no longer a place for him. I move to him and put my arms on his shoulders. "Draco, you must return to Hogwarts. Now. I don't want you here any longer. It won't be safe."

"I understand, Father," Draco says, almost sounding relieved. He looks to Narcissa, "My wand?"

Narcissa pulls hers from her sleeve. "You must take mine."

I cannot believe she is doing this. We will be truly defenseless. "Narcissa, no," I protest. I presume something must have happened to his while I was Stunned.

She puts her hand on my cheek. "Draco cannot return to Hogwarts without a wand. Not only would he be unable to complete his studies, but he would be defenseless."

"And what about us?" I ask trying not to let her see the fear in my eyes, though I know that one wand against the Dark Lord's followers would be useless.

"You don't think I can keep you safe, Brother?" Bella replies snidely. "You think you are in danger here?"

I know that I am in constant danger in my home, but I realize that it's not a point I can argue. "Be safe, Draco," I say before he leaves to pack his things to leave as soon as possible. If nothing else has happened, I feel that my relationship with Draco is changing, that he is finally beginning to understand how helpless I have been, even before my incarceration.

We have been drug to Hogsmeade, forced to join our insane master. I can barely move as I was beaten within an inch of my life as the Dark Lord vented his anger over Potter and his friends breaking into Bellatrix's vault and stealing a cup. I find there is much I don't know. I have no idea why a single cup should be so precious, but it was not my place to ask. For now my goal is survive this and find Draco.

In the distance I hear the sounds of destruction reigning upon Hogwarts, the Dark Lord's minions must have broken through the protective wards. "My Lord," I say in a voice that sounds far less forceful than I would have liked. "My Lord... please... my son..." I say hoping to sound somewhat less terrified than I am.

"If your son is dead, Lucius, it is not my fault. He did not come and join me, like the rest of the Slytherins. Perhaps he has decided to befriend Harry Potter?" the Dark Lord says in an accusatory tone.

"No...never," I whisper at the verbal slap, doing my best to convey my family's loyalty.

"You must hope not." He says.

The menace in his voice tells me my life is forfeit should that be the case. "Aren't...aren't you afraid, My Lord, that Potter might die at another hand but yours?" I ask, still unable to keep the fear out of my voice. "Wouldn't it be... forgive me... more prudent to call off this battle, enter the castle, and seek him y-yourself?"

"Do not pretend, Lucius. You wish the battle to cease so that you can discover what has happened to your son. And I do not need to seek Potter. Before the night is out, Potter will have come to find me."

I was almost positive he would see through my thinly veiled attempt to save my son, but I had to try. With no wand, my intellect is the only weapon I have.

The Dark Lord drops his gaze once more to the wand in his fingers. I can see him lost in thought, clearly perplexed. "Go and fetch Snape," he says simply.

"Snape, M-My Lord?" I ask, thoroughly confused by this request. Clearly he can't mean to send me unarmed into the battle.

"Snape. Now. I need him. There is a...service...I require from him. Go," he orders in a voice that leaves no room to question.

Knowing he will tell me nothing more and punish me further if I remain, I muster all my strength and do his bidding.

It takes me close to an hour to find Snape, and I am sure I will be punished for taking so long, but it has been hard for me to move. I have never felt so vulnerable and begin to wonder if it has all been a ploy to get rid of me. Surely our Master would have had a better way to summon Snape to him, but at least it has gotten me out of our Master's presence for a time. Slowly I return to where our Master was, unable to keep pace with Snape.

Before I make it to the Shrieking Shack, I hear his announcement that he is suspending the battle. I breathe a sigh of relief and can only hope Draco has survived. Hearing he will be waiting for Potter in the Forbidden Forest, I head in that direction, hoping to find Narcissa still safe.

We walk to the castle, victory seemingly at hand. At least victory for the Dark Lord. I have no idea what this bodes for us. We have yet to be able to prove that we are invaluable to the Dark Lord.

Narcissa grips my hand and leans into me, whispering, "Draco lives."

"How do you know that?" I whisper back, shocked at her statement.

"Potter told me."

I glance at her in shock. "But he's dead!" I hope that my voice is not as loud as it seems to me.

She answers with a knowing smile, the blood nearly drains from my face, and I miss a step on the rough terrain. My witch, my wonderful witch, has not only lied to the Dark Lord, but did so successfully. She gives my hand a reassuring squeeze before releasing it.

If Draco is alive, it means that not all is lost. If Potter is alive, that means that the Dark Lord's victory is not assured. There may still be a way out of all of this. Of course if he is defeated, then what? I was one of his supporters. I went to prison for committing a crime at his behest. I see no way out of the predicament that we are in. No matter what happens, it seems that my life is forfeit. If I should be sentenced to return to Azkaban... I glance at Narcissa, wanting to tell her my somber thought, but knowing I cannot burden her with that now.

While there are many of us awaiting trial, there are not near as many as last time. I willingly provided the Ministry with the names of Death Eater I knew. It was quite simple as most of them were not the sort of people I would ever associate with and the Wizarding World will be better off with them imprisoned. A few of the others, it was a matter of revenge for how they treated me following my release from Azkaban. I know that my only hope is to cooperate with Ministry fully. That and the fact that I truly did nothing after I left Azkaban.

I have not been afforded legal counsel, the Ministry probably feeling that some sort of loophole would be found where I could argue for my escape from a severe sentence. Thankfully Narcissa has been spared from confinement, though I know that Draco is being held elsewhere. My only hope is that his age and the age at which he was forced to take the Dark Mark will spare him from a lengthy sentence.

I have yet to be allowed to see Narcissa. Once the battle ended, it didn't take long for Aurors to take Draco and me into custody. My captors provide me with very little information other than delighting in telling me how long the sentences of my fellow Death Eaters have been. Honestly, I am glad to see them rot in Azkaban. At least Rodolphus is safely imprisoned again, though I wish he had met the same fate as his wife and brother.

My one wish is that before this is over, if I am not allowed to see Narcissa, is that I will at least be able to write her a letter to explain what I have planned. I know that she won't be pleased with me, but I will not suffer through another incarceration at Azkaban. While searching through my vast library for information I could bring to the Dark Lord's attention to curry his favor, I stumbled upon a spell that will allow me to quickly and painlessly end my life. It would allow me to die with dignity rather than wilt away for the rest of my life in Azkaban. I'm sure my captors would not object and would of course label it a coward's way out. It may be. Many of my actions were quite cowardly, but at this point, I find I no longer care. It would allow her, and hopefully Draco, to move on with their lives without the shadow of my imprisonment hanging over their lives.

It has been eight days since the Dark..., no Voldemort, or more appropriately, Tom Riddle, has been vanquished. I will use his name. I will no longer allow it to have power over me. My captors are now leading me to trial, though I somehow doubt it will be anything fair. Not that I can blame them. My past is not something to be proud of. True, I may have had no choice in my continued service to Riddle, but I had choices in how I treated others such as the Weasleys and Muggleborns after the first war, though perhaps not as great latitude with them, but I could have ignored them. Instead I cared only about the Pureblood principles instilled in me by my father. Even after the old bastard's death, I never changed my ways, never considered that those outside my social circle were not vastly inferior. Now I know that not only are they not inferior, but they are quite likely the best among us.

I walk into the trial chamber and see that while it is not the full Wizengamot, it is more than the triumvirate that sat my previous trial. Seated at center is Kingsley Shacklebolt, acting Minister of Magic. I know little of him other than the fact he is a powerful Auror, and I can only hope that he can be impartial.

"Lucius Malfoy," he says in his deep voice that commands respect, "you are accused of being a Death Eater and conspiring with Voldemort to bring about the death of Harry Potter and destruction of Muggleborn witches and wizards. How do you plead?"

How I wish I had been granted access to my attorney. Thankfully I have been involved in enough legal situations to have a fair knowledge of how this should work. "Guilty to being a Death Eater, though I plead extenuating circumstances." I know there is no point in denying my involvement. After all, I was already imprisoned once for a very similar charge.

"And what circumstances might those be?" Kingsley asked, arching an eyebrow at me.

In my mind I have been rehearsing this moment, knowing that I would have to be concise and convincing and hopefully given a chance to expound on my reasons.

"First of all, I would like to inform the Wizengamot that I did not escape from Azkaban, and that I was in fact left behind at first. But because of that abandonment, I had time to reflect on my past behavior, and I have come to the realization that I was not a good man and that I can do better. That has been reinforced in the time since.

"Second, following my liberation from Azkaban, my wand was taken from me, and I was rendered powerless. I took no offensive action against Ministry, Hogwarts or Order of the Phoenix forces. I know that Potter and his friends were treated horribly at my manor, but I was powerless when faced with my sister-in-law." It pains me to admit my impotence, but I can only hope that it will help sway them that I have done nothing more to victimize anyone in Riddle's name in the last year.

Knowing that humility and repentance are key, I continue, "I know there is little I can say and any apology would be met with skepticism, as it should. I have not been known as a wizard of my word. The last thing I will say in my defense is that I had little choice in returning to Riddle's service when he returned. Karkaroff tried to flee, and he was hunted and killed. I have no doubt that would have been my fate and the fate of my family. I have already answered for my crime on the night I broke into the Department of Mysteries." I feel that to say more would be to seem too desperate. I want them to believe that I am repentant, which I am. All I can do is wait for questions.

Madam Brown glares at me. "You are proclaiming your innocence since you were broken out of Azkaban?" she asks skeptically.

I know I must tread carefully. "Madam, I know it is difficult to believe and that the only witnesses I have are my wife and son, who you may not be inclined to believe, but I was for the most part a powerless prisoner in my own home. Without a wand, there was nothing I could do to anyone, not that it was my desire."

She leans forward, clearly not believing my words. "You expect me to believe that you did not want to hurt anyone who opposed Voldemort?"

I do my best to sound repentant. "Madam, back when Riddle first rose to power, he rallied my father and others like him who felt that those from Muggle families and those who married Muggles were diluting the magical world and bloodlines. During the first war, it seemed that those goals were being pursued. This time..." I think of what he tried to do to my family, what happened to some other Pureblood families. "This time, it was different," I said, my voice trailing off. She arches her eyebrow at me, and I continue. "I failed Riddle and I nearly paid the ultimate fate for that. He sent my only son on an impossible mission. The only reason he survived was because my wife made an Unbreakable Vow with Severus Snape. When I learned of this, I knew that this was not like the first time. Knew that Riddle had become... unhinged. He was willing to sacrifice one of the oldest bloodlines in Wizarding Britain due to my failure. At that point I realized that his victory would probably lead to the destruction of our way of life. Unfortunately, I was by no means in a position to do anything, not that anyone other than Potter was in that position."

"So you bided your time, waiting to see which side won?" she asks pointedly.

"I know that it seems that way. I also know there is nothing I can say to change anyone's mind. Again, the only witness I have to offer for my epiphany is my wife. I can say that I truly hit rock bottom and realized the error of my ways. I have willingly provided the names of every Death Eater I can recall. I realize that a number are dead and that I did not know everyone, but I hope the information I gave can help track down those who survived. I can only hope that this body can be convinced to let me prove that I have become enlightened. That I have seen that family provenience has no bearing on a person's worth."

I look among the members of the Wizengamot present, waiting for one of them to speak, one of them to dress me down. They lean over and whisper to each other. I try not to imagine what they are saying about me.

After what seems like an eternity, Kingsley turns back to me. "We have interviewed Mrs. Malfoy, and she has corroborated much of what you have said. We have taken into consideration the fact that Mr. Potter has spoken very highly of her." He pauses for a few minutes as his eyes bore into me. "We are not ready to pass judgment at this time and will adjourn to discuss what you have told us and the information we have received from others."

He waves his hand at the Aurors who have been steadfastly at my side, and they lead me out of the courtroom. I have no idea what to think. I must imagine that they are at least considering some measure of leniency. Otherwise they would have just condemned me to Azkaban. Of course, part of that depends on which others they have taken testimony from and what they I have said. I know that Draco and Narcissa will have given testimony that supports what I have said, but it is quite possible Rodolphus has tried to take me down with him. Now it is just a matter of waiting.

While waiting for the verdict, I must have dozed off because I was rudely roused by one of the Aurors kicking my cot.

"Time's up, Malfoy," he leered at me, clearly expecting I will be returned to Azkaban.

I try to imagine he is just saying that because he doesn't like me, not that I can blame him. If I were in his place, I wouldn't like me, either.

I finally find myself standing before the Wizengamot. I do my best to look contrite.

"Lucius Malfoy, we have reviewed your charges, along with the testimony you and others have given us. It was by no means unanimous and there are those among us who do not entirely believe you, but we have found no proof that you did anything to harm anyone since you left Azkaban."

I try not to get my hopes up, though I do wonder who the others might be. I know that I am still guilty of breaking into the Department of Mysteries and that I did not serve my full sentence and they would be well within their rights of making me fulfill the rest of that sentence.

"If you were granted your freedom, what would you do?" asks Shackbolt.

This is the last question that I expected. "I would endeavor to do what I can to see that the Wizarding World returns to normal as quickly as possible. Part of that would include a donation to the rebuilding of Hogwarts. I would be amenable to contributing to a fund to help the families of those who were killed or harmed during the war." I know that it is too presumptuous to say that I would set up a foundation. "I would work to see that witches and wizards are judged by their knowledge and skills and not by their parentage. As one who was a leader in the business community, I hope that I will be afforded the opportunity to lead by example, to place Muggleborns in places of leadership commensurate with their skills. Miss Granger acquitted herself extremely well and has most definitely proved that she is equal to any, if not better. I have no reason to believe that she is an anomaly. As one of the largest private employers in Wizarding Britain, I believe I am in an excellent position to set an example for others to follow."

"Presuming you would be allowed to keep your business ventures," a middle aged wizard named Niles Reed said.

I nod my head in his direction. "I understand that it would be the Ministry's prerogative to confiscate as much of my property as they deemed necessary for reparations, but I would humbly remind this panel that running business ventures can be quite time consuming and tedious, not to mention requiring a certain amount of expertise, of which I am clearly in possession." I try to humble my voice. "What I would propose is a defined amount of reparations to be paid out of my profits, after an agreed upon amount for living expenses for my family. I would of course be quite happy to have officials from the Ministry oversee my books to ensure that I am being completely honest." I cannot believe what I am hearing. I try not to get my hopes up too much that I might be allowed to retain my empire. "I of course know that there are some losses that no amount of money can replace. But I do know that breaking up my business holdings could prove quite detrimental to our economy. To rebuild, people will need jobs. For the time being, supply lines will need to be established outside of usual parameters until local businesses can rebuild. While some shops such as restaurants can quickly be replaced, there are some such as quill and cauldron makers that will take time, not to mention other basic goods. I have had contact with wizards in other countries, and we may be able to take advantage of those relationships in the short term."

I'm not sure everyone is convinced this is the correct course of action, so I add, "By setting a defined reparation amount, it would encourage me to grow my businesses. You see, the sooner I could pay off the reparations, the sooner those funds would be available to me for further expansion. I would of course like to set up a long term recurring donation to help those who were orphaned during the war, something outside of the terms of my reparations." I hope this final plea, this final tug on the heartstrings to help children will be exactly what they want to hear and will help secure at least some measure of freedom for me. I have no doubt there will be restrictions on my leaving the country and who I may or may not consort with, but honestly, so many of Riddle's most recent followers were the type of filth I would never associate with anyway."

I hope that I have not sounded too optimistic in answering Shackbolt's question, but I found it hard to contain my excitement as I outlined my plan back to prosperity. My heart is beating quickly in my chest as I realize I am likely mere moments away from learning my fate. While just this morning I feared my fate would be a life sentence, now I am not so sure.

Once again I watch the members of the panel confer with each other. I desperately wish that I could hear what they are saying, that I could interject, clarify my statements. Dare I say, I even wish I could beg for forgiveness, a second chance that I know I probably don't deserve.

Finally Shackbolt returns his attention to me. "The decision of what to do with you has been the most difficult decision we have faced, especially since you were found

guilty of breaking into the Department of Mysteries and attacking both Potter and his friends and those who came in their defense. As we said before, we can find no proof that in the last year you did anything illegal." He pauses. "Know that this panel was split. Some feel that you should return to fill out your sentence. Some of us feel your statements about running a business are correct, that we need someone with experience and that your cooperation with the Ministry have earned you leniency. As such, we have reluctantly decided that you will serve probation for a period of two years instead of being returned to Azkaban to complete your sentence. During that time, you will be unable to leave the country without receiving permission and traveling with a Ministry representative. These trips will be limited to those that are business related."

"I understand," I say as soberly as possible even though I am completely elated. I will not be returning to Azkaban.

"Know that your manor will be thoroughly searched. We understand that it was used as Voldemort's base of operations and that items may have been brought into your home. We will allow you amnesty if you immediately turn those items over to Aurors."

"Thank you." I realize this is a perfect opportunity to get rid of some of the Dark Artifacts I have accumulated over the years. My mind races as I try to determine what might be hidden well enough to evade detection as some of them have been in our family for hundreds of years.

"Ministry officials will make periodic, unscheduled visits to inspect your facilities and also to go over your books."

"As I said before, I am more than willing to open my books at any time. There will be no subterfuge." I have been doing this for so long that I know how to keep my books in perfect order so that there will be no question that everything I'm doing is aboveboard.

"Your reparations will be in the amount of fifty million Galleons."

I am barely able to control myself at this number as it is much higher than I expected, and I'm sure the blood has drained from my face.

Shacklebolt continues, "To be repaid over a maximum period of five years."

I lick my lips. "I understand." I know that these seems a paltry sum when compared to my presumed worth, but much of my wealth is not available as gold, but invested in the family properties and various business ventures. But I also know that it is an achievable sum, likely in less than five years.

"Should you violate any of the terms of your probation, you will serve out the rest of your life sentence."

"I understand." I quietly wait to see if there are any more conditions to my release. While I had hoped for this sort of outcome, I can hardly believe it is coming to pass.

"You are free to go." He bangs the gavel to conclude the hearing.

"Thank you," I say as I bow to the panel.

The Aurors gruffly lead me out of the courtroom. I can tell they aren't pleased with the verdict that has been handed down. I do my best to hide my elation as they take me to the clerk who has my possessions.

The clerk passes a box and a piece of parchment onto the counter. "Sign for the goods," he says in a bored voice.

I quickly look through the box and everything seems to be there.

I'm shoved towards a small room. "Get changed," the larger Auror orders gruffly. "You have two minutes."

I look at him incredulously. Dressing in two minutes is not something I am accustomed to, but something tells me they won't care if I'm not finished by then. Quickly I throw off the vile prison clothes I was forced to wear. I then dress with the utmost haste.

"Ten seconds," the Auror shouts.

As he calls time, I am buttoning my outer robe and hurry out of the cubicle before he hauls me out.

"Let's go," he says gruffly, shoving me towards the exit.

I long for the ability to tell him to keep his paws off me and that I can walk under my own power, but I know that would be a bad idea right now. "Where are we going?" I ask cautiously.

"Time to go inspect your manor," he says. His self-satisfied smug grin indicates he thinks he's about to uncover something that will lose me my freedom.

"Of course." I had hoped to have time to reunite with Narcissa and Draco upon gaining my freedom, but I'm sure the Ministry doesn't trust me to not secrete something away before they could have their way.

As we line up for the Floo, I see the stares and hushed whispers people are giving me. I know this will be my new normal for some time. In time, I hope to prove to them that I have changed, that I am no longer the wizard I once was. I also notice several other Aurors joining the pair who have been my guards.

It took close to six hours for them to finish ransacking my house. They found nothing, of course. I was able to dispose of a number of Dark Artifacts that I had been stuck with from previous generations of Malfoys. Unfortunately I was forced to part with several books that I had not wished to dispose of, but I knew that to keep them would have been risking a return to Azkaban. They confiscated several books I had not pointed out to them, but due to the size of the library, I was able to convince them there was no reasonable way I could be familiar with them all by making that point when we entered the library.

Checking the clock, I see that it is nearly ten o'clock. I realize I have no idea where Narcissa or Draco are, and that I have no way to get a message to them. I stand forlorn in the grand foyer as it looks like a herd of Hippogriffs has rampaged through my house looking for anything edible. Furniture is shoved out of place or overturned, cushions and drawers scattered everywhere. Paintings are dumped on the floor or askew. In some cases draperies have been pulled off the walls. I wish I had a wand so that I could restore some order. Perhaps the house-elves could sort out the house.

Then I realize that I have not seen a single house-elf. I wonder if the Ministry has set them free and not told me.

Suddenly I hear a pop behind me and I spin in place, wishing I had a wand to defend myself. Imagine my relief when I see Narcissa and Draco, and I run to them. I embrace them both and the tears come unbidden. "Cissy, Draco, I thought that I would never see you again."

"Oh, Luce," she says, tears also streaming down her cheeks.

"Father," Draco says quietly.

"I am so, so sorry," I say. I am broken, beaten and scarred, but I know that I will one day be whole again. I will rise again.

"Broken, Beat & Scarred" by Metallica

You rise, you fall, you're down then you rise again

What don't kill you make you more strong

You rise, you fall, you're down then you rise again

What don't kill you make you more strong

Rise, fall, down, rise again

What don't kill you make you more strong

Rise, fall, down, rise again

What don't kill you make you more strong

Through black days

Through black nights

Through pitch black insides

Breaking your teeth on the hard life coming

Show your scars

Cutting your feet on the hard earth running

Show your scars

Breaking your life, broken, beat and scarred

But we die hard

The dawn, the death, the fight to the final breath

What don't kill you make you more strong

The dawn, the death, the fight to the final breath

What don't kill you make you more strong

Dawn, death, fight, final breath

What don't kill you make you more strong

Dawn, death, fight, final breath

What don't kill you make you more strong

They scratch me

They scrape me

They cut and rape me

Breaking your teeth on the hard life coming

Show your scars

Cutting your feet on the hard earth running

Show your scars

Breaking your life, broken, beat and scarred

But we die hard

Breaking your teeth on the hard life coming

Show your scars

Cutting your feet on the hard earth running

Show your scars

Bleeding your soul in a hard luck story

Show your scars

Spilling your blood in the hot sun's glory

Show your scars

Breaking your life, broken, beat and scarred

We die hard

We die hard

We die hard