

For the Good of Us All

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For the Good of Us All


by [toomanysunkenships](#)

Summary

Hermione has finally managed to corner Harry and convince him to listen to her plan. "Harry, going back in time to save Tom Riddle before the monster envelops the man is the best plan we have. It's for the good of us all."

Portuguese translation- <https://my.w.tt/bShCBaldz7>

French translation- <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11651824/1/Pour-le-Bien-Commun>

There is a second French one as well, it's linked on my unfinished rewrite of the story 

Back in Time

-Harry-

“Harry, I know it’s mad, but..” Hermione whispers.

“I can’t do it, Hermione!” I say.

“Shh! I’ve been researching this spell for around a month and I think it’s safe,” she says quietly.

“Oh, brilliant, you *think* it’s safe,” I say.

She shushes me again before beginning another tirade on the importance of following her plan.

“Harry, it reverses time. It isn’t going to harm you, but not many people have ever done it before. There isn’t concrete evidence, but this is the best way. I found that if you’re careful and don’t erase yourself then you can change the future without ruining the present or future,” she says.

“How is that possible? You’ve always said that messing with time is tricky,” I say.

“It is tricky. That’s why I waited until I was sure,” Hermione says, “Let it suffice to say that you could go back and-”

“Save me parents? Dumbledore?” I ask with excitement.

“Save everyone, Harry. If you could encourage Tom Riddle to never become You-Know-Who, if we do this right then you could save everyone, including him,” she says.

“Why would I want to save a murderer?” I ask.

“He had to be a person once. Go back to the orphanage that you told me about. Befriend him. Kill him if you must, but remember Harry that if you do it before he’s done anything, before the monster envelops the man, it makes you no better than him,” she says.

Of course I am the only one who can do this. Me. It always falls to me. Always. I have to become friends with Tom Riddle? That’s brilliant. I suppose it couldn’t be someone else’s turn to ‘save everyone.’ No, never. It always must be me.

“Hermione, why are you suggesting this? You usually tell me to listen to Dumbledore,” I say.

Hermione bites her lip. I know that it must be difficult for her to defy authority, and because of that I know that this alternative plan must be tremendously better than the one we have now. And we don’t really have a plan now, but we sort of do at the same time. If only Dumbledore had told us more than he did, gave us any reason at all to follow his plan over this one. The one that sounds like it could actually work.

“Dumbledore isn’t here anymore to advise us and I think we should try this before we try his plan,” she finally says.

“How am I supposed to get back if I fail?” I ask, “I suppose you’ve researched that too?”

“Yes, but you can’t keep going back and forth. You get one shot and then if you want to come back, if you’re really done there, then you can come back. But that will be the end, Harry. You can’t come back after he’s defeated because a different version of you will take your place. But if you do fail to defeat him, or bring him to your side.. you say ‘*Reditum*’ and you find me. We’ll go Horcrux hunting, but as a last resort,” she says.

I walk towards the back of the Astronomy Tower. Hermione grabs me in a fierce hug,

“Um, I guess this is goodbye,” I say.

“Goodbye, Harry. I’ll, well... I will. I want you to know that if you don’t come back, and you live out your life, that even though I’ll forget you I don’t want to. I love you, Harry, and I’m going to miss you every single day until magic fixes the paradox by erasing my memories. If you don’t come back,”

I cut her off with a rough hug.

“I’ll never forget you, Hermione. I’m sorry that the war and Voldemort took away our ability to stay friends,” I say and then I whisper the spell with my back turned to her, tears streaming down her face that I just can’t bear to see.

I suddenly find myself in dripping wet Muggle clothing and standing outside of the orphanage that I saw in the Pensieve when Dumbledore was showing me his memories of Voldemort. No, Tom. I don’t know when he became skilled in Legilimency but I know that he can’t find any thoughts like that in my head, even though I’ve learned to protect myself from those kind of attacks.

I look down into the puddle left by the rain and see my reflection. I’m soaked, but I can see that I look young, like I’m 11 years old again. I’m scrawny and I look underfed, as though the spell understood my needs and adapted me to fulfill them with the least resistance. The effects are confusing, but helpful at the same time.

“Hello?” I call out, seeing no one in the lobby.

“Hello? Oh, hi there. Can I help you?” a tall woman asks.

“I’m Harry. I don’t have any-” what should I say? How do I explain that I must be here simply to spy on or to become the close friend and confidante of a soulless murderer? That I am either to avenge my parents death, and Dumbledore’s and countless others, or I am to live out my life at the side of Voldemort- Tom Riddle?

“I don’t have anywhere else to go,” I admit quietly. Not a lie.

“Oh, my! Poor dear! Come with me, I’ll help you get dry,” she coos.

I follow her quietly. Now what? Do I follow him around here or wait for Hogwarts? Will I get a Hogwarts letter, considering I don't exist yet?

"Here are some towels and some new clothes for you, dear," she says, "Just stay in here with Tom and I'll come back later to talk to you, okay?"

I nod and rub the towel over my head. Easier than I thought, I guess. Although I shouldn't be surprised no one wants to share a room with a psychopath. I look around the room. Share a bed?! Tom must've been moved to a single room to save space. Either the spell was trying to help me, or they ran out of that space when I came. Brilliant. Rooming with the devil.

"Whatever are you doing in my room?" Vol-Tom says when he walks in the door.

"Hi.. er.. I'm Harry and I live here too," I say.

I sound so meek. Already cowed to him. It's disgusting, and yet I'm... nervous? Tom scowls at me and goes towards his- our, I shudder- bed.

"Are you going to stand there and get my floor all wet or are you going to towel off?" he asks.

I pull off my wet shirt and rub the towel across my body. I slowly and methodically take my wet clothes off, drying myself and then putting new clothes on. Tom never takes his eyes off of me. I flush red.

"You're Tom, right?" I ask, even though I know.

"Yes," he says.

We stare at each other for awhile. Not nervous, I think, maybe just uneasy.

"Er, how old are you?" I ask.

"I'm eleven," he says with boredom.

"Do you go to school?" I ask.

"The orphanage has tutors for us," he says.

He's definitely annoyed now, but I feel the need to be persistent. I smile. Wonderful, Dumbledore hasn't come to see him yet, or if he has, term hasn't started.

The front desk lady comes through the door.

"Hello?" she calls.

"Hello," I say.

"Oh, good, I just wanted to ask you a few questions. How old are you, dear? What is your name?" she asks.

“Harry Potter,” I say with a small glance at Tom. He’s unaffected and looks bored. It feels weird to say my name and get no reaction. No shrieks of joy, no anger, just acceptance.

“I’m eleven,” I say. I hope that I’m eleven, or else it will look badly when I don’t get invited to Hogwarts. He’ll think I’m a Muggle.

I’m surprised that I can be in a room with him and feel nothing. Maybe it’s because he hasn’t done anything yet, or maybe I don’t truly hate him. I don’t hate anyone, really.

“Okay, Harry, where are your parents?” she asks.

“I don’t know,” I say.

It isn’t really a lie since I don’t know where they live.

“What are their names?” she asks.

“I don’t know their real names. I haven’t seen them for years and years,” I say.

She looks alarmed. Just a little lie so that she never finds out that I don’t exist, that I have a ‘home’ and don’t belong in an orphanage, and especially that I have come from the future to change the past.

She smiles at me one last time and then leaves the room looking troubled.

“I don’t have friends, so don’t expect me to like you,” Tom says.

I almost feel bad for him.

“I could be your friend, and you don’t even have to like me,” I say.

“Whatever,” he says.

Hit the Books

Chapter Notes

Snape, Lucius, Lily, James and Co. all go to Hogwarts. I know that it isn't historically accurate, but this story is a bit AU

"I'm nervous," I say as we crowd on the doorstep of Hogwarts.

The last month had been difficult, to say the least. Living with Tom was not at all what I expected. He's messier than I am. He snores quietly at night. I know these little things about him that don't seem like much but mean that I am closer to him than I expected to be. Than I ever wanted to be.

"Nervousness is for the weak, Harry," Tom says without looking back at me.

I say nothing as the large doors open and we are led inside. A small raven-haired boy brushes against me. I smile in his direction, a courtesy that does not go unnoticed by Tom. He looks at me harshly.

"Harry, come here," Tom says.

I thought it would be easier to.. convert Tom before he had ever heard the word 'Mudblood' or any other slurs used by the elitist purebloods, but I've found that he has always been the type of person who thinks himself superior. He's treating me like a Death Eater, like personal property always at his beck and call, only suitable to serve and follow him around like an adoring puppy, and it disgusts me.

I walk back to his side and mumble the necessary words of remorse and sorrow, We walk through the doors together and await our Sorting.

When Headmaster Dippet calls my name, I realize that it's rather nice to not hear whispering as I sit on the stool. Being a first year again has its drawbacks, but I'm a first year with the knowledge of a sixth year and the strength and talents of those far above me. The Sorting Hat is lowered onto my head and when it places me into Slytherin I make no protest.

I sit at my new table and survey the crowd. The people that I recognize look so different, so young. Lucius Malfoy looks almost... innocent. Eager. Tom sits beside me.

"I've heard that Slytherin is the best House," I say by way of greeting.

"And whoever did you hear that from?" Tom says as though he suspects me of some malicious deed.

So possessive of his minions. I suppose I won't be allowed to make a single friend while I'm here.

"A person in the crowd. No one important," I say quickly.

"It is only fitting that we were placed into the best House," Tom says, "Don't you agree?"

"Yes, Tom," I say, "Whatever you say."

I lay in my bed awake but with my eyes closed to steel myself for going through seven years of school again.

"Potter, get up!" a voice calls.

I roll over and groan. I don't want to be awake. Tom is more possessive at Hogwarts than he was at the orphanage. Last night he kept me tethered to his side and hardly allowed me to answer when other students talked to me.

"Potter!" The voice calls again.

I think I recognize it.

"Yes, that's me," I say around a yawn.

I sit up and look around for the person who woke me. It doesn't sound like Tom, and he never calls me by my last name. Another form of ownership.

"Your boyfriend was here just a moment ago," a boy says.

The boy from last night, the one I wanted to talk to.

"I don't have a boyfriend," I say.

"You don't? The other boy, Riddle was it?, he didn't seem to want anyone else to wake you," he says.

Why do I recognize this face?

Of course Tom would scare away everyone in this school. He wouldn't have it any other way. I'm his property now, and he doesn't like to share. He probably has plans to make me the first Death Eater. But sooner or later he'll do something, and I'll kill him. Fifth year at the latest, I think, when he made the diary Horcrux.

"Who are you?" I ask.

"Severus Snape," he says.

"Please, call me Harry," I say.

Hearing Snape call me by my last name brings back unpleasant memories of Potions class and failing marks. And then I smile. Tom won't keep me from having at least one friend.

"Why did you call me?" I ask.

"Because you wouldn't listen to me," Tom says.

I wince. Spoke too soon. He must have just walked back into the room. I was hoping to get to know Snape better, perhaps understand him on a level that I didn't have the opportunity to because of the things that happened between me and my father. Things that haven't happened yet. And he doesn't know that James Potter is my father yet.

"You're lazy and useless. Is that what you want? Even your subconscious should obey me. Or I will replace you," Tom snarls.

How disgustingly arrogant he is. I roll my eyes at Snape to calm the worried look in his eyes and then turn to face Tom. I pinch my leg until my eyes tear and attempt to look apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Tom. I'll try harder," I say.

"See to it," he says and then walks out of the door.

Two Months Later

“Hello, Tom,” I say as he meanders into the room moments before curfew.

“Harry,” he says.

He then stretches out across his bed and purposefully looks in any direction but the one that I'm in. I take a deep breath. He hasn't talked to me at all today. I know that I have to do better, but I'm worried that he'll just kill me or something if I try to take charge of him. I need a different approach.

“Have I done something wrong?” I ask.

“Why are you asking such foolish questions?” Tom asks me without turning his head.

I take deep breaths to keep from getting upset. Upset? I can't help but laugh at myself. Is three months all it took to make me forget that this boy and my parents are one in the same? Is that all it took for me to cling desperately to him approval?

“It's just that, er, you haven't... looked in my direction, never mind directly at me, or talked to me very much today,” I say quietly.

Even I know how that sounded. Pathetic. Dependent. Attached.

Merlin, do I sound like a cowed little slave. What should I care? He's-or he will be- a murderer.

Tom scowls at me before gracing me with a reply. Yes, earlier today he informed me that he graces me with replies to my benign questions and irrelevant statements.

“Am I to look at you every second and talk to you every minute? Do you presume yourself so important? Do you wish me to sigh your name all night long? Do you really think you deserve that?” he asks, his voice dripping with venom.

I look down at my feet. He's right, I've lost sight of what I'm supposed to do. In spite of how he treats me and what I know about him, I started to view him as a true friend. This alternative is not going to be the easy way out for me.

“No, Tom,” I say.

“Then why does it matter to you that I have tired of your presence?” he asks cruelly.

I pause. Have I managed to lose him so quickly? Er, I mean, to fail my mission? This is Lord Voldemort, not Tom Riddle. I need to- I should feel despair at the state of my mission, not pain at this betrayal, not the slow cracking of my heart.

“You don't want it to, but it bothers you,” Tom says in a taunting voice that doesn't sound quite as strong as before. There's something underneath.

I say nothing.

“Did you fancy yourself by my side forever? Did you-” he asks.

I cut him off.

“I thought that we were friends, yes. Perhaps more than that. It bothers me that you’ve tired me. I have no other friends,” I say.

I widen my eyes in shock at my honesty. I didn’t mean to reveal my inner thoughts. Foolish of me, really, but I considered Tom my best friend. Until now.

“Never interrupt me!” Tom yells.

I look around the room quickly. All but Severus are asleep.

“I,” I stutter,

“Be quiet now or others will witness your humiliation! More than that? Did you think that I could love you?” he laughs.

I glance around.

“I cast a silencing charm. Answer me when I speak to you! This is the very reason that we are done. I have no need of you. You have outlived your usefulness, Potter,” he says.

“No, Tom,” I say.

Even blinded by him I could never be thick enough to believe he was capable of love.

“You have no friends because you didn’t need any. Use your brain a little. You needed no one else when you had my favor, but now you have lost it,” he says.

“I won’t allow this,” I say.

“It was never in your power to allow anything. I. Have. No. Need. Of. You. Do the only thing you are good for, and go to sleep,” Tom says.

It amazes me that he manages to both yell and whisper.

He lays on his side and I sense the conversation is over. It only reinforced my fading beliefs that Tom is no different now than in the future and that there was never a man to save. No matter, I won’t allow this. I have a duty and his whims will not interfere with it. Just a little detour.

And yet when I close my eyes to sleep a few lonely broken dreams slip through and wet my pillow.

“Can I sit with you, Severus?” I ask.

I decided to brave the Great Hall for lunch after I realized that I can’t go hungry forever.

“What happened to that Riddle?” he asks warily.

Tom was rather rude to him ever since the morning he dared to talk to me. How dare Severus distract me from what Tom Marvolo Riddle wants? Like I didn’t have better things to do than kneel at his feet.

“I got the answer wrong, I guess,” I say with a smirk.

I sit down anyway. Severus is going to be my first non-Tom friend.

“You seem upset,” he says.

My facade of control falters and I feel the pain I didn’t want to acknowledge.

“I’m fine,” I say

“You’re not,” Severus says.

I sigh.

“I am upset,” I admit, “I didn’t expect to be, but I am.”

More upset than expected is an understatement. I laid in my bed until now and skipped all my morning classes. I passed the time with alternately crying and cursing myself. I must look awful.

“I can relate,” he says.

“You can?” I ask.

Weakness. Yet another weakness which will prevent me from accomplishing my task.

“You’re the only person who has been nice to me since I got here. I will try my best to help you,” he says.

“The only one?” I ask.

“The only boy. There was a girl, Lily. She was sorted into Gryffindor and we grew apart. But there’s always Bella,” Severus says.

I didn’t know that he was friends with my mother. I can’t help but think that the feud between him and my father was over a girl-will be over a girl.

“What happened with Riddle?” he asks.

“He tired of my presence. I always knew that he would decide he was better than me-” I say.

“You love him,” he says.

“I don’t! What makes you say that?” I ask.

“You’re devoted enough to him that you don’t realize that he’s a prat and you’re lucky to be shot of him. You’re wistful. You spent the morning crying over him. Your eyes glaze over when I say his name, need I go on?” he asks.

“I hate him, Severus,” I say quietly.

He snorts. I shove his shoulder lightly. He reminds me of Ron. I’m hit with a wave of missing so strong that it brings tears to my eyes. Severus looks triumphant. Of course he thinks that I’m crying over Tom. He doesn’t know that I’m from the future, and I can’t tell him. I can never tell anyone.

“He certainly seemed to hate when you talked to other boys. He always watched you in class,” he lists.

I shake my head. That was just him making sure that I had no one else. Isolation to ensure loyalty.

“No, never. We knew each other before Hogwarts. That’s just how Tom is,” I say.

“Me thinks the lady doth protest too much,” he laughs.

“Severus, where did you learn that?” I ask.

I look over at Tom. He’s sitting with Lucius Malfoy. I watch them talk and laugh together as if they don’t have a care in the world. I can almost physically feel him forgetting me in a seamless split. This isn’t good. It’s almost Christmas and I can’t think of another time I’ll get before summer to talk to him if he doesn’t want to talk to me.

“You’re staring at him, Harry,” Severus says.

“I was just looking,” I say.

“Of course you were,” he says.

“It’s hate,” I mumble.

“Of course it is, Harry,” he rolls his eyes.

I laugh without knowing why. There is a perfect silence as we stop talking to finish our food.

“I’ll be your friend,” he says.

I smile back at him.

“Same,” I say.

Green and Silver Bells

“I don’t know why you won’t admit it,” Severus says.

I laugh.

“Because I’m not in love with Tom?” I say with a smile.

“You should see your face when we’re eating. All lovelorn and obsessed,” he replies while making a ridiculous face as an example of what he thinks I look like.

“Okay, whatever you say,” I say.

We wander around the school corridors for hours. Only a few other students are here. It’s a beautiful thing.

“You also make that face at treacle tart,” he says.

“I should hope not! I love treacle tart,” I say.

“Exactly!” he shouts, much too loudly, but there’s no one around to mind.

Even though he’s ridiculous, I love hanging out with Severus. He’s always full of the most surprising quips. His sharp tongue makes me laugh.

I start to tell him for what has to be the millionth time that I don’t like Tom Riddle one bit when we run directly into the very boy we’ve been talking about.

“Tom,” I say quietly.

“Potter,” he says.

My breath comes in short pants.

“Riddle, Harry was your friend,” Severus says, “You shouldn’t be so cold to him.”

“Was, I believe, is the key word. We are no longer friends,” Tom says.

He turns to me and I step slightly behind Severus and then catch myself.

“Get your little lackey to shame me into playing nice, Potter? Or is he simply tired of your sniveling?” Tom spits.

“I don’t snivel. He’s my friend, Tom, my very best, and friends don’t allow anyone to insult their friends in such a childish manner. My name is Harry, as you well know, Tom. Use it or don’t speak to me at all,” I say.

I can tell that Severus is smiling at me, but I don't look at him. I look directly into Tom's eyes until he turns away. The power is mine, especially since I am technically older than him.

"Very well then, Potter. I have no desire to speak with you and whatever doubts I may have had about the end of our friendship are gone now. You have proven yourself to be everything Lucius says you are, and I will no longer defend you to him," Tom says with a fierce determination in his eyes. He moves past us. He bumps into my shoulder. I turn and watch him go.

He defended me? He missed me?

Severus grabs my arm and pulls me into a hug that I am disgusted with myself for needing.

No, he doesn't really care about me. He murmurs something about a "useless simpering idiot."

I stand in the hallway until my breathing slows and I no longer want to collapse to the floor about how I have lost Hermione and Ron and Fred and George and everyone, everyone for no reason at all. Severus stands next to me.

"I think we should talk about this. But not here. You look like you could hardly stand for another minute, Harry," he says after a long time.

I agree. We walk to the dorm room together. He watches me closely. As we lay in beds that are side by side I say, "Severus, I'm not going to cry."

"Just making sure that you're okay," he says.

"I'm alright," I lie.

TOM-

I listen to Harry and Snape-no, Potter and Snape- talking. They either haven't noticed me or think I'm sleeping. I can use this to my advantage somehow. I don't know quite what for yet.

It is wonderful to be free of Potter's pointless drivel and his emotions. He is weak. The strong may protect the weak, but the weak should be able to find their way out of a wet paper bag with an exit sign at the end.

"Why wouldn't I be alright?" Potter asks.

Because of who you are. You allow your emotions to show. He knows too much about you.

"Because of..." Snape says.

He seems uncomfortable. Maybe he's noticed me. I keep my eyes closed in case they think I'm asleep.

"No, you were right. He's a prat," Potter says.

“But you love him anyways,” Snape says.

“Did I say that?” Potter asks.

So he loves someone that he also hates. I can use that. Me, most certainly, the way he used to follow my every order. He still does. It’s how I know that he is too...pure. Anyone worthy of my time would have never listened to me when I told them to leave. They would’ve known I was lying.

He doesn’t fight for himself, and I won’t burden myself with someone like that. I can’t respect that, and one should respect those they order about.’

“You didn’t have to. Have you ever seen a mirror? Your face is an open book,” Snape says.

“I wish you wouldn’t insist that I love Tom, Severus. I despise him. Every piece of my soul strives to find the furthest place from him,” Potter snarls.

“No, don’t smirk at me! I’m not deluding myself or any of the other things you say. When will we decide this topic is played out and that Tom doesn’t deserve for us to care about him enough to talk about him constantly?” Potter asks.

My eyelids grow heavy. I struggle to hear the response. I know it will be important. Snape analyzes Potter’s prattle into things that I can actually use.

“When you stop calling him by his first name,” Snape says.

He says something else, something I can’t hear.

“No, I’m not angry with you,” Potter sighs.

Sleep colors his voice and I decide the end of this conversation will be unimportant and sentimental. I allow myself to sink into sleep.

Dear Lucius

AN- It's short, but exams are coming up and I didn't have a lot of time. To the guest who replied: This story is AU, so characters that are out of place in canon do belong in my story. Also, Harry and Tom's rocky relationship will eventually even out, it just adds to the conflict better if Tom thinks he's winning. Can't make it too easy, eh?

Lucius,

How is your holiday going? I hope it's well. Mine has been alright so far, though quiet until I ran into Potter and his flunkie in the hallway. We had an argument, during which I feel I revealed too much, and when they came into the room Severus was attempting to console Potter. He claimed that Potter is in love with me and should allow himself to be devastated by my ill treatment before it eats him alive. I write to you because I have to admit that I need some advice on what I should do for the remainder of the holiday, and even more on what to do during the summer. Our room at the place I spoke of, though if you ever repeat it you will pay dearly, is one that we share. It has proven impossible to ignore them altogether.

-Tom Riddle

Tom,

Thank you for trusting me with this. My holiday is going quite well. I received a great assortment of presents. In regards to your problem with Potter and Snape, I suggest you ignore them as much as possible. Only see them at mealtimes and when you go to bed. Don't start any conversations, no matter the nature of it.

As for Potter, he may be a bother but he can be molded to your will. I saw myself that he is clearly devoted to you. You have said that he is in love with you, or that at least Snape thinks he is. This information could be useful to you at a later date. I suggest that you move from sharing a room to sharing a bed. He is very powerful and could help us one day, as evidenced by his marks in classes. Don't disregard my advice because you find it distasteful, Tom, I know what I am talking about.

-Lucius Malfoy

Lucius,

I would never disregard any advice you give. You are the one I trust most above all. Potter and I need to stay separate entities, even with your suggestions. Our friendship was no longer beneficial and he was becoming far too attached. Having drooling starry eyed people hanging off of your arm is not what will help us to move our plans along, Lucius. I don't appreciate him clinging to the edges of my robes like a starving puppy hoping for a scrap of food. He is not a dog and I will never have a scrap to throw him. It is an ill match, my friend.

I always consider the things you say carefully. The plan has worked so far, I've heard a few things that I might find useful enough later on, but mostly it is the worthless drivel that passes

between two friends.

I dislike seeing him happy. Does this make me the things those Muggles say? Evil? I believe we are doing the right things. What the Muggles did to me fills me with anger and every breath I take is full of the desire for revenge. Potter is infuriatingly positive at all times. I want to hurt him. I want to yell at him and tell him that he is worthless until he cries. I don't want him to get any closer to Snape. I don't understand it. How can I feel the anger and hatred that I feel towards the Muggles that hurt me towards Potter?

-Tom

I read Lucius' reply to my letter and then ball it up in my fists. How dare he? How dare anyone insinuate? I pull out my wand and watch the paper burn. What will I do if he's right?

The Escapades of Bella, Sev, and the Impossible Boy

“Are you ever going to stop moping and help me with this potion?” Severus asks.

“I’m rubbish at Potions, Sev. You know that,” I sigh.

After a disastrous accident with a sleeping draught, everyone knew. He’s been forcing me to spend countless hours cutting things neatly and reading directions carefully so that it never happens again. The entire class is grateful.

“You’ve gotten better, Harry. Cut those, will you?” he says.

I pick up a knife and instinctually cut the monksroot into even pieces.

“I’m not moping,” I say.

“You are. Hand me the scales,” he says.

I roll my eyes and thrust out my hand. I have been less...cheerful than usual, but only because my mission is in danger. My alternate plan of forming an army immediately failed. I’ve never been good at ordering people around. Back in my time they followed me without any effort from me, first because of my scar, then because of my friendship.

“Do you think I’m really getting better at this?” I ask.

“You do have one of the best tutors in the entire school,” Severus laughs.

“Tom Riddle has top marks in all of his classes,” I say.

“See? Moping!” he says.

But I’m not. It would be a mistake to do anything other than respect him and to recognize his abilities. You can’t defeat your enemy in a fistfight if you stubbornly ignore his wand. When I tell Severus this, however, he scoffs and gives the cauldron one final stir.

“Perfection,” he says.

I’m overcome with a sudden swell of longing. I miss Ron and Hermione, but mostly I miss them because I no longer miss them. Sev’s crooked smile is one of the best things I’ve ever known. And somehow this distraction doesn’t feel like a waste.

“Severus, you are my very best friend,” I say.

“Hello!”

I turn around quickly.

A small girl with big, dark eyes that catch the light in the most unusual way and wild, curly black hair walks over to us. I must've missed the bell. I can tell by the smile on her face that were she not a Slytherin, she would be skipping. Despite her size and her cheerfulness, a sense of superiority lingers about her. I turn to Severus.

"I mean it," I say.

He stutters, which is very unlike him and turns slightly pink.

"Hi, Bella," he says quickly.

Bella?

"You're Harry, aren't you?" she says to me in a way that says she already knows the answer. I absentmindedly touch my scar, then remember that isn't how she identified me. That probably isn't how anyone identifies me. Not anymore. I nod. Something about her reminds me of Colin Creevey. And then I recognize her. Bellatrix Lestrange? How can a woman so twisted and broken be this girl in front of me? Maybe all of those people were, in fact, people before they met Voldemort.

"I'm Bellatrix Black. Severus told me all about you. He-" she says.

"Bella!" Sev hisses.

I laugh.

"Told you I'm bad at Potions, did he?" I ask.

"No, he-" she starts.

"Bella!" Sev says.

"Tell me," she says while leading us out of the room, "are you really in love with Tom Riddle?"

I pinch Sev's arm while fervently denying that I could ever love Tom. He tries to explain all of his reasons that prove I'm lying. Bellatrix laughs heartily while I exhaust myself.

"I could never! How could I ever?" I cry.

It's been awhile since things were easy.

I smile at my own little "army" and suddenly remember what that word used to mean to me. Not servants, not things to use as shields, but people that I would live and die for. Dumbledore's Army was about knowledge and fellowship, and so is mine.

"Bella, you walk too quickly," I shout while jogging.

“No way Ravenclaw will beat us,” I say.

I watch the Chasers enthusiastically. Severus isn't very interested in Quidditch, but he let me drag him along to watch the game. Mostly because Bellatrix agreed with me and decided to go.

“Tell me about Quidditch, Harry,” Severus says.

I guess he got tired of watching the flowing robes and decided to understand the game. Sev hates not knowing things.

“Oh! Well that player there is the Keeper,” Bella says before I can even open my mouth.

She seems delighted to have a task, so I leave her to it. Behind us and to the right is Tom. He's sitting with Lucius Malfoy and another boy I don't recognize. The boy is slightly turned in a way that suggests that he is the one speaking and that he's nearly whispering. I wish I could hear what they're saying, but I know Tom will have set up wards.

“I'd like to play next year,” I say.

“What position, Harry,” Bellatrix asks.

I've noticed that she craves knowledge. Not the things that Severus prizes, not things found in books, but the kind of causal knowledge that means you know a person best. That sense of belonging is most likely what drew her to the Death Eaters.

“Seeker, I think,” I say.

I know. The only thing that will keep me from it is the captain and I doubt he'll say no when he sees me fly. There is the problem of no longer having a broom or any money. The only reason that I have schoolbooks and robes is because of the fund for orphans. But that's no problem. I shouldn't have allowed myself to hope for that anyway. I gave up Quidditch and all of those luxuries for peace and safety. I will go to Azkaban and I will die there if I kill Tom. If I don't, I will still spend the rest of my life keeping him human.

I sit on the dock above the Black Lake. I have an idea.

“Bella,” I say, “have you ever skipped a stone?”

She stares at me in confusion. Her eyebrows do the most amusing thing.

“Skipped...a stone?” she asks.

“Let me show you,” I say.

I pick up a smooth, flat stone the color of Bella's eyes. I slip the stone into the palm of my hand and toss it across the lake. I watch as it skips once, twice, five times. Bellatrix narrows

her eyes in competition and reaches for the first rock she can find and flings it wildly into the water. It sinks and her face falls.

“You have to get a smooth one,” I say.

I hand one to her. She repeats her wild movements and it sinks again. She turns to me, her hands on her hips and a frown on her face.

“Did you use magic?” she asks.

“No, but I can,” I say.

I levitate another stone and skip it across the water twice.

“Show me how!” she says.

“Nope,” I says.

“You just used Wingardium Leviosa, right? I can do that,” she says.

Bellatrix flicks her wand and sends another rock to sink into the dark waters.

“Bellatrix, don’t use magic! You have to do it by hand,” I say.

She hisses at me and tries again.

“I’m going to go do that essay for History of Magic,” I say.

She picks up another stone.

“Aren’t you coming?” I ask.

“I’m going to get this right,” she says.

I laugh.

“It’s all in the wrist,” I smile.

Father Knows Best

Chapter Notes

Short, but sweet. I may have time for a second upload today, so look out for it.

-Tom-

Lucius lies in the bed next to mine and tells me again why it's important to follow his plan. Why after Hogwarts we must work together to ban Mudbloods from the wizarding world and further separate ourselves from Muggles.

"Muggles are disgusting creatures. I hate them and they should be exterminated. My father agrees with me," he says.

"*All* Muggles?" I ask.

I only want to hurt the ones who hurt me.

"Yes. Mudbloods and blood traitors too," he says.

I let the thought stew in my head. My father should pay. All Muggles should. I'm sure that a wizard would never abandon their child's mother, forcing her to do the same to the child when she dies of grief. Wizards aren't the ones who...

A pureblood wizard would accept their responsibility fulfill it with pride.

They would never dirty the world with pollution or litter or all of the things my tutor taught me. Magic is dying because Muggles are intermixing with wizards. Taking it out. Diluting it and oppressing those who wield it. It only makes sense to go along with what Lucius says.

"Useless, filthy creatures, Muggles. Worse than Squibs, at least they're magic," I say.

Lucius nods his head, satisfied that I finally agree, and then closes his eyes. I lay my head back against my pillow and let my mind wander.

I almost miss Potter spewing words at me every second of every day but I know that I can't allow him to be by my side. Regardless of what Lucius advises, I need to focus. I don't need Potter following me around everywhere that I go. The notion itself is far too tempting, mostly because Lucius is nothing like him. He is quiet and polite and well bred. He listens to me but doesn't quite obey me the way that Potter did. Not yet. I look over in Potter's direction- no, *Harry*, Lucius told me I should go back to calling him that at least in my mind- and find him happily engaged in a conversation with Snape, as usual. He would be distracted as well. He

laughs and something inside of me twists. I do so hate to see them enjoying themselves. I can no longer bear to see such a sight, so I close my eyes, But I can't sleep.

-Harry-

"This term is almost over," Severus says.

I grimace to think about sharing a bed in a shared room with the very worst of villains.

"Yes. Maybe it can stop being Us and Them when we all come back," I say.

"I don't think it will ever stop, Harry. You and Riddle are both so *thick*, you won't just give into it and therefore you will be at odds forever," he replies.

I laugh. Bella said a similar thing earlier tonight at dinner.

"You're hopeless," Bellatrix sighs as she tries to skip lima beans across her soup.

"Have you managed it yet?" I ask.

"No," she sighs hopelessly.

"It's all in the wrist, Bella," I say.

"Don't change the subject!" she says.

A bean slips from her grasp and hits Crabbe in the nose. He glares at her and I chuckle.

*"You and Tom Riddle **need** to confess your love for each other or I'll just die!" she says. She stares back until he looks away. Fiercer than a mountain troll, this girl. There's no one like her.*

"That will definitely happen," I say.

She hits me with a handful of lima beans.

"I love that you're so positive," I say to Severus.

Even though they're both stuck on a secret love affair between Tom and I, Sev and Bella always make me laugh.

"I love that you love that," he says.

"Oh, confess your undying love for each other already so I can get some sleep!" Tom yells angrily.

Sev and I collapse in a fit of laughter.

"Sev, my dear," I giggle, "I have loved you all this time."

He chokes on his laughter.

“I too have harbored great affections for you,” he snickers in a smarmy voice.

We chuckle so loudly that I’m surprised Tom doesn’t yell at us again.

“You would think that someone else would’ve yelled at us by now,” I say.

“We should sleep now,” Sev says.

I nod, though I’m sure that he can’t see me in the darkness.

“Goodnight, Sev,” I whisper.

“Goodnight, dear Harry,” Severus laughs.

If Only For a Moment

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I lay beneath the stars back at the orphanage. It's hard to believe that a year has already passed. I miss Hermione with every fiber of my being. Ron too, but Hermione above all. She is and will always be my best friend, even if I have to live my life without her.

I miss the way her hair whipped against my face in the winter when we went to Hogsmeade. I miss late nights in the common room helping her study for Ancient Runes. I miss seeing her in the stands when I played Quidditch, writing to her in the summer, going to the library for every single thing, Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, and the way she gripped my wrist when she knew that I was afraid. There is no one to do that for me now, and I am very, very afraid.

The darkness of the night hides me as I remember other things I miss about my old life. Luna's bizarre outfits and wide smile. Professor McGonagall offering me biscuits. Mrs. Weasley's Christmas sweaters. So many things that I don't get to keep because of a stupid prophecy. Sometimes I wish that I could be anyone but myself, even just for a day.

Six years seems a long time to live without them, but Hermione told me that I had to wait until the very last moment, until his soul is officially lost before I can decide that I am incapable of succeeding in saving Voldemort and after a year of trying to kill him and failing, I can come back. No, I suppose he's Tom Riddle now. I can decide that all hope is lost and flee back to Hermione to continue on with our dangerous and half formed plan.

I wonder if Ron knows I'm gone yet. Has it been a minute? A day? Does time pass the same way it does here, in the past that is the present? I don't know. All I know is I don't know if I can wait five more years.

"What are you doing out here?" Tom- no, Severus told me that I should stop that- *Riddle* says.

"Nothing that concerns you," I say.

I look out into the distance. How many turns of the time-turner would take her to where I am?

"My roommate isn't in bed after curfew. Either it concerns me, or it concerns Mrs. Cole," Riddle says.

Threatening to *tell on me*. Very mature.

"I'm only thinking," I say.

I refuse to let him know how close I've come to breaking. I am strong. I have lived and died and I am still here. I **don't exist** and still I am here. I will always be here.

“Thinking,” Tom says.

“Yes, Riddle. I do that occasionally. I have a brain, and though it may shock you, I use it!” I snap.

“I merely wanted to know what you’re doing outside this late. Do not disrespect me with half truths and lies,” Tom says.

“Now you want to own my thoughts too? I don’t owe you anything, Riddle. We are no longer friends. Severus is the one who has a right to question me. You have no right! I trusted you, I believed in you and not the things the other children said. I would’ve stayed by your side forever,” I say.

I pause, momentarily terrified at myself for meaning what I said. I can’t seem to keep my mouth shut around him. I truly cared for Riddle and was learning to see him as something separate from Voldemort. I wanted him to be worthy of salvation but it seems I projected that onto him. He was never enough of a person to save.

“I would’ve done anything for you. Go ahead, call me weak. It is a *weakness* to care about you. I was wrong and it won’t happen again,” I say.

I storm back into the orphanage and curl myself under the bedcovers. Never again will I lose track of my mission.

-Tom-

I sit against the stone wall that Harry was resting on only moments before. I come in like a destructive force and tear apart anything that has any merit. I don’t want to be that way. I want to be like Lucius, a pure-blood, strong and undeterred by anything. I want to be able to walk up to anyone, tell them exactly what I want and have it happen without question or hesitation. And I want Harry back. I want to turn around and bump into him, all blushes and apologies with bright, devoted eyes looking into mine, because he’s been following too closely. I stand and walk to our room, pretending not to notice the quick shuffle as Harry pulls the pillow over his head as I lay down behind him.

“Harry, this feud is no longer amusing to me. It’s lost its novelty,” I say quietly.

He turns to me with slivers of moonlight reflecting off of his wet cheeks. I look back at him even though I can feel that my carefully constructed mask has fallen. He doesn’t bother to wipe his face, just stares defiantly at me. His expression dares me to look away and pretend that I never said anything.

“Why?” he asks, his lips carefully forming the word.

“Because it’s childish and unnecessary,” I say.

I refuse to apologize for my actions even though I am... remorseful for them. They were necessary at the time, but are no longer. I don't make the wrong choice.

A smile wrestles for dominance with the anguished frown he's wearing.

"No... no other reason?" Harry asks slowly.

The care he's taking with his words feels wrong, almost scripted. He's trying to avoid saying anything entirely truthful.

"What other reason would there be?" I lie.

He looks so full of despair that I realize what his true purpose in asking was. He wants to know if we will be friends again. He wants reassurance. I've gone in over my head again, I see as my chest jumps in an uncomfortable way. I need to do something that will prevent him from ever talking about this conversation. I grip his head roughly and kiss him. I kiss him with as much pressure as I possibly can and then slide my hand into his pajama bottoms.

He wouldn't tell a soul about this, especially if I ignore him for the rest of the summer. His hook nosed friend, that Snape, would berate him for it and he's far too sensitive for criticism. He arches his back to move closer to my touch.

I always get what I desire.

AN: The smut in this chapter is more implied because of very important and relevant plot enhancing reasons (Not quite sure what they are, but they definitely exist). Later smut will have better detail, I SWEAR) Please review:)

Chapter End Notes

They didn't actually have sex, just a little handjob action. I specify later, but I don't want people to stop reading because they don't understand.

I Think I Can

AN- Parseltongue is underlined

“The entire summer was awkward. Tom tried his best not to talk to me or to be around when I was. Except for one night. We had a fight and he came in to give me a non-apology as I was falling asleep. After that I didn’t see him, so much as catch him hovering outside of my vision. He came to bed after I was asleep and left before I woke, if at all,” I say to Severus and Bellatrix as we ride the train to Hogwarts.

“He’s ‘Tom’ again?” Severus asks.

“No. No, Riddle,” I say.

“So after all this time they haven’t given you separate beds?” Bellatrix asks.

There isn’t really room. The orphanage is full, almost too full. Riddle was put in a room that was once something else, and there isn’t space for two separate beds in it. I guess that’s what I get for rooming with someone who bullies other children so badly that he can’t be with them.

“No,” I say.

“Did you forgive him?” Sev asks.

“No,” I say quietly.

Maybe I should have, but I couldn’t. I just couldn’t forgive him because I never should’ve let my guard down around him at all.

“But surely you will?” Bellatrix asks.

Our compartment flies open suddenly and Riddle walks in. How does he always know when we’re talking about him?

“Potter,” he says.

I don’t say anything but shoot a hex at him. Impediment, I note absentmindedly as he dodges it with a glare at me. Idiot though I was, I am no longer. Maybe I’ll kill him now. I’ll go to Azkaban whether I wait or not, right? Now is as good as ever. The wizarding world in exchange for my soul.

“That wasn’t wise,” Riddle snarls.

My blood flames. Why can’t I control my emotions around him? I thrust my wand into my pocket. When he realizes I’m not going to duel with him, he leaves. The look on his face tells me that I’ve made a giant mistake.

“No,” I say, “I don’t think I will.”

I stand in the hallway just outside of the enjoyment of the opening feast. I’m not sure why I’m here, but just as everyone started to focus on the Sorting, Tom grabbed the back of my robe and pulled me away.

“What part of truce do you not understand?” Tom yells at me.

I was going to accept his terrible apology. I really was. It sounded to be reasonable and like he meant what he said. But I can’t. Everything I was thinking about evaporated when he thought he could wank me into submission. I shouldn’t have let it happen. It was angry. Hateful. Possessive. Just him showing me that I can’t ever escape for long. I’m beginning to wish I was brave enough to choose the war.

“I don’t want a truce with the likes of you,” I say, “All the peace in the world isn’t worth it!”

“You shouldn’t cross me, Potter,” Riddle hisses.

“Do you think I’m afraid of you?” I laugh.

“You should be,” he says.

I can feel his magic filling the hall, chilling my bones and trying to suffocate me. Mine responds in kind with warmth swelling around us.

“I’m not going to fight with you, Potter,” Riddle says.

He isn’t yelling anymore. I want to yell at him. I want to make up for every stupid, sappy moment and every tear that I let fall. I want to kill him, slowly and painfully. But I don’t want to become like Voldemort and hurt people who don’t deserve it.

“Then what do you want from me?” I say loudly.

He throws something heavy at me and I fade to black.

-----I’m beginning to believe that I’m allergic to the 40s. I wake up in the nurse’s office with a bad headache and a strange sensation in my feet. I look up to see a snake wrapped around my legs. I could panic, but my head hurts so much that I just lay back down and hope that it won’t eat me.

“Please don’t eat me,” I say.

“Why would I eat you?” the snake hisses.

“Who are you?” I ask.

I don't bother to consider it odd that there's a snake wrapped around my legs. What I do focus on is how it got here.

"I don't have a name. I am a hatchling. But you are Harry Potter."

"How do you know who I am?"

"The other boy, the one called Tom. He said I was to be a present for you. Silly boy. As though I can be given. I chose to stay with you."

"When did you get here?"

"He threw me at you. You fell, but I chose to stay."

"Why?"

"You ask too many questions."

I watch the snake slither along the bed. Tom threw a snake at me? Why did he throw a snake at me? Why did he buy me a snake in the first place?

I laugh to myself. I do have nothing but questions lately.

I feel less hostile now. That was dangerous thinking before. I have no desire to see any Dementors again. Ever if I can help it.

"Your name is Balthazar," I say sleepily as I fall back against the bed.

IT

Snakey Buisness

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait. I have less internet access in the summer. I have been writing, and I think it's great. In about twoish chapters I'm going to do a time-skippy montage thing to get to fourth year. Enjoy!

A mild concussion later, Balthazar and I make our way down the hallway with Bellatrix in tow. Sev, though he'd *never* admit it, is slightly terrified of him. Bella is fascinated by him, as she is by everything. She didn't even blink when I told her that Tom threw a snake at my head, and that's why I wasn't at the opening feast or the first day of classes.

She just muttered, "how odd," and then smiled down at him with admiration.

Not exactly down. Balthazar is fairly large and Bella... Bella is not quite the tallest person around. They were almost the same height once he coiled around my waist to greet her.

He's a funny little thing. He has all the sarcasm and bite of Severus on one of his very *best* worst days, alongside the mothering spirit best found in Mrs. Weasley. I can't help but laugh as I think of future Snape treating me like his own child. I feel sorry for the little thing.

"That boy looks just like you, Harry," Balthazar hisses.

I look up and see my father standing in front of me. He isn't facing me, but I know it's him. I knew that it had to happen eventually. Both of us Potters, and everyone who knew us both said I was nearly a carbon copy of him, except for the eyes. I never thought of how I would handle this. Why don't I plan better? It is literally **time travel**. I had all the time in the world to make plans and charts but I didn't even eat first. Brilliant, Harry.

I knew that once we reached the year that Lily Evans finally tamed James Potter I would want to see them together. Once that happened and they are the way I remember wanting to remember them, the glances across the table at mealtimes wouldn't be enough.

"He's...he's a relative. Distant cousin," I stutter.

Before now I didn't know that it was possible to stutter in Parseltongue. Balthazar lifts his head from my shoulder, which I shake gratefully, It was starting to fall asleep. He looks at me and I look back at him. He doesn't believe it either.

"Do you like Tom Riddle, Balthazar?" I ask.

"He's a distant cousin," I whisper to Bellatrix as we walk past him. I don't think he noticed us, he was much too busy playing with a Snitch, but she noticed him.

“He threw me at your head,” Balthazar says.

“Then.. you don’t?” I say.

If snakes could roll their eyes, he would be right now.

“You are mine and he tried to hurt you. I don’t like him,” he says.

I don’t mention that even for a young snake, Balthazar is quite heavy and that Riddle probably didn’t mean to hurt me.

“I am that boy’s son,” I say.

It’s wonderful to have someone to share my secrets with. It’s been so long since I could completely confide in someone. Balthazar is practically heaven sent. The only thing that stops me from openly saying that is *Tom Riddle* sent him to me, and Riddle is no angel.

Balthazar doesn’t blink at my story. Well, he *can’t* blink, but he doesn’t seem to be shocked at all by my story.

“Why would a person like that bring us together?” he asks after I finish my sordid tale.

“I haven’t figured that out yet. But I will,” I say.

I gently set him on the floor and allow him to do whatever it is that he does while Bella and I continue on to class.

TOM-

I watch Harry say goodbye to his snake, the beautiful carpet python that I picked out for him. He seems taken with it. He takes it everywhere with him, except for lessons. But he *still* won’t talk to me. The snake wouldn’t talk to me either. What could I have possibly done wrong? Perhaps knocking him out with a snake wasn’t the *wisest* choice, but he wouldn’t have taken it otherwise. Not from me.

The snake turns it’s head in my direction and throws me what is undoubtedly a hateful glare. Even his snake hates me. His closest friends stay around him in a huddle whenever I come neart ever since the incident in which I accidentally almost bludgeoned him with a snake. Bellatrix smiles at me occasionally but they’re snarky smiles with a clear message: I’m protecting this one, and I don’t mind blood. He told Mrs. Cole last summer that she is “fiercely loyal and an incredibly good friend.” Little bint bonds with everyone and everything he can. Everyone but me, that it.

“I don’t understand why,” I mutter under my breath.

“Understand what?” Lucius asks me.

I forgot he was here. But he’s always here, now, isn’t he?

“Nothing, Lucius. None of your concern,” I say.

I really wish that Harry didn't reduce me to a confused and groveling mess. The apology with the snake didn't go as planned, seeing as the infernal thing apparently refused to pass on the message. Maybe a different kind of snake? No, then he will have an army of angry snakes. I could form one too, but I'm not entirely sure that I could force them to hate Harry. I can't even force *myself* to hate him.

On the bright side, Harry's obsession with my failed apology seems to have gotten rid of Snape's constant presence, so at least there is the opportunity to talk to Harry without having to make it a large altercation.

Larger than the one where I knocked him out with a snake, anyway.

"I've been meaning to ask," Lucius says cautiously, "Where did Potter get the snake? He didn't have it on the train or at the Opening Feast."

I must shield Lucius from my tremendous failures in order to keep up the charade of flawless leader.

"I have no idea," I lie.

HARRY-

"He really isn't scary, Sev," I say.

Severus finally consented to sit next to me and Balthazar in the common room.

"More witnesses for when it eats me," Sev said.

"He's big and green and incredibly dangerous," Severus says quietly.

"It's more of an olive," I say.

He glares at me.

"Olive *is* green," he says.

"He'd never hurt you. Would you, Bal?" I say.

"Why would I hurt the one who has helped you so much? It is the slimy one with an empty space where his heart goes that I hate," Balthazar says.

I grimace.

"He says no," I say.

"What else did he say?" Severus asks.

"Now you can talk to my snake better than I can?" I laugh.

“Your face changed,” he says, “I know you.”

“He hates Tom Riddle,” I sigh.

Now they’re going to conspire together to get rid of him. Do my job for me.

“Does he? What’s his name again?” he asks, suddenly excited.

“Balthazar,” I say.

“I like this one,” Bal says.

“Of course you do, he doesn’t like Tom either,” I say.

“You called him Tom,” he says.

“I can do that,” I say defensively.

I laugh. I could honestly spend my life in a hovel with Bal, Sev, and Bella for the rest of my life and be happy.

“He likes you,” I say.

“Bellatrix is my favorite. She tells me stories,” Balthazar says.

“I tell you stories,” I say defensively.

I tell him about Hermione. Every night I whisper another one to him as I fall asleep. Just yesterday I told him about the time we defeated a troll together. I tell him about Ron and all the Weasleys, about Dumbledore as I knew him. I tell him about Luna and Neville and living on Privet Drive. I never tell him about future Severus Snape because I want him to like Sev. Forgiving isn’t as easy for Balthazar as it is for me.

“I think I’ll go upstairs,” Sev says.

“Why?” I ask.

He rushes off without answering.

I turn around to see what scared him off.

“Demon,” Balthazar hisses.

“Honestly, Bal,” I say in English while focusing on the approaching Riddle.

“Hello, Harry,” he says.

“Riddle,” I say, trying to push the barrier back up.

“I expect you didn’t relay my message,” he says to Bal.

“I would-” Balthazar begins.

“Balthazar!” I say quickly.

I can only handle the one snake, and I don’t feel like another concussion.

“Don’t start fights, Bal. I won’t let you bite him. Let’s go upstairs. I’ll tell you more about Fred and George,” I say desperately and then without waiting for a reply I pick him up and follow Severus’ example.

The atmosphere in the common room is suddenly toxic.

A Little Bit in the Wrong Part One

An- Fun fact! Balthazar loosely translates to Protector of the King/Chosen One. Thought that was cool since that's not why I picked it.

-Tom-

I've waited hours to be sure that everyone is asleep so that I can put my plan into effect. Having ruled out giving him a different snake, and a thousand other equally terrible ideas, I've decided to make the snake that he already has like me. With all the whispering they do I know the snake is practically an extension of Harry's mind and so it won't be easy. What was it he called the thing? Bal something. Balthazar? Yes, that sounds right.

"Balthazar," I say quietly.

I have to call a few times before it wakes. Harry stirs but stays asleep.

"I wish to speak with you," I say.

The snake almost glares at me through the darkness. The golden pattern on it's back shines almost as though it lights by itself. It slithers to my side.

"Why do you wish to speak with me?" the snake asks.

It sounds bored of even basic pleasantries.

"I want to know why you did not relay my message. It's been months and still you've said nothing," I say.

"What proof do you have that I've said nothing to him?" It asks.

"Harry still avoids me," I say.

"Perhaps your feeble apology means nothing to him. You do not deserve his forgiveness," the snake says harshly.

And here it is. The snake doesn't dislike me, it *loathes* me. My life has reached the point where all of my plans depend on the approval of a snake who loathes me.

"What business is it of yours? What have I ever done to you?" I ask.

"To me you have done far less than you have done to my Harry. I have chosen my feelings for you on his behalf," it says.

"To Harry?" I ask.

Harry turns in his sleep. What have I done to him? Besides throwing a snake at him and that whole telling him he's insignificant thing. It isn't *my* fault he's average.

"Yes. He's suffered a great many pains because of you. He could've had so much more without you," the snake says.

What does that mean? Why is this snake so vague and why do his words cut so deep?

"Can I apologize for them? What have I done?" I ask.

Look at me. Asking a snake for advice, *begging* for it like a starving animal would for food. Lowering myself and leaving who I am supposed to be behind.

"You can do nothing. You have done *enough*."the snake says.

Surely Harry isn't so fragile that a few harsh words would shatter him so. I told him the harshest version of the truth, maybe, but it was still my truth. I was tired of him hanging around and twisting my mind. I was tired, and I am tired, of pretending to hate him for it.

"Did he say that?" I ask.

"He no longer clings to the absurd notion that he can help you," the snake says while curling up against Harry's feet.

A puff of air escapes my lips as I lay down defeated. Can't even sway a snake.

-HARRY-

"Bella, that was *my* chocolate frog!" I say.

She ignores me and continues to eat it. Severus laughs at my plight.

"I'll sic Bal on you," I say uselessly.

"Balthazar would sooner bite off his own tail than hurt me and you know it," she says while gently stroking the scales below Bal's neck.

I do know it. I wish my own snake wouldn't turn against me, but he likes Bella and her warm laugh. I can't blame him, I love her too.

"Sev!" I try.

He half-heartedly swats her arm. I throw myself onto the floor in defeat and Bella places her foot on my back like a warrior in battle.

"Traitor," I say to Balthazar as I situate myself on the couch.

"I know how to pick the winning side," he says.

"Oh," says Bellatrix, "I wanted to tell you two- three..."

Bal climbs up my arm and rests his head near my ear.

"Tom Riddle tried to get me to apologize to you for him last night," he says.

Tom Riddle? *Apologize?* Even through another person..er, snake,it doesn't seem like something that would ever happen.

"What?" I ask.

"He's been trying for months, actually," Bal admits.

"He's what?" I ask again, "It's nearly the end of the year, what've you been telling him?"

"I told him that he's done quite enough and that you'll never forgive him," he says.

"Bal, I've *already* forgiven him. That's the problem, I shouldn't have done it. I'll never let him know it. There are other ways to complete my mission," I say.

"Like death. I vote for the plan that involves his death," Bal says.

"What I'm mad about is last summer. Did he apologize for last summer? What does he think I'm upset about? That's great, Bel," I say.

I have no idea what she's talking about. Bella beams while Balthazar shakes his head. She hasn't seemed to notice our hissed conversation at all, even though Bal isn't even trying to be quiet.

"Does he even think he did something wrong?" I ask.

"I don't think so. I believe he sees you as something he's being denied," he says.

What is it that Bellatrix is telling us about? I think it involves her sister somehow. She sounds happy about it. I should pay better attention to her.

"How can you forgive him?" Bal asks.

"Well, most of the things I could be mad at him for haven't happened yet," I say.

He flicks his tail against my hand while he contemplates this. I know views my thoughts on my classmates and friends as ridiculous, but I can't fault them for things they haven't done and will most likely never do.

"Bal, wait! What is Bella talking about?" I ask desperately.

But he's already gone.

A Little Bit in the Wrong Part Two

-Tom-

"Tom Riddle, I have come to tell you that the layers of hatred I hold for you have been slightly reduced,"I hear from underneath my table in the library.

Balthazar, Harry's snake. It doesn't hate me anymore? No, that isn't it. It hates me *less*. It says a lot about my life that I consider this an accomplishment.

"So very grateful," I say, "and what happened to cause this?"

"I won't explain myself to you," the snake says.

I shrug and go back to the book that I'm reading, which is tucked inside of another book just in case I am seen. I don't quite recall when this became a serious pursuit instead of me simply refusing to let a plan fail.

"But I will help you. You may have one chance to apologize to him, but I'm not your slave. A real man would do it himself," the snake says.

I turn around at that. There's my in. He may have just told me that I am nothing if this doesn't work, but I'll take it.

"Thank you," I say to him.

I don't see him again for a month. Something about thinking for myself and drafting my own apology. I don't do much of that because everytime I try Lucius is around and bothering me about something or another.

-HARRY-

"Where are you going to take her?" Bella asks me.

"Take who?" I ask.

What is she talking about? She's acting like this is something I should already know about, but I've never heard her asking me to take anyone anywhere.

"Narcissa. My sister? Where are you taking her?" Bella asks.

"Taking her?" I say slowly.

"Yes, you said you would show her around the Muggle world over summer hols. Please tell me you remember saying that. She's so excited about it," she says.

When did I say that? I can't *not* do this. It's Bellatrix's sister, it's Draco's mom. I'm fully confident they will band together and suck the life out of me if I back out. I must have agreed

to it accidentally during one of the times I was talking Bal out of killing Tom himself.

"Of course I remember. It's going to be great!" I say.

Just great.

-TOM-

"Please tell me you have something more than 'I'm sorry'," Balthazar says.

I look at him helplessly.

"You don't, do you," he says.

I do hate that this snake thinks I'm so incompetent. The only thing I hate more than that is that he's right. I don't know anything about apologizing. I never admit I'm wrong. Never.

"I could throw in 'I'm sorry for...' but I don't actually know why he's upset," I say.

"This is more hopeless than I thought," Balthazar sighs.

I fight the urge to bury my head in the pages of my self-help book. Er...Study of Eastern Dragons I mean.

"What could he possibly be upset about?" he asks.

Sarcasm. Balthazar is being sarcastic with me. It's worse than I thought.

"He's upset about first year. I was...harsh. And we fought unnecessarily last year," I say.

"Is that all?" he asks.

"I..threw a snake at him," I say.

I still maintain that it was a good plan in theory.

"Anything else?" he asks.

I struggle to figure out what he's so obviously trying to get me to say.

"You ignored him all summer. Almost all summer," Balthazar says after making me flounder a while longer. A painfully long while.

Oh. He wants me to apologize for...?

But he said it was okay..

"Okay, I understand now," I say.

I shove my books into my bag and prepare to hurry out. Rule one: when embarrassed, rush away as though you can no longer be in such an insignificant presence.

"I think you should spend another week or two on it," he says.

"Then the school year will be over!" I hiss.

"You have too many problems to just jump into anything," he says.

"I'm insulted by that," I say.

"That's good. Someone needs to resist you," he says.

"Harry's done a fine job of that so far," I grumble.

"You need to learn to accept opinions that are not your own. I will come back when you have," Balthazar says.

Harry sits calmly on our bed. He's in here at the same time as me for the first time in weeks. Why? Why..oh I remember now. Balthazar convinced Harry to go ten minutes late to lunch so that I could talk to him. I'm sure that it was more of a delay than an actual choice to see me.

"Tom... Riddle," Harry says.

The pause delights me. The moment that it takes for him to remember that he hates me is all that I need. I can take advantage of that pause, that singular moment. I'll string all of those singular moments until I get a lifetime of them in a row.

.....

.....

What?

That's not what I...

"Harry," I say.

What was my plan? The elaborate plan Balthazar and I came up with, that we've spent months on?

"That is my name," he sighs.

"I want to," I say.

I need to.

No one is around. This was the plan. No one will witness me losing my mind and slipping away from what I am. A bright and well liked boy who gets what he wants no matter the cost

and never begs or apologizes. A model Slytherin, mentally crumbling to his knees for a truce. Or a stoic and frightening loner, walls all breaking down.

“I’m hungry and I have to show Narcissa Black around today,” Harry says impatiently.

A girl?

“I..when I think about..I want to apologize,” I choke out.

I’ll be writing to Lucius about this. He’ll..occupy the girl. Keep her out of sight.

Harry looks slightly shocked. Actually, he looks like he might pass out.

“For being so awful last year. For ignoring you after..” I say.

That’s as good as it’s going to get. I’m surprised that I managed such an amazing apology. Harry bites his lip so hard I wonder why it doesn’t fall to the floor. I focus on standing strong and staring straight ahead. I am supposed to be *mentally* crumbling. That is what I have allowed for this moment, for sincerity’s sake. I am not supposed to be physically hurt. Every second of silence is not supposed to be worse than torture, than what the Muggles did.

“I’ll think about it, Tom,” he says quietly just before walking out of the door.

Things I Wish I Didn't Know

Tom-

The school year starts again with nary a word from Harry either way. After I made myself weak in front of him and otherwise showed what a horrid failure at copying Lucius I am he hasn't stopped pretending that I don't exist. He ignored me until that moment, even going so far as to charm Mrs. Cole into bringing a little battered armchair into the room, which he then slept on. She adores him. Thinks he has me tamed.

Preposterous.

But now Harry's back at Hogwarts, back with the sneering one and the girl who wants me to disappear and it's easier for him to make no choice at all. Every time he smiles politely when I try to talk to him I get more and more aggravated.

Aggravated because no one should ignore me, of course.

I wish I didn't know that I'm lying through my teeth.

Lestrangle, Mulciber, and Avery sit around me talking, I don't care about what. It's of no consequence, to me they are all replacements. *Temporary* replacements. Eventually I will get my way and they will become obsolete. I don't need them. Lucius thinks I need Mulciber, thinks I need Avery and Lestrangle, need him. I don't. They're all connections, all second rate stand-ins. Poor substitutes for the real thing. Why else would I need so many of them, Dolohov and Macnair and Goyle, to replace one single person?

I *really* wish I didn't know why I hang about with them. It would be infinitely easier to pretend that I enjoy their presence.

"Hello, Balthazar," I say.

Yet another who avoids me in a polite and subtle manner.

"I have come as I said I would," he says.

"As you said?" I ask.

I don't remember what he's talking about.

"When you understand what you're reaching for when you reach for him, I promised to return. I have watched you. I have heard you. You understand now," Balthazar says.

"Thank you," I say.

I wish I didn't mean that, that I didn't know my usually empty words are true when I thank this snake, when I plead with him, when he shows me my soul and I recoil.

"Why are you thanking me?" he asks.

"I want Harry by my side again, Balthazar. More than anything. He is important to me. I don't understand it but I'll do anything to achieve my goal. You recognize that and I respect you," I say.

"You've come a long way, Tom Riddle, but not far enough. It will take a long while to win him back," Balthazar says.

I wish I didn't know that I will never give up.

-Harry-

"How dare you forgive him?" Severus says through clenched teeth while we draw star charts in Astronomy.

I roll my eyes. He's so against it. Bal, however, is vehemently pushing for me to do it. But how can I choose between them? Should I listen to Severus because of my silly, useless feelings or should I go with Bal? It will always end the same, no matter who I pick. I will save Tom.

"What could possibly happen if I did?" I ask.

"Pain, endless suffering, pestilence, death, trolls," he lists.

"*Trolls?*" I smile.

"You wanted the worst possible thing," he says.

I just laugh. I carefully label the stars and constellations. Ursa Major. Orion. Sirius.

Sirius! How could I ever forget? He's alive here, mercifully and beautifully alive. I feel sick for forgetting about him. Even with the weight of the world on my shoulders and the pressure of keeping my mission secret, he should always be first. Him and Remus. I can't erase myself if I talk to them, surely I need to see them. Now. Oh, I wish Slytherins paired with Gryffindors for Astronomy more than anything. But Headmaster Dippet sees fit to keep the rival Houses apart-brilliant man, but now I wish he had less forethought.

I haven't lost everything. I haven't lost everyone.

"Harry?" Severus says.

I wonder what happens to him after I succeed. Does he live? With life less hectic, does he marry? I always worried he would grow old by himself.

"He apologized for ignoring me after we had sex. I hardly-" I say.

"After you *what?*!" Sev asks loudly.

A few heads turn back to us but they go back to their telescopes when neither of us say anything. I blush.

"I hardly thought he would notice it bothered me," I finish.

"You *what*? Are you absolutely mad?" he asks.

"Well... not exactly. It was more like, er, his hands? Can we not talk about it? I'm trying to forget it happened," I say.

Talking about what happened last summer-two summers ago now, I guess- is awkward for me, and I've been trying desperately to avoid the entire thing. Honestly, *Voldemort's hands* and- I shiver. If I avoid the whole thing I'll forget that I wanted it. I'll forget that I begged.

"I didn't mean to," I say.

"Tell me about it?" Severus asks.

"Let it happen. Tell you. Just..everything," I say.

The bell rings and we shuffle out of the room and towards our dorm. Bella hops up behind us.

"What were you yelling about?" she asks.

"Tom has asked me to forgive him," I say reluctantly.

"And Harry is going to because he *let Riddle give him a handjob!*" Sev says angrily.

"Sev!" I shout.

A few years in the past with younger people has re-sensitized me to certain kinds of conversation. And while Ron and I used to talk, mostly him, but still together, I no longer feel entitled to things like that. They belong to older boys with firmer muscles. I scowl. I have to go through puberty again.

"What was that?" Bella hisses.

At moments like these I can see why Balthazar likes Bella so much. She gets practically snakelike. If it weren't impossible, I'd say she's half basilisk. Or maybe something more deadly.

"Bella, your eyes are losing their brown again," I say warily.

"He. did. what?" she asks.

"I was crying and he came in...I couldn't... I mean I... what was I supposed to...he's the bloody," I clamp my mouth shut.

I almost said, "he's the bloody Dark Lord."

"I wanted him to," I say.

"You were vulnerable and he took advantage," she says.

It does sound like that. But that's not really...

"No, Bella, it wasn't-" I say.

"Don't forgive someone so twisted that he's willing to do that!" Bellatrix spits.

She sounds like she's parroting an adult. Her mother, maybe? If she understood then she wouldn't think that way. It's my duty to save the world, any way I can, from Lord Voldemort.

"You *like* Tom. You adore him and you think I do too," I say.

"Until now!" she says, "Now I hate him and I know you're too delusional to do the same."

I look at the floor.

"Thank you, Bellatrix. He doesn't listen to me," Sev says.

I'm suffocating. I need to escape and I need to find Sirius. I'm sure I wouldn't mess up too much of the plan if Sirius was my friend. I physically need him. And I think Remus would benefit from another friend. Maybe I could even casually know my father.

"I listen to you. Both of you. I need to think about what you've said," I say.

I rush down the hallway and look out of the window. No full moon tonight. I guess I'll have to wait until tomorrow.

Harry, Don't You Dare

I nervously walk up to Sirius in the hallway. He's standing by himself but he probably won't be for very long. The Marauders, if they call themselves that yet, are very close knit, I remember. Lupin told me you could never see just one alone unless they were a lookout.

"Hey, Sirius," I say.

I bite my lip. I was so anxious to talk to him the way I did before that I forgot to not actually do it.

"Did you call me by my first name?" Sirius asks. His tone is amused.

"Er.. I feel like I've known you before, like.." I say.

I'm a disaster.

-Sirius-

A boy who looks almost exactly like James stands in front of me in the hallway. He's shaking slightly as he almost says what may be one of James' favorite lines, "I feel like I've seen you before...in my dreams." If I didn't know where James is, couldn't hear his laughter I'd assume it was a prank. Even though I've heard James use it often enough that I roll my eyes, I can tell that he's sincere. He really does see something in me that he saw in someone else. And he... he must have cared about them a lot. Have I met him? He acts like he knows me, just stares at me with this deep blush, and searches my soul for whoever he thinks I am. Lucky sod, that guy.

He bites his lip and his outlandishly green eyes blaze into my own with affection and longing. I blink and look away. It's a lot to stay still and calm under such a powerful gaze. I can feel his magic pulsing around him and gently circling me. This is intense.

"You remind me of," I say.

"I'm *Harry* Potter. We're distant relatives or something like that. I don't much care for ancestry. It's more about people for me," Potter says.

No, Harry. The way his eyes are probing at me gives me permission to call him by his first name. And they are. I'm sure he isn't aware of it but it's like a caress in itself. I find myself stepping towards him, towards those dazzling emerald eyes begging my own to respond in kind. He's almost beautiful in a way that's awkward since I can see James in him. His hair is darker and his eyes- but the glasses, the hair, the nose. It's so bizarre.

A soft explosion can be heard. That's my cue.

"I'm Sirius Black. Did you need something?" I ask.

"No. I just wanted..to meet you," he says.

Harry stares at his feet as though he's waited for this moment for a long time and it hasn't gone quite right. Obviously he's smitten with me, by the way he's acting. I could brush him away, like James would, or completely not notice like Remus would but instead I kiss him quickly, smile, and run off with my friends as they burst from the room laughing.

I simply must see him around.

-Harry-

I touch my fingertips to my lips. What did I do? He must've thought I was nervous and awkward because... Oh, I've gone and done it! I have most certainly gone and mucked everything up. I absolutely cannot be trusted with anything. Say hello and don't act like a gormless twit, Harry. Become friends with your godfather the way you never got the chance to, Harry. Don't.. my cheeks flush an angry red. Don't kiss him and most certainly don't enjoy it! Why do I give myself any tasks at all?

"Severus, Sev, I did something," I say.

"That is an understatement," he says without looking at me.

He takes the salt from Bellatrix even though it's closer to my plate.

"What? No! I didn't forgive *him*, I kissed Sirius Black. Or..he kissed me," I say.

Still a little fuzzy, that. Severus whirls around to face me with a curious expression. Bella stops pretending to be angry with her sandwich and looks at me too.

"He's my cousin," she says almost absently, "but we don't talk about him much because he's a Gryffindor. We don't talk to him much because he ran away."

That's a stupid reason to ignore your family.

"He's a Gryffindor and a bully," Sev says in a low voice.

I tend to have a penchant for the bad ones.

"I have no idea what happened. I said hello, he asked what I wanted, I said to meet him, and then he kissed me. The end, not in the plan," I say.

Not at all in the plan. Severus shrugs but his lips stay firmly in a snarl. I remember the way they treated him. Maybe I can stop some of it from happening.

"Ooh!" Bella says.

She can't miss the opportunity for romance, especially if it keeps me away from Tom. It's been almost three months since Tom's apology at the orphanage. It's been disturbing me that he's dealt with me taking so long to decide. He never would've done that before. He wants something. But what? The space beside me is suddenly filled. I look over, expecting to see that Bella moved to my side, but instead I see a smirking Sirius.

"So Harry Potter is a snake," he says.

"That I am," I say.

He doesn't seem too put off, if he came to sit by me. I guess he hasn't started hating all things green yet. He's watching me watch him and I realize that all of the missing him desperately and loving him and joy that he exists that I was trying to hide is leaking out of my eyes. That must be why he kissed me. Anyone confronted with those kind of feelings has to react somehow. But what do I do about it?

"You know something cool about snakes, Harry?" he asks while leaning in to my ear, "They sample the world with their tongues."

I promptly choke on my food. Bella didn't hear what he said, she couldn't have, but she looks amused anyway. 13 year old Sirius..seductive? I know he and the Marauders were/are/will be? highly regarded by the students, but I never knew he was a flirt. Is everyone I used to think of as responsible adults with self control to be respected just an overly sexually charged boy? Merlin, how will I get anything done if that's true?

Two can play this game. Sirius, any way I can get him. He's not my godfather, as I haven't been born. We aren't related in any way. And a...*distraction* would keep Tom away until I can figure out what to do, because I haven't actually forgiven him the way he wants. We're on speaking terms.

Sirius' breath is hot on my ear.

We're causal friends, if one can be with Voldemort, but I can tell he wants the past. He wants first year Harry.

I flick out my tongue and wink. Severus glares at me but I ignore him.

"But I've never seen a snake up close," he says while inches away, "so it's probably just a myth."

I bite my lip, internally panicking.

"Does something unobserved no longer exist?" I ask.

Before I can think about anything, before I can decide if I want to go so far, his lips are on mine. He licks at my lips and I open them. This is *so* not what I had planned. How does he know how to do this? Merlin, where did I go wrong? This is not how I accomplish... I pull away breathlessly to the sound of whoops from my father and Remus. I blush. They were watching from the other side of the room and now everyone is probably staring at me. Us. My glasses have fallen off. I look around the world with blurred vision and see a figure rushing out of the hall. I start to wonder who it is but then my glasses are placed on my nose, my eyes refocus, and I see Sirius grinning at me and Bella smiling over his shoulder and I forget how to care.

-Tom-

What a disgusting display. There I was, calmly eating my dinner and discussing whether or not Mudbloods will be included in our regime, when out of the corner of my eye I am assaulted with the sight of *Harry* kissing that boy. Not just any boy, but a Gryffindor, right in the middle of everything with no regards to anyone at all. My blood boils inside of me. He doesn't have time to give me a straight answer, hardly enough time to talk to me in class, but he can find time to fraternize with the enemy?

I throw my fork down and mutter, "Macnair. With me," before rushing out of the room and away from Harry's stupid overjoyed smile.

I will not be pushed aside like some lackey.

"It's time for Plan B," I say.

Little Miracles

I sit in the stands with Sirius uneasily. How do I get myself into these situations? My leg rests against his and I can't help but flush at the feeling. I want to move closer to him, but I don't want to be terrifying or seem like I'm too familiar with him. I feel too familiar with him. I just.. when I feel his next to me I have this desire to crawl into him and just let the whole world fade out but I know I shouldn't do that. I know he'd never want that- so I don't. Of course, I did know him before. Not as well as I'd have liked, but enough that I can't play the total stranger thing without serious effort. The Slytherin Seeker swoops overhead. I smile awkwardly as Sirius looks at me. I look back at him, sitting in the wrong stands, leg pressed against mine, with far too wide a smile on his face for someone whose team is losing.

His hair isn't quite long enough to completely obscure that smile but, oh, I wish he'd try. He kisses my cheek.

"You're losing," I say.

"You're lovely."

"Be *serious*."

"I am Sirius," he says with a grin.

I groan even as I laugh. What a lame pun. He's far too amused with himself.

"I don't mind that we're losing right now, because we're going to win," he says.

"Unfounded confidence is the mark of a Gryffindor," I tease.

Of course, just to spite me, they win.

"Are you sure I should be in here?" Sirius asks in a low whisper.

"Do you really care? Breaking rules is your specialty," I say.

Reckless Gryffindor to a tee. He shrugs his shoulders and chuckles softly.

"Anyway, you need someone to make sure you do your work," I say.

I smile to myself.

"You're smart but you're lazy," I add.

How very Hermione of me, isn't it? He grumbles and pulls out the Potions essay. We sit in silence and I play with his hair while he writes. A combination of Sev, Tom, and trying to honor Hermione's memory have forced me into having good study habits.

"It's hard to focus when you touch me, Harry," he says.

I pile his hair on top of his head.

"You *want* me to study, don't you?" he asks.

I push the books out of his lap and plop down onto it.

"*Harry*," he says.

Listening to Sirius complain isn't my idea of fun. I start to braid his hair. Eventually his whole head is filled with cascading braids. I kiss the top of his head and smile.

"Leave it like that. And Sirius? Monksroot doesn't work that way," I say.

He throws his quill at me.

I've taken to putting things in Sirius's hair. Braiding it is also a frequent occurrence. He pretends he doesn't like it but he always lets me/ Right now a small braid lies just behind his ear as he colors in a snitch on my ankle. I wriggle my foot in his grasp. He sticks his wand in his mouth.

"Harry, this is *permanent*. Do you want a scribble or a snitch tattoo?" he asks.

"That's gross," I say, but I hold still.

He pulls his lower lip into his mouth and starts on the wings. I levitate purple rose petals into his hair to amuse myself. My favorite color, my favorite flower. But it couldn't be helped. Someone's cat knocked over the vase and stepped all over the ones I kept by my bed. At least this way their pretty fragrance can be put to use. The purple is striking against his black locks. It makes a lovely picture.

"Finished," he says.

I look down at the little golden snitch and admire its silver wings. It's so realistic. Magic is amazing. And Sirius is talented, of course.

"I love it," I say.

He starts pulling the flower bits from his hair. This tiny tattoo is my anchor to my other self and I adore it. Sirius leans in and gives me a kiss.

"I am talented, aren't I?" he says.

I shove him over and sit on his chest until he admits that it only looks good because I have superior skin. I've never been so happy.

Joy and Other Useless Things

"How are you doing that?" Sirius asks.

I laugh out loud and continue doing cartwheels down the rolling hills. I run back to the top and plop beside Sirius.

"*What* are you *doing*?" he asks.

"Having fun," I pant, "surely you've heard of it?"

"Of course I-" he says.

I pull him up by his hands and demonstrate a single cartwheel.

"We learned it in gym class during the gymnastics unit," I say.

It was one of the only enjoyable things about school- especially about gym class. He attempts to copy me and ends up kicking me in the face.

I find it amusing when my friends can't do Muggle things. And now that Bella can skip rocks, I need something new to teach someone.

After twenty minutes we've made little progress. I yank him to his feet.

"One day you'll be as good as me," I say.

"Harry?"

"*Yes, dear?*"

"Shut up."

"Yes, dear."

Sirius slowly swishes his wand through the air. Bubbles and butterflies float from it. The butterflies land across my skin, one boldly fluttering against my nose.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" I ask.

"Fleamont taught me," Sirius says, "Oh, sorry. James's father."

I pop a bubble with my finger.

"Why?" I ask, enraptured.

"To impress 'the ladies,'" he laughs, " but I wrote to him to say that there is nothing as wonderful as the way your jawline moves when you're impressed. He told me to try this."

I smile at him through a sheet of bubbles. I pop one with my nose.

"I like being around you," he says.

That is beyond an understatement. The bubbles pop and shimmer into a rainbow. I laugh in delight.

"These are spells meant to distract children," he says with a smirk.

I lay my head on his shoulder. He sighs and kisses my forehead.

"You're cute," he whispers against it.

-Tom-

Macnair sits at my feet while I pet Balthazar and grumble. Lucius lounges gracefully in an armchair and Lestrage balances on the shoulder of it beside him.

That's one thing.

Lestrage is close to Bellatrix Black, is he not? That's one way in. And his other companion, Severus Snape. Surely he has a weakness. Surely he isn't all bitterness and old shoes. He has to have a soul, even if it's kept in someone else the way mine is. I will find it. I will exploit it. And then they will lead me to Harry.

Yes, that is the plan.

Macnair plays with my shoestrings. I wrench my foot away. Stupid boy. He mistakenly believes that I've fallen for him. He believes he is *worthy* of me. Only one ever has been. Only one will ever be. I could only ever weaken myself for one person, and he is not him. Macnair will never be him.

Harry has changed. I saw the evidence last night when I caught a golden glint at night before he crept into bed. A tattoo! A visible mark upon his skin that mars the beautiful surface and colors the pale expanse a shade of something awful, something despicable inside of me. I have given him part of me and he is expelling it, piece by piece, with every touch he accepts from the Gryffindor brat and every time he smiles because of one.

He is erasing me. He is erasing me within himself and I can feel it as surely as I can feel physical blows and I want to do something drastic, something vile, but that would only serve to push him further away. He's so...innocent.

I want to shatter it. I look down at Macnair in disgust.

How dare he think he's better than Harry? How dare he attempt to take his place? Because my place will only ever be with him and they *know*, they all know, even if they're afraid of what I'll do if they spoke of it.

Plan B was, admittedly, not one of my best ideas. If I made mistakes- this would be one. But I don't. It seems all of my exceptions lead back to one person and I don't know just how I feel

about that.

-Harry-

"You've got to get it just right or it won't fly," I say.

Sirius hammers the wooden beam into a crooked x.

"No, here," I say, "Let me help you."

I adjust his work and begin to lay out the colorful fabric while Sirius paints smiley faces and-

"*Sirius!*" I say.

"Sorry," he says with a grin.

He turns his doodle into a strange looking rabbit and sets about writing my name. Only he spells it *Harry Black*.

"Don't sign my name to that *now*," I say.

"Too late," he smiles.

I paint him an equally expressive picture on his forehead and then I start to attach the string.

"Wouldn't it go faster with magic?" he asks.

I refuse to look at him and the blue shape on his forehead.

"That would cheapen it," I say.

He pulls out his wand and quickly dries the paint.

"*Cheapened!*" I shout.

He flicks the paintbrush at me. I rub black specks off of my glasses and shrug.

"How does it fly?" he asks.

It only takes a half dozen attempts to show him.

"I'm doing it!" he says.

I smile at his giddy expression.

"Isn't it fun?" I say.

"Hello," Tom says.

I turn around quickly. When did he get here? He looks at me, bemused, and casually swipes his forehead.

"Hey," I say.

He raises his eyebrows. I grab Sirius's arm and our kites.

"Come on, Sirius, you've got a bit of dick on your forehead," I say.

I flap the arm holding the kites at Tom in the imitation of a wave and then walk us back inside.

There's a Plan in There Somewhere

Chapter Notes

An- I skipped to 4th year around Oct, Nov. Sorry that I couldn't do it more eloquently, I just felt there wasn't any more to 3rd year now that I got them together and stuff. Please don't fall too in love with Sirius/Harry, because Tom needs saving before the end of next year if we don't want him to lose his mind and attempt genocide. I'm sorry, Sirius/Harry shippers. I hope they're fluffy enough to soothe your pain.

"I love him!" Bellatrix exclaims after we come in from a long afternoon of just breathing in Sirius.

Or, at least, that's what I was doing. Feeling his warm hand in mine and relishing in the fact that he's alive as I've been doing for almost a year. Bella decided to join me for the first time tonight, ignoring what her family says about him. It makes me very proud.

"Is it because he couldn't skip the stone and you almost did it six times?" I ask.

"No," she says.

I laugh at nothing and everything as we walk through the portrait.

"Then, why?" I ask.

"I like the way you smile when he's around, Harry. You look so happy with him," she says, "You were so... tortured looking all the time, like the world was on you and you couldn't take it."

Yes. That. I must learn to keep my face in a more neutral position the next time we're all together. That's how I got into this mess, isn't it? It's pretty useless around Sirius now, but no one else needs to believe I'm practicing my Harry Black signature or anything like that. But I'm okay with him believing that. I get to see him breathing as often as I like. It isn't gross or anything because we aren't blood related and I hardly had time to think of him as family before. I need to be around him. I *have* to be. And now I get to be.

"You're doing it again," she says.

"He makes me happy," I say.

And he does. Looking at him reminds me of why this plan is good. Why I should stop half doing things and become Tom's friend again, change him. I still haven't officially done that. Tom's getting pouty. He's been dragging this boy around for months, one of the future Death Eaters if I can't stop him, mostly to make me jealous. Yeah- I'm not that dense. He thinks I

can't tell that's what he's doing. In a way we're closer friends than we were before, mostly because he's actually treating me like a friend.

I can't help but stare at Sirius's lips to watch the air slide out of them. Every time he catches me doing that he kisses me, because of course I can't tell him that I'm just glad he's breathing at all. I must look absolutely enraptured by him, to people who don't know why I'm staring at him.

You'd think the novelty would've worn off by now, but it hasn't.

"Where's Sev?" I ask.

"Over there," Bella says.

We both smile and wave him over. He doesn't like Sirius, even though I've cured him of the habit of calling Sev Snivellus, at least when I'm around. He doesn't share Bella's enthusiasm about my relationship. And of course, nobody rivals Bal.

"Hey Severus," I say.

"Have you been drinking some obscure Cheerfulness potion, Harry? It looks as if your lower jaw just might fall off," Severus says dryly.

"Oh, don't be like that, Sev. We were with Sirius at the lake. You should go next time," I say.

"Perhaps," he says in a tone that implies a Muggle in a meatsuit might stand a better chance against a giant than he ever spending time with me and my... and Sirius.

I decide to drop the subject for now. Maybe he'll come around. I have to hold in my laughter.

"Let's play chess," I say.

My head is laid across Sirius's shoulder as I absentmindedly play with his hair. I sit in the space between his legs and let mine just rest.

"What are we?" he asks.

Merlin, what do I say to that? And why now, after a year of blissfully undefined companionship, does he want to know? What *are* we? I don't know anymore. I hold his hand and kiss him. We spend long hours together just sitting and breathing the same air. I love talking to him. But this only happened because he was my godfather and then he died and I loved him. And I love him now in the same way because he is the same but I don't know what that means. Am I in love with him or do I think I am because I'm so glad he exists to love? Or am I using that as an excuse to be in love with him?

"We don't need labels," I say.

I am decidedly *not* in love with Sirius Black. It's just... I love him a little bit. And that's alright, yeah? It's high time for first love. But not.. *notlove*.

"That's what James says when he's chasing some girl he never wants to see again," Sirius says.

I turn and look into his eyes. I guess I have to tell him, don't I? Tell him the thing I've been hiding from myself.

"You are family and love and hope. You are everything I never thought I would have and certainly more than I deserve. I-" I stop short of very awkwardly declaring my love for him.

But not my *love*.

He won't understand what I mean. Or maybe, and this is what I fear most of all, he will. He kisses my forehead and I sink into his embrace.

"Please, Harry. I love you. What are we?" he asks.

I kiss his neck.

"We are my best chance at getting something right, Sirius. We are the best piece of eternity," I murmur into his ear.

He shivers against me. I've as good as told him, but maybe avoiding the exact words(which don't mean exactly what I want them to, anyway) will help him understand. That doesn't make much sense. I guess it's because I'm not saying the words that I can fully describe what I'm feeling rather than letting four little letters (and highly inaccurate ones at that) do all of my explaining for me. He holds me to his chest and I hold his as closely as I can. I think I've done well enough. It's hard to explain, even to myself. I care deeply about him. More so than maybe anyone should allow themselves to care about anyone. Life can fail. He's already died on me once. But as long as I have today, I think I'll be alright. His breath ghosting across my nose brings me back to the present.

"Some Slytherin I am," I laugh awkwardly to cover the silence.

He says nothing. I rotate in his arms so that I'm straddling his lap and looking into his eyes.

"Are you sure you haven't gotten me mixed up with someone else? Maybe there's another, more attractive, well-behaved, interesting- more everything version of me and you got us confused. There's someone out there who deserves you and you're just wasting your time with me," he says.

"Don't be ridiculous. Another Sirius Orion Black? Another beautiful, kind-hearted boy who's just tall enough for me to fit my head under his chin with long hair that gets tangled into the wind so that I get to brush it out? Did someone else paint dicks all over the kite I worked so hard to make with a cocky little smirk? Do I permanently have a snitch with the initials S.B. on my person for someone else? Hmm?"

I kiss him.

"Another boy who smiles when he catches me looking? Because I can't stop looking at you, Sirius. Each time I see your face I find something new to love about you that I've never seen

before. I don't want to stop looking at you, even if I could. You're more than handsome," I say.

"I don't deserve the look in your eyes," he says quietly.

The look that I am almost comically bad at concealing. I've stopped trying, really.

"I don't deserve to have someone as wonderful as you thinking those things about me. Depending on me," I say.

I grab his hands and look directly into his eyes.

"No. You are strong and brave and without you I would have nothing. I would be nothing," I say.

He was there right when I was ready to give up and slink back to Hermione as a failure. I almost couldn't function in my own time without him when he died. Sirius is my... he's *Sirius*. No other name but Hermione's has ever held enough weight to describe every good thing in the world.

"But I-" he says.

And in this moment I hate Wallburga Black even more than I always knew that I would. I have to say it. I have to say the, admittedly only slightly inaccurate, words and deal with what it brings later.

"I love you," I say, "I love you with all that I am and just looking at you fills me with this surge of joy that makes everything better and right and-"

Sirius stares at me with his mouth open and I finally, finally initiate a kiss. I hold my hands to his face and beg him to believe me with the intensity of my kiss, even though it might be slightly terrifying to be loved this much.

He lays his head on my chest.

"Do you think," Sirius whispers after a while, "that you could tell James that?"

I laugh and kiss him and whisper that I love him until it sounds like a made up phrase and promise to tell everyone that he's mine.

-Tom-

"Look at them walking together and completely ignoring everyone else. I never want to be so wrapped up in someone that I forget who I am," I say.

Macnair stops walking for a moment and then continues on beside me.

"Does that bother you?" I ask rudely.

"No, of course not. I'm..I'm happy to be by your side," he says.

Liar. No one in this school is good at controlling their emotions. Not a single person. i, however, am highly skilled in keeping my feelings inside. No one has noticed how much I want to *hurt* that stupid, worthless boy Harry's so enamoured with. I want Harry to be my bright eyed pushover first year. But I don't. I just pretend I do because it's easier. Harry isn't good at it. he doesn't even try. The whole school is filled with his love for the Gryffindor brat. It's nauseating. The temperature of the room rises every. single. time. they're both in it. Harry looks at Black like he's lost him before and would do anything to prevent it from happening again. Warmth curls around my fingers as Harry beams at *him*. I squeeze them together while snarling.

"Tom, your bag," Lucius says quietly.

I look down at the inky mess in my hands. Isn't that just brilliant? It drips down my hands and onto my robes. Macnair at least knows enough to make himself scarce.

"I think," Lucius says tentatively, "you should try talking to him again. Maybe stop this.. this thing with-"

"I think that you should stop talking, Lucius. I think I need to get this ink off of everything I own and then I need to get to class. And I think Rodolphus should hurry things along with Bellatrix Black. Don't you?" I say harshly.

I spin on my heels without another word.

"You weren't in class," Harry says.

"You care?" I ask.

I force my voice to sound bland and dry. Unconcerned. Harry doesn't blink.

"That doesn't work on me, Tom. I *invented* pretending not to care. I know you have this image you think you need, but there's nobody here now. Just me. It's always been me, eh? I forgive you, Tom," he says.

Yes. It's always been you.

I nod the way I would at Nott. He smiles grimly.

"Nobody here but me, Tom," he says again.

Just before he's too far away for me to hear he says, "But you already knew that. You just don't care."

The Gryffindor Brat

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

-Tom-

"Balthazar, I haven't seen you with Harry lately," I say.

"Sirius is uneasy around me and I would not disrupt his time with Harry," he replies.

Everyone seems to like the Gryffindor brat, even though he and his friends are nothing but trouble.

"What does he have that I don't?" I ask, mostly to myself.

Many people think I'm trouble. Is it because Harry doesn't believe I'm dangerous that he doesn't care what I want from him?

I understand why Harry whispers to Balthazar in the dead of night. It's nice to have someone to vent everything I wish I could say out loud to. I guess he is the only one I can trust to never tell anyone, not even Harry. Harry may be clever enough to make guesses but Balthazar keeps secrets well. Most infuriatingly, Harry's best of all.

"Sirius Black has a good heart. Harry cares for him deeply and I do as well," he says.

"And I don't?" I ask indignantly.

"He would never be twisted in the things you are," he says.

"How did you- I have to find out who my parents are. I think I've finally exhausted the name Riddle. I need to- to belong somewhere," I say.

Understand me.

"Push it back a year before you decide, Tom. You'll find you belong at Hogwarts. You belong in Slytherin. You belong with Harry. That should be enough for you," Balthazar says.

I nod my acceptance while I ponder his words.

"I belong with Harry? But..." I say.

"You were great friends once. You've let a boy come between your plans. At Christmas, tell him how you feel. I will work on Harry," he says.

Pick a side.

Tell him how I feel? I'm not a *girl*. I don't prance about exposing my heart to the world. Just to... I have but one heart and I don't keep it in my unworthy chest. What Balthazar is asking is too much. It's too *hard*.

"The Gryffi-" I start to say.

"Sirius is going home for the holiday with Harry's...cousin. Harry has been moping for a week, haven't you noticed?" he asks.

Haven't I? I don't think I have since I mostly just gripe about how happy everyone is and ruin my bag repeatedly. Just yesterday I ripped the handle off twice. What had I noticed? Macnair. There's been a lot of whining about how I never touch him. It's because I have no desire to ever touch him, even casually, and his only purpose is to make Harry jealous. It's obviously going well.

I've noticed Lucius suggesting a titanium bag and I noticed hexing him. I noticed my homework and my teachers. I've been acting like he went and died instead of just choosing some lion over my friendship. *Friendship*. But the worst part is, he already forgave me. I just don't believe him. Harry has been suspiciously kind to me. He talks with me, eats with me, he doesn't pretend I'm some inconsequential Hufflepuff first year unworthy of even a first name, but he's still so far away. He calls me Tom without hesitation. He even does the thing when he lays against my shoulder while he's studying. But that's not the problem, is it? The problem isn't any of the things he is or isn't doing, it's that I care about them.

I'm a mess. Some asset to the cause. Surely I am the leader Lucius has been searching for. Who *wouldn't* want an emotional wreck as a leader?

"I haven't," I admit.

"Of course you haven't. That would make things easy for me!" Balthazar hisses tragically.

"Bal? Bal?" Harry calls.

"He is early," Balthazar remarks.

"Back from where? Where should I go?" I say.

I'm panicking inside of my head. If everything unravels too quickly he will refuse his place at my side. And then what will I do? In every single plan for after Hogwarts I've drawn him at my side. Macnair usually pouts about this- I'd do well to abandon him in a weighted sack thrown into the Black Lake- and Lucius smile triumphantly while I rip the plans up and pretend it was meant to be someone else.

It's getting out of hand. The wall that I've carefully been constructing since I was 6 or 7 is crumbling pathetically.

"You're in your room, are you not?" he asks.

"Yes, but-" I say.

But Harry hates being alone with me. But I don't think I can handle being alone with him after a conversation with you because I let down too many barriers, compromise too many plans.

"There you are, Bal. Sirius says goodbye and -Tom, what are you doing?" Harry says.

I bite my lip into a stiff frown and nod at him.

"Nothing," I say.

Must stay stiff. Stoic. Unimpressed.

"Er.. and Bellatrix gave you this box of mice," he continues.

Stupid disintegrating fool!

"Severus is just outside but I came to give them to you," he says.

How did I do it before, when it was the doing that was effortless and the stopping that was hard?

"Why are you ignoring me?" I ask.

Almost. He raises an eyebrow at me.

"I mean, don't ignore me. I will not go unnoticed," I say.

Better.

"Don't you have anyone else to bother?" he asks, "Or animals to torture or something?"

I knew that I couldn't believe he forgave me. Fickle. He's fickle. I should harden my heart. I should-

"What happen to accepting my apology?" I ask.

Make it bloody obvious that I miss him. That I think he's-

He pauses.

"I don't know if that's such a good idea anymore. Last time I considered... you kind of jacked me off and then ignored me for weeks," he says.

"That's... that's not going to happen again," I say, "Ever."

I wouldn't ignore you like that again.

"Good. I think Sirius might have a problem with that," Harry says.

So his name is Sirius. I've heard it before but it never really registered until I hear his voice soften, (*soften!*) when he said the stupid thing. I will learn everything about him and I will...

"I'll forgive you when you look at me and see me. Not whatever psycho plans you have for our future as overlords. Just me," he says.

"You said you've already forgiven me," I say.

Pathetic.

I'm trying my hardest to ignore that he just called me psychotic.

"You're right but I..." he says.

"Harry, Severus is waiting for you," Balthazar says.

Harry leaves quickly and apologizes loudly. I sink down to the bed.

"Thank you, Balthazar," I say quietly.

He looks at me and says with far too much pity, "It wasn't for you."

Chapter End Notes

It's looking like it'll be closer to 35-40 than the 30 I had planned, but I'm writing the final chapters right now and it won't be longer than that.

Could I? Should I?

Sirius,

I don't mean to bother you while you're with your family, but I have something that I need to talk to you about. I would've asked Sev or Bal (because they're here so I know I'm not bothering them) but they're biased about this and I really need the help. Do you remember when I told you about Tom Riddle? I think it might've been once or twice. We were.. friends once? I guess we were friends. I suppose you could even technically call us friends now. He was possessive and controlling and rude. Honestly, I don't even know why I bothered. Eventually he told me to make new friends and stopped talking to me, except to argue. And the arguing was... well, it was worse than arguing. It was like we wanted it to work, like it was our last chance for it to work and when it failed we couldn't pin a reaction down. It was like we were in a wizard's duel with no second and our wands were poison swords or something. It's hard to explain. But after them I usually ended up pretending not to cry somewhere. But..

I don't know. It wasn't all , there were cracks in his outer shell and I-

He gave me Balthazar. He was intended as an apology and I've been struggling with whether or not I should do it. He wants me to forgive him and pretend that nothing has happened.

I want to, but you see, the question isn't the forgiving. I've forgiven him for much worse things. At this point I will probably always forgive him. He was my first friend. He was the first person who cared after I was abandoned. I care about him? He'd deny it endlessly, probably curse anyone who dared to suggest it, but he was. I just can't figure out if that's enough of a reason to let him back in.

-Harry

Harry,

You couldn't bother me if you tried. Have you *seen* Remus, Peter, and James? Even though we're all in the same place for most of the summer I get nonstop owls and some of them are filled with pranks and horrid things.

It would've been nice to know about Riddle a bit earlier, especially as it sounds you're half in love with him. He's the tall one that scowls a lot, isn't he? The one who can speak the slightly terrifying snake language? It sounds a bit like you don't really need my help as you've told him you forgive him and you're hanging out with him. What else is there to it?

-Sirius

Sirius,

Yes. Could you maybe answer my question?

-Harry

Oh, Brilliant. You've already let him back in. Really bloody brilliant, Harry. Severus Snape told me about him. He's bad news-

I look at the letter. Sirius doesn't want me to let Tom back in. Sev doesn't want me to forgive him so much he's trying to use Sirius against me. Bellatrix would pick her teeth with my bones before she let me anywhere near Tom if she knew what I'm thinking now. I'm going to forgive him, all the way. I have to. It's ridiculous to be willing to forget the lives he will destroy if I fail, that in my lifetime he did destroy, but not to accept that he isn't very nice and he's terrible at problem solving. I knew from the start and I know now that I can't let feelings get in the way.

"I know you're there, Tom," I say.

"How?" he asks.

"I know you," I say.

I turn around to look at him. He steps out of the shadows where he's been for three days, lurking around and waiting for me to make a decision. One day I hope to show him how terrifying that is.

"I want you to know that I forgive you, Tom Riddle. I was being childish. Once I saw you were willing to change I should've...but I just.." I say.

He smiles at me.

"I know you will never actually say the words, 'I'm sorry,' and that you'll probably just do it again because that's what you do," I continue.

"That's what I do?" he asks.

"You build walls and you push people away. But you need friends. You need people who refuse to be pushed," I say.

You need me. People with friends don't torture animals for revenge. Maybe if he had someone, he wouldn't have given in to the evil. Maybe his plan to be a politician or whatever it is Lucius Malfoy is always going on about would've worked.

He thinks that I can't hear him at night when he talks to Bal, so he isn't careful about volume the way I am. I have faith in him. I believe that he can do wonderful things. Everyone needs someone to balance them out.

He clenches his jaw and I can tell that he's going to shove the wall back in place.

"Nobody needs to know, Tom. But you shouldn't hide all of your weaknesses all of the time. They make you human. And such a human you are. Don't pretend with me, Tommy. I'm not leaving. I'm not afraid to look into your eyes. I know what I'll find and I'm not afraid," I say.

I fling my arms out.

"There's nobody here. Nobody but us. Okay? Just us again, hey?" I say.

"Us and Sirius and Bellatrix and Severus and Lucius and Macair," Tom grumbles.

I think it's amusing that he calls everyone except the boy he keeps on a string around his finger by their first name.

"Us..fell apart, sure. But no one ever said 'us' had to be two people," I say.

"I did," he snaps.

Oh, but Tommy boy, that's not healthy. I fumble with the letter in my hand. He makes it so difficult to just do my duty and get on with my life. I want to..protect him? No, it isn't protect. He's strong and capable. People who don't know him are terrified of him as much as they love him. The way of popularity, I guess. Maybe I'm just more open and sentimental because of Sirius, but I wonder if anyone has truly seen Tom before.

"We're the sun and those people we know- they're planets. We shine. We are eternal. I could never survive as half of myself. Don't you understand? You are my natural balance. Without you.. Destiny has placed us together. She is cruel when we try to pry ourselves apart," he says.

He thinks now that he needs to be whole, but soon if I can't stop him he'll have 7 pieces to live with and he won't bat an eye.

"I am half of you," I say.

As it must be for the rest of his life. Sirius is really not going to like this.

Oh, Harry

"This is idiotic. I've never seen you act more like a Gryffindor. It's *his* influence," Severus says in my ear as we sit at the Christmas feast.

Though it may have more to do with the fact that Severus, Tom, Balthazar, and I are all in the same spot than with any actual kind of idiocy, I feign injury and conceal my laughter when I notice Tom watching us in amusement.

Severus, however, is less than amused that I've forgiven Tom. He's more wary than ever of Bal because he knows that Tom can speak to him and that Bal was instrumental in..well, everything.

"You have fewer brain cells than a fairy, I hope you know it," Sev says.

I roll my eyes.

"He knows it," Tom says.

Sev scowls and I focus more attention than necessary on popping the crackers in front of me. Tom is my friend again because I am not a killer, not because I actually want to know him. I.. don't care about him. *I don't!* I shouldn't know that he's joking by the way his eyebrows tilt. He didn't used to joke at all. When did this happen? When did my life stop making any kind of sense at all? And when did I?

It sounds like you're half in love with him, Harry.

I shake my head.

"Bellatrix is going to kill you and let mooncalves dance on your grave," Sev says.

I eat a piece of turkey with enthusiasm.

"Merry Christmas," I say to a random Hufflepuff.

She smiles at me.

He's wrong.

"I found a book on Wizarding customs. Holidays like Yule were pushed out to make Mudbloods feel more comfortable. I think- why are you glaring at me like that, Harrison?" Tom says.

Bellatrix probably will be furious. But it's fine, it's fine. I am not making decisions for me anymore. I am *saving the world*. I scoff. How very *noble* of me.

"Harry?" Tom says.

"M'fine, Tom," I mumble.

"I might just join them- ow!" Severus says.

"He isn't poisonous," I say quickly.

Bal curls his tail around my hand. Tom looks confused and Severus looks like he might bash Balthazar's head in. Not that he could. Bal is huge and heavy and fast.

"He agrees with me. Don't hold grudges," I say.

Anyone who knew the full story, as Bal does, would agree that I've made the right choice. I am doing the wise thing, being the hero of the world that I've always been expected to be.

"That's because Riddle *brainwashed*- ow, Balthazar, stop that!" Sev says.

He senses that he's on the losing side and quickly leaves the table.

"Don't bite my friends," I say.

"But he said," Bal says.

"I know that Tom didn't brainwash you. He doesn't know how to do that," I look at him quickly and add, "I think."

"I would never use that against you," Tom says.

That wasn't a denial. Have I been manipulated? He may know how to-oh. He must be talking about the Imperius curse or maybe a perhaps..thinking of Macnair perhaps his horrid apology tactics work on other people. My vision flares red for a moment and I grit my teeth.

I am slightly more okay with that, since I seem to have tamed him.. a bit. Maybe? Or since he has corrupted me to the point where it doesn't bother me. I do not know which.

But at least Macnair went home for Christmas.

"That wasn't a denial, Tom," I say.

Why do I care?

"I do not need to 'brainwash' you, Harry. That's a Muggle notion. The very idea! I get what I want with no aids," he says.

I flinch back slightly but keep my face neutral. There's the fate stuff that might get me killed. Sirius will literally turn into a dog, though he probably can't do that yet, and *eat* me. I wish destiny made things just a wee bit easier for me. Just a bit. Like maybe making my own personal monster just a little less likeable. Or more likeable. Right now it's as if he can't decide on a personality.

"Harry would most certainly not need any modification," Bal says.

Traitor.

"Balthazar! Don't you have mice to kill or something?" I ask.

Tom's lips quirk up in an almost smile, the closest I've seen him come to one. This is so *strange*. Honestly, this is one of the strangest things that I've ever done.

"No, Balthazar is telling me a story," Tom says.

"He is most certainly not!" I shout.

Tom narrows his eyes.

"Yes, he is," he says through clenched teeth.

I give up and settle for begging with my eyes. I look at Bal with a pitiful pout and silently will him to change the subject. I can't exactly tell anyone about this kind of mission, or that I'm surprised a mass murderer has kind of maybe half a heart. Balthazar slithers away while hissing about mice. If he were human, he'd be whistling. Tom rounds on me.

"Tell me!" he says.

He attempts to intimidate me with a scowl that would work on anyone else here, but I'm used to it. I glare at him in defiance.

"Orders again, Tom? I don't work for you," I say.

"You can't hide it forever. You're an atrocious liar and everybody talks," Tom says.

"How was it? Did you get a lot of presents?" I ask Bellatrix.

I try not to remember that this was the fourth year I didn't get a Weasley sweater.

"It was fine, yes, I missed you but now you have to die," she says.

"Er..Bel?" I say.

Her eyes are wilder and bigger than ever before. She seems so angry that I can't help but stumble as I slide further away.

"I'm going to miss you," she sighs.

I hit the wall. At first I thought she was joking, but there's a touch of the madness I saw in her future self. She's frightening, even at her small height. Her curly hair swings around her face in a way that reminds me all too well of the lions I saw at the zoo.

"Bella?" I shout.

"It's such a shame," she says.

I cringe as she moves closer.

"But I'm going to have to let the mooncalves dance on your grave," she says while beating me with her mercifully light trunk.

The familiar phrase calms my nerves and brings me back to the present-past?

"That *hurts*, Bellatrix!" I laugh.

"Good!" she says, "Maybe I'll knock some sense into you."

Severus pushes off from the wall where he's been leaning the whole time. Sirius recrosses his arms and remains laid across the floor.

"Bella, I think he understands now," Sev says lazily.

She throws the trunk to the floor and hugs me tightly.

"You were going to let her murder me," I say, "Aren't you just the best friend? And you! I didn't see you stopping her."

Sirius shrugs.

"You didn't have to sit next to her on the train," he says.

"He's less awful now," I say.

"If you say so," Bella says in a voice that suggests she might be sharpening knives behind her back.

"I'll take Bella to put that trunk away. Try not to be any more stupid while we're gone," Severus says.

I act like the adult I'm supposed to be, even if I'm the only one who knows it, and very maturely stick out my tongue at their retreating backs.

"You would let her beat me to death with a suitcase?" I ask.

He glances at me as though considering it.

"I'd do it myself," he says.

I stare at him. Did I do something wrong? Then I remember how angry Sirius could get about things that didn't really matter. He does know that we're 14 and I'm not really *in* love with him, right? I don't love.. anyone. *No one. He was WRONG.* I think back to my previous (future?) life. Ginny didn't know that she wouldn't always think I was everything. Well, bloody hell. I smile, the saying reminding me of Ron.

Then I remember I'm currently in trouble with my.. Sirius and smiling at the wrong moment could get very ugly.

"You never replied to my letter," Sirius says.

I never finished reading it, to be perfectly honest. Was there something I missed? It sounds like something important.

"I'm sorry, I was.." I say.

"Palling around with that snake, I know. *Bellatrix* told me. There's something more to him. Everyone thinks he's so charming and handsome.. He's not right," he says.

"You're jealous," I say, my eyes wide open.

This is bad. He can't notice Tom is less wholesome than he seems. He puts on a nice show when he's with me and an even better one for teachers, but if I don't do something soon, more people than Sirius and Dumbledore will see the Voldy bits peeking out. Has Tom been doing anything to make it obvious that he isn't exactly Light? I think back to the Pensieve memories. He hasn't killed anyone yet. He doesn't know the name Gaunt, but he's close to finding it. No Horcruxes. No pre-death eaters, but the forces are assembled should he want them.

Sirius scoffs, "What is there to be jealous of?"

Charm? Charisma? Power?

I know that my answer is going to determine whether Sirius blows up or calms down. I sigh. The whole reason I'm in this mess is because I wanted to keep him near me so that I didn't lose *everything* that I had before. My own reminder that what I'm doing is right. This is the beter choice because no one will die, no one innocent anyway. I can't stay near my father or mother because of who they will be to me and the effects that might have on the future, but I can have Sirius if I want to, and I want to. I *cannot* lose everyone. But it's so hard to try to reconcile my two selves; Slytherin Harry and the Gryffindor Harry are very different. I hated the people I now call my closest friends. Bellatrix may think like a traditional pureblood, but I adore her and I'm glad she's part of my second life. Tom is everything we worked against in my first life, but I find myself lost without his little sneer and his constant frustration. It's a change from beefore. Tom is like a more clever, more attractive Malfoy (no insult to either of them, just- have you *seen* Tom?) and I can't help but wonder if, had I taken Malfoy's hand that first year, I would've fallen into the role I have now.

I wouldn't have talked to any of them before. I wouldn't have talked to myself. I smile at that. I used to have to try so *hard* to feel this happy. But now...no Dursleys, no Umbridge, not in constant danger, and people don't decide who I am before they know me? Well, *most* people. I love it here.

"*Harry*?" Sirius says.

I realize I've never answered him. He wants me to say something. I was hoping he would keep talking and not realize I've stopped.

I can't pick a side between saving the world and my own personal happiness. I will have both for as long as I can, but when it comes down to it...

"Sirius..." I say.

He winces in understanding.

I want to make sure no one is put down because of who their parents are ever again. It isn't fair to Sirius, but this is the best way to do it.

"You think he has something I don't?" he asks, his voice dangerous.

I flounder for a second. I hear approaching footsteps and turn around, gratefully expecting it to be Bella and Sev.

"Tom," I say the way I am supposed to.

He has a lot of rules. Oh, I'm sorry, *requests*.

"Running away isn't enough to keep me from finding out what I need to know," Tom says.

I stop trying to look happy to see him and glare almost as intensely as Sirius is.

"I won't tell you, Tom. I don't care that you want to know. It is between Bal and I. *A secret*," I say forcefully, earning an angry glare of my own from Tom.

"Did Balthazar know it was a secret?" Tom asks.

No! He'd never tell anyone. Bal knows that what he knows could doom everyone if told to the wrong person. And Tom is the wrong person. The very worst wrong person to tell anything to.

"He would never tell you, Tom. He never spills your secrets to me, try as I might. Don't play mind games," I say.

Oops. I just admitted that I want to know the things that keep him up all night. He smirks and leans in close.

"Careful, Harry. I'm not a very patient person," he says.

I glare up at him and wonder if I know how to wordlessly set his hair on fire.

"I was talking to Balthazar, the snake you've bonded to who shares your dreams? Quite entertaining," Tom says.

"*Thomas*," I hiss in warning when I notice that Sirius hasn't left.

I mentally catalogue everything I can remember telling Balthazar into two sections: WORST POSSIBLE THING HE COULD KNOW and MINOR CATASTROPHE. I can handle something from Minor Catastrophe leaking out. Except maybe *that* dream.

"What is he talking about, Harry? Why does he want to know about your dreams?" Sirius asks.

I quickly step on Tom's foot. His expression changes so fiercely that I am reminded of his eyes blazing during his duel with Dumbledore. He's very angry. I didn't hurt him, but I had the nerve to try to in public. In order to avoid showing the weakness I feel I press harder on his foot.

"It's nothing," I say.

I can tell he doesn't believe me. He turns on his heel and walks towards Gryffindor Tower without a word. He doesn't turn back. Once he's gone I remember what I've done.

"Remove yourself from me at once," Tom orders.

I draw my foot back and step a few feet backwards. I'm not too keen on facing his wrath alone in an empty hallway. I would take Hagrid's three headed dog any day. At least Fluffy could be calmed down. *And* he had a limited range.

"What was that?" he asks.

"I...are you trying to make Sirius hate me?" I say.

It isn't really a good question because I already know that he is. He doesn't answer me, but then he never answers my questions before I answer his.

"Why can't you ever just leave it alone? I don't want you to know, Tom. Does it really matter why I wouldn't need to be brainwashed? Sev wasn't being serious, I was joking, and Bal misunderstood," I say.

"Harrison," Tom sighs, "Just obey me in one thing. We are seamless. Flawless. Once you get better in Potions, we will be the top two. We are a powerful pair. Leaders do not contradict each other in front of those they lead."

"We're *14*, Tom! We don't lead *anything*. We can't even be prefects yet," I say.

"Yet, Harry. Yet. Don't you know how hard you must work for the place at the top? And after Hogwarts we will hold top positions in the Ministry. We will make the changes that need to be made," Tom says.

"What does that have to do with my..Sirius? Don't talk about things like that in front of him," I say.

Please, please don't ask me to be a baby death-eater. I can't. I just can't.

"You can't even say it, can you? *Boyfriend*," Tom says.

He walks towards me quickly and places a long, slender finger on my nose in a way strangely reminiscent of the way Voldemort did in the graveyard. My knees are nestled between his. I blink and try to pull back. It's uncomfortable.

"How can you claim him if you won't say it? Is there something you're trying to hide?" he says.

"Don't do it anymore," I say again.

"I don't take orders from you," he says.

"Okay...would you mind not touching my nose? My glasses are falling," I say.

With his other hand he pulls my glasses off and tucks them into his pocket.

"Better?" he asks.

"No, Tom, I can't see anything and I'm going to fall over," I say.

He presses his hand into the center of my chest and walks me backwards until I hit the wall and then casts a spell, all without taking his hand off my face. My eyes blur and refocus. I wrinkle my forehead when I realize I can see even though my glasses still glint from Tom's pocket.

"How did you know how to do that?" I ask.

"You really should say thank you more often," he says.

Yes, still pressing on the bridge of my nose, his whole body much too close for comfort.

"Thank you," I spit.

He releases me at last. I am, unfortunately, not as unaffected as I would like.

"Do you ever read a book that isn't assigned?" he asks.

"I'm not going to tell you," I say.

I turn on my heels and go off to find Sev and Bella. It takes a few minutes to remember why it was funny to me. I picture Tom as Hermione with her hands on her hips and laugh so hard that my eyes tear.

Falling Together and Coming Apart Part One

Chapter Notes

Honestly I was just too lazy to type the whole chapter so I split it into two parts.

"Bella, is it really so bad that I forgave Tom?" I ask.

"Is it really that bad? He took advantage of you while you were vulnerable! He treats you like the very lowest of servants," she says.

"More like a house-elf," I mutter.

Even the lowest of servants receive some kind of compensation.

"My mother is kind to our house elves. They adore her. They are still our servants, Harry, because they *like* working for us. They *chose* to be bound to our family. Do you like being Tom's toy?" Bellatrix asks.

She does make a good point. He has treated me like a toy since the very first day he met me. At first I was the kind of toy children hate because they outgrew it years ago but have to pretend that they never received a better present because a relative gave it to them. He kept me around when it suited him and I put up with it. Magic chose the moment we came together. We didn't chose to meet two months before Hogwarts began and we didn't choose to share a single queen bed, but because it happened we had to go along with it. After we got here and he had other options, I was last Christmas's popular toy thrown under the bed until the new ones grew dull. Now I feel as if I'm the only toy in his room still functional. I may be a one-eyed bear with threadbare fur, but I will keep being dependable. I will keep tightening my stitching and sewing my heart in because I have to.

"He's better now...kind of," I say.

"Better? People like him don't get *better*, Harry. They get smarter and more cunning but they never get better and they *never* change," she says.

I refuse to believe that. I can't kill him and I never could, that's why Hermione researched this for me. She knows me better than I know myself. *Knew* me, I force myself to think.

"Trust me, Bellatrix. Please," I say.

I know what I'm doing. I know who he is and what he's capable of doing. All along I've known those things. I knew that it would take a lot of work. I know that I might still be trying 50 years from now, but I will save Thomas Marvolo Riddle. No matter what.

"This is a mistake!" she says.

But it's my mistake to make.

"Bella, please," I say, "I won't abandon him."

She bites her lip which is already red and swollen from the amount of times she's done it. Her mother would hate to know she does it when she gets frustrated. It isn't very *pureblood*. I roll my eyes. Bella subscribes to that nonsense, but at least she's human about it. Hah! I never thought that I would say that Bellatrix Black was more human than anyone, except Voldemort himself.

Though you don't think Tom's so bad, do you?

A lack of insanity will do that to you, I suppose.

"Is this really..oh, Harry, why can't you think about things first?" she asks.

"I did think about it, for months. I got everyone's opinion on it first, to consider the other side and then I did what was best," I say.

"Four months and you didn't.." she says.

"Balthazar was an apology present," I say.

She sticks out her lip and pouts.

"Telling you then would have done the same thing it's doing now except you might've made me give Bal back then," I say.

I know that she hates being left out of things, but I had to keep it from her. There's too much at stake if anything goes wrong.

"I've thought this through, Bella," I say.

She bites her lip and her fingers curl inwards.

"If we want anything to happen, we have to talk to the snake, then?" she says.

I sigh.

"And you're always going to fall back into Tom's arms because you cannot fathom life without him but you *still* claim you don't love him," she says.

"Bellatrix," I say, "Please."

"Fine. But don't you come to me crying. Don't tell me anything he does to you. I forgive you because *I* care about you," she says pointedly, "and it would be stupid to be actually upset with you for being nice to your roommate. Remember that."

I can tell from her statements that Sev isn't going to be as quick to get over this. I immediately

change my direction and go downstairs to my dorm room. I should get Tom out of the way before I lose my good mood.

"Tom," I say, "I came to apologize."

I love the Slytherin dorm room. The one in Gryffindor Tower is always crowded and loud. I could never sit on the edge and have a private conversation. Besides, there's just something about the color green.

"Oh?" Tom says.

He doesn't look up from his book.

"What are you reading?" I ask.

"A romance novel. I borrowed it from a Mudblood," he says.

"You borrowed it? Meaning, you intend to return it?" I ask.

He glares at me.

"Yes, Harry. What use would I have for a romance novel?" he asks.

I scoot backwards on the bed. It isn't mine, but I don't care much.

"I'm sorry that I stepped on your foot earlier. Sirius is important to me, Tom. I can't lose him," I say.

"You're forgiven," he says.

He's back in the pages of the romance novel. I can't see the cover because his hands are on it. What use *would* he have for a romance novel, even temporarily? He must've gotten it from a girl. I can't see why any Slytherin boy would admit to having something like that. I'm desperate to know the story. It might explain why he wants it.

"What's it about?" I ask.

"I would know if you would stop talking," Tom says.

I lay my head on the pillow.

"Wake me when you've finished. You can help me with Potions," I say.

I look over at him. His lips are curled upwards in the diary-Tom kind of smile I despise. He forces his mouth into submission rather than truly feeling satisfied.

"Professor Slughorn might let us use his classroom. He likes me. Go to sleep then, lazy boy," he says.

I can't do anything about the smile on my face, even after I lose consciousness.

Falling Together and Coming Apart Part 2

I wake up with Tom's face inches from mine. His smile is genuine. And *close*.

"Tom? What are you doing?" I ask.

He quickly sits up and straightens his robes. Does he do that often?

"How long have you been lying there?" I ask.

"Don't question me," Tom says.

"I could've counted the hairs in your eyebrows! What if someone came in?" I say.

"A few did around lunchtime and two more got back today. Snape came in and scowled. Balthazar came by. He said he's going to hunt in the Forbidden Forest," he says casually.

Too casually. If that many Slytherins saw, then half the school knows what we're doing. Or.. thinks they do. That's worse, honestly. Thoughts are dangerous. I stare at him.

"I have better luck than some at repelling unwanted attention," he says.

Better luck than me anyway. I struggle to find something to say about it. I try to get outraged, but what can I say? We share a bed at the orphanage. *But he wasn't sleeping. But at the orphanage you have no choice.* I open my mouth a few times but close it when I realize I have nothing to say.

"Potions?" Tom asks.

"You were supposed to wake me up. I need to find Sev and Sirius. Be less weird when I get back," I say.

I know that he has lesson plans and charts ready. He takes his studies seriously and was itching to make me do the same.

It doesn't take long to find Sev. He's tucked into the little alcove he likes best for hiding and potion making.

"Hey, Sev," I say softly.

"What is it, Potter? I don't have time for fools," Severus says.

He spits my name with all the venom usually reserved for my father.

"I thought name warfare was beneath you," I say.

He looks directly into my eyes and it's like a blow to the heart. He's looking at me like a stranger he feels he won't like. Like the Dursleys looked at me.

"I thought I knew who you were," he says.

He didn't find out about my mission, did he? I don't keep a journal. The only person who knows is my snake. He's not a Parselmouth. The only thing that came with me from the future was my wand. Maybe it's something else then.

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

"I *saw* you. You sleeping peacefully next to him as he read. In the same bed," he says.

How long was he next to me? The whole situation gets stranger over time.

"We share a bed at home. You knew that. Why does it matter now?" I say.

"I thought you would understand, might hate him as much as I do, but you sleep with him like he could never hurt you. You act like he's this perfect person," he spits.

"Why do you hate him so much? Tom would never-" I stop short of saying he would never hurt me because he has and he will again if I can't stop him.

"Black is one of my worst tormentors, did you know? And he hasn't stopped, even now. It's worse now that you've forced him to be clever about it. Him and his friends call themselves Adventurers, but all they are is bullies," he says.

I swallow a large lump in my throat. I did know, but only because I saw his memories of it in the future. Here I would have no idea what was going on if I didn't already know.

"You *knew*," he spits.

I feel awful but I have to let it happen. I tried to make Sirius stop, at least, but obviously that didn't work. If they don't bully Severus, he'll never insult my mother. She might marry someone else instead of James. I can do anything but erase myself.

"I didn't know. I should've guessed...I," I stutter.

I feel quite unconvincing even to myself. I can see that he doesn't believe me either. I can't.. I can't stop it from happening. I don't know why it's him they chose, or why Dudley chose me. All I know is that as awful as it was, I wouldn't be who I am without it and neither will he. My best friend and I can't even protect him. I hate this! I'm reasoning like Dumbledore would and now I realize what he was under.

"I'm sure you know how Riddle and his cronies treat me as well?" he says.

"I didn't know," I mumble.

They aren't bad people. I'm saving all of them.

Does he have *any* friends besides Bella and I? I can't think of any.

"I don't believe a word you say," Sev says.

"What does he do? If Tom is mean to you-" I start.

"If Tom is *mean* to me? That's an understatement. But you don't believe me, you don't want to. Precious, beautiful *Tom* would *never* do that, Sev. It must be a misunderstanding. Hah! It isn't. Your wonderful angel isn't as good as he seems," he scoffs.

"I...I'll go to him. Tom wouldn't..I'll," I say, knowing very well that Tom would do anything Severus says that he did and that whatever I say won't stop him from doing it again.

"You'll *what*, Harry? You'd break things off with Black and stop trailing along after Riddle because I asked you to? We both know I'm last on the list of people you'd sacrifice Black for. We both know that no one, not even Merlin himself will ever pry you off Riddle and we both know you'd never do that, that it wouldn't change a thing if you did. Might make it worse. People who have everything hate even the smallest of losses," he says.

The smallest of losses? Is that what he thinks of me? Some tiny trinket in the great expanse of the Riddle estate? Yet another crystal goblet or silver picture frame in Grimmauld Place? How dare he assume they have everything? Tom is an *orphan* who lives in a place surrounded by people who were so disgusted with him for what he is that he could do nothing but hate them back. He's faced many nights without supper. He was alone before I found him, and I know what that can do to you.

Sirius is the only Gryffindor in a house that has always been full of Slytherins. He's a Light wizard in a Dark family. He receives none of the privileges his brother does. His life is nothing like Severus thinks it is.

I'd never tell him about them. They are both too wonderful to be pitied. Even little demon in training. *Especially* Tommy. He is above pity from everyone.

"What do you want me to say?" I ask hopelessly.

This is worse than the very worst of my fights with Ron. This is worse than when Tom left first year. The only thing in the world that could be worse than this is what's coming with Sirius.

"It's too late for you to say anything. My friend would notice my pain and ask questions. He'd never talk to a rude, arrogant brat like Sirius Black. And never would the boy I thought I knew talk to Riddle after last year," he says.

"Sev, please. I've thought this through. I know what I'm doing," I say.

"I don't recognize you, Potter, and I'm not in the market for new friends," Severus says.

He stands and leaves quickly. Suddenly I'm not feeling so hopeful about smoothing things over with Sirius and bringing everyone I care about together. I'm never going to have any kind of family again. I find myself leaning heavily on the wall and wishing that I could sink to the floor.

"The Fundamentals of Potions. It's a marvelous subject, allowing accomplished brewers to create fame, fortune, beauty, love, death, and many other things. It takes a careful hand and a steady eye," Tom says.

I watch him as he continues enthusiastically. His eyes are animated and he's smiling again, truly smiling. I love- I mean, er, smiling is great for all humans. Smiling's my favorite. Er.. yeah.

"Do you have any questions?" he asks.

I shake my head to clear it out.

"Do you want to be a professor, Tom?" I ask.

He rotates his wand in his hands. If he were anyone else I would say he did it nervously.

"I want to make a difference. Do you have a question about what I just said?" he says.

"You'd be a wonderful teacher, Tom. You should do it," I say with a smile.

He turns his head away.

Fine, we won't talk about how you could be good at something productive. But now that I think, he *did* want to be a professor, didn't he? He applied for DADA but was denied. I decide to show him how well he can teach by actually learning.

"Why are love potions the most dangerous of any kind?" I ask.

I can guess at the answer. I remember my experience with them, Ron proclaiming his love for Romilda Vane, Hermione explaining them in class. I remember girls trying to slip them to me constantly and, after Cedric, boys. I remember that Tom's mother used one on his father.

"It's impossible to create true love with a potion. Severe infatuation is the best you'll get, and that can be deadly. You lose your common sense," he says.

It isn't the full description I was hoping for, but I can tell that love potions make him uncomfortable. His face is slightly pink, a weakness he only affords to me. I wonder why. But at least I've proved that I was listening to him.

"Shall we try to make one?" he asks.

"A love potion?" I ask incredulously.

He sighs in exasperation.

"No. Something from the curriculum. You're trying to get better in Potions, Harry, not seduce anyone," he says.

"Maybe I am," I say.

He looks vaguely constipated.

I laugh.

"I wouldn't need a love potion," I say.

"That Gryffindor of yours is rubbing off on you," he says.

I smile when I think about what he's said. I'm proud that he thinks so. I will always be a two sided coin, but I'm glad that Slytherin Harry and Gryffindor Harry can get along so well.

"I guess he is," I say, "So why is this important to the potion?"

It Has Been Noted

After a few weeks of Tom's instruction, I may know more about Potions than the textbook. Professor Slughorn was immediately impressed by my improvement.

"Where has this been before now, Potter, eh?" he chuckled.

"Tom Riddle is an excellent teacher, sir. Without him I wouldn't know much of anything," I said.

It got to the point where I was one of the top Potions students, behind only Severus and Tom. I was already doing better than I did the first time through, but Potions has never been my subject. I top almost everything else, having done it before, but my mother is still best at Charms and Tom is slightly (okay, a lot) better than I am at everything except Defense Against the Dark Arts. And Tom is amazing in DADA.

I lay face down on a bed, I don't know or care who it belongs to, and relax for the very first time in awhile. It's been hectic, between classes, Tom's tutoring, and his insisting on my meeting every "important" person in school. I'm exhausted.

"You should get up," Tom says.

"So we can study more? Or maybe you'd like to introduce me to more 'useful contacts'. They won't be impressed if my legs fall off and I pass out and DIE," I say.

Tom chuckles softly.

"They will be useful. They come from influential families. You have to start early or they could notice that you only speak to them for their connections," Tom retorts.

I sigh loudly and roll over onto my back.

"I'm sorry, are you 14 or are you 20?" I ask.

I hate it when he talks about the future like this. I don't know why, I just have difficulty facing it. My spine shakes when he goes on about *our* purpose, *our* future, *our* plan. Together. I don't know how to feel about it. No, I know exactly how I feel about it. I'm still hoping I'm mistaken.

"You need to learn to speak as though you come from something. Professor Slughorn has invited you to his next party. Due to your recent success and your *connections*. Things you despise and wouldn't have without me. Carry yourself well," Tom says.

In one fluid motion I sit up and lob a pillow at his stupid, smug face. I know that it will only lead to more practice, and my least favorite kind, but he's just so annoying. I physically could not take another second of his gloating.

"Do you have a death wish?" Tom asks.

I stand up and brace myself for defense.

"What if I do?" I ask.

"You are no match for me. Not yet," Tom says.

With a flick of his wand and a muttered word, my personal supervillain has me lying on the floor and looking up at him in defiance.

"What if I was?" I ask.

"Then you wouldn't be on the floor," Tom smirks.

I crawl over to him and yank him by his ankle to the floor. I plant my elbow in his rib carriage and cross my knee over his thighs. I meet his shocked expression with a self-satisfied grin. I rather like him like this.

"Am I the best?" I tease.

"I'll kill you, Harry. Get off me right now. We never said wandless," he says.

"So you can kill me? Never. You must be strong *without* your wand so no one can best you," I say.

I'm thrilled to be an actual addition to our training sessions.

"Get off of me," he growls.

"So brave, making demands when I have the upper hand," I taunt.

He bites my arm.

"Mind explaining what's going on here?" Sirius asks.

I turn my head towards the doorway where Sirius stands.

"We don't bite, Tom. It's rude," I mumble.

Sirius's fists are clenched and his face is red. While I'm distracted Tom kicks my knee away and pushes me to the ground. Before I can finish gloating or figure out what to say to Sirius, his wand is at my neck.

"Never take your attention off your enemy," he says, "Again."

I push hopelessly at Tom's stomach.

"How can I go again if you don't let me go?" I ask.

Sirius clears his throat loudly.

"Who let you in?" I ask, a bit rudely.

"Oh, now you remember me," he says at the same time Severus pops out from behind him and says,

"I did."

His face is smug as he smiles wickedly and lounges on his bed to observe the chaos. Sirius stares at my hands on Tom's chest and then trails up to his wand at my throat.

"This isn't what it looks like," I say.

I sound like every single movie ever, but it's the truth. Unless he actually thinks it looks like Voldemort is showing me that he could kill me at any time. Then it's exactly what it looks like. How often we resort to cliches when our world threaten to collapse.

Tom frequently surprises me with spells that I have to block or counter. I thought I'd show him that it isn't always possible to do so.

Why am I helping future Voldemort to become a better fighter? Because I believe in his goals and I think with me he can accomplish them the way he plans to. I think his use of dark spells and rituals to make himself invulnerable are the true problem. I can stop that.

"What is it then?" Sirius asks harshly.

Severus continues to smirk. My eyes water. Tom looks at me, clenches his teeth, and stands without removing his wand, then taps my nose with it twice. I blink up at him.

"After I deal with this scum you will do it again, my Harrison," He strolls across the room and seizes Severus by the nose while adding, "we seem to need to have a talk."

Together they march out of the room.

"Training exercises," I say.

"Training dfor *what*?" he asks.

I'm not telling him about the future Tom has planned. It saounds ridiculous and suspicious, even to me.

"I have no clue," I say.

I retrieve the pillow from the floor and put it back on the bed. Sirius stands next to the door looking uncomfortable.

"I'm the only one who actually keeps a snake in here," I say.

He walks further into the room but doesn't look any more comfortable.

"Where've you been?" I ask awkwardly.

Tom filled weeks don't leave much room for anyone he doesn't think is important enough to fit in, and Sirius hasn't sought me out. Since Sev decided he wasn't talking to strangers, I've

only talked to Tom and Bella. She doesn't trust Tom but is warming up to him. They're similar, in a way.

"Adventuring with my friends as far away from Slytherins as possible," he says.

Adventurers. That's what Severus called them. I suppose it took awhile to come up with a name that stuck.

"Don't be that way," I say.

"You think I'll stand around while you wrestle with Tom Riddle and he has his wand at your neck?" he asks.

"While it may have looked like he was going to hurt me, I was safe," I say, "I'm always safe with Tom."

I kiss him on the cheek while he scowls.

"I told you it was training. I won't explain myself any further," I say.

"You won't? Careful, *Harrison*, you're beginning to sound like a Slytherin," Sirius says.

I look at him as though he couldn't have given me a better compliment and then cross my arms.

"Don't call me that," I say.

"Why not? He did," he says.

"It's.. a Tom specific thing," I say lamely.

Everything always happens to me. I'm caught at the wrong moment at the wrong time, always. Sirius's eyes flame with anger. I wish my life could be easy and stable. That I could've been Hermione's best man and married Cedric. Or at the very least that I could keep my life here without complications. What I wouldn't give to have Sirius, Bella, and Sev as my best friends. And Tom as my- and Bal too. Er.. that would be my ideal life. But with a bunch like that there was bound to be a conflict eventually.

"You're being silly. I missed you. Are you done being angry with me?" I ask.

He sighs deeply.

"Sirius, after Sev decided to hate me I couldn't take it if you won't forgive me either," I say.

Especially since I did *absolutely nothing wrong*.

"What would you be willing to give up to get me back?" he asks.

I stare at him in shock. One or the other, is that how it is? Is my life always going to be a choice that could change everything? Will the ability to make things easier for myself always

be torn away by obstacles that shouldn't even exist? I couldn't choose in December, and I can't choose now. It isn't a fair thing to ask.

-Tom-

"What kind of friend are you? You're acting like a Hufflepuff, it's always feelings with you. You should be ashamed of yourself. Your emotions don't matter here," I say roughly.

Snape looks at me like the most disgusting half-breed he's ever seen. He thinks I'm not worth the callouses on his hand and I despise him.

"What business is it of yours how I treat Potter when you have and still treat him worse than I ever could?" Snape asks.

What business is it of mine? What business!

"*He* is my business. You seem to have forgotten who you are and what you're worth," I say.

"You can't possibly be implying that you care? You wouldn't bat an eye if Harry was eaten by a dragon," he shouts.

"I know what a friend does. Do you?" I say.

His eyebrows fly upwards when he hears me address Harry as my friend. I haven't before now. I don't understand why I haven't. Above all students in Hogwarts, Harry is the one I see as my equal. Even Lucius is just another connection.

"I have never held a wand to his throat!" he says.

What a weak attempt at discounting me.

"You were assisting him, an average attempt as it was, in Potions. There is little need for wands there," I snap, "but in Defense, there is."

He clenches his jaw repeatedly as he searches for something to say about what I've said. I smile at him without showing my teeth.

"I will tell you this one time and one time only. Apologize to Harry or face the wrong end of my wand," I say, "I will make you regret hurting him. You will *beg* for death."

He pushes past me and stalks away to wherever it is things like him hide. I move to walk back inside of the dorm.

"What would you give up to get me back?" one of them says.

I believe it's Black. I stand outside of the door as silently as I can.

"That isn't a fair thing to ask. Tom or you, is it? I won't do it," Harry says.

"You'd rather have the snake?" Black asks.

I dig my nails into my palm.

"*Tom* and you are both very... dear to me. I won't give either of you up this way. I'll *never* give him up," Harry says.

I bite the inside of my lip sharply as I sweep into the room with a smirk. I'll never give you up either, Harry.

"I have returned," I say.

Harry rolls his eyes. Black stares at me for several long seconds and then follows Snape's example.

"Tom?" Harry asks.

I nod my head to show that I'm listening and lay on the bed.

"Can we spar later?" he asks.

I turn my head so that I can see him.

"Tell anyone that I was even remotely kind and I'll work your fingers to the bone," I say.

He smiles gently.

"Thank you, Tom," he says.

I roll over. It's almost time for class to start.

"You..heard me, didn't you?" Harry says.

"Yes," I say.

"I wouldn't get rid of you if it was the only way to save my life," Harry says.

I cough. He mumbles something that sounds suspiciously like 'there's too much at stake for that'.

"I think you hit your head on the floor. I need to finish reading the book I borrowed," I say.

I don't know why I continue reading these, but I can't stop. It's like I'm searching for something that's missing. It's the single most aggravating thing in the world, the only thing that soothes my frustration is more reading.

-Harry-

I check to make sure that the professor can't see what I'm doing before nudging Tom.

"Are you going to stop reading those books? Who is this..person that has so many, anyway?" I ask.

The only thing I know is they're Muggleborn, probably to be sure that I keep my nose out of it. He's reading yet another romance novel. It's tucked into the folds of his robes to avoid notice, but I notice it. Mostly because I've been watching him. He doesn't answer. I know that he isn't as into the book as he's pretending to be, because Tom refuses to space out in class. He multitasks infuriatingly well and is never caught off guard. Which means he knows I'm staring. I pull out a piece of parchment and scribble a note. He isn't the type to write back, but then again I thought he wasn't the type to read books like those.

Tom, why won't you answer me?

It might have something to do with the fact that I'm reading

but we're in class. You hate doing things in class.

I'm searching for something

Thanks to Tom I can see him scratching something out while peeking over his shoulder. I couldn't see nearly as well before because my glasses weren't my prescription. He's given me a new way to look at the world. Oh, that's lame. Knowing Tom, I see a lot more things clearly. The space in front of me, namely, and why forgiveness is important. And that I am a sappy, useless *idiot*!

I already know about the goblin wars. This is important.

Why?

Harry, you shouldn't

I jab him in the leg and write over his arm.

Tom, no! Don't keep secrets from me. Don't be that way with me. I am a person you never have to hide from

I am a romance novel. A poorly written romance novel.

I'm looking for something

And it can be found in a Muggle novel?

I don't know

You don't know something? The world might collapse!

Tom shakes his head and pulls the note under his sleeve while he answers the professor's question. I brush my hair out of my eyes to observe him. He looks back into my eyes. My hair is getting long. I wonder if I should get it cut.

I wonder if Tom- no, don't even think it. Tom's pupil dilates. I shiver. I'd know that feeling anywhere.

"Don't. It looks more...dignified," Tom says.

"Where did you learn that?" I ask.

I rip my eyes away from his. I know the touch of Legilimency when I feel it. I need to work on Occlumency. But how? My memories are too dangerous for him to have access to. But his touch is gentle. Coaxing. Did Sev just do it wrong?

My eyes narrow.

Was he just trying to hurt me?

"It's not as unruly when it's longer," he says.

He shoves the note into my hands. I blush.

Don't worry about that. Has Snape apologized yet?

I focus on my memory of my second first meal at Hogwarts. Intently.

It's been maybe two weeks since he tried to ruin my life. Why would he? He's stubborn

It's no matter

Was he supposed to?

Drop it! I wish I was better at this. I learned from a book, but the instructions weren't clear. I can't keep it up. I can't do it without eye contact

Why would you want something like that?

I know the significance of Tom admitting a flaw to me. I feel accomplished that I got in so close without detection.

Wouldn't you want it? I wish I could see more than current thoughts. I want to see memories

Tom, I don't think you should

I do what I think is best.

Would it really be so interesting to see memories?

I want to feel their feelings. I want to dream their dreams.

Why?

Don't ask that of me.

That started a tradition of sorts. I would write notes with Tom in History of Magic. After the first day, he didn't try to peer into my soul anymore. I know he practices it. I've been working

at night building walls. Bal helps me think of memories to push forward if I ever have to. Safe memories.

Has Snape apologized to you?

No.

How are things with Black?

Better. Why?

His mother would be an excellent person to get close to.

He hates her.

I see. You seem distracted.

Will you tell me something personal, Tom?

That depends on your question

Why me?

What are you trying to say, Harrison? Use your words.

I mean, why me? Is there a reason you chose me as the one person you don't need anything from, the one person you tell things to, who isn't a connection? You told me once that you would never help Lucius Malfoy with school work because you wouldn't allow the opportunity for anyone to rise above you. So why do you help me? Why am I the only person in the world that you've decided not to hate? I don't have any of the qualities that you admire. So why me?

Tom stares at the words I've written. I chew on the end of my quill. He says nothing. I watch him but he ignores the paper, so I finish the timeline I was supposed to be making. A simple curiosity is leaving me feel bared and vulnerable. I hate it. More than anything I hate this because it reveals more about me than I'd like in the open.

That's what I'm looking for

Looking for? You don't know?

In the books. That's what I'm looking for. I told you once that I don't have friends, and I don't. I have connections and I have followers and I have people who stand in my way. But I don't have friends. Except you. I don't understand why I tell you the things I do, why I let my guard down around you, why I trust you with my weaknesses and my wishes and my dreams.

You think you'll find the answer in a book about Muggles falling in love?

It's the only kind of book she had, and Muggles think about these things.

What things?

Emotion. Friendship.

If you can't find it there, where will you look?

I've tried a few things. I asked Lucius. I've looked in the library books. The only place left is a Muggle. I might ask Mrs. Cole.

You hate Muggles. You hate her.

Never let emotion get in the way of opportunity, Harry.

Wise-and-sagely Tom again?

You've said some things I think are part of it.

Oh?

You told me Sirius Black is worth more than anything to you and that you would do anything to make sure that you don't lose him, but when he asked you what you would risk you told him nothing was worth losing me

yes

If he told you not to talk to Bellatrix Black again, what would you say?

She's one of my best friends. I would never do that.

Do you feel this way about all of your best friends?

It's only you, Bella, and Bal. Three is not that many. Four was not that many.

Do you ?

Yes

Is that typical? When you care about someone very much, do you want them in your future and does it hurt to not talk to them?

Yes, why?

I think I'm understanding this. I'm going to the library.

Tom stands and tells the professor that he needs the nurse. This is the first time he's ever left class early. A warmth spreads through my scar and I touch it in alarm. How is that possible? I hold my hand against it and try not to panic. It's not unpleasant, but it's worrisome. Maybe it will stop. It's a fluke thing. I hardly notice the rest of the day passing me by. I notice only two things: Tom doesn't come to class and it never stops.

The Howler

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I sit calmly at the breakfast table, nestled between Bellatrix and Tom. Severus hasn't sat with us for a long time now. I don't even hope that he will anymore. When I decided to pretend as though the future never happened because war changes people, I forgot that some things stay the same.

Severus Snape holds grudges. He has a vice grip around any slight and he'll never let it go if someone doesn't make him. But I'm okay, for now. Tom needs someone around that doesn't expect anything from him in order to change into a better person. I know now that Dumbledore wasn't being a sentimental old man. The power he knows not is love, true friendship, and human connection without purpose. He told me himself, he doesn't have friends.

"Do you think on Saturday we could go down to the lake?" Bella asks.

"Sure, sounds like fun," I say.

Tom eats his eggs silently. I know he doesn't expect to be invited. He's missed out on too much because he grew up surrounded by people who only know how to hate when they are afraid.

"Do you want to come along?" I ask.

"I wanted to show you my new technique. *Alone*," Bella pouts, "I've almost got it enough to try it with magic."

I start to tell her that I want Tom to come when owls come flying through the room. I always get distracted when the mail comes. They're majestic. Just looking at them makes me miss Hedwig. A long horned owl swoops over my head and releases a small red envelope beside my plate. And then everything stops.

"What is that?" Tom asks.

I stare down at it in horror. It seems so innocent. How can something so evil look so innocent? My eyes flick to Tom's coiffed hair and water.

"Who would send you a Howler?" Bella asks.

I don't have long before it opens itself, I know. Only one person would have done this. I look around the room, twitching my nose to still the tears. Don't let them see.

No one seems to have noticed yet, no one but a few people from the Gryffindor table. Sirius sits grimly between Remus and my father. All of them are facing me, waiting for the

explosion. I look helplessly at Bella, a tear slipping from the corner of my eye. She understands immediately.

"Riddle, you stay with him. If you leave him, I promise I'll skin you and wear Riddle hide gloves to Herbology," she says.

"What-?" Tom says.

"I'll kill him," she yells fiercely.

She stands up with so much force that the offending letter falls to the ground. She nods her head once at Tom, marches over to Severus, grabs a handful of his hair, and pulls him from the room. Hardly a minute left. I wipe at my cheek.

"Tom, come with me," I say. I *beg*.

I pick up the letter and then grab his elbow and half drag him out of the Great Hall. I jog to our dorm room while anxiously staring at the steaming letter. My ears are pounding. It's growing hot. I slam the door shut and let go of Tom.

"Don't grab me!" he shouts.

I know he'll keep yelling so I bite my lip and open the letter. I choose to be swallowed by the hard place.

-Severus-

"Severus Snape, have you lost your mind?" Bellatrix yells at me.

"What are you talking about?" I ask casually.

She's probably going to yell at me about Potter, again. I have to distance myself from this madness. If my happiness is unimportant to him, his happiness is unimportant to me.

"No! Don't talk, don't open your filthy worthless mouth until I'm done. I don't want to hear a single word you have to say. *Nothing* will be good enough. *Nothing*! How could you do that to Harry, of all people? Do you know what you've done? Don't bother denying it, I *know* it was you that caused this," she shouts.

She's pacing back and forth, trying to figure out what to do, I presume. She slaps me across the face and her eyes dance wildly.

"Do you know what that letter will do to him? *Do you?* Do you even care? Because *I* do. Because I've seen it before. You told him so hurtful that he felt the need to send a Howler to Harry," she says.

I say nothing. She shoves me against the wall and punches my jaw.

"A *Howler*, you ass! This is going to be worse than after Tom Riddle, Severus! I thought I knew who you were, I thought I was *helping* you. I could kill you!" she shouts, " Why does it

matter if lovable, adorable Harry isn't oblivious to how he feels anymore?"

"You do know me. I did what had to be done. It's better this way," I protest.

She kicks me.

"Shut up! You don't get to defend yourself. If he cries, even *once*, because of this I'll never forgive you," she says.

And the force of her fury tears a hole in my soul.

-Harry-

HOW COULD YOU? I WAS GOING TO GIVE YOU A SECOND CHANCE! I TRUSTED YOUR PROMISES AND YOU-

I grimace and back away from the Howler. It follows me closely, not allowing me to breathe or escape. I feel as though Tom is across the room when in reality I can feel him there beside me, touching my arm and staring at the screaming letter with a fierce sort of determination.

FORGIVING HIM WAS BAD ENOUGH. AND THE WRESTLING, THAT "TRAINING", WHATEVER YOU'RE CALLING IT? YOU AREN'T SUPPOSED TO

I consider giving in to the tears just to drown out the noise. Flashes of exactly why I should have listened to Sirius flood through my mind. I hear a loud, cruel laugh. Flashes of green. And Cedric, Cedric, Cedric. The Dark Mark in the air. Dumbledore falling. Cedric dying. Bellatrix killing Sirius. And screaming. I hear horrible, heartbroken screaming. It takes a moment to realize that part, at least, is coming from me. I'm screaming.

I run into the bathroom, followed the whole way by this stupid Howler. I get into the shower fully clothed and turn on the hot water. It's almost scalding but it will be worth it if the letter melts. A pocket of air surrounds it and the water rushes past, leaving it completely dry. I sink to the floor. *Of course*.

YOU TOLD ME THAT YOU CARED ABOUT ME, HARRY. THAT YOU THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T DESERVE ME. YOU TOLD THE TRUTH ONE TIME, AT LEAST.

I see myself dying next to Sirius as Dementors circle our bodies. None of my memories are happy enough.

HOW COULD YOU NOT TELL ME THAT YOU LIVE WITH HIM? THAT YOU SLEEP WITH HIM IN THE SAME BED? WHY DO I HAVE TO GET ALL OF MY INFORMATION FROM SEVERUS SNAPE?

A sad, soggy laugh squeezes from my throat. That stupid bed. It's not my fault no one wants to share a bunk with Tom. There wasn't space when I got there, and now I balance him out so well they'd never move me.

"Expecto..." I try, "Expecto Patronum!"

A soft white mist tumbles lazily out of my wand.

ARE YOU HIDING IT FROM ME ON PURPOSE? ARE YOU CHEATING ON ME WITH HIM? YOU NEVER TOUCH ME-

I think of being free of the Dursleys.

I'M DONE WITH THIS, HARRY. IT'S TOO MUCH.

"Expecto Patronum!" I shout.

I feel weak and empty. I don't know why I'm trying to get rid of the letter this way except that it feels like my own personal Dementor. I am hardly aware of anything at all. Only when the letter catches fire do I realize that I'm sobbing.

"Expecto Patronum," I whisper while thinking of the first time I made Severus smile.

The shower curtain is pulled away and I tumble into Tom's arms just as a large blue snake erupts from my wand. Wait- a snake? I look at where the stag is supposed to be and see... Merlin, is that Nagini? I laugh hysterically between sobs as I realize how completely I've lost myself.

"He'll pay, Harrison. Oh, Harry, he'll pay," Tom whispers into my steaming neck.

"How could he?" I whisper to myself when I've calmed a bit.

"Harry, look at me. Your skin is steaming. What is that?" Tom says.

If he was anyone else, I would say he was almost frantic.

"It's called a Patronus. It's made of happy memories and it eats depression," I sniffle.

Then I realize that I'm steaming, soaking wet, and in Tom's lap. The water is still running. I'm getting hot water and snot all over him. I push out of his robes.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"I'm not," he says, "You need to go to the nurse before class. Don't be late, alright? It's hard to stay at the top."

"Okay," I say.

"And Harry?" Tom says.

I look at him. He brushes a tear from my cheek.

"I'll kill him for this," he says.

He flings open the door and rushes away.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, Harry/Sirius shippers. Honestly, I hurt myself writing this.

He Waited a Month

-Tom-

My hand arches against the cool stone that lines the hallways. I push my palm against the surface.

"Severus Snape," I growl.

His shoulders press against the wall and he wriggles beneath me.

"Why won't you leave me alone?" he asks desperately.

"I'm haunting you," I say.

I slide my knee into the slot between his legs and slam his hips backward.

"Why?" he asks.

"Just as Harry is haunted by the pain left over from what you did, scum, I will follow you," I say.

"Wouldn't it be easier to hit me?" he asks.

I chuckle darkly.

"And more fun, as well. I promised him I wouldn't hurt you," I say.

Severus's eyes grow hopeful. I slam his shoulders against the wall again.

"Doesn't want me sent to Azkaban for what I'd do to you," I add.

The light fades from his eyes.

"You belong there," he says defiantly.

I say nothing.

"Oh, look. It's Snivellus," a boy says from behind me.

"Maybe-" Black says.

"Oh, *look*," the other boy says harshly.

I back away with a smirk.

"Be seeing you, Snivellus," I say.

-Harry-

He waited a month before he came to talk to me about all the things he said.

"I want you to know that I wasn't lying to you, that they weren't my secrets to tell," I say.

He says, "I just came to apologize for the way that I did it."

"I'd like for us to be friends," I say.

He says, "I should've found a better way to tell you that's never going to happen."

I waited a month for him to say that. I waited a month, each day hurting more, each day hurting less. And every day I kept up hope, even though I knew it was useless.

"I never see you anymore," Bella says, "It's been a week."

"You wouldn't want to. It's mostly me pretending not to cry and Tom pretending not to care," I say.

"Maybe it would be easier to care," she says.

*I just smile wryly at her because she doesn't understand. I lost more than a relationship. I lost **Sirius**.*

Only Bal knows what that means.

That month had a thousand days and each one of them stung. I was assured that I was being silly. I was assured that it wouldn't last. I was told that I should be manlier and forget about Gryffindors.

But he's not a Gryffindor. He's *Sirius*.

They shouldn't write him off the way they do. I refused to listen to them. But he waited a month to tell me I should.

-Tom-

"Have you been terrorizing Severus Snape?" Bellatrix Black asks.

I lift my eyebrow and smirk.

"And if I am?" I say.

"Good." she says firmly.

I nod.

"Black-" I say.

"Bellatrix," she corrects.

I glare at her.

"Bellatrix, is there something you wanted?" I ask.

"I wanted to make sure you weren't just driving him insane. I..Harry," she says.

"Harry?" I ask.

Her nose wrinkles as she considers what she's going to say.

"He..last time.. when it was you," she attempts.

"Last time he was like this," she tries again, "it was because you- He doesn't deal well with things like this. He needs you to show you care about him. Or he won't get better."

She bites her lip and looks at me with renewed fervor.

"And if he doesn't get better, Riddle, and I have to write him letters again- I'll use your blood to write them," she says.

I nod once. I respect this girl, mostly because she cares about Harry with this intensity that I can believe in.

Ugh. Slytherin, Tom. You're a *Slytherin*.

"Whatever it takes," I say.

So much for that.

-Harry-

I sit in the corner of my bed sniffing occasionally and trying to decipher what happened yesterday. No more Sirius. Ever.

"Must you make that noise?" Tom asks.

Sirius doesn't want to be friends, he never wants to see me again.

"Sorry," I say.

He throws a handkerchief at me. T.M.R

"Don't bother, just stop crying," he grumbles.

"How?" I ask miserably while wiping my face.

Tom caught me when I fell from the shower and let me get tears and snot all over his robes. He's usually so cold. He's just horrid to anyone who even accidentally dirties his clothing. He removes himself from all emotion.

So why did he look so..caring when he sent me to the nurse? He saw me crying. I let him see me crying. What's wrong with me? Why am I so easy with him? Is that why Sirius hates me?

"Harry. Harry, stop that," Tom says.

What is wrong with me? I am going to die alone. Why? Why can't I ever be happy? Why do I lo- NO.

"That's it! That's it, we're done with this," Tom says.

He grabs my arm and hauls me to my feet. He shakes me slightly.

"For the love of Salazar, stop crying! I can't keep acting like I don't care if you don't- No, nevermind. We're going to a place where you can snivel all you want. But I'll leave you there if it gets ridiculous. I'm not a kind person, Harry. I don't make people feel better.

I smile in spite of myself.

"You're truly awful," I say.

He drags me off to the Room of Requirement. I pretend to be shocked when I'm pulled into a replica of our room at the orphanage.

"Tom?" I say.

"You won't stop sobbing. It's horrible...it's full of despair. It's like you want to drown in it. I.. it makes me want to hold you or something," he says.

He almost sounds tortured.

"Is this something you found in a Muggle book?" I ask.

He nods. I decide that I need the contact too much to care where it comes from and pull off my shoes. I climb into the little bed and bury myself under the covers. Tom stands just in front of it.

"Now what?" I ask.

"I don't know," he admits.

But I do. If he thinks it works the way it does in romance novels..

"Is it because I'm not crying anymore?" I ask.

He runs a hand through his hair.

"No. It's because you aren't crying anymore, but not because I want you to cry. I wanted you to stop. I-" he says.

"It's okay," I say.

I flash him a watery smile.

"I know you're still upset. I don't-" he says.

"Sometimes it hurts too much to cry," I say.

He gets into the bed behind me and lowers his hands slowly. I grab them and wrap them around my back. I point my face towards his chest and close my eyes. His breath hitches and then rustles my hair gently.

"You're a good friend," I say.

I can remember a few nights with Hermione like this while Ron was dating Lavender and after I had to tell Ginny I was gay. There might've even been some after low grades or embarrassing moments. It's the easiest for comfort. I quickly fall asleep.

We used the RoR for many nights, me and Tom. It chased nightmares away.

It took two months for him to come running back. The best of all friends actually treated me like that.

"What do you want?" I ask.

He says, "Harry, I'm sorry. I can't possibly explain how sorry. I thought I knew best."

"You were wrong," I say.

"Is this necessary, Tom?" I ask, my hands over my eyes.

"I want to surprise you," he says.

"Muggle notion," I say.

"Those are your favorite," he replies.

He taps my hands and I move them away from my face. A white table sits in the middle of the room surrounded by twinkling lights draped through the rafters. Soft music plays along with trickling water from a fountain. Voldemort's hands, what is this? I turn around to look at him.

"What is this?" I ask.

"A place to eat," he says.

"It's been three months. I can handle the Great Hall. I've *been* handling the Great Hall," I say.

"Doesn't matter. I made food," he says.

He pushes me to a chair and sits in the other one.

"Is this a lesson on poison?" I ask.

He smiles and wiggles his eyebrows.

"You're a very odd person, Tom Riddle," I say.

"It's not a lesson on poison," he says.

I eat a meatball.

"I don't get it," I say.

"It's my job to understand things and explain them to you," he says.

I shrug my shoulders.

More of the same, then. Not a lesson, but a proposition.

"Harry, I cannot begin this without you. I have great plans. I will become great. We will, *together*," he says.

I sigh deeply and poke at my salad. This beautiful room was a distraction, the food was a bribe.

"Tom," I say.

He grabs my arm. I look at him.

"You used to follow my every order and I liked it too much," he says, "I thought, almost all the time, how easy it would be to order you to kiss me."

I try to remove my arm from his grip. Not hard enough. Not enough to be taken seriously.

"I denied it. I dated that idiot, Macnair, and I stayed away from you. It worked until.."he says.

"Until you decided sexual contact might fix anything?" I supply helpfully.

"..yes, until that," Tom says.

"I shouldn't have stayed away from you," he says after I don't respond.

You should've, I don't say, *I was alright without you. I had Severus and Sirius without you.*

I do say, "I'm glad you came back."

He nods and pushes his fork around his plate.

"Be my lover," he says abruptly.

My eyes fly open. Is he *insane*? Of course he is. He must be. I look at him helplessly. He has to be. I just...

I just agreed to be friends again. It ruins a friendship.

I-

I'm here for a reason.

What are you taking? How dare he ask me that? I lost Sirius because of this! I assured him Tom was sane and our friendship was simply that and Tom would never, never, *never*-

He didn't believe me. Why would he believe me? Tom is *absolutely bonkers*. What other explanation is there? He's raving.

The word 'lover' brings about the image of stolen kisses and forbidden trysts. It's ancient. It's...intimate. How could I ever?

"No," I whisper.

The sound hardly escapes my lips. I stare down at my noodles, begging them to make sense. This isn't for me, but could I do it? Tom watches me, his eyes narrowed. How could I, even three months later, prove Sirius right? It would take away my right to mourn our relationship.

I-

"I can't," I say a bit louder, "It's too... *Sirius and Severus*."

"What do they have to do with anything?" he asks.

They are *everything*.

"They'll never come back if they think they were right! If he thinks I want you- no," I say.

I rush out of the room. I must remember this day. I must remember I said *no*.

-Tom-

"Lucius," I say.

"Yes, Tom?" he responds quickly.

I let my fury boil into something useful: revenge. Clearly that boy hasn't gotten the message yet. Half assed apologies are not enough. Not for me.

"Do you remember the plan for Severus Snape?" I ask.

"I do," he says.

I rotate my wand in my fingers. He steps back, not at all eager to be anywhere near me when I have been denied something I want. *Someone* I want more than power, more than to be a master of time. But he did give a reason. He said he's worried about appearances. I smile to myself. I can fix that. I can respect that.

"Do it. Spare no mercy or expense," I say.

He nods his head and begins to step away.

"And Lucius?" I add, "Make it hurt."

Torturous Love

Chapter Notes

An- when Tom says 'snit', he means snit. Not a typo

-Lucius-

Step one: project an aura that both intimidates and awes anyone it's particularly directed at.

I skill my features into an expression not unlike one Tom would wear. I shake my head. I look ridiculous. My eyebrows are all wrong and I'm more nausea than intrigue. Maybe I should try a different approach. Perhaps it would be more believable if I acted like Harry Potter instead. Potter always fumbles in, smiles a bit, and walks away with an ally or two. He hates networking and doesn't understand the need for connections but he has enough to take over Wizarding Britain without a fight. He's genuine.

Be like that, then. Easy enough.

"Hello, Severus," I say.

"I wasn't under the impression that we were friends, Malfoy," he says.

I smile.

Potter rule number one: Nothing fazes Potter.

"I'd like to be," I say.

"Would you now?" Severus asks.

What else? His feelings shine out of his eyes so strongly you'd never dare refuse him. I try to do that. I hope my desire to please Tom is easily translated into genuine affection.

"Go trail behind Riddle, Malfoy. I have better things to do," he says.

I suppose it wasn't as effective as I'd hoped. Of course, Potter does have his "I will be the very best" and "Tom Riddle is lord" attitudes to keep him blazing. My eyebrows furrow in confusion.

"Surprised?" he says.

"No. I was hoping you could...tutor me in Potions," I say.

"Riddle tops Potions," he says harshly.

"The only one he'll help is Harry," I say.

I smile to myself. I don't even have to worry about lies. This should be easy.

He nods, his lips pressed together in thin lines. A dark shadow crosses his eyes.

"The only person I help is myself," Severus says.

He leaves the room with his robes billowing. Make it hurt. "Yes, Tom. No problem." *Idiot!*

-Harry-

I wander around the library while wondering if the books Hermione used for research have been written yet. I don't have any particular purpose, I suppose, but it keeps me busy and free from wallowing. And wondering if I shouldn't have run away from Tom yesterday. I don't know why I lied and told him it was far too soon after Sirius. It's been three months and I wasn't *in* love with Sirius, no. I love him, sure, same as I love Ron and Hermione, and Lupin, and everyone from my time. It seemed simple, the easiest way to make him stay. I didn't think it through very well, obviously. I don't think much of anything through. It's strange. At times with Tom it feels like...like home. It scares me. Sirius said it himself, "*It sounds like you're half in love with him.*"

But it doesn't scare me enough to make me stop. I couldn't. How could I? I run my fingers along the spines of the big leather-bound books. I'm grabbed by the shoulder and whirled around.

"Tom," I say breathlessly.

"Hello, lover," he says.

He really isn't going to ask me again. He isn't going to listen to my answer either. He's conceited and much too self assured and

"Tom," I say, "I'm not your 'lover'."

I don't care one bit.

He presses me against the bookshelves and moves his mouth towards my neck. I wish he would stop using that word. My fingers open and close against his chest. Am I pushing him away? Am I pulling him closer? My mouth hangs even though I'm pushed against a shelf and my torso is pinned to it, he hesitates. I have to say something. I place my hands on his chest firmly and, for some reason best described as a wrist malfunction, I pull. He moves towards my mouth and claims it deeply. He pulls back.

What did I do?

"We'll be dining in Greece tonight," he says.

"Oh..Greece?" I say.

His smile is almost sharklike. I look around for a reason to say no but find none.

"Won't Professor Dippet mind?" I ask.

A weak excuse, we haven't eaten in the Great Hall for weeks and weeks. Or slept in our dorm room. Honestly, he needs to monitor us better.

Only one person would know about my...minor obsession with Greek culture. Is it just a coincidence? It must be. Why else would Tom know? Why else would he care?

"Leave him to me, Harry," he says.

"What about our Charms essay?" I ask, desperate for any excuse to escape.

Too much exposure to him dulls my senses. Already I'm feverish and struggling to breathe in air that doesn't taste like him. More than before the weight of what I've agreed to presses down on me. I can't let him touch me. I'll-

"Harry, you're acting like you don't wish to go," Tom says.

He's angry. I've already said no to him once. I don't know if either of us can handle a second time. But I can't handle caring for him now.

"Is it too much to ask, Tom, for you to mean what you say?" I ask.

"I don't understand you at all, Harry," he says.

He turns around and leaves. I sigh. Don't worry, Tom. I don't get you either.

-Lucius-

I smooth my deep black robes over my chest and ruffle my hair into an attempt at the artfully messy style of Potter's. I look into the mirror. It looks less dignified, somehow. His hair *is* shorter than mine, dusting his collarbone as opposed to mine which rests just below my shoulder blades. It's also this midnight black color that makes him look mysterious in an almost otherworldly, kind of deadly way. He looks like he belongs at Tom's side. I look like a boy playing at being grown. It's no wonder I couldn't convince Severus. Well, maybe I can't emanate Potter *or* Riddle, but perhaps I can imitate my father. He's almost me anyway. I take a brush spelled to add shine and moisture and pull it through my hair, leaving it neatly feathered behind my ears. I point my nose to the ceiling and stride into the dormitory.

Severus lounges on the bed reading a Potions book.

"Severus Snape," I drawl, "I have a proposition for you."

"Would you like to hold hands and skip through the daisies?" he asks without looking up from his book.

"What? Yes-*no*. No. Hush now, I'm beginning an experiment," I say.

"How do you know what an experiment is, Malfoy?" he asks.

"No matter," I say, "Kiss me."

His head whips toward me. His eyes are open wide with shock.

"What?" he says.

"Kiss me," I say, "Surely you know what that means."

He gets up and crosses the room. My breath hitches. He leans in close and whispers

"You're mad, Lucius Malfoy."

He walks out of the room chuckling. This is going to be harder than I thought.

-Harry-

I sit on the couch in the common room drinking tea. Did I give away too much? Did I try to get things I can never have from him?

"Harry," Tom says.

I look up at him. He always seems to find me.

"Hello," I say.

"Explain what you meant," he says.

I glare at him. He looks back at me, lost.

"The word is 'please'," I say.

He continues looking at me.

"Fine. I wanted you to not be doing whatever this is because Lucius told you to or you'll have a better chance of chance of world annihilation or whatever," I say.

"World annihilation?" Tom says.

"I wanted you to actually care about me, okay? I know it's pointless," I say.

He gives my shoulder a slow tap.

"That's ridiculous," he says.

I turn my face away. I *know*. He grips the sides of my face and forces me to look at him.

"This has nothing to do with world annihilation, you little snit," he says.

W-what?

"I *told* you already. You never listen. If you were anyone else I'd have given up on you by now," he smiles, "Come on then, I'm hungry."

I follow him to the marvelous world he's created. I wonder why I never used the room like this. There's dozens of colorful platters filled with olives. I'm too impressed by this, he can tell, but I ignore him and stare in wonder. There are green ones, black ones, amfissas and kalamatas, all surrounded by a circle of tiny breads, He- Bellatrix must have told him. It's too involved to be a coincidence. We sit down at a little table and I start eating. I sneak a look at him and wonder why he's bothering.

"Do you enjoy it?" Tom asks.

"Yes. How did you know that I would?" I ask.

"Greece is one of the only worthy Muggle civilizations and so I decided to indulge your love of the culture," he says.

I mutter some response as I make enjoyable food noises.

"What's all this?" I ask.

"I set up typical Grecian dishes in a more familiar style dinner. It isn't how they do it but I grew tired of researching," Tom says.

"Lucius assisted me in making it, along with Professor Slughorn," he adds.

I stare. He *made* it? He didn't just require it or call for a house-elf to make it? What.. what does that mean?

"Harry, you're thinking much too loudly. You can't 'require' food, it can't be made with magic," he says.

"You're reading my mind?" I say hotly.

I slam up my walls and glare at him. Well- his eyebrows.

"I simply wanted to know if you changed your mind about what I asked you," he says.

We eat in silence for a few moments.

"Ask for what you want," I finally say.

"I want to kiss you," he says.

He's giving me the chance to refuse. I look at my moussaka. He winces and sips on his drink to cover the movement. I could pretend not to notice that he's disappointed. I could. But.. I move around the table and sit in his lap almost awkwardly. There really isn't a better way to do this, so I lean in and press my lips against his. I move them slowly, searching, and twist my fingers in his hair. He touches my back both carefully and rough, like he's afraid I'll run

and he can't decide if he should hold me down or keep from frightening me. I turn and wrap my legs around his waist. My heart and mind speak in unison.

"I'm not leaving."

He picks me up anyway and carries me to the other side of the room, the part we sleep in, and places me onto the bed before climbing on top of me. The dinner tables disappear. He takes my mouth again. I close my eyes and arch into him. I've gone and done it but this time I don't mind. I tug on his shirt with a vague *What am I doing?* running through my mind. He helps me pull it free and I run my gaze down his chest. *Oh, yeah. Him.* His eyes are wild and desperate. I kiss him again. He rolls back until he's sitting in front of me.

"This isn't-you aren't," I say.

He shucks off his clothes and undresses me slowly, placing a kiss on each inch of revealed flesh.

"No world domination here," he says.

He slides off my socks and kisses my toes.

"Only Harry domination," he growls.

He flips me over so quickly my hips bounce on the bed and I squeal a bit. He slides his tongue along the curve of my asscheek. I squirm.

"No leaving, now," he says brusquely while gripping my hips.

I laugh, a needy breathless sound.

He pushes my legs apart and traces his tongue along the ring of my puckered hole. I moan and try to both pull away and push closer to him. He does it again and again, until I'm squeezing my eyes shut and hardly breathing between ridiculous sounds. He takes his tongue away and replaces it with a finger.

"Tommy!? I shout.

"I do love it when you call me that," he says and then he adds another finger.

I shriek. It hurts but.. it *hurts*? It's not a bad pain. He pulls his fingers out and I whine.

"Turn around. I want to see your face," he says.

I do so quickly. He pushes his fingers back in again and-

"Oh my- Tom! Tommy, Tommm *fuck!*" I yell.

He smirks and does it again. He presses *that* spot a few times and watches as my cock pulses with need. He kneels and reclaims his fingers. I could complain but I see his cock coming and I *want* it. I need him.

"Damn, I need you," I breathe out.

He whispers a spell, presses his lips against mine, guides himself into me. It aches and burns a bit. It's an odd sensation but it doesn't take long for me to be howling and writhing in pleasure again. He looks just as deliciously tortured. He thrusts his hips against mine over and over again. I rock backwards into him, searching for more, more. He hits that spot again and my vision blurs. I throw my head backwards and then he's filling me with warmth and he lays on the bed beside me panting and reaching and he gives my cock a few tugs before I cum into his hand and then I climb into his arms and shut my eyes. I'm far too happy and exhausted to stay awake any longer.

Tom? I think to myself, *It's far too late to be opposed to loving you.*

He kisses my forehead and passes out. I smile. It doesn't make any sense, but when does it ever? My little monster. I bury my head in his neck and sleep peacefully.

Stay With Me

Chapter Notes

Moving up Severus' redemption in honor of the wonderful Alan Rickman. Raise your wands, all.

wake up in the all too comfortable embrace of Tom's arms. My eyes resist opening and Tom's breath ruffles the shorter strands of my hair. This isn't happening. I am *dreaming*. I look up at his sleeping face. His eyelids flutter as one last, soft snore passes through his lips. This isn't good. I'm too... too emotional. It's not... get a grip, Harry! Control yourself. Tom opens his eyes and smiles this sleepy, unaware smile. And there goes all my bloody self-control. I can't help but respond. How could I not when I know that this is his first reaction to seeing me, before his guard goes up again? That this must be how he feels about me *all the time* but he never expressed it? This isn't going to work, things like this never do. It's going to crash and burn. I can see that Tom's working about the same thing behind his steely blue eyes. I kiss him wholeheartedly. He tightens his grip on me and then pulls back to take a breath.

"So we're acknowledging last night?" I say, mostly to myself.

"Why wouldn't I?" Tom asks.

I shift positions to look at him and wince as pain shoots up my spine. That's.. certainly not pleasant.

"You're Tom Riddle," I say.

He grabs my ass and smirks down at me.

"You're mine," he says.

He nips my shoulder and then untangles himself to start getting dressed. I groan. It has to be four am. I understand the need for *some* discretion, especially in this time where everyone believes you date to marry before the end of Hogwarts. Half of the 5th years and most of the 6th years, excluding the Muggleborns, of course, have marriage contracts laid out. I smile. I suppose my "Pureblood Studies" with Tom have stuck. I know things. I bite my lip. But... does it mean he's horrified by the idea that he insists we meet in an impenetrable, unplotable room no one else knows about? Am I?

I shake my head. Why does that even matter? I slowly make my way into my trousers.

"You look like you've been riding a horse," Tom laughs.

"Are you complimenting yourself?" I ask.

He chuckles again, the kind of laugh that only I get to hear. I rush, as much as I can manage, off to the showers.

Shit.

Lucius-

"Hello, Harry," I say.

He jiggles his leg against the couch in the common and plays with the ends of his still wet hair. It's too early for nervous energy, so something must be bothering him. And if something is bothering Harry, something is bothering Tom. It would be wise to treat him as an extension of Tom, even were I not as fond of him as I am. He makes Tom better.

"What's on your mind?" I ask.

He looks up at me in surprise. I try my friendly smile out.

"Marriage contracts," he says.

I give him a strange look.

"You'll be getting one with Narcissa Black, won't you?" he asks.

Oh..

"Most likely. It's to," I look around the common room quickly, assessing the room. Empty but for us. "my advantage to align myself with her."

Unless she finds out about Severus Snape. Nothing has happened yet, not for lack of trying, but it soon will.

"Why, may I ask?" I say.

He looks down at his hands and blushes.

"No reason, Lucius. I'll be going now," Harry says.

Strange boy.

-Harry-

"There's a fifth year named Rodolphus that I've been seeing for awhile. I admit I've thought about it, I'm glad you're telling me things again," Bella says, "but why are you asking?"

"I wish everyone would stop asking that and just answer my question," I grumble.

She peers into my eyes and then gasps.

"*You did it again*, didn't you!" she says.

"Are you going to hurt me if I say yes?" I ask.

She slaps my arm, but not maliciously, and squeals.

"I thought you were against the idea of Tom Riddle," I say.

"I am firmly against the idea of you being unhappy," she says, "oh, I told you then and now, now I'm proved right!"

I smile and tug on a piece of her hair.

"Why do you want to know about marriage contracts, though?" she asks.

"I'm just... curious," I say.

"Are you-" she asks.

"Harry," Tom's voice curls around my shoulder.

I jump, pulling half of Bella's hair with me. How long has he been here? Everywhere I am he shows up.

"Yes, Tom?" I say.

I ignore the hotness in my cheeks.

"I'm retiring for the night. Tutoring will have to wait," he says.

My face falls. He descends the stairs to the dormitory. I stare after him in shock. The *dorm*?

"They're like betrothals, in a way. When you sign, you commit to eventually having a bonding digital. They're really important and most people make them before the 16th birthday. When they're completed is more.. flexible, what have you," Bella says.

I smile faintly and nod my head. What was I thinking? Obviously he'd never want to-I don't even want to-I never should've..

"I don't feel much like staying awake either," I say.

Bella stops talking. She looks in the direction Tom walked and winks at me. I drag the corners of my mouth upwards before going to bed, where I proceed to throw myself face first and mentally chastise myself *again* for forgetting who I was thinking about. I should have known better.

But..

I do know better, don't I? I thought I was making him better. I thought- I should've known it wasn't going to last. I lost my head and started getting fantastical. But I was getting used to sleeping next to him, even when it was just our arms touching. This bed is too cold and I'm too alone. Everything is falling to bits. At this rate I'll die completely alone and all I'll have

done is make Tom Riddle into a politician who dislikes Muggleborns instead of a crazy person snake man that kills everyone he sees. I could get a kneazle, maybe. Bal would like that. We could be a trio, me and Bal and a kneazle named Hermione. I'm an idiot. An absolute fool. I sigh internally and, for the first time in awhile, cry myself to sleep.

-Lucius-

"Severus, I let you snub me for far too long. You belong to me now, " I say.

He looks up from his cauldron.

"Do I?" he asks.

I pull him across the cauldron by his tie.

"Don't you dare forget," I say.

He smirks.

"Wouldn't dream of it," he says.

"Get rid of the cauldron," I whisper.

He pushes it aside. I keep my grip on his tie, pulling him downwards.

"You overly sassy little demon," I say.

"I'm not a demon," Severus says.

I smile and press my lips against his.

"Aren't you?" I ask.

Then I let go and capture his lips again. This is bizarre. They taste like..

"Butterbeer," I say.

"Butterbeer?" he asks.

I shake my head. I am supposed to be ruining him as revenge for Harry's sadness. But right now I don't care very much about any of that. He fine, if a bit strange.

"All of your attempts to win me over will fail," he says while standing up.

But I am supposed to-

He leaves me with a smirk and a wave. I sigh. Finally I have good news to report. Sort of.

So It Doesn't Hurt

An- Harry seems pretty determined to be angsty, doesn't he?

Tom-

"Has Severus apologized to you?" I ask.

"Are you focusing on that again, Thomas?" Harry asks.

His eyes aren't shining and his smile his cold. And *Thomas*? He's being melodramatic again.

"Answer me," I say.

"No," he replies.

What good is Lucius if he can't accomplish a single task? What kind of demon is that boy that he can't be swayed by love. Or... what feels like love. I snarl. Harry needs his friends, as ridiculous and confusing as that seems. They make him happier. I see him getting more distant each day that arse refuses to grovel before his feet.

"It doesn't matter, Thomas," Harry says.

He makes to walk away from me. I speed up.

"It matters because I say it does," I say.

I don't like the flat tone of his voice. It's dead in a way that's too close to not existing at all.

"I don't care," he says.

I stop walking, he doesn't.

"Harry!" I say.

He turns around and glances at me.

"Where are you going?" I ask.

"Just drop it, Tom. It doesn't matter. I shouldn't have pretended I deserve to be happy," he says.

I can hear his unspoken words, *it won't happen again*. I shake my head.

"No. Don't you listen? We are-" I say.

"We are central, we are important, everyone cares about us," he says, "yeah, yeah. It's all bullshit and I don't want to hear it. Nobody cares about me. They care about *you*. I lived in

your borrowed light for too long and I ... forgot but it's gone now and I have to figure out how to survive."

I stand speechless. It's a first. Is this what he really thinks? How he really feels? Is he so sensitive as to see a bit of space as an ending?

"I'm going to class now, Thomas. I don't have time for this," Harry says.

-Harry-

My feet dangle off of the side of a stool in the very back of the library as I flip through books on dragons. I sort of miss it-the adventures. They were dangerous, but they were real. I never went through one and got told it was my imagination. Everything was constant. No ups and downs and miscommunications. I guess it's not hard to tell that I'm not doing well. I yelled at Tom this morning and I've been avoiding Bella all day. I just can't take any more rejection.

"Harry," Bal's familiar voice says.

"Balthy," I say.

He rolls his head but allows it.

"Bal, my life is falling apart. I miss... everything. I miss Hermione and Ron so much. They'd never- I know I never deserved them, but they stayed anyway," I say.

"Why do you think you don't deserve companions?" he asks.

"Tom doesn't want me, Sirius left, Sev hates me, and Bellatrix is here only because she's too nice to leave," I say.

"That's not true," Bal says.

"That is true," I say.

"Sirius left. This is true," he relents.

I frown and shake my head.

"It's all true," I insist.

"I'll just have to find someone to agree with me," he says.

He glides out. *Good luck with that.* I go back to my book. I remember Norbert and smile. I actually miss Norbert. A tear falls down my cheek. I swipe at it angrily.

"What am I doing here, you infernal beast?" Severus asks.

No. *No.* Bal wouldn't. But apparently, he would because his tail is coiled around Sev's ankle.

"Potter," he says when he sees me.

I make no effort to wipe away the tears. Let him see. Let him remember.

"I'm sorry, I can't control him," I sniff.

I close the book and gather my things together.

"Don't," Severus says.

I look up.

"Don't cry," he says.

"Why not?" I ask, "what else is there?"

He takes the books from my hands and sets them on the table.

"I'm an ass," he says.

I flash him a soggy half smile that's more like a grimace, if we're being honest.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I shouldn't have sabotaged your relationship, I-" he says.

I wrap my arms around him and let out a wail into his chest. He grips my arms.

"Please don't cry. Forgive me. Please forgive me," he says quietly.

I nod and let out huge, racketing sobs against him. He doesn't relax his grip until I've finished blurting out the whole tale.

"I think you're overreacting. It's.. not been good, I know. I'm sorry. It might feel like everyone abandoned you but there is no way anyone that self serving and hateful would do any of those things. I think he does care and is afraid you don't," he says.

I shake my head and look at the ground. That doesn't make any sense.

"I think you both care too much, maybe a bit more than is technically healthy or reasonable, and haven't had many opportunities to learn how to deal with that. It's why you want a permanent, binding, forever commitment to make sure he won't leave and he's preempting the rejection and is trying to keep from falling in too deep, " he says.

"I don't want to get married..." I say.

Sev smiles.

"I still know you best," he says, "and I know that's not true."

-Tom-

So I admit it. I'm eavesdropping. I saw Balthazar leading Snape somewhere, presumably to Harry. I may have been hiding behind a bookcase with my wand out, ready to bleed him dry if anything happened. I may or may not still be there, listening. I am. Fine, I am.

I about killed the slimy git when Harry started crying. The only thing that stopped me was the way Harry clung desperately to him while pouring out our history. *I* made him cry like that? Maybe I might be a bit...jaded. Perhaps I can be described as *removed* from emotion. But I think it was a bit callous to refer to me as a heartless snake incapable of *all* human emotion, least of all love. And to use that as an example for why it isn't possible that I'd abandon Harry again. I press my ear against the bookcase that is my shelter.

"I don't want to get married, Sev. I should've never let a thought like that into my head. I should've listened to you. I-" Harry says.

I pull away and stop listening. Who said anything about-

No.

But at the same time, I have no desire to hear any more. He's safe and, apparently, happier, so I leave.

Assumptions

Harry-

I roll my ankle in my hands. My back is against a wall in whatever this room is supposed to represent.

"Are you going to sit over there this whole time?" Tom asks.

"I can learn defense from over here," I say.

He stands up quickly. I look over to him, at his lips firmly scowling. My heart jumps.

"That's enough, Harry. I heard you," he says, "in the library. I heard you."

"Everything?" I ask.

"Most likely not," he admits.

At least we avoided that misunderstanding. This is so dumb! We don't sound like ourselves, we're acting like puppets on a string made to dance by a very cruel, heartless master. Tom is being too nice and I-

I care too much about him. It's all wrong but..I don't care.

"Then why does it matter, Thomas, what you *think* you heard?" I ask stiffly.

"What matters is that you're being petty and childish without cause and- you were the last person in the world to think that I'm not some kind of soulless demon child. I want to change things. I want to make things *better*. But everyone wants a monster, so I'll give them what they want," he says.

My eyes widen in horror. Shit. *No*. I was doing so well and now the thing that tips him over the edge won't be his Muggle father. It will be me, his last hope, giving up on him. Am I really the only one who's made an effort to see him? To care about him?

"No, Tom. You're not a monster," I say.

Not yet. Please, not ever.

"You promised you'd never leave. Nearly five months ago. And three years before that. I told you what they thought. You *swore* you'd never think that way," Tom says.

I walk over to him and touch his arm. Shit, shit, *shit*. I remember.

"I don't, Tom," I say.

"*I heard you*," he says angrily.

"You're not very good at eavesdropping," I say fondly, "I didn't mean that, Tommy. Didn't the fact that I was sobbing tell you I was trying to convince myself it was a good thing you don't care about me?" I say.

"I?" he shouts, a fragment of a sound.

He pulls me roughly by my collar and shoves his tongue into my mouth.

-Tom-

"You hurt me," I say against Harry's skin, "we can't have that."

I push him against the wall and hold his wrists. I almost said.. He's too concerned about me. I have to distract him.

"I-"he says.

I bite his lip and he opens his mouth into the perfect "o." I nearly shove him to the floor and slip his pants off before grabbing his hips and flipping him around to expose his flesh. I throw my hand forward with a loud *slap*.

"You can't apologize until you *know* pain," I say.

I leave a trail of small bite marks down his ass. I sink my teeth in each time I bring my hand down and when I'm finished the surface is peppered with the indentations of my teeth and a mottled red. I scratch my nails down his back. He's scooting towards my fingers. I flip him over again and try a different kind of torture. I slide my fingers along every inch of skin-ignoring only his cock and the hard nubs of his nipples. His lip is wrenched tightly between his teeth. I pull my fingers down to the inside of his thighs.

"I'm sorry, Tom. Please," he begs.

I line myself up with his tight hole and, with a quick spell to stretch and slick, (contrary to popular belief, I am not a monster) press myself inside roughly.

I watch my length pull in and out of Harry and then lean forward to bury my mouth in his neck.

-Harry-

I kneel on the ground and shake as Tom rocks into me. He slides his tongue down my neck and then follows it with the edge of his teeth. I let loose a loud moan. He nibbles my shoulders and the feeling keeps me grounded while his pumping sends me skyward. Tom pumps and pounds and precum leaks from my cock. Like beats of a drum-an overenthusiastic drum- he hits my prostate. I dig my fingers into the wooden floor and lay my face onto it to muffle the sounds of my pleasure.

Tom slides out of me.

"Sit up, Harry," Tom says.

It's almost a plea. I do what he says and open my mouth to accept what my lover has to offer me. He needs this. *I* need this. I grip his knees to steady myself. He holds the back of my head firmly. I attempt to swallow much more than I am able. His cock pulses. I struggle not to gag. I roll my tongue over the underside of his cock and hum a little. I want him to enjoy this. It's my own plea. I want him to love me. I give myself to him entirely with the next suck. He doesn't notice. I lock eyes with him and cum onto the floor. I give one long, needy suck and he explodes into my mouth. I back off and the second burst covers my cheek. Tom looks down at me; I look up at him.

"I'm not prepared for you to leave me again," I say quietly.

And you aren't making it easier by having sex with me every time I try to go.

I walk over to the bed and mash my face against the pillow. I don't bother to do anything about my cheek before I do. Tom lays down beside me, tucking my body neatly into his embrace.

"I'm not going to leave you again," he says.

He kisses my neck. I turn around and hide my face in his chest. He wraps his arms around me, pressing my body flush against his. I sigh.

"Thank you for putting up with me, Tommy. I'm ridiculous," I mumble.

"You deserve the world. We both do. And I- I'm going to get it for us," he says.

I fall asleep slowly and all at once.

-Lucius-

"Shall we talk?" I ask.

I've wedged myself into the nook where Severus hides from the world. He catalogues ingredients and doesn't pay me the slightest attention.

"Oh, Severus. You never want me around, we never talk, you kissed me and ran yesterday," I say.

"Lucius?" Severus says, "Shut up."

I pull a corked bottle from a row of completed potions. The curving surface gleams a pearly red.

"What's in here?" I ask.

He takes it from me.

"Something deadly. Go away," he says.

I grab hold of his hair, move it out of the way, and press my lips against his neck.

"Tell me," I say.

He pushes me away.

"It's Amortentia," he says.

"It's highly difficult to brew and illegal to use. What would you want with a love potion?" I ask

He shrugs.

"Worked on you, didn't it?" he smirks.

I take it back and allow myself an undignified snort.

"I just wanted to see if I could do it. I want to be a Potions Master," he says.

I pull back and tug at the cork.

"What are you doing, Lucius?" Severus asks.

"Not 'Malfoy' anymore, am I?" I ask.

He makes a nondescript sound. I bring the bottle to my nose and sniff it carefully. I can sense the warm jasmine and mint of shampoo, an earthy smell, and something that isn't so much a smell as a feeling I can't identify. I pop the cork back in and shrug.

"Just curious," I say.

"I don't understand you," he says.

I laugh.

"Tell me, you talked to Potter. What happened?" I ask.

"He forgave me. Didn't think he deserved an apology. I- I don't know why I'm telling you this," he says.

I shrug and put the bottle back in its row. I must've gotten some on my hands because the smell of wood chips and dirt still lingers.

"Because I asked," I say.

"Why *won't* you go away?" Severus asks.

"Because you don't want me to," I say.

He moves all of the bottles out of the way and looks into my eyes.

"Everyone leaves eventually," he says.

I tie his hair up to the side.

"I like seeing your neck," I murmur.

I press my lips against the pale surface. He breathes out. I nip at the place where his collarbone meets his shoulder. I make to push him backwards but his grip on me tightens and he lowers me down.

"You just don't learn, do you?" he says.

He pulls the band from his hair while shaking his head. He grips the sides of my face before tugging my hair into a low ponytail. He follows the curve of my ear with his lips, pressing gently against unexpectedly sensitive flesh.

"Not here, Lucius. Not in a hallway," he says.

"Harry would," I grumble.

Severus's eyes blaze.

"I didn't need to know that," he says.

"Not with me, calm down. You know he's besotted with Tom," I say, "You see I'm still living."

I sigh. This is the perfect moment, but he's unravelling my plans.

And I don't care.

Lilac Skies and Certainly Not Mint

Narcissa's head rests lightly against my shoulder in a minor display of possession as we lounge in the common room. I haven't spent as much time with her as I'd like to because I run the risk of Severus seeing us. *(Because he's better at conversation, is more fun to chase, and is actually of substance)*

I shake my head to clear my thoughts. Even now he might, but at least at this point it might cause the damage Tom is depending on and as the year ends next month, he'll have the summer to stew over it. My shoulder is a bit wet, as she's just washed her hair. *(Where's Severus at? Maybe I could slip away and taunt him into a real conversation.)*

I love the scent of her shampoo. There's a reason I smelled its minty aroma in that love potion of Severus's, after all. She looks up into my eyes, her hair scrunching behind her. I catch a whiff.

Strange...

It isn't quite as strong as I remember it, her shampoo.

"I never see you anymore, Lucius," Narcissa says.

We only ever have the barest of conversations.

"I'm sorry. I've been.." I trail off.

She nods in understanding. Something is off. But what is it?

"How are you doing?" she asks.

(And where is Severus?)

"I'm well," I say.

What is it? She laughs. I raise an eyebrow but smile until she stops. Whichever person was eyeing me has been warned off for another day. She leans in to kiss me.

That.

How couldn't I have noticed it before? Her hair smells like lilac and honey. Not a thing like mint.

"Did you happen to switch shampoos?" I ask.

She wrinkles her nose. Nothing like wood chips, either, but I did assume that was her smell after Herbology.

"No..." she says, "I've been using this since I grew hair. Did you *just* notice?"

This is a complication I did not expect.

“I need to go,” I say.

“What?” she asks.

I stand quickly. Tom. Tom will know what to do. Tom knows how to deal with... I shudder... emotions. He kept himself removed from Macnair all while doing what he had to do. And it worked, didn't it? And maybe-maybe Severus doesn't smell like that either. I sniff at the arm of my robes. *Jasmine*. Maybe the stuff wasn't well made or was packaged in the wrong bottle and I only smelled an old cologne.

Oh, who am I kidding? *Severus* made it. It worked.

Or Harry. *Harry*. Yes, I believe I'm close enough to him to trust him to keep his mouth shut. And Severus is his friend, one of his closest.

“Harry,” I say breathlessly, “what are you doing out here?”

He balances on the ledge of a window, looking out of it with a curious expression on his face. He's wearing a sweater, too large for him, that says “Riddle me this.” I smile at the sight. He turns toward me when I call his name, smiling pensively.

“I don't know,” he says.

He looks down at his toes, covered in fuzzy grey socks, and sighs.

“I have a question. About Severus. About Amortentia,” I say.

He looks at me, interest blazing in his emerald eyes.

“Ask away,” he says.

-Tom-

I cannot believe I'm doing this. It's highly irregular, something I'd never *ever* do. But I *promised*, and for the first time in my life that means something. I promised him I would secure it. He didn't believe me. I'll prove it to him-I'll show him how important his happiness is. If that entails this horrendous act that will surely destroy a piece of me, so be it. I take a deep breath. Steely blue eyes gaze into mine. I don't look directly into them but I can tell-oh, I can tell.

For Harry. This is all for Harry. I smile to myself at the thought of the look on his face when I accomplish this task. I only have four months, give or take, to master it and a majority of those will be spent reading the theory unless I can gain *his* help. I don't want to. I abhor him. But Harry....I will do anything for Harry.

Even this. Especially this.

“Professor Dumbledore, sir,” I say.

Keep your voice steady. Don't let him know just how important this is. He smiles at new. I breathe out.

“ I was reading a book in the library and I came across something curious that I thought you might be able to tell me more about,” I say.

-Harry-

“What do you mean, we're staying with Lucius for the summer?” I ask.

Tom rolls his eyes at me. I smile; he never would've done that before. Too *Muggle*. “I promised you I'd make a way,”he says.

I bite my lip. It just sounds too easy, having him gaining guardianship like that.

“ *Didn't I?* ” he asks.

“You did,” I relent, “but what does that have to do with Malfoy manor?”

“Must we thrust our feelings about this early in the morning?” he sighs.

“It's three in the afternoon,” I say.

“Your point being?” he says while turning a page in the book he. isn't. reading.

“Tom!” I say.

“I have a meeting with Dumbledore. I need to go,” he says.

Again? What could they possibly be doing?

“Answer me!” I say.

He leaves the room. I sigh. He pops his head around the door.

“And is that my sweater?” he asks.

It is, in fact, his sweater. I had it made for him in Diagon Alley because I had some spare change and I thought it'd be funny.

“You never wear it,” I grumble.

More accurately, he only wears it to bed. Nearly every night, but I wanted it to see the light of day just once. And if he knows I've noticed, he won't do it anymore.

He laughs, “Why you bother protesting, I'll never know.”

And then he's gone.

What is that boy planning? Has everyone around me gone mad?

Lucius is sniffing love potions, Tom is being strangely nice and he's been spending a lot of time with the Charms professor and just today he's gone to meet with *Dumbledore*, of all people, Bellatrix is *giggling*. Severus is secretive. Well, actually, that's not so strange. But everyone else has gone *insane*. And I could.. come up with a hobby, I suppose. Because if *we're* going to the Malfoy's, Tom and Lucius will be leaving me alone a lot. I could try knitting. I laugh to myself. Maybe not, but certainly something.

-Lucius-

"I just want to talk. Why are you so difficult?" I ask.

Severus pulls his hand away from mine and turns his head slightly away.

"We talk all the time," he says.

"All right, what's wrong?" I ask.

"Go have your conversation with your girlfriend," Severus snaps.

I frown and reach for him. He steps back.

"I don't have a girlfriend. That's-just appearances," I say.

"Appearances? Sorry, I wasn't aware I wasn't up to snuff," he says hotly, "I *knew*, I knew I shouldn't let you near. You're too close to Riddle, you-all he cares about, seems to, is Harry. He'd never let anyone who hurt but,-no. I have to go," he says.

I step forward and grab his arm, spinning him to face me.

"Stop that, now. I broke that off. Well, I meant.. well, it was an experiment wasn't it?" I ask.

He nods, looking fit to burst.

"Control group?" I say weakly.

He laughs, throwing his head against my shoulder and holding onto me.

"Do you mean it?" he whispers.

He looks up at me. I flick a piece of hair out of his eyes and kiss his forehead.

"Ask Harry. I asked him about you days ago," I say.

I move inward for a kiss. He smiles.

"No, we'll be like them. Go away and I might accept a letter from you this summer," he says.

I smile.

"Severus Snape, you will be my undoing," I say.

He smiles.

“I’ll do my very best,” he says.

Up and Up

Severus,

This summer I'll be expecting you by. At least once.

Lucius

Lucius,

Honestly, did you think that would work?

Severus Snape

-Harry-

I lounge on a sitting chair in my room. Well, I say it's my room-Tom and I have never slept separately, even while arguing, and he comes in most every night to sleep here. Well, I say sleep...

Anyway, after my third day alone I decided I had to pick a hobby of some kind. I've exhausted the Wizarding Pastimes books I bought with my newfound fortune. I suppose it does pay to have a Guardian like Mr. Malfoy, even if Tom probably did something highly unethical to convince him and I'm very lonely. It isn't bad at all to live here. I have an excellent room and less of a structured schedule. Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy are very nice. I sigh and stick my knitting needles into the ball of yarn.

Hobbies. These are easy enough to come by, aren't they? I toss the half completed socks against the wall and watch as they fall onto the pile of Harry's Failed Hobbies. They land on top of a painting of Tom, some plant or another (channeling Neville, I guess), a kite, a book of spells for tattoo making, (though I suppose the ones I managed on my arm before I gave up on being a tattoo artist are kind of interesting) a model car, and a pile of playing cards. It isn't that I was *bad* at any of that stuff the painting is quite good and the socks are comfortable. But none of it captures my interest.

"Why don't you try rock climbing?" Tom asks.

"How long have you been here?" I ask, whirling around.

He sits on the floor next to my- let's be honest, *our* -bed, casually reading a large book. He holds it open on his lap, an attempt to keep me from finding out what the book is about.

"Long enough to watch you steal three pairs of my socks, try on all my sweaters, attempt to knit, and read through six hobby magazines," he says.

“You utter creep!” I say.

“You *stole* my *socks* . Why do you like wearing my clothes so much?” he asks.

I make an indescribable noise.

“They smell like you, okay? You’re not much for cuddling-I’m lonely, I’m bored,” I say.

I wrap my arms tightly around my body so he can’t take *my* sweater (it’s mine now) from me. He looks confused.

“I like to be near you,” I say.

“I’ve been learning to dance,” he says.

I pick at the sleeve of *my* sweater.

“That pile is getting ridiculous, Harry. So I suggest you try rock climbing. It’s Muggle, but it will keep you out, away, and busy while I make a fool of myself. There’s good exercise in it, and Mr. Malfoy suggested it at my last lesson,” he says.

I say nothing.

“I’m sorry, Harry. That you’re...I’m sorry,” he whispers.

It’s barely audible but I stare at him in shock. He might as well have told me he was secretly 40, or confessed his love for me. An apology??

“Mr. Malfoy?” I ask.

I get up and flop onto the bed. The Malfoys are monopolizing my boyfriend. Tom laughs behind me as he climbs onto the bed and pulls me close.

“Are you happy now, you insufferable snit?” Tom asks.

I sigh happily. Salazar, Tom. I think I- I bury my head in the pillow.

“I’ll be meeting with... people often. I don’t want you feeling abandoned,” he says.

“You sap,” I mutter.

I grumble into my pillow. He kisses my shoulder.

“I-Well, that is to say, I- I’m..sorry,” he says.

He’s never been at a loss for words before. I wish I could just force the words out of my mouth but instead I say,

“I’ll do it.”

-Lucius-

“Why am I here?” Severus asks.

“I assume it is because I invited you over,” I say.

He touches the arm of the couch and looks at me with guarded eyes.

“I meant, why did you invite me here, why did I agree? You got your revenge on me, Harry’s honor is defended, I learned my lesson and all- I forgave you, and I’m sure Narcissa Black will in time,” he drawls.

I nod my head, both in acknowledgement and assent. All of this is true, though I have no desire to go back to Narcissa.

“Why am I here?” he asks again.

He stands next to the couch, rather than sitting on it. I smile softly. His stoic dungeon master disguise fades when I look at him.

“Because it’s you I smell in Amortentia,” I say.

He tenses, a quick pulse. His eyes cloud with disbelief.

“Don’t...” he says.

“I didn’t know, that is, I assumed-” I say.

“I don’t need you to tell me you wish it wasn’t true. I know,” he says.

I shake my head.

“I’m delighted it’s you,” I say.

His eyes are still skeptical.

“I love you, Severus Tobias Snape. It stopped being a ploy months ago, maybe the first time you refused me. I love you and I’m quickly falling in love with you,” I say.

“I..I don’t know what to say,” he says.

He sits. I cup his face and press my lips against his. I look into his eyes as I tug his robes over his head.

“Say..say something,” I whisper.

“But what?” he asks.

I reach for his hair, pushing it out of his eyes. I do so love it when he wears his hair up. (A thing that only happens when I physically tie it up myself)

-Sev-

I pull on Lucius's shirt to pull him down to me. He's just too tall, it isn't fair at all. He grabs my waist and chuckles into my mouth before carrying me up the stairs, most likely to his bedroom. Which I allow for convenience's sake. Of course.

He plops me down onto the downy comforter.

"You really should wear your hair up more often" he says as she covers my body with his own.

He kisses my cheek. Am I honestly going to let him- I tighten my knees around him and flip us over. My hands rest on either side of his shoulders. No, no Malfoy. If I'm going to let my guard down, *I'm* going to let my guard down. I straddle him and tug off my robes. We separate only long enough to let the rest of our clothes fall away, then I reclaim my throne.

"Lucius," I say, "I know what to say."

He leans his neck forward to taste my lips.

"I love you too," I moan.

I grind my hips against his. His eyes widen in surprise, as though he wasn't expecting me to touch him.

"Did I come to the right conclusion?" I tease, ignoring the catch in my voice.

"I don't know. Did you?" he asks.

I kiss him again, holding his lips to mine until he pulls away panting before diving in to chase my tongue with his. My hand slips between us and I squeeze his cock appreciatively.

"Don't be cute," I say.

He pants heavily. A little moan falls from his lips. I let my hand follow the length of his cock slowly. He grabs at my back. I smile against his neck. He tilts back his head.

"Get on your knees," I say.

-Lucius-

Severus grabs my waist and guides me into the position he wants. He spreads my cheeks and whistles softly. I squirm and wonder about whether or not purebloods should bottom when *oh*. His tongue trails a wet line down my crack. A noise slips out of my lips. Composure, dammit. He covers my hole with his lips and sucks. I quiver.

"I've always been a quick study," he murmurs in a low voice while easing a finger inside of me. My arms refuse to hold my weight any longer. I rest on my elbows. A fierce blush spreads through my skin. Such a debauched position I've found myself in. He pushes his finger in deeper. I bite my lip but fail to conceal the squeak that escapes me. He puts in another finger and moves both of them quickly. I pant. He licks my asscheek while adding another finger. I sigh.

“You make pretty sounds, Lucius,” Severus says.

“Need you,” I groan.

His other hand moves down to stroke the inside of my thigh. He reclaims his fingers.

“Please,” I whisper.

“And you beg nicely too? Oh, Lucius, I could eat you up,” he says.

And then something much bigger than fingers, much bigger and warmer and much more Severus is pressing against me. He lines himself up and begins to push in. I cry out. He grips my cock tightly and licks my shoulder blade. I forget the pain momentarily and moan. He pushes in father. It. Hurts. Why is this Tom's preferred method of Harry control? Severus moans loudly. Maybe it feels better for him. But then..... why does it make Harry stay around? He thrusts up to the hilt. I scream and his hand starts pumping on my cock. *That's why.*

“Mmmmove,” I say.

And he does. He puts one hand on my hip and winds my hair around the other and he fucks me. That's a way to describe it, isn't it? He fills me so completely that I forget any discomfort or embarrassment. I am apparently rather vocal. Learning things about myself every day, I suppose. He pulls me back up to my hands by my hair and tugs until I turn to kiss him. I know now what I meant by Butterbeer. He tastes the way it feels, fizzy and golden and exciting. Wonderful in excess even though you shouldn't.

He slides out of me.

“Noo,” I whimper.

“I want to try something,” he says.

He beckons me off the bed and against a wall. My hands claw against it as he enters me again. My face lies against the wall. My knees are weak but I ignore them to keep pushing, keep feeling like this.

“I'm close,” he says.

I respond with an inhuman noise and push off the wall to force him to go faster, deeper. He shudders delightfully and grips my hips hard. It'll bruise, I know. I don't mind.

“C..cum for me,” I beg.

He latches his mouth onto my shoulder and howls in his release. I turn around and lower him to the floor. I'd like to sit too. My legs shake.

“You,” he pants.

“Me?” I ask.

He rolls his eyes and reaches for my leaking cock. He essentially impales himself on it. I fling my head backwards. He's quite the master with his tongue.

I've decided that Severus should no longer attempt a Master's in Potions, because he is much too good at Skullfuckery and *Salazar*, that tongue. I attempt to tell him but all that comes out is

“Salazar, tongue- *fuck*, ” before I curl my toes and thrust into his mouth. He lets me go and I crumple to the floor beside him.

He sighs contentedly and reaches for me before laying on the floor in a little ball. I smile at his sleepy figure and figure we can shower before dinner.

Couldn't Love You More

Wind whips through my hair and I blow it out of my eyes while the wizard snaps me into my harness. Turns out rock climbing isn't as Muggle as Tom assumed it was. He tugs the straps tightly. I laugh, for no reason other than to have something to do that isn't panicking. Why did I let Tom talk me into *rock climbing*, of all things?

“Do you want to tie your hair up before we start?” the wizard asks.

It isn't really a question. I reach around my wrist and pull my hair into a low bun type apparatus. He fastens the helmet under my chin. My grip tightens on the face of the mountain. Well, more of a large cliff, really. A very *very* large cliff. Am I insane? We've about grown out of using the Houses as descriptors, of thinking only those people are capable of doing certain things, but this is the most *Gryffindor* of acts, so entirely Gryffindor the snake on my shirt ought to peel off and flee from the impostor that I am.

I pull myself up, feeling the light burn in my arms. This is going to be difficult.

I throw myself onto the bed beside Tom and groan.

“Must you do this every time?” he asks.

“*You* suggested rock climbing, Thomas. Don't be rude to me,” I say with my face buried in the pillow.

He rolls over and places his hand on my shoulder.

“I heard none of that,” he says fondly.

I whip my head towards him.

“Don't be *nice* to me,” I say.

He rolls his eyes and smiles, drumming his fingers along my collarbone.

“Make up your mind,” Tom says.

“Okay, maybe you can be a little nice to me,” I pout.

He pulls my hand to his mouth and bites my finger.

“What about a little mean?” he whispers.

I flush and sputter.

“Won't you make up your mind?” he teases.

“It's a difficult thing,” I grumble.

He lets our intertwined hands fall between us.

“My dance lessons are complete. Tomorrow we will go to Diagon Alley,” he says.

“Oh.”

“Have I mentioned I enjoy these, these tattoos on your arm?” he asks.

“Failed hobby,” I mutter.

He kisses my arm.

“Nothing you do is a failure to me,” he says.

I blush and fall off the bed.

“You aren't Tom!” I accuse.

He chuckles darkly.

“I could prove it to you. Come a little closer,” he says.

I smile and climb onto the bed.

“There you are,” I say.

-Tom-

“What do you mean, you can't finish the plan?” I ask.

“Do you really care about that anymore? You haven't checked on it in months,” Lucius says.

I look at him.

“I let him claim me,” he says.

“What does that-Lucius what are you talking about?” I ask.

“That is my definition of... of affection. When you need someone the way I need him. To let yourself be completely vulnerable, to lose control, to make yourself truly equal. To give them the ability to break your heart and leave you like you left so many-that's trust. That's how you begin to love. You asked me once how you love someone. That is how, how I do it.

“It's always been Harry, only Harry,” I say.

Is he trying to say that I'm incapable of loving Harry because I haven't taken it up the ass? That's an elementary viewpoint. Isn't it?

“I *love* Harry,” I say through gritted teeth.

“Does anyone know that but you?” Lucius asks.

Harry does. He *does*. I don't answer him. He nods shortly and walks away.

He isn't right. Harry *knows* . And I'll make absolutely certain that he never forgets.

-Harry-

“Where are we going, Tom?” I ask.

His grip on my hand tightens but he says nothing. He pulls me down a little alley and opens the door of a shop.

“What's this place?” I ask.

“That stupid Gryffindor had an idea, I suppose. But I'm going to do it properly,” he says.

I follow his gaze to the wing glittering above the edge of my sock. A tattoo?

“A tattoo?” I ask.

“i have to stare at that snitch every night, the one that is specifically for *him* . I thought I could buy one for you-that is, if you want another, “he says.

I fling my arms around Tom's neck and kiss him.

“That was a question! A proper question, not rhetorical or anything!”I shout.

“Yes....”he says.

“Yes!” I say.

A witch pops around the corner.

“Congratulations,” she says.

I blink at her in confusion. Tom pats my arm after she's gone.

“She thinks I proposed,” he says flatly.

I bite my lip, disappointed.

“What's wrong?” Tom asks.

I shake my head.

“Nothing. A tattoo?” I say.

We make our way into the shop. I sit on a chair. The witch from before comes over to talk to me.

“What a lovely couple,” she says.

“Thank you,” I say.

She smiles.

“What will you be wanting?” she asks.

Tom steps in front of me.

“I have a drawing, here,” he says.

An hour and a half later we're walking out, hand in hand.

“Can I see it?” I ask.

“It's your body,” Tom says, “though the location would cause you to flash passersby.”

I look down at my robes. Yes, I would have to pick up the whole thing if I wanted to see it.

“Take me home?” I say.

He smiles in a predatory manner.

“Of course,” he says.

Tom presses me against the headboard and kisses me soundly. I sigh into his mouth. I go to make my way down to Tom's leaking erection.

“Wait, Harry,” he says.

“Wait? For what?” I ask.

He slides his hands down my body and follows them closely with his mouth. I stare directly at him, unable to see anything else but the way he touches his fingertips to my hip and smiles gently. He's shaking. I reach for his hand and kiss it gently. I'm unsure of what's going on, but Tom seems anxious. He picks up my cock with his other hand and looks at it with wide eyes. The room is quiet but for our breath. He brings his lips to the shaft and lightly lets them graze the surface. I sigh happily. I release his hand. He sticks his tongue out, like he's unsure of quite what to do with it. He's looking directly into my eyes. I smile at him encouragingly.

“Am I doing this right?” he whispers.

“What?” I ask.

He's admitting he's worried? Making himself vulnerable to me? Needless to say, I am now a pile of mush.

I nod my head and gently stroke his cheek.

He traces the veins in my cock with his tongue slowly and deliberately. I bite my lip. Just when I think it can't get any better he takes it into his mouth. I moan loudly. He's brilliant, truly and completely brilliant. I shudder and shake my way to a noisy orgasm. Tom licks the residue off of his hands.

“You are my life, Tom Riddle,” I say.

He smiles at me, wiping his other hand off on the sheets and adjusting his underwear.

“No, let me,” I say.

I pull his hand to my mouth and suck his fingers clean. He lies against me. I lay my head on his shoulder.

“I couldn't stand to let you go,” I say.

He kisses my forehead.

“Neither could I,” he says.

Gotta Get Back to Hogwarts

Chapter Notes

I know, I'm terrible. I'm sorry it took so long and I will be getting out one chapter of Complicated Love Shapes and Far Too Many Nights this weekend.

"You have an unhealthy obsession with potions ingredients," Bella says.

"I have no such thing," Sev says.

I laugh, "Whatever you say."

We stand in front of the Apothecary. Sev's gaze is bordering on reverent.

"It's just a *building*," Bella says.

He shakes his head. A wizard grabs a woman's hand and tries to pull her close. She slaps him and rushes away.

"I could skin him," she mutters.

"Please don't. I'd rather you didn't go to Azkaban," I say casually.

"Just a little hex?" she asks.

I sing, "*Azkaba-an*."

Sev tries once more to pull us into the apothecary, his hand almost touching the door.

"Can't we please go last? It smells like bugs in there," I say.

"Bugs don't smell-" he begins.

I roll my eyes and wander away. I adore Diagon Alley. It's beautiful and vast and breathtaking. Bella and I walk into an ice cream shoppe. There's so many places that either didn't exist any more while I was in my original time or that I never noticed. This place isn't Florean's, but I like it that way. Bella's looking at the list of flavors, her pinky resting on her bottom lip. How *does* she manage to look so enthusiastic without skipping? I shrug my shoulders and order treacle.

"It's our fifth year," I say.

Bella smiles at me.

“I know. I made prefect,” she says.

“Did you really? Hiding talents from me?” I ask.

She sticks out her tongue.

“Who did you blackmail?” I ask.

She flicks me with her spoon.

“I am extremely intelligent,” she says.

“Your knowledge of effective threats *is* impressive, though I’m not sure that’s quite prefect material,” I say.

We carry our little cups of ice cream into Flourish and Blotts.

“Good job, Bellatrix. I’m proud of you,” I say.

Her ears turn pink.

I stick my spoon into my mouth and pull a book off of the shelf. The ice cream itself is gone, but the spoon is smooth against the roof of my mouth. Severus walks around the bookcase and sets a box of beetles in front of me while he adjusts his bag of ingredients.

I wince.

He looks down at them, then back to me and smirks.

“What?” he says.

“Are those *living* ?” I ask.

Bella peers at them, her wild hair falling just into the box.

“They’re clearly moving, dolt,” Severus says.

I wrinkle my nose. Bella calmly pulls a beetle out of her hair and places it back into the box.

“What kind of potion requires live beetles?” I ask.

While comfortable with spiders, ants, and the like I’ve never liked beetles. Or creepy, crawling things. I pull my snake necklace into my mouth. The metal is cool against my tongue. I trace the diamonds. Surely not the purpose Tom intended for it, but I’m not too concerned with that.

“Don’t worry about it, Harry,” Bella says.

I fling backwards onto my bed while I wait for Tom to get back from his prefect duties. I'm still not quite sure what he does as a prefect, but it gives me time to take off my necklace and compare it to my tattoo. I know that it's a perfect match, after all Tom drew it as a "permanent reminder of a promise for permanence" or something like that. *I* think he's been talking to Bellatrix too much. I trace my finger across my hipbone, letting the tips graze the black snake curling eternally around a bright purple rose, forming a reptilian infinity. My other hand clutches the black and silver snake that's twisted its way into an infinity sign, biting its tail as a circle that never ends.

I sigh, my hand falling lower, and shut my eyes.

"Hmm," I breathe.

"Harry," Balthazar says.

I yank my hand back and groan.

"Yes?" I hiss.

"Hogsmeade weekend coming up," he says.

"Really Bal? Now ? All summer you've hardly mentioned this. Last week you went to bond with snakes in the Forbidden Forest. And now you want to talk?" I say.

He shakes his head.

"Did you have fun?" I ask.

"You should ask Tom," he says.

I know immediately what he's talking about. I refasten my necklace and adjust my robes. Apparently that's not going to happen right now. I swallow my frustration.

"In public? You're kidding," I say.

He nips my finger. I sigh. I suppose that wouldn't be the worst thing that's ever happened to me. And that's how I find myself, violently biting my lip and fighting my own blood to stop its rise to my cheeks, in a hallway full of students and one Albus Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling merrily.

"Do you want to go to Hogsmeade with me, Tom? I mean, if you don't, that's fine but-" I ramble.

"Harrison, dear, do you honestly think I'd refuse you? No need for embarrassment," he says.

He reaches for my face and smiles at me. This is.. unexpected. He's just so tall. I knew he was taller than me but I didn't notice just how much until I had to pull his face down to mine. But I don't mind. We aren't hiding anymore. We're going to Hogsmeade. I guess Tom got tired of being prefecterly. I laugh. That's a word. Everyone carries on their business, because i know they noticed. The noticing is all I need. Everyone knows he's mine, all mine.

“I love you, Tom Riddle. Don't you dare forget,” I say.

Can't Say It Loud Enough

-Harry-

“Good morning, Harry,” Lucius says.

I wipe at my eyes and frown.

“What’re you doing here?” I ask.

“You’re going to Hogsmeade today, lazy,” he says.

“We’re not friends,” I groan.

“Harry, you are a very strange person,” he replies.

I pull myself from the bed.

“People are going to give you things today. Don’t lose them,” Lucius says.

I stare at him.

“Why?” I ask.

“Just don’t lose them,” he says.

He slides a crown on flowers onto my head, smiles at me, and adds,

“Don’t be late.”

The entire event is so bizarre that I wear the crown downstairs. As it’s the first Hogsmeade weekend of the year, everyone waits for the third years to be waved through.

“Harry!” Bellatrix says.

“Hi, Bella,” I say.

She stands on her tiptoes and half tosses a wreath of lavender onto my head. I laugh.

“Why?” I ask as I catch it and place it properly on my head.

She shrugs.

“Have fun in Hogsmeade,” she says.

“Have you seen Tom?” I ask.

She shakes her head.

“Go to Honeydukes,” she says, and then she’s gone.

My friends are being quite strange today.

I’m wandering around Honeydukes, touching things on the shelves and trying to pretend I don’t look like I’m waiting for someone. Where *is* he? I thought we were going to Hogsmeade *together* .

“Looking for someone?” a voice asks.

I turn around.

“Sev, hi!” I say.

He hands me a wreath of olive leaves and ivy.

“What?” I say.

He laughs.

“Go to the Three Broomsticks,” he says.

“What?” I say again.

He hugs me tightly.

What?

Severus Snape does not hug people. It just does not happen.

I could not be less confused when I stumble my way into the Three Broomsticks. Tom hands me a Butterbeer and gives me a large, open smile.

“Why don’t we run away?” Tom asks.

“Because of all of those *obligations* and *responsibilities* you’re always on about. Aren’t I supposed to be the ridiculous one?” I say.

He kisses my forehead, knocking the wreaths slightly askew, and takes hold of my hand.

“We’re going to leave right now,” he says.

He grabs my hand and tugs me into the Floo. We slide neatly into the stately room we share at Malfoy Manor. We walk out of the door and down the street. I give up my protests and allow myself to be led. We walk into the garden behind the house and into the field. Tom retrieves yet another wreath of flowers-baby’s breath and Queen Anne’s lace- and stacks it onto my head. Even though they’re mostly thin and woven with tiny flowers I fear I’ll look like I’m wearing a garden soon if he doesn’t stop. And I’m confused. What on Earth is Tom doing? He won’t answer my questions. He’s not talking anymore.

“Tom?” I say.

He hands me a purple rose and holds onto the stem so tightly that his fingers bleed.

His eyes catch on mine. He looks...worried. What is he worried about? What are we running from?

I place my hand on his and give him a soft smile.

Then the world is lost as I'm yanked by my bellybutton to a distant location. The flower was a Portkey?

I take the rose from him and smile.

"Don't hurt yourself," I say.

Abraxas Malfoy scowls in greeting.

"Muggle neighborhood, boys?" He says with a crinkled nose, "Well, good luck, Riddle."

He cracks a rare smile and pats Tom on the back.

What? What?

He ruffles my hair and then Apparates away.

...what?

The stars are sparkling above me in the inky black night. He walks toward the orphanage where I first saw his face.

"What are you doing, Tom? We don't live here anymore," I say.

He brushes his thumb over mine.

"We can't break into an *orphanage* !" I say.

But I follow him anyway, through the window and into the room we once shared. No children sleep there, which is good for us. I wonder if it's only ever been Tom who was hidden away here.

Well, and me.

Tom reaches into the folds of the bedcovers and grabs another wreath.

"Come outside," he says.

I must say, the security is beyond lax. Even after climbing through the window and clomping through the building, no one comes to confront us.

We could theoretically just run off with some child.

Not that we *would* , but it could happen.

He takes me toward the brick wall where I cried about my sorry lot so many years ago.

“Tom, are you going to explain this?” I ask.

“Just...wait,” Tom says.

I look at him in confusion.

“Wait? For what?” I ask.

Balthazar slithers in, wearing a wreath of his own. He tilts his head towards me. I take it and loop it around my wrist with a laugh.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

Balthazar sticks his tongue out at me.

Sure, he’s a snake, but I stand by that statement.

Five wreaths balance on my head in an uneven stack. I hold onto them with the hand holding my rose.

“Do you...” Tom says.

He’s..shaking?

“Do you have seven pieces, then?” he asks.

I quickly count and nod.

Seven .

That number sparks a flame in my memory. I have seven pieces. What are they for?

“Okay. Okay, how to say this. I’m not...good. They say that you can’t love someone without loving yourself. And that’s false. That’s- I have never thought anything of myself. But you... Harrison, you are special. You changed me,” he says.

Tears well up in my eyes. He- he. This is a cruel joke or a beautiful dream. I’ve never known him to have difficulty speaking.

“And I know I’m awful. That I make you cry. You’re- you’re crying now,” he says, slightly panicked.

I wave my hand.

“I’m fine,” I say.

“But you love me anyway. And I do. Merlin, I love you. I want to get to do that forever. I-” he says.

“You will, I love you,” I say.

He starts crying then. I’ve never seen- I didn’t know he could...

“I don't question myself, never worry about others, never am at a loss for words. I don't apologize. I never care about others- I don't care. I don't beg. I don't have friends. I don't fall in love,”he says.

I nod. You won't scare me away, Tom.

“But you-Harry, with you. I am in love with you, Harrison James Potter. I am in love with you the way the Sun rises and sets each day, inevitably, eternally, consistently. I am in love with you the way that the seasons change.

You make me want to do better things, to be a better person,” he says.

Tears fall freely from my eyes.

“Will you marry me?” Tom asks.

He swirls the wreaths into one and weaves the rose in-between it before talking his wand against it. A small purple circle lays in his palm.

“I've never... never had to ask, never had to share. But *please* Harry. Share your life with me,”he whispers.

I take the ring from him and slide it onto my finger.

“Tommy, you sap,” I say.

He laughs, his eyes wet.

“Of course I will,” I smile.

“Silly Muggle tradition, really,” he mutters

I press my lips against his.

Oh, Hermione, if you could see me now.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tom pulls Ruby into his lap and gently tugs on her ponytail.

"Loveable Muggable," he says as he peppers her face with kisses.

She wrinkles her nose and pushes him away.

"Dad," she groans.

"Thomas Riddle, I told you not to call her that anymore," I say.

Harrison Riddle, you told Bellatrix quite the opposite just yesterday," he quips back.

I smile.

"Your father is ridiculous, Ruby Jean," I say.

"You're both insane. Can I go back inside? Dora said she'd firecall me when she got her new broom," she replies.

I sigh loudly. She rolls her eyes.

"I have to see it, Papa. She said her mom might spring for a Nimbus," she says.

"If you must," I say.

She twists and looks pointedly at Tom until he releases her.

"You're too much like your father," Tom says as Ruby brushes off her skirt and flounces inside.

I roll my eyes and lean against the chair.

Actually, it shocks me how well Ruby mirrors us. Twelve years ago, when we walked into the first wizarding orphanage and found that little muggleborn girl. She was so quiet, so

reserved. I thought we might have trouble understanding her, connecting with her, even with who we are. But she's so similar to us both.

Tom is an amazing father. He thinks I don't know it, like it's some big secret, but he keeps a stash of Disney Princess Band-Aids just for the satisfaction of cleaning her wounds for her. I

suppose I'm not supposed to know this either, but he sings to her at night. She told me she'd grown out of being tucked in. I guess I'm just not the favorite anymore.

"The Malfoys are coming over still," Tom says.

I smile. He deserves the spot.

-Sev-

I lie in my bed with my eyes closed. The sun streams against my face, trying to coax me awake. I have to use the restroom, but I've found a spot on the bed where everything is warm.

The space beside me is mercifully empty and I have the entire bed to myself, which means I can utilize the entirety of the covers, a rare thing. I've never felt the need to sleep in before,

but I recognize the appeal now.

"Se-ver-uss," I hear.

I close my eyes more tightly and groan when a heavy weight presses on my chest.

"Lucius, I'm sleeping," I grumble.

"No you aren't. I have it on good authority sleeping people are rarely so responsive," he says.

I swat at him without opening my eyes.

"Your hair is in my mouth," I say.

"The Riddles are expecting us," he says.

"For dinner!" I groan.

"Get up!" he says as he rolls off of me and leaves the room.

The house is filled with the smell of coffee and those scones he's been so fond of. I stomp off to the bathroom as loudly as possible.

Lucius comes in with my clothes in his hand and a scone in his mouth while I brush my teeth.

Toothpaste slips to the corner of my mouth. Lucius kisses my nose.

"You're cute when you're grumpy," he says.

I growl. He squeezes my butt.

"You loove me," he sings.

"Of course I'll just bow and scrape at your feet, husband," I say.

He tugs on my earlobe and kisses my cheek.

"Fancy a scone?" he asks.

-Harry-

"Remind me again why I let you have a party the night before we left for Romania?" Tom asks.

I kiss his nose.

"Because you love me," I say.

"The night all of our house elves went on vacation?" Tom grumbles as he stirs a batch of cookies.

"It builds character," I say.

"I have enough of that, what I need is-" Tom says.

I slam my hands enthusiastically into the meatloaf.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

"Kneading the ingredients, what do you need?" I say.

He shakes his head.

Moments like these make me miss Hogwarts. 1940s Hogwarts, that is. Teasing Tom was always more fun when Bal was around, and Severus. But snakes don't live very long and people move on.

"You're wistful," Tom says.

"Where's Ruby?" I ask.

He calls for her. Loudly. She stumbles down the stairs, all cheer and a suspicious amount of glitter.

"Rube- what were you doing?" I ask.

"Nothing!" she says.

Too quickly. I raise my eyebrows.

"So do you need help making cookies?" she asks.

I stare at her.

"I'm good at it," she says.

Tom smiles.

"Yes, I'm afraid I'm not very good at it," he says.

I look over at him and the flour on his forehead. We all collapse into laughter before the easy silence of cooking together settles in.

"I've missed you. How've you been?" I ask.

"Well Rodolphus and I have been traveling. I think he wants to be an Auror, but he won't tell me. Just lots of him meeting new people to duel with and us lounging around. We're having a baby," Bella says.

"That's great!" I exclaim.

She smiles.

"How's Ruby?" she asks.

"Ruby's great. She's been up in her room doing something involving glitter, but she won't tell me what it is," I say.

Bella smiles.

"That's my girl," she says.

"Then you can clean up the mess!" I say.

We both laugh.

Tom and Lucius stand off in the corner looking stiff. I walk to them.

"What's the matter, Tom? Too many people who aren't set on world domination?" I say.

He reaches for my hand.

"You could say. I find I'm a bit out of touch with the current gossip and Quidditch game. I'm a political man," he says.

"You're a bore. Lucius, surely you can liven him up?" I say.

Lucius laughs.

"I'll do my best, Harry. Don't you let us old men get you down," he says.

I laugh and tap his shoulder lightly. My arms are lifted up as I'm hugged from behind.

"Who is this?" I say.

"Papa, I made you something," Ruby says.

"Hello, little missus. May I see it?" I say.

She hands it to me and holds my waist tightly. As I suspected, there's an excess of glitter.

"Thank you. I love your paintings. I hope you didn't get any on the carpet," I say.

"I didn't," she says.

"Go put this somewhere safe for me, okay?" I say.

She runs off.

Tom smiles at me. I hit his arm.

"Oh, hush. It's you who'll have to clean it up if she made a mess," I say.

His smile fades and I laugh.

Chapter End Notes

Well, it's been a long ride. I really hope you enjoyed my story. Feel free to send me prompts and messages! I'd love for you to check out my other stories!!!

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