

The room it revealed was small, but stepping inside Draco quickly realised what they were there for. Sat on a pedestal in front of him was a large, smooth crystal, swirling like it held mercury inside it.

The Malfoy wardstone.

For some reason, Draco had always expected the wardstone to be somewhere... grander. He'd gone searching for it, in his youth; determined to uncover all the family secrets. His father had told him he would only learn of it when it was time for him to become lord of the manor.

That time was now, Draco supposed.

"Mother, what are we doing here?" he asked, when his mother had shut the door behind them, both squeezed in the small room. The magic radiating from the wardstone was palpable, dragging at Draco's own core like treacle.

"We are here to reclaim what is ours," Narcissa replied primly, rolling up her sleeves. "Your father invited that *filth* into the manor. But he is gone now, and we no longer need to put up with his guests. His *influence*."

Draco's eyes widened. "Are— are you sure?" Anything they did now, it would be a statement. It would reveal to the Dark Lord that the Malfoys were no longer securely under his thumb. "What about your Mark?" He'd heard Severus mention more than once that the Dark Lord has ways of reaching him through his Mark, tangling with his magic, bringing him to heel.

"Quite certain," Narcissa assured. "My Mark is not like Severus' — he is valuable enough for the Dark Lord to keep a close connection; I am just a wife," her lips curled in a smirk. "He did not believe me worth the effort of controlling, and that shall be his error." She softened, reaching out to squeeze Draco's hand. "We made our choices long ago, little Dragon. I made mine the moment I saw you look at Harry Potter like he was the greatest treasure in the universe." Draco couldn't help but blush. "While Lucius was around we had a part to play, but that is past, now. I am Lady Malfoy, head of the family until you come of age. And I refuse to cower in my own manor. Between the two of us, I believe we'll have enough power to lock down the wards, and eject our unwanted visitors."

She spoke so casually about booting the Dark Lord himself out from their house, it made Draco gape. "I— is that possible?" He was underage, and his mother was only a Malfoy by marriage.

"This manor has war-wards, and it is understood that war does not always wait for the head of the family to reach majority," Narcissa said. "I have faith that this will work. And if it doesn't... we have other options."

Draco wondered if he perhaps should've packed a bag, after all.

But it was too late now. Squaring his jaw determinedly, he nodded, and together they turned to the wardstone. "Let me do the asking," Narcissa instructed quietly. "You just put the power