

**the pleasure, the privilege**

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# the pleasure, the privilege

by [asterismal \(asterisms\)](#)

## Summary

It begins with Vernon Dursley's body, dead across the table.

*In which Voldemort is dosed with amortentia, and nothing is better for it.*

## Notes

### **Prompt:**

through a series of mishaps, voldemort is dosed with amortentia.

the amortentia that harry potter had made for extra credit in sixth-year potions.

voldemort's obsession with harry takes on a new definition :heybby:

title is from the song: there is a light that never goes out, specifically the sara lov cover

# Chapter 1

They're in the Great Hall when it happens.

Even before it happens, Harry knows that something is... wrong.

Beside him, Hermione is laughing at a story Ron is telling, snorting between laughs in a way that has Ron's ears turning red with pleasure. Further down the table, Ginny and Dean are holding court with the fifth years, and Neville is smiling as he tries and fails to focus on his Transfiguration reading for today.

This moment hangs in the air, tilting, warping at its edges. Behind his eyes, there's a rioting mass, clamoring for his attention. For days, now, it's been growing. Desperation that is not his own turns to glee, and between breaths, the scene changes.

A break, the crack of displaced air.

Where there was once a feast, a body lies.

There's a moment of silence as realization spreads, and then the screaming starts.

All around him, the Gryffindors scramble to get away from the table, falling onto the floor in their haste. Harry... doesn't. He's too busy staring.

He *knows* this body.

Half-naked on the table, Vernon Dursley looks smaller in death than he ever did in life. His face is frozen in a mask of terror. His neck is cut, and his tongue has been removed. In his chest, there is a cavern where his heart used to be.

In the empty space, lavender and edelweiss flowers bloom.

*"SILENCE."*

The echo of Dumbledore's shout is enough to send Harry's mind spinning. All around him, he can hear the whispers of people guessing who the body used to be. Somewhere behind him, he thinks he hears someone crying.

Ron grips him by the shoulder and pulls him away from the bench. Another hand, Hermione's, slips into his own, and he holds tight.

He can't take his eyes off the body.

He thinks he should be horrified, or... sad, maybe. But he feels nothing.

He feels empty.

As if from very far away, he hears the sound of Dumbledore's voice, commanding the prefects to lead the students to their common rooms. Ron and Hermione are reluctant to leave him, he knows. But they do, and he's left alone in the middle of the hall.

He turns to follow them, but before he can, Dumbledore wraps a heavy arm around his shoulders and leads him away, toward his office. He can hear McGonagall following, her familiar footsteps loud against the stone floor, and Snape is likely close behind.

Harry lets himself be led.

He can't get the sight out of his head. He wonders if Aunt Petunia was there when it happened. Or Dudley.

It's this thought alone that sends a pang through his chest. He hopes Dudley didn't see.

He blinks, and they're in Dumbledore's office.

"Look at me, Harry," Dumbledore is saying, his good hand gripping Harry's neck and holding his head upright.

Harry does as commanded, and he feels the slip of legilimency before he closes his eyes, something like anger burrowing deep in his chest. He doesn't know what's going through his mind right now, but it's his. He doesn't want anyone else to see. "It's me, professor," he says, and his voice is hoarse, as if he's been screaming. "Just me."

"I'm sorry, my boy." Dumbledore finally releases him, presses a hand to his shoulder as he stands. "I had to be sure."

Harry opens his eyes again, because if he keeps them closed he thinks he might lose himself forever in the space behind them, but he keeps his gaze trained on the floor. "Right."

"Who was that, Potter?" Snape demands, as if Vernon Dursley wasn't a regular feature of the memories Snape took such joy in dredging up during their lessons.

Harry clenches his jaw, looks to the empty perch in the corner instead of answering. "Where's Fawkes?" he hears himself ask.

Dumbledore furrows his brows, turns his head to follow Harry's gaze. "Hunting for berries, I'd imagine," he says, and Harry nods.

He can practically *feel* the glare Snape must be aiming his way at being ignored. On any other day, he might find some satisfaction in it. Now, satisfaction sounds like too much work. "It was my uncle," he finally says. He looks into Dumbledore's eyes again, before Snape can ask another question. "Has anyone checked on Aunt Petunia? Or Dudley?"

Dumbledore's gaze flits to McGonagall over Harry's shoulder, and Harry hears the click of her shoes as she heads for the door, likely to do just that.

"Are you alright, Harry?" Dumbledore asks after a beat.

Harry shrugs. It's a stupid question, but he doesn't say that.

"Yeah." He scuffs his shoes against the stone floor. There's a hole in one of them, and his toes are cold. "I'm fine."

Snape grunts, as if to protest before he thinks better of it.

When Harry peeks over his shoulder at his dour professor, the man looks profoundly uncomfortable. When he catches Harry looking, he glares, but he doesn't say anything. He doesn't even sneer.

"It was Voldemort, wasn't it," Harry says.

It isn't a question.

But it hangs in the air like one anyway. Neither Snape nor Dumbledore wants to confirm what they all know to be true.

Then the door to Dumbledore's office opens again, and McGonagall steps back inside.

"The house has burned down," she says, her voice brisk, firm but not unkind, as if she understands that it hurts more when they try to break the news gently. "Neither Petunia nor Dudley Dursley has been found."

"But you're looking," Harry says, because he needs it to be true.

"Yes, Mr. Potter," his professor tells him. She rests a hand on his shoulder; it's warm. "We're looking."

## Chapter 2

Four days later, his aunt and cousin have yet to be found.

When Harry leaves his dorm early one morning, too wired to stay in bed even though he doubts anyone else will be awake at this hour, he learns why.

In the center of the Gryffindor common room, hanging in midair with her arms crossed over her chest, is Petunia Dursley. She looks pale in the dim light of the early morning sun. Translucent. Like she's been drained of blood. And she has been, Harry realizes as he casts a light over the scene. What must be thousands of deep, red beads glitter in the air around her.

They orbit her frozen body, shifting through the air to a beat that echoes the one in his chest.

He moves closer, stunned by the picture her body makes.

She looks... *magical*. She looks like everything she ever hated.

His mind catches up to him, then, and he sets the fireplace alight before summoning a patronus, sending it off to alert the professors. While he waits for them to arrive, he sinks to sit cross-legged on the floor, watching her blood move.

McGonagall is the first to arrive.

"Oh, Merlin," she says faintly, pressing a hand to her chest.

When she spies Harry on the ground, looking up at the spectacle of his aunt's body, she looks so sad that Harry stands and joins her by the entrance, taking the hand she offers him.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Potter," she tells him. Her grip is firm, but her voice is soft. "I'm sorry we couldn't save your family."

Harry swallows down the sudden lump in his throat.

It's strange, he thinks, blinking back tears that burn. It's strange that he's more upset at being comforted than he was by the body.

Dumbledore is the next to arrive, and the expression on his face when he sees Aunt Petunia's blood in the air is so full of despair that Harry has to look away. He feels guilty, almost. She's his aunt, but out of everyone here, he's the least affected.

It hits him, then, that Dudley is an orphan now. Just like him.

He thinks he might throw up, but he doesn't.

He wants to ask if they've stopped looking for his cousin. He wants to beg them to look again if they have.

Snape and Madam Pomfrey are the next to arrive, and Harry lets Madam Pomfrey usher him toward one of the plush armchairs and fuss over him as the others try to figure out how to deal with the body without disturbing the blood. He watches them over Madam Pomfrey's shoulder, and as Petunia Dursley's blood bursts into sudden flames, something foreign presses into the back of his mind.

He thinks about telling them. He thinks about putting this burning euphoria into words.

But he can't.

So he doesn't.

Every day, the fear of what might be sent next gets worse.

Ron and Hermione try to help, and sometimes they even succeed. But before long, his thoughts always stray, and he loses himself again.

"What the hell is his problem, anyway?" Ron demands one night as he paces back and forth in front of the grand fireplace in the Room of Requirement. "I mean, we all know he's fucked up, you've gotta be to become a Dark Lord, but *this*?"

Hermione casts a worried look Harry's way over the pages of her book, but Harry doesn't mind Ron's anger. It's nice, actually. Ever since his uncle's body popped into existence on the Gryffindor table, it's like everyone has been walking on eggshells around him, just waiting for him to snap.

But not Ron.

"I mean, really. Does he think he can scare you off?" Ron scoffs. "Not bloody likely."

At this, Harry frowns. He hasn't shared his theory with anyone else, but the more he thinks about it, the stronger this certainty becomes. "I don't think Voldemort's trying to scare me," he says, and if he sounds nervous it's because he is. "I think they're... gifts."

Both Ron and Hermione pause what they're doing to stare at him.

"Are you—?" Hermione exchanges a wide-eyed look with Ron before turning back to Harry, frowning. "What do you mean, *gifts*?"

Harry shrugs, picking at a loose thread on his sweater. "Exactly what it sounds like."

"Ugh, gross," Ron says, nose scrunched up in disgust. "Who sends dead bodies as gifts?"

"I don't know," Harry says, defensive. "But if anyone was going to do it, I imagine Voldemort would be pretty high on the list."

Hermione snaps her book shut. “But how can you be so sure?”

Harry clears his throat, suddenly uncomfortable. He trains his gaze at a spot on the floor and says, “I’ve been having these... dreams. Of Voldemort.”

“What?” Hermione’s eyes widen. “Harry, you’re supposed to block him out!”

“Oh, yeah? I hadn’t realized,” Harry says with a mild glare, “I’d like to see *you* try to keep him out. It’s not exactly easy, you know. And anyway, these are... *different* from the others.”

He can tell that both of them want to ask what that means, but they don’t.

Instead, Hermione sighs, clearly deciding it’s not worth a fight today. “I know; I’m sorry. I guess I’m just worried.”

Ron abandons his pacing to sit beside her on the couch, and she leans against his shoulder, looking almost as tired as Harry feels.

“We all are,” Ron adds.

Harry would love to tell them there’s nothing to be worried about, but he knows it would be a lie.

The next morning, Harry wakes with a groan, and he knows he’ll be sore all day from sleeping in such an awkward position. He’s half tucked beneath Ron on the couch, and his mouth is full of Hermione’s hair. Carefully, so as to avoid waking his friends, Harry reaches for his wand and casts a quiet *tempus*.

One hour until breakfast.

With a sigh, he settles deeper into the couch cushions and lets his eyes drift shut once more. There’s no harm in sleeping just a little longer.

Except apparently there is, because two hours later, Harry, Ron, and Hermione are all but running through the halls. As they go, Hermione does her best to pull her hair into a bun with the seafoam green scrunchie Harry keeps around his wrist for exactly this purpose. Ron gave up on his appearance mere seconds after he woke up.

Harry never had any hope to start with.

Breathless, they burst through the doors of the hall and collapse into the empty seats closest to the doors. The second years nearby sneak an odd glance or two their way, but they’re too busy piling food on their plates to care. Just as Harry is about to reach across Ron to grab a roll, the screech of an eagle owl makes him flinch back, just in time to catch the box the creature drops before winging away, not bothering to wait for a response.

“That’s odd,” Harry says. He jostles the box and hears a series of dull thuds, like something is rolling around inside of it.



He sets the box on the table.

“What is it?” Ron asks, only half paying attention.

“I’m not sure.”

“You aren’t expecting anything?” Hermione asks.

Harry shakes his head. He looks up at the staff table, but none of them are paying him any attention. He grabs his wand and cuts the box open.

The first thing to hit is the smell.

“Oh, gross,” one of the nearby second years complains as Harry coughs into his elbow.

It smells like sweat and blood, only stale.

He rises to his knees on the bench so he can peer into the box. What he sees leaves him relieved he hasn’t eaten anything just yet.

Wrapped in tissue paper is a pair of severed hands. Boxers’ hands.

Hands that were the cause of nearly every bruise on Harry’s body between the ages of three and ten.

“What is it, Harry?” Ron asks.

After glancing at the second years, who are not-so-discretely listening in, Harry shakes his head. “Nothing,” he says as he reseals the box. He grabs it carefully with both hands and stands to leave. “Everything’s fine.”

That said, he heads for the doors of the hall, something like panic rising in his chest and making it hard to breathe. He hears the sound of Ron and Hermione chasing after him, and it gets a little easier.

## Chapter 3

“Obviously, Headmaster, your plan has failed.”

It’s such a blatant bait that Harry wants to be curious. He really does.

But Dudley’s hands are in a box on Dumbledore’s desk, and they’re curled and stiff, like they were in pain before they were cut, and they’re covered in blood. When Dumbledore lifted them free to check for spells, Harry looked away. He didn’t want to see.

He didn’t need to.

He thinks he’ll remember the sight of them forever.

“Severus—”

He wonders what it means that only a piece of his cousin was given to him.

“Potter needs to know. You *know* it’s true.”

He wonders if Dudley is—

The silence drags too long.

When Harry looks up from his own hands where they’re curled in his lap, Snape and Dumbledore are watching him. They’re waiting. Probably for a response, Harry realizes, but he doesn’t know what to say. He has nothing to give them.

He opens his mouth, not knowing what will come out, and says, “Do you think Dudley is alive?”

Dumbledore doesn’t answer. He looks away, combs a hand through his beard and closes his eyes, shoulders slumping as if under a sudden weight.

Snape answers for him. “If he is,” he says, his voice devoid of any emotion, “he will, by now, wish he was not.”

Harry forces himself to nod. He didn’t expect to hear anything else.

Not really.

“Can I go?”

Snape and Dumbledore exchange a long, meaningful look. Harry sees it, but he can’t find it in himself to care what it might mean. Snape is the first to turn away, and Dumbledore sighs. “You may,” he says. Harry stands, stilling when Dumbledore raises one hand. “However, if you find yourself in need of *anything*, please do not hesitate to ask for aid.”

Harry swallows thickly.

He feels like crying so often, lately. It's starting to get annoying "Of course, sir," he says, and he almost means it.

Dumbledore frowns, as though he can tell, but lets him go.

Later that day, Harry sits cross-legged on his bed, staring down at his hands.

In the bed closest to him, he can hear Ron snoring. Across the room, Dean grumbles in his sleep, tossing and turning. Harry doesn't want to sleep.

For weeks, now, his dreams have left him feeling disoriented, restless. He never sees Voldemort in these dreams; they're never so fully formed that they can speak with each other, but he knows the man is there. He feels him in the blank spaces, curling around the edges of his mind, trying and failing to get in. Watching and waiting, though for what, Harry doesn't know.

Every night, it's the same.

Harry settles back against the headboard, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.

He's so tired.

His eyes slip shut, and he feels as though he could sink to the center of the earth. He thinks he wouldn't mind. He *needs* to stay awake, but his bed is so soft, and the room is so warm, and he's so *tired*.

When he wakes, he's somewhere else.

He's in a bed, but it's not his own. The sheets are too smooth, the blankets atop him too light. He reaches one hand forward, searching for the edge of the mattress. It isn't where it should be.

He hears the shift of fabric across the room and stills.

"Open your eyes, Harry Potter."

He does. Instead of the Gryffindor dorm, he's in a richly decorated bedroom. The sheets he lies on are dark. Moonlight spills across the floor through parted curtains. And there against the far wall, Voldemort stands, eyes alight with pleasure at just the sight of him.

"This is a dream," Harry says, and the panic that floods through him freezes to an unnatural calm.

"Is it really?"

Harry sits up, glares. "Why am I here?"

Voldemort smiles. "Did you enjoy my gifts?" he asks instead of answering.

Harry takes a deep breath. Then another. "No," he says, voice flat.

"No?" Voldemort doesn't sound offended. He doesn't even sound surprised. "Why not?"

"He was my *cousin*."

"He hurt you."

"*You* hurt me all the time."

Voldemort's expression darkens. "I have seen your memories, Harry Potter," he says. He pushes away from the wall. Harry scrambles back against the headboard, but Voldemort is faster. With one hand, Voldemort grabs him around his ankle and pulls, until Harry lies flat against the bed. He reaches down to trace a line across Harry's collarbone, where Dudley once carved into him with a rock. "I cannot abide someone laying hands on what is mine."

Harry slaps his hand away. It's probably a bad idea.

"I am not *yours*," he says with a glare, and that was probably a worse one.

Voldemort's frown turns to a snarl, and he lunges. Harry flinches away, but the blow he's expecting never comes. Instead, he feels the weight of Voldemort's body settle over him as the man straddles his thighs and presses his wrists against the bed with one hand. Harry freezes beneath him, waiting to see what he'll do.

"Harry Potter," Voldemort says, and the madness in his eyes is different—wrong. It has been for weeks. "You have *always* been mine."

Harry presses his head back against the mattress, baring his teeth.

"Get off of me," he hisses, bucking his hips, trying to knock the man aside.

But Voldemort only sways forward, presses his open mouth to the hollow of Harry's throat.

"I don't want to hurt you, Harry Potter," Voldemort croons, and the skin of his neck feels too tight under his touch. "Don't make me hurt you. I think I might die, if I do."

Harry lets out a gasping breath. "What?"

Voldemort laughs, and it's an ugly sound. He presses his lips to Harry's jaw, then behind his ear. Harry shivers at having the man so close. He thinks he might shake apart in this bed, in this hold. He thinks he might never come back together.

"You've done this to me, Harry Potter," Voldemort is saying, voice softer than he's ever heard before, "You've *changed* me."

Harry feels the touch of Voldemort's tongue against his throat, and whatever hold he had over Harry shatters. With renewed strength, with a new desperation, Harry struggles. Pulling at Voldemort's hold on his wrists, he rises to bite at the meat of Voldemort's cheek, and the man lets go of him, rearing back with a shout. Harry takes advantage, kicking at the inside of Voldemort's thigh, then at his crotch, as he rolls off the bed.

Voldemort laughs again, half-mad.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Harry says, panting.

The rage in Voldemort's expression is expected. The pleasure is new.

Harry licks his lips and tastes blood.

"Don't you?" Voldemort asks. His eyes narrow, and he smiles again, full of promise. "You will."

## Chapter 4

Harry wakes again. This time, he can hear the familiar sounds of Gryffindor Tower all around him, and the bed is his own again.

Still shaking, though whether it's from adrenaline or fear he doesn't know, he lies in the dark and does his best to breathe. This isn't the first time Voldemort has been close enough to touch him, but it's the first time his touch didn't also bring pain.

He wonders what it means.

The walk to the Great Hall is a quiet one.

Ron is back in the tower, having waved them on when he realized he'd lost his charms homework somewhere in the pile of clothes at the foot of his bed, so it's just Harry and Hermione today.

All around them, people stare as they pass. Somehow, it got out that a body was found in Gryffindor Tower (that a body was found in Gryffindor Tower by *Harry Potter*), and people are already speculating what was in the box from yesterday. By now, most people know that the bodies belonged to his family.

No one has said anything to him, but he knows what they're all thinking.

Who's next?

Hermione bumps her shoulder against his, and he looks down to meet her concerned gaze.

"I'm alright," he says. Hermione doesn't look convinced, so he pastes a smile across his face and wraps an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close to his side. "I'm *going* to be alright."

Hermione sighs and snuggles closer, until she's leaning all of her weight against him, and Harry laughs as they stagger down the hall together, swaying with every step.

Behind them, they hear footsteps pounding against the stone floor. Harry barely has time to look over his shoulder—where he sees Ron running after them, a mischievous light in his eyes—before the taller boy is upon them, sweeping them up in his arms and lifting them off the floor.

"Ron!" Hermione protests, laughing.

Harry squirms in Ron's hold, but his friend isn't letting go, so he slumps back against his chest, something warm blooming in his chest.

“You were cuddling Harry without me, Hermione,” Ron says, and Harry can hear the grin in his voice. “What was I supposed to do?”

Harry groans. “You’re so *embarrassing*.”

Ron shakes him, twirls them around, and Harry finally gives in to laughter.

When they walk through the doors, a hush falls over the hall; students at every table turn to look at them.

“Oh, Merlin,” Ron says with a sigh. “What now?”

“Ron,” Hermione hisses, elbowing him.

Harry ignores them and everything else. He walks down the aisle to sit next to Ginny, who scoots over, making room for Ron and Hermione to slide onto the bench on either side of him. Neville, with a vaguely sick look on his face, passes him a copy of the Daily Prophet.

Ron and Hermione lean in to see.

It takes Harry a moment to understand what he’s looking at.

The photograph is blurred just enough to block the torso and face of the body that lies in the center of the Ministry’s atrium. But Harry doesn’t need to see her face; he’d know that hair anywhere.

“No way,” Ron breathes.

“Is it real?” Hermione asks, hushed.

Harry doesn’t look away from the image. There’s a part of him that burns with satisfaction to see Bellatrix Lestrange lying dead there, in the very same building where she sent his godfather falling beyond the veil. For just a moment, he wishes the image wasn’t censored, and then he feels shame pool through him at the thought.

“I think it is,” he answers, voice faint.

He looks up and sees too many faces to count turn away, just slow enough to be caught.

His gaze narrows on the staff table. Dumbledore is missing. So is Snape.

With a frown, Harry looks back at the paper.

Not saying a word, he reaches across the table to squeeze Neville’s hand, and the other boy grips his hand tight.

That night, Harry doesn’t sleep.

Hermione spends fifteen minutes lecturing him about the importance of letting his body rest. Ron offers to stay up with him. Harry thanks them both, because he knows they're worried for him, but before long he shoos them up to bed, assuring them he'll be fine.

Hours pass, and one by one the common room empties of students until it's just Harry, alone in the light of the fire.

Now, it's three in the morning, and Harry is fighting the urge to claw his own eyes out, they're so dry. Knowing how tempted to fall asleep he'd be if he were in his bed or on one of the many couches spread across the room, he's sitting cross-legged on the floor before the fireplace, with his back to the flame. The shadows warp at the edges of his vision, and he snaps his head to the left when one grows just a little too person-shaped for comfort.

He keeps his gaze trained on the dark mass at the edge of the room, but it doesn't move.

With a shuddering breath, he turns away again.

He can't shake the feeling that someone is watching him.

Pulling his knees up to the chest, he shivers. Gooseflesh rises across his arms. When he breathes, his breath fogs in the air.

At his back, the fire burns strong.



## Chapter 5

“Harry, mate,” Ron says to him two days later as he tries and fails to write his potions essay, “you need to fucking sleep.”

Harry tries to write another sentence, but halfway through it becomes little more than incoherent scribbles about something entirely off topic as his mind drifts. Frustrated, he reaches over to pinch the skin on the back of his hand as he tightens his grip on his quill. The bright pain of it helps to narrow his focus, but not for long.

He takes a deep, calming breath and tries again.

Ron, who’s been watching this happen for an hour now, grabs the quill out of his hand. “Please, Harry.”

Harry just groans, slumping over to lie across his friend’s lap. “I know,” he says, “but what if —?”

“Harry.” Ron grabs his wrist to lift his hand into the air, and there’s no hiding the way it trembles. “You need to *stop*.”

“I can’t,” Harry says. His voice is steady, if hoarse. “*He*’ll be there, I know he will.”

“We’ll get you some dreamless sleep, then.”

Hermione drops down to sit on Ron’s other side. “What’s this about dreamless sleep?” she asks, a disapproving look on her face.

“Harry’s worried he’ll see—” He pauses, then pushes onward, only stuttering once over the name. Harry can’t help but smile when he hears it, feeling proud. “That he’ll see V-Voldemort if he dreams.”

“Oh,” Hermione says, “Are you *sure*—”

“Yes, Hermione,” Harry says flatly, and he can’t even bring himself to feel annoyed. He’s exhausted by this conversation already. “I’m sure I can’t use Occlumency to keep him out. And anyway, how am I supposed to protect myself when I’m sleeping?”

He can almost hear Hermione’s brain puzzling over the problem. “Then we’ll just have to find a different way to keep you safe,” she says eventually, voice firm.

She stands and grabs her bag.

“Where’re you going?” Ron asks. “You just got here.”

“To the library,” Hermione tells him. “There has to be something that will work, and if there is, I’ll find it.”

“Do you want help?” Ron asks.

Harry resigns himself to seeking out Ginny or Neville for aid in staying awake. They’ll be sure to ask all sorts of uncomfortable questions, but he figures it’s better than falling asleep.

“No,” Hermione says, surprising them both, “You should stay.” She crouches down beside where Harry’s head rests on Ron’s lap and runs one hand through his hair, wincing in apology when her fingers snag in the mess of untamed curls. “You’re going to be alright, Harry. We’ll figure this out.”

Then she stands, pats Ron on the shoulder, and sweeps out of the room.

The next day, Harry still hasn’t slept, and it’s only by the grace of potions that he’s still functioning. Which means it’s perhaps the worst day for Aurors to corner him during lunch.

Ron bristles at his side when the pair approaches them, though he stays seated when Hermione lays a hand on his shoulder.

“Mr. Potter?” one of the Aurors asks, as if she can’t tell who he is just by looking at the scar on his forehead.

“That’s me,” Harry tells her. If he squints, there’s two of her.

Her partner steps forward.

“My name is Lyle Kells, and this is my partner, Marissa Cannis,” he says, voice friendly. Harry blinks up at him, waiting, and he asks, “Will you come with us, Mr. Potter?” When Harry just stares blankly at him, the man clears his throat, apparently uncomfortable under Harry’s stare. “We’re hoping you can help us identify a man we apprehended earlier this morning.”

“Why Harry?” Ron demands. When Harry looks, he sees Hermione staring the Aurors down as they consider Ron’s question. “Why not someone else?”

Before they can answer, McGonagall finally steps in, having risen from the staff table as soon as the Aurors entered the hall. “Perhaps we should have this conversation away from listening ears,” she says, casting a stern look at a nearby huddle of fourth years who reluctantly turn away, looking sheepish at being caught.

“Lead the way, Professor,” Auror Cannis says, clearly deciding it’s not worth a fight.

Nodding primly, McGonagall turns on her heel and leads them away. Ron and Hermione scramble to their feet when Harry stands, sticking close to him as he follows the adults out of the hall. The Aurors look disapproving at their presence, but neither of them says anything.

“Now,” McGonagall says as the door to the small classroom shuts and seals behind them, “What can we help the Aurors with today?”

“Er, actually, Professor, we’re only here to speak to Mr. Potter—”

“I understand that, Mr. Kells. However, as his Head of House, I must insist that I am present for any conversation you have with him. Unless you’d rather I fetch the Headmaster?”

Harry imagines he’s supposed to feel upset or embarrassed by McGonagall stepping in to protect him, but it makes him feel nice. It makes him feel safe.

“No, that’s alright,” Auror Kells hurries to say. He looks to Ron and Hermione. “Only—”

“They’re staying,” Harry says flatly. Ron and Hermione stand taller at his side.

The Aurors look at him, then at each other. Auror Kells shrugs and turns to his partner for guidance, and she sighs before nodding, resigned. “This morning, a man claiming to be Peter Pettigrew was found in Diagon Alley,” she tells them. Harry feels his breath catch, wondering if the lack of sleep is finally causing auditory hallucinations like Hermione warned him it might. “Upon getting him to a healer, he confessed to numerous crimes.”

“So what’s the problem?” Ron asks as he crosses his arms, jutting his chin in the air

“The problem, Mr. Weasley,” the woman says dryly, “Is that as far as the Ministry is concerned, Peter Pettigrew was murdered nearly sixteen years ago by Sirius Black.”

“Well,” Hermione says, only a little bit snide, “Obviously, he wasn’t.”

“Right, obviously,” Auror Cannis repeats with a heavy sigh, looking as if she wants to be anywhere but here. She meets Harry’s accusatory gaze anyway. “If the Ministry had listened to you, three years ago, perhaps we would have known sooner.”

Harry snorts, bitterness curdling in his chest. “Perhaps.”

“Is there a point to this conversation, or are you simply here to disrupt my students’ lunch hour?” McGonagall cuts in, and Harry feels another rush of gratitude for her presence.

“While there are those among us who are inclined to take the man at his word, some of the higher-ups want to confirm his story first,” Auror Kells explains. He nods to Harry. “Mr. Pettigrew told us numerous details about the night he escaped from Hogwarts nearly three years ago. If you can confirm them for us, we can have him formally processed.”

“What about veritaserum?” Hermione asks, her eyes narrowed, though she isn’t quite glaring.

The Aurors exchange a long, heavy look.

“Before he was released into Diagon, Mr. Pettigrew experienced a severe trauma—”

“Trauma?” Ron asks.

“Torture,” Auror Cannis says plainly, and Harry has to fight not to flinch. “I will spare you the details, but I assure you, Mr. Pettigrew was in no state to be questioned under veritaserum.”

Harry sees Hermione nod, her lips pursed as she process the information they've been given. She shuffles closer to take one of his hands in hers, and Ron steps close enough that Harry can feel the heat of his chest against his back.

Taking what comfort he can from their presence, he steels himself and asks, "What do you want to know?"

Harry skips the rest of his classes that day.

Ron and Hermione must sense his need to be alone, because they don't offer to stay back with him, promising instead to bring him some food from dinner later. McGonagall pretends not to hear this conversation.

The walk back to Gryffindor Tower passes quickly, and he barely remembers giving the password before finding an armchair to collapse into.

His head is spinning. He doesn't know what to think.

It doesn't help that he can barely think at all.

Peter Pettigrew was valuable to Voldemort, if only for his animagus form. Bellatrix LeStrange was his right hand. He had no reason to be rid of them. No reason, except—

Harry stops himself from even thinking it.

But if it's true...

If Voldemort is doing all of this for *Harry*... How is he supposed to live with it? How can he go on as normal when his family is dead because of *him*?

He's always thought it, and now it's true twice over.

He rubs a hand across his eyes, and the dull throbbing in his forehead gets worse, spreads until even his teeth ache. He clenches his jaw then forces himself to relax as best as he can, closing his eyes. It doesn't help, not really, but at least it doesn't make the pain worse.

He doesn't know how much time passes as he sits there, trying not to think.

All he knows is the next time he opens his eyes, he's not where he's supposed to be.

"Harry Potter," Voldemort says, and Harry thinks he's going to be sick, "you've been avoiding me."

## Chapter 6

“Why are you doing this?” Harry asks.

Perhaps it’s the sleep deprivation talking, but as he stares Voldemort down without even a wand in hand, he feels no fear.

Voldemort’s eyes narrow. Harry pushes onward anyway.

“I can understand why you killed my relatives,” Harry says flatly, imagining he’s far above the world and none of this can touch him. It helps. “They were nothing to you. But why would you get rid of your Death Eaters?”

Voldemort sneers. “Perhaps your happiness outweighs their usefulness,” he says, and from his mouth the word happiness may as well be a curse.

Harry scoffs. “Last I checked, you don’t care about my happiness.”

“Don’t I?” Voldemort asks. He steps forward. Harry holds his ground, and Voldemort seems pleased by it. Soon, he’s close enough to touch. “Have I not proven my intentions?”

“Your *intentions*?” Harry asks, his upper lip curling in disgust. “You make it sound like—”

He cuts himself off, and Voldemort laughs, high and thin. Harry feels as if the world shifts beneath his feet as realization clicks into place.

“I was right,” he says, voice soft. “They’re gifts.”

Voldemort bares his teeth in what might be called a smile. “Yes.”

Harry takes a deep, shuddering breath. Then another. “What do you want?” he asks, voice too faint to be a demand.

“I want many things.”

“What do you want *from me*?”

“A dangerous question,” Voldemort muses. He begins to pace in a circle around him, and Harry keeps still, refusing to give Voldemort the satisfaction of seeing him turn in place to keep him in sight. He refuses to be afraid. “I suppose I want to cut the heart from your chest.”

Harry’s breath catches. Behind him, Voldemort hisses in satisfaction at the sound.

“Why don’t you?” Harry asks, gathering himself and lifting his chin, ever defiant.

“Because that is not *all* I want.” Voldemort moves to stand before him again. “I want you gone from this world, it is true. But even more than that, I want you...” He grabs Harry by the shoulders, too quick to resist, and turns him so he’s facing the bed. “*Here.*”

“You want—?” Now, the fear sets in.

Voldemort lets out a hissing laugh. “Oh, Harry Potter,” he says, “How amusing your mind is. No, I want nothing so vulgar.” He stops, and Harry feels something like relief curl through him. Then, Voldemort speaks again and ruins it. “Or perhaps not only that.”

“You’re sick,” Harry says, voice shaking.

Voldemort’s hands clutch at his shoulders, and then the man pushes him from behind. Harry is too surprised to fight it. He falls across the bed, and he can’t stop the moan that tears out of his throat, unbidden, at the feeling of a soft mattress beneath him, of silken sheets against his skin.

He knows he should fight. Or maybe he should flee.

But all he wants is to curl up here and bask in the comfort he’s been offered, however temporary it may be. He’s been so cold since he stopped sleeping, and this bed is so *warm*.

He drags himself across the bed, until he can dig his toes into the sheets as he reaches out his limbs to fill the entire space, shivering happily. He rolls leisurely onto his back, letting out an involuntary hum as he sinks into a stretch. He opens his eyes, half-lidded, and Voldemort is watching him with naked desire across his face.

Harry is disgusted by the sight, it’s true. But mostly he finds it difficult to care.

With a sigh, he turns his head away, rubs his cheek against a pillow. His eyes drift shut again. A tension he hadn’t even known he was carrying drains from his body, and the throbbing ache in his skull drips away until the haze of his thoughts is pure pleasure instead of pain.

Beside him, the mattress dips.

Harry takes a moment to feel it, to consider whether it’s truly worth the effort, before he turns his head again, dragging his eyelids open to see Voldemort looking down at him.

“Such a strange creature,” the man says, voice full of wonder.

He reaches out one hand, as if to touch him, and Harry allows it. Voldemort’s hand rests on his cheek, and it’s... fine. His hand is dry, Harry notes. Warm.

He feels like a person, and it’s awful in a way Harry can’t quite put into words.

“Is this all it takes?” Voldemort asks, voice soft and entirely new, “A warm bed and a gentle hand, and you’re mine?”

Harry wonders how long this will last, how long he has until Voldemort turns again. “No,” he says, though he doesn’t push the man away. Not yet. “I’m just... tired.”

The hand on his cheek grows heavy, and Voldemort’s nails dig into his skin, just enough for him to feel it. Harry tells himself he isn’t disappointed. “I have given you your enemies, dead

and dying,” Voldemort says. With each word, the quiet calm falls away. “What more must you *take* before you’re satisfied?”

Harry tries to turn his head, tries to look away again, and Voldemort’s nails cut into him. A trail of blood drips across his cheek. Voldemort catches it on one finger, lifts it to his lips. Before he can taste it, Harry feels something like fury shake loose in his chest, and he lunges for the man, shoves him flat on his back as he straddles his chest.

Voldemort looks up at him, eyes wide with surprise.

Harry’s own gaze is trained on the deep red of his blood against Voldemort’s pale skin. This man has taken so much from him, Harry thinks. For two years, Harry’s stolen blood has sustained him.

He doesn’t get to take any more.

As Voldemort watches, barely breathing, Harry grabs the man’s wrist and lifts. When he sucks Voldemort’s finger into his mouth, the man sighs and goes boneless beneath him, practically melting into the mattress.

The taste of his own blood is sharp against his tongue.

He can feel Voldemort’s nail pressing against the tender skin of his cheek. He imagines biting down, cracking the bone of Voldemort’s finger between his teeth. It would be easy.

He thinks the man would let him.

“Harry.” Voldemort’s voice is ragged.

It hits him, then, what he’s doing. He lets go of the man’s wrist as if it burns and rears back, gasping as Voldemort’s hand falls away from him.

“Harry Potter,” Voldemort says, wistful. He sits up, too fast for Harry to scramble away, and grips him at the waist. He presses his forehead to Harry’s collarbone, the pressure of it making it hard to breathe. “Only say the word, and I will lay the world at your feet. Tell me, I command you, what do you want?”

“Nothing,” Harry says, too quick to be honest, and Voldemort knows it. He takes a breath and tires again, voice flat, “I don’t want anything.”

Voldemort lets out a hurt noise, and his hands become like talons gripping into him. “You’re a liar, Harry Potter. Everyone wants something. So let me ask again, what do you *want*?”

Harry shoves Voldemort away from him, and the man lets him, falling onto his back once more.

“What do I *want*?” he snarls. There’s something rising in him, something beyond words that threatens to tear him apart. He opens his mouth, not knowing what will come out. “I want my *parents back*.” Voldemort begins to speak. Harry cuts him off with a violent hiss, grabs him by the lapel of his robes and drags his torso up and off the bed. Voldemort’s hands rise to

wrap around his own. "I want my *family* back," he says. He doesn't know if the world is shaking or if it's just him. "I want my godfather back. I want more than just stories and old pictures; I want them to be *here*."

Voldemort stares up at him, eyes wide.

"But you can't give me that, can you?" Harry says, letting go. "Because all you do is take. And destroy."

The silence is heavy between them.

Then, Voldemort breaks it.

"Harry Potter," Voldemort says, and everything soft about him has burned away. "You know *nothing* of destruction." His eyes glint with a dark, desperate promise. "But you will."

When Harry wakes, he's back in Gryffindor Tower, and someone has draped a blanket over him while he slept. The sky outside has darkened, but the many candles that hover in the air cast a warm glow over the room.

On the table before him, a plate of food with a stasis charm is still steaming.

Nearby, Ron and Hermione are curled up at opposite sides of a couch, sleeping peacefully with their faces turned toward him. With a quiet sigh, Harry grabs the plate of food and settles back against the chair's cushion.

He doesn't get any more sleep that night.

Instead, he keeps watch as his friends get their own much needed rest and does his best to forget his most recent brush with Voldemort's mind.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

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

When there's no post for him at breakfast later that morning, Harry lets out a sigh of relief.

Hermione smiles grimly at him from across the table. He hasn't told his friends the full extent of the dream he shared with Voldemort last night, and he doubts he ever will, but they know enough to feel the relief as well.

It doesn't last very long.

Beside Hermione, Ron lets out a quiet noise of horror, and Harry feels his heart jump into his throat. Hermione is already leaning in to peer down at the copy of the *Daily Prophet* in Ron's grip. Ron's face pales as he reads, and Hermione gasps, her eyes darting Harry's way before looking pointedly away.

"What is it," Harry hears himself ask.

Blood rushes in his ears, and he's painfully aware of the beat of his pulse in his throat.

"It's— There's—" Ron tries and fails to find something to say, looking to Hermione for help.

Harry itches to snatch the paper from their hands, but he doesn't. He wants to know, but whatever it is, he doesn't want to see it. He wonders if that's selfish of him.

Hermione takes a deep breath, visibly steels herself. "There's been an attack."

Harry feels cold, suddenly. "What?"

"A muggle village was attacked last night." Hermione doesn't look at him. "Or, this morning."

Harry folds his hands in his lap and tries not to completely lose it in the middle of the Great Hall.

"There were no survivors," Ron adds, voice hushed.

Harry finds it in himself to look around the hall, but no one is paying them any attention. Those who know are sitting in stunned silence. Those who don't are huddling around copies of the paper, desperate to learn of the newest tragedy.

Hermione's eyes are wide, glassy. When she speaks, her voice shakes just a little. "The whole town is just... gone."

Harry reaches out a hand. Ron hesitates, but eventually hands the paper over.

Harry spreads it out on the table. The front page is taken up almost entirely by an image of what was once a town square and is now little more than heaps of wreckage piled alongside cracked cobbled streets. One of the piles looks to be smoking. In the sky above the wreckage, the Dark Mark looms.

There are no bodies in the image, and Harry wonders if they were taken out or if there was simply nothing left of them to show.

The thought is enough to send him reeling, and he feels as if he's looking down at himself from a great height.

*Destruction*, he remembers Voldemort saying, *you know nothing of destruction*.

Struggling to breathe, he looks to the staff table and isn't surprised to see Dumbledore is missing. Without even bothering to check for Snape, Harry gathers his bag and shoves himself away from the table, rising to his feet and striding on unsteady legs for the doors to the hall. He feels lightheaded, like he might faint. Behind him, Ron and Hermione hurry to follow.

"Harry," Hermione says, reaching out to grasp his arm by the sleeve, and he slows just enough to let her catch up. "Where are you going?"

"To see Dumbledore," Harry says, not bothering to keep the chill from his voice. "He did something, him and Snape."

"What—?"

"I heard them talking about it, after... After Dudley, but I didn't ask." He clenches his fists. "I should have *asked*."

"Harry, you're not making any sense," Ron tells him.

Harry whirls to face them. "Look," he says, "Ever since the start of term, Voldemort's been weird, and you know it. He murdered the Dursleys. He sent me their *bodies*." It's hard to speak through the lump in his chest, but he does it anyway. "He killed *Bellatrix Lestrange* and set Wormtail loose in Diagon Alley."

Hermione bites at her lip, tugs at her hair. "It *is* strange," she allows.

Ron just frowns.

"When has he ever done something like this?" Harry asks, urging them to see what he already knows.

"Never," Ron answers for him.

"And then there's the dreams," Harry adds, shuddering. "He wants something from me, I know it. Something he didn't want before."

"What—?"

“I don’t know,” Harry says, turning to stride toward Dumbledore’s office again. He does know, but he’s hardly going to say it out loud. “But Dumbledore will.”

They reach the griffin statue, and it steps aside without waiting for a password, as if Dumbledore knew he’d be coming. Before Ron and Hermione can join him on the stairs, however, the griffin blocks their path.

“Oh, come on!” Ron protests. Hermione grabs him by the wrist, as if to keep him from charging the statue, and although Ron glances down at her hand on him and blushes, he gets over it quickly. “Harry needs us.”

It’s true. Obviously, Harry knew this already, but these last few weeks have proven it again and again. And yet, there’s a part of Harry that’s relieved they won’t be coming with him this time. He doesn’t want them to know what Voldemort has done to him, what he’s asked. Now, because Dumbledore has made this choice for him, they won’t, and he doesn’t need to face their questions.

It’s an unexpected kindness.

“I’ll tell you everything later,” Harry says as the staircase begins to rise, and he hopes it’s at least somewhat convincing, “I promise.”

When he opens the door to Dumbledore’s office, it’s to the sight of Snape pacing across the room as Dumbledore sits at his desk, his head in his hands. They both look up at him as he stands in the doorway, and there are so many things he could say to them.

What he says is this, “What did you *do*?”

Amortentia, he learns.

They dosed *Voldemort* with *Amortentia*.

“Are you insane?” Harry demands. Hermione would no doubt be appalled with him, but he’s entirely beyond caring about being respectful right now. “Why would you do that? And why, if *you* were the one to dose him, why would he be obsessed with *me*?”

Snape glowers at Dumbledore, and Dumbledore looks down at his hands where they’re clasped atop his desk.

Harry remembers, then, the extra credit work he did for Slughorn before break. He’d thought it was odd that such a dangerous potion would be offered as an option, but he figured it was just another example of the adults at Hogwarts paying little to no mind to what might constitute an age appropriate (or even legal) activity.

He couldn’t have predicted *this* scenario if he’d tried.

“You used the potion I brewed,” Harry says, voice faint. “Why would you do that? I don’t even know if I got it right!”

“You didn’t,” Snape says flatly.

“Then why—?”

Dumbledore interrupts him.

“I told you, once,” he says, “that love is a power Voldemort knows not.” He won’t meet Harry’s eyes. “Voldemort was conceived under the influence of Amortentia. I suppose I had hoped that by introducing it to his system in such a way, it might... incapacitate him.”

“But Amortentia doesn’t create *love*,” Harry reminds him, “and it doesn’t work unless it’s administered regularly. You told me that yourself.”

Dumbledore nods, conceding the point. Then he explains, “For a man such as Voldemort, even a short-felt obsession may have been enough, when it would create in him such warring desires.” His voice trails off. “I suppose I had hoped that by fixating so deeply upon you, you who have suffered so much by his hand, he might come to regret what he has done. That he might feel some... remorse.”

Harry can only stare, disbelieving. He knows, of course, that Dumbledore must be frustrated by their lack of progress with Voldemort’s horcruxes, but still... To dose someone, even someone like Voldemort, with Amortentia...

“Well,” Harry finally says, “he doesn’t.”

“We’re aware,” Snape drawls.

Harry feels a sudden anger flare up in his chest. “And it hasn’t worn off yet, either,” he says, voice heated, “so you messed that up as well.”

Snape and Dumbledore look at each other, then at Harry. They wear the same intent expression, and Harry feels suddenly as if he may have made a mistake.

“The effects haven’t worn off? Are you certain?” Dumbledore asks. When Harry nods sharply, uncomfortable, he turns to Snape, who looks even more offended by the state of the world than usual.

“That should not be possible,” Snape says. He narrows his eyes at Harry and demands, “How do you know?”

“I—” Harry bites his lip, looks down at the floor. He wars with himself for a moment longer before sighing, giving in to the inevitable. “I’ve been having... dreams.”

“Harry,” Dumbledore says.

He sounds disappointed, as if it’s Harry’s fault he’s been having these dreams when *they* were the ones who decided it was a good idea to dose the fucking Dark Lord with the most

dangerous love potion of all time. It makes Harry want to throw something, but considering his history of breaking things in this office, he decides it's probably best if he doesn't. If he gives in to the anger now, he thinks he might never stop.

"They're not like the others, though," Harry tells them, reluctant to share even this much. "I'm not looking at the world through Voldemort's eyes. I'm..."

"Go on," Snape says, voice dangerously soft. Harry closes his eyes so he doesn't glare at the man.

"...I'm there with him."

"There?" Dumbledore asks.

"Somewhere," Harry says, waving a dismissive hand. It takes all of his effort to maintain a mask of calm. "I don't know. And anyway, it doesn't matter."

"No? Then tell us, Potter, if you're so certain," Snape says with a sneer. "What does?"

"Fixing it. Fixing *him*," Harry says, voice firm. When he finally opens his eyes, Snape and Dumbledore are exchanging a long, heavy look, and Harry begins to feel nervous. "Right?"

"Perhaps..." Dumbledore begins, voice thoughtful, but Harry is already shaking his head.

"No," he says. "No way. You can't leave him like this."

"But think, Harry," Dumbledore says, and there's a strange light in his eyes, "If Voldemort is truly so obsessed, he will be distracted. He will make mistakes. We can *use* this."

"Use—? Professor, he just massacred an entire village!"

"We do not know for certain that it was related," Dumbledore says absently, stroking his beard in thought. Harry can feel Snape's piercing gaze on him, and it makes him uneasy. He doesn't want to tell them what Voldemort has asked of him, what Voldemort has done to him—what Harry has allowed. He doesn't want to say it out loud.

But he will, because clearly he needs to.

"But it was," Harry tells them, voice ragged. "It *was*, because I— He told me—" Harry cuts himself off, presses his face into his hands.

"What, Potter?" Snape demands, stalking closer, "What did he tell you? What does he want?"

Harry laughs, and there's an edge to the sound.

"You dosed him with fucking *Amortentia*," Harry says, half snarling. He gets in Snape's face as much as he can while the man does his best to loom over him. "What the hell do you *think* he wants?"

Before Snape can reply with something suitably biting, Dumbledore interrupts them.

“Severus,” Dumbledore says, gently chiding, and the man backs away, still glaring. Now, Dumbledore turns his solemn eyes Harry’s way. “My dear boy,” he says, and Harry tells himself he won’t be swayed by anything he has to say, “I’m sorry.”

Contrary to what he's just decided, Harry falters, losing grip on his anger. “It’s, um...” He stops himself before he can say it’s alright, because it *isn’t*.

Dumbledore sighs heavily and continues, “We have placed a terrible burden on your shoulders, Harry. One that should not be yours to carry.”

It’s a start, Harry thinks. But it’s not enough, so he asks, “Can you fix it?”

“No,” Snape tells him.

“We shall try,” Dumbledore says, and Harry supposes that’s the best he’s going to get.

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who's left a comment or kudos! Getting those notification emails throughout the day makes classes bearable lol. To everyone else, thanks for reading!!

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

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

When he closes his eyes, he sees a village in ruins.

All around him, bodies pile as high as the sky. He takes a breath, and the smoke of burning flesh curls deep in his lungs and settles in. He thinks he can feel the weight of it there inside him. He thinks he'll carry it forever.

With a quiet sigh, he opens his eyes to stare blankly at the ceiling.

He won't be getting any sleep tonight. He couldn't, he thinks, even if he wanted to.

This time, Ron and Hermione stay up with him. They refuse to consider anything else. As they wait for the common room to empty, they curl up together on the couch closest to the fire, basking in the warmth of the fire and each other.

Finally, they're alone, though they cast a privacy ward just to be safe.

"Voldemort was dosed with Amortentia," Harry says, breaking the silence.

He feels the way both Ron and Hermione tense, suddenly attentive, but they don't say anything. They just stay there, quietly giving him the space to talk. Harry is almost grateful for it.

"Dumbledore did it," he continues, voice flat. "Snape helped. They used a potion I made to do it."

It's harder to say the words aloud than he thought it would be. As if sensing his struggle, Hermione tucks her head beneath his chin and Ron wraps his arm tighter across him, pulling him more firmly to lie against his chest. He can hear his friend's heart, beating like a drum in his chest.

It's nice.

"That's terrible," Hermione says, voice quiet, when it becomes clear that Harry can't say anything more just yet.

"It's *wrong*," Ron adds. Harry can feel how much effort it takes him not to shout. "They shouldn't have done it."

A fear Harry hadn't quite put into words sinks away. On some level, he realizes, he was worried they'd tell him it isn't a big deal, that he should just get over it. He sinks into Ron's hold and wraps an arm over Hermione's shoulders, a quiet calm settling in his chest.

He should have known better.

“It gets worse,” Harry adds when he thinks he can speak again. “The dreams Voldemort has been sending me, they’re—” He cuts himself off, starts again. “I haven’t been telling you everything.”

“We know,” Hermione says, and he thinks she might be smiling.

His chest feels tight, suddenly, and he has to blink back tears that sting. The calm that has settled in him blooms into something new, something bright and burning.

“You don’t have to tell us,” Ron adds. His reluctance is audible, but he says it anyway.

Love, Harry thinks, love so bright it could blind him, so strong it could raze a thousand cities. He *loves* them. “The Amortentia hasn’t worn off,” he says. Hermione lets out a sharp gasp and Harry pushes on. “When I dream, I see him. I talk to him, and he... he *wants*—”

“So you were right,” Ron says, interrupting him before he has to put it into words, and Harry feels a rush of gratitude so strong it steals the words from his tongue. “They were gifts.”

“Yeah.” Harry stares up at the ceiling.

He feels simultaneously as if he might burst and as if he feels nothing at all. It’s an odd feeling, though one he’s growing used to.

“So, your relatives,” Hermione says, realization dawning, “and the Death Eaters...”

Harry swallows through a lump in his throat. “Yeah,” he says again, softer this time.

“But what about the village?” Ron asks, and he sounds reluctant, apologetic at even saying the words. Harry does his best to breathe through the sudden weight on his chest. “If he’s been dosed with Amortentia, if he wants you to— Why would he kill all those people?”

There are multiple answers Harry could give, all as true as each other. Because he’s Voldemort, he could say. Because this is what he does. He destroys everything he touches and he kills people as if they don’t matter.

But none of these answers are as true as this: “Because I said no.”

“Oh,” Hermione says, like the sound is punched out of her. “Oh, Harry.”

She turns in his arms so she can bury her face in his chest, wrapping her arms around his waist and clutching at him with both hands. She’s shaking, half fury and half aching sorrow. Ron stays silent beneath him, but even he trembles, and the hand that rests at Harry’s hip curls into a fist.

“It’s not your fault,” Ron tells him, voice firm, as if he has no doubt.

Harry isn’t so sure.

“Ron’s right,” Hermione says, like she can feel the way his resolve has been shaken. “You didn’t do this, Harry; Voldemort did. And Snape, and Dumbledore. They’re the ones to



blame. Not you.”

Harry lets out a shuddering breath. It hurts to hear, but maybe he *needs* to hear it. “Thanks,” he says, voice choked. He doesn’t quite believe it, but he thinks he could let their resolve carry him, just for a while. He thinks they wouldn’t mind.

“Don’t give in,” Hermione tells him, then. Ron stills beneath them, listening carefully to whatever answer he might give.

“What?” Harry asks.

“Voldemort is doing this to torment you, because pleasing you won’t work.” She lifts her head from his chest, looks at him with steel in her eyes. “Don’t let him win, not when winning means you have to give him—” She stops, as if she can’t bear to say it out loud.

Harry knows the feeling.

“I won’t,” he says, and he wants to mean it.

As the hours pass, they shift until Hermione is squished between Ron’s body and the back of the couch and Harry is curled up beside his friends’ feet. Hermione fell into a doze two hours ago, and Ron soon followed. Harry just sits there and breathes, thinking over the things they said to him, the things he’s told them.

For all that he feels cut open, he thinks it might be a good thing. He was afraid they’d be angry or disgusted, and they are, but not at *him*. It’s... nice.

It’s good.

“Oh, you’re up,” a voice says behind him.

Harry flinches so hard he almost falls off the couch, and Ron startles awake, which makes Hermione moan in protest when his shoulder jostles her head. Harry turns, looking over his shoulder to see Neville standing at the bottom of the stairs.

He can’t help the petulant glare he sends the other boy’s way.

“Sorry,” Neville says, biting back a smile, “I thought you heard me coming down.”

Then what he said registers, and Harry exchanged a confused glance with Ron. “Wait, why wouldn’t I be up?”

“The curtains around your bed are closed,” Neville explains, “I figured you were sleeping in today; I didn’t expect to see you down here instead.”

Harry feels his heart sink in his chest.

He left his curtains open last night.

He scrambles off the couch, and Ron follows, practically falling to the floor in his haste. Passing Neville, who steps aside, looking concerned, Harry takes the stairs at full speed. As the door bangs against the wall, their doormmates protest with a round of barely awake groans.

Harry ignores them, and Ron silences them with a well practiced glare as Hermione rushes through the door after them.

Like Neville said, the curtains around his bed have been pulled shut. It's possible, of course, that someone else closed them before they went to bed last night, but considering everything else that's happened lately, he doubts it could be anything so benign

With a trembling hand, Harry reaches for the curtain around his bed and pulls it open.

Behind him, Ron swears, and Hermione stumbles to a halt.

Before him, Dudley Dursley lies in his bed, barely breathing as his unbandaged wrists bleed sluggishly across Harry's sheets.

## Chapter End Notes

to anyone reading this who's commented on the concept/idea of this fic, i would like to direct you to the lovely [trashgoblinwizardparty](#) who prompted it in the first place. i'm sure you're already reading their fics bc they're amazing, but go check them out if you haven't already!!

(also @ mith square up bc both times i've filled a prompt for you, it's ended up way longer than i intended and you need to take responsibility for your beautiful ideas)

## Chapter 9

Dudley survives the trip to the Hospital Wing.

Harry doesn't know how to feel about this or about anything, and somewhere along the way, someone makes the horrible decision of leaving him alone to figure it out. Which is why he's knelt on the floor beside his cousin's bed in the near silent Hospital Wing, watching him breathe as he does his best to ignore the rising pressure in his chest.

"You're an orphan, now," Harry tells his cousin's body. His voice is loud in the empty space. "You're like me."

He doesn't remember what it felt like, the first time he understood what it meant that his parents were dead, but he remembers how it felt to know there was no one who loved him in the world. He remembers a deep, dark pit, always in the back of his mind, always hungry for more than he was given.

He doesn't know what his cousin remembers, how much he saw, but he knows this: "You're going to hate it."

When nothing happens, he sits back on his heels, staring blankly down at his knees. It's cold here on the floor, but he can't be bothered to move to a chair. And anyway, it's kind of nice, he thinks, to feel something that doesn't hurt.

Then Dudley shifts, the slide of sheets moving like a shot through the empty room.

Harry's head snaps up, and he sees Dudley watching him, eyes half-lidded, as if it's a struggle just to keep them open. It probably is.

"Hey, Dudley," Harry says, voice soft.

Dudley just stares at him. "S'this real?" he asks.

Harry swallows through a sudden lump in his throat. He nods. "...Yeah."

"Oh." Dudley turns his head to look back at the ceiling, and Harry tries and fails to think of something, anything, to say. "Harry..." Dudley's voice is weak, but he may as well be shouting. "Harry, that man..."

"Who?" Harry asks, leaning closer.

"Red eyes..."

Harry takes a deep breath, holds it. If he isn't careful, he thinks he might start shouting and never stop. "Voldemort," he says, finally. "His name is Voldemort."

"Voldemort," Dudley repeats, voice shaking. He opens his eyes, and when he looks Harry's way again, they're glassy, feverish. "He—"

His voice falters into a deep, guttural moan, and he sobs. Just once.

“Hey, listen,” Harry says, as gently as he can. His cousin is shaking as he does his best to breathe. “You don’t have to—”

“No,” Dudley interrupts, shaking his head. “No. Not me. He— He killed Mum and Dad.”

Now it’s Harry’s turn to falter. “Dudley...”

“Harry,” Dudley says, reaching out with one arm as if he wants to hold onto him or anything, but he *can’t*. “Harry, he killed Mum and Dad.”

Harry wraps a hand above the bandage on his cousin’s wrist, squeezing gently. “I know, Dud,” he says. Dudley’s eyes fall shut. “I know.”

“What’m I gonna do?” Dudley asks, and he sounds out of breath. “Harry, what am I gonna do?”

“Marge will take you,” he says quickly, voice firm, because he knows this feeling, this desperate, trembling need for someone, anyone, to step forward and guide you to safety. If he can do one thing for his cousin, he can lay this particular fear to rest. “She loves you, Dudley. She’ll take care of you.”

Dudley moans again, shaking his head. “No,” he says, “No, I want—”

“*I know*,” Harry tells him, leaning forward to press his forehead against his cousin’s shoulder. Dudley lets out another heaving sob. “Dudley, I know; I’m sorry.”

The moment stretches just a little longer as they both do their best to regain some control over themselves. Then Dudley speaks, and Harry has to focus to understand the mumbled words. “He talked about you, that man,” Dudley says, and his breathing picks up, “Vuh... Vol —”

“Voldemort,” Harry offers, voice soft.

“Voldemort, yeah,” Dudley says. “He said— He said he would give me back. Harry, why did he kill Mum and Dad?”

“I don’t know,” Harry says.

But he *does*.

“D’you think they were in pain?” Dudley asks.

“I don’t know,” he says again, because he doesn’t want to say yes.

“I was,” Dudley tells him, and Harry has to fight to keep himself still, to keep himself from getting up and walking out of the room; he’s so tired. “I was, and he told me—” He cuts himself off, and when he turns his gaze back on Harry, his eyes are wide. “Harry. Harry,

listen.” Harry rises higher onto his knees, presses against his cousin’s shoulder when he tries to rise from the bed. “Harry, I’m sorry.”

“Dudley, what—?”

“For when we were kids,” Dudley says, insistent. “I was... I...”

“Dud,” Harry says, and his voice breaks. He doesn’t know what to say. None of this is fair. “We were *kids*.”

“Do you— Can you...?” Harry looks away, and Dudley lets out a shuddering sigh. “Okay,” he says, “Okay.”

Harry needs to not be having this conversation.

He’s so *tired*.

“You’re gonna be alright, Dud,” he says, voice as firm as he can make it.

Dudley is still shaking, but he doesn’t say anything more. He just keeps his feverish eyes trained on Harry until finally, thankfully, they slide shut, and he falls into a fitful sleep. Harry loses track of how long he stays there on his knees, just watching.

This is the last family he has left, he thinks, and it’s like an open maw deep in his chest. He thinks it could swallow him whole if he lets it.

He swipes a hand across his eyes, furious at the tears he finds there.

He’s glad Dudley is alive, he is. But there’s an awful voice in his head that tells him it’d be better if he wasn’t, because how can he live with what’s been done to him? How could anyone?

How can Harry?

At this thought, a low, keening noise builds in the back of his throat.

How is he supposed to live like this?

Sometime later, the door to the Hospital Wing opens and McGonagall sweeps inside, only briefly faltering at the sight of Harry on the floor. The look on her face hurts to see, so he turns back to his cousin.

When a hand falls upon his shoulder, he flinches.

“Come on, then, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall says, voice firm but not unkind as she grips him by the shoulder and pulls him to his feet. “Up you get. It’s going to be alright.”

Harry wants to believe it. He really does.

In the moment before he turns to look at her, he feels a sudden, unfamiliar urge to tell her everything. Then he sees her face.

“What is it?” Harry asks, voice flat.

McGonagall hesitates, but not for long. “There has been another attack,” she tells him.

Of course, Harry thinks as he does his best to breathe under the weight of this newest tragedy.

Of course.

By the time he makes it back to the Common Room, classes are done for the day, and his pockets are one vial of sleeping potion heavier.

Ron and Hermione waste no time in dragging him up to the boys’ dorm. As soon as the door shuts behind them, Hermione throws her arms around his neck, squeezing the breath out of him as Ron wraps his arms around them both.

Harry closes his eyes, breathes in.

“Dudley’s alive,” he says. Then, “There’s been another attack.”

Hermione pulls away, reaches up to cradle Harry’s face in her hands. “Oh, Harry.”

“There were no survivors,” Harry tells them, reaching up to lace his fingers with Hermione’s. “It’ll be in the *Prophet* tomorrow.”

“Does Dumbledore know,” Ron asks.

“Yeah,” Harry says with a nod. Then he sighs. “I think...”

“No, Harry,” Hermione interrupts him, glaring.

“You don’t even know what I was going to say!” Harry protests.

“Yeah, actually, I think we do,” Ron says dryly. He exchanges a heavy glance with Hermione. “Let me guess, you were just about to tell us why you need to sacrifice yourself.”

Harry clenches his jaw and looks away, eyes burning. “What if it’s the only way?” he asks.

“But it *isn’t*,” Hermione says. “You told us yourself that Dumbledore is looking for a cure.”

“And in the meantime, Voldemort has slaughtered hundreds of people,” Harry says. He looks away. “How many more will die before he finds one?”

“I don’t care,” Hermione snaps, angry tears gathering in her eyes. “It doesn’t matter. Harry, you’re *important*.”

And Harry's chest *aches*, suddenly; he can barely breathe. "So were all the people Voldemort murdered."

"No one is saying they weren't," Ron says. "But, Harry—"

"I can stop it," Harry says, and he feels as if nothing has been so certain in a very long time. "I *can*. Knowing that..." He takes a shuddering breath, lets it out slow. "How am I supposed to sit by and let it happen?"

"We'll find another way," Hermione tells him.

"What if we can't?"

Neither of them has anything more to say to that, and Harry tells himself he shouldn't feel disappointed. He pulls the vial of sleeping potion from his pocket.

"Harry," Hermione says as soon as she sees it, voice sharp, "What is that?"

"I told Madam Pomfrey I wouldn't be able to fall asleep tonight, and she said I should take a dose before going to bed." Harry holds it up to the light, and the deep blue liquid shines. "Apparently, once I do, I'll be out within seconds."

Ron looks skeptical, and Harry sighs. "I'm not saying I need to hand myself over to Voldemort right this minute," he says, "but I can't keep ignoring him. You *know* I can't."

"I don't like it," Hermione says, and Ron is quick to echo her.

"You think I do?" Harry asks.

Ron and Hermione look away, and Harry wants to shout, but he doesn't, because it's not really them he's mad at, and he knows it. Instead, he reaches out, snags a hand in each of their sleeves and pulls them closer, holding on as tight as he can. When he finally pulls away again, he can tell neither of them wants to let him go.

But they do.

"I'll be alright," Harry tells them, "I'll be right here."

When neither protests, he lifts the vial to his mouth and takes a sip, just as Madam Pomfrey instructed. He sets the vial on the nightstand. Heaviness seeps into his limbs, and he stumbles to his bed and falls into it, melting into the mattress as his eyes slide shut.

The last thing he sees is Ron and Hermione looking down at him, faces solemn as they settle in to guard his rest.

# Chapter 10

## Chapter Notes

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

When he wakes in a familiar room, he's alone. Then he isn't. "Harry Potter," Voldemort says, voice all but caressing his name, "you're early."

And Harry wants to run, to hide, but he can't. Instead, he does his best to keep his breaths even, to hide the fear the thrums in his chest.

You chose this, he reminds himself.

He put himself here, knowing Voldemort would leap at the chance to corner him, knowing there's no escape. He put himself here, knowing he could *use* this. "You need to stop," he says. He doesn't turn to look at the man. He doesn't think he could stand it.

"Stop?" Voldemort asks, and he sounds as though he might laugh. "Oh, Harry, I've only begun."

Harry closes his eyes, does his best to keep the shudder out of his limbs as the reality of what he's done, of what he's doing, crashes down upon him. He's here. He's dreaming, he knows, and yet... This is more than just a dream.

This is real.

This is... odd.

For so long, Voldemort has been the ultimate evil, the monster at the end of the year. And this is still true, Harry thinks, but it isn't the whole truth.

He's like something out of a story. Or, he was.

"You've killed so many people," Harry says, and he hates the way his voice shakes. Voldemort says nothing, but Harry can feel him listening. He swallows past the lump in his throat. "Why?"

"What an interesting question." Voldemort's voice is closer than before. "Perhaps it's because I can."

Harry's hands clench into fists at his sides. "That's not good enough."

"No?" Voldemort is close enough to touch, now, and he does. He curls his hands over Harry's shoulders, gripping tight. "Tell me, then. What would you like to hear?"

Harry takes a deep breath, then another.

He shivers as he feels Voldemort's breath against his cheek. He's too close.



“Shall I tell you I killed them out of rage?” Voldemort asks. Harry can almost feel the bruises begin to form as Voldemort’s fingers dig into the meat of his upper arms. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you? It would be simple. It would make sense.”

Harry shakes his head, because he can’t do anything else.

“Still no?” Voldemort sounds faintly curious, detached, as though none of this matters. But it matters. “Well, then. Perhaps the truth. Are you certain you want to hear it?”

Harry feels as though he’s standing at the edge of a tall cliff, waiting to jump, not knowing where he’ll land or if he’ll land at all. He takes a deep breath, then another, and says, “Tell me.”

Voldemort curls over his back like a wave about to break. “Harry Potter,” he says, and Harry knows what he’s going to say, but he doesn’t want to hear it, “I killed them because I *love* you.”

It hurts like he thought it would.

“Love,” Harry echoes, voice thick. He thinks he might vomit. He thinks he might scream. “This isn’t love.” He shrugs his shoulders, as if Voldemort might let his hold be dislodged. “You killed them because I wouldn’t give you what you want.”

“It’s certainly possible,” Voldemort tells him. He smiles, and Harry can hear it in his voice. “Does it matter?”

He supposes it doesn’t.

“It isn’t real,” he says. Voldemort’s hold falters, then grips tighter than before. He can almost hear Snape and Dumbledore in the back of his mind, chiding him as he says it, commanding him not to tell. He imagines Voldemort learning the truth is the last thing they want. But it’s their fault he’s here. They don’t get to tell him how to deal with it.

“Isn’t it?” Voldemort asks. He bends closer, ignores the way Harry attempts to shy away. “*ache* for you, Harry Potter. Tell me, what about this isn’t real?”

“You were dosed,” he says, tripping over himself to say the words before he changes his mind, “with Amortentia—”

“Amortentia,” Voldemort echoes, darkly amused. “Of course.”

Harry takes a shuddering breath. “This... love you feel,” he says, doing his best to push through the gathering storm at his back, “it isn’t *real*.”

“And yet—” Voldemort releases him, and Harry hears the brush of his robes against the floor as he paces behind him. “—I feel it.”

Finally, reluctantly, he turns to face the man. Voldemort looks distressed, more so than Harry has ever seen him before. Harry doesn’t want to pity him, or feel guilt, but he does. He wasn’t

the one who killed all those people. He wasn't the one who slipped a love potion into Voldemort's cup.

And yet, here they are.

"It should have worn off by now," Harry tells him, and Voldemort stills, "but you were born under it, right?"

Voldemort whirls to face him, and Harry stumbles back at the look on his face. "So it's my fault," Voldemort snarls, all but hissing the words.

Harry shakes his head, heart in his throat. Then, beneath the desperate need for all of this to go away, to leave him be, he feels something like rage begin to bloom. Because this love isn't Voldemort's fault, he knows. But everything else?

"You *killed*—"

"Do you think I want to be this way?" Voldemort interrupts him, teeth bared. He stalks forward, crowds Harry back against the wall and sneers. "Panting after a child. Desperate for your attention, for your touch." He grabs Harry by the collar of his robe and pulls him closer. Harry does his best to breathe through the proximity. "I loathe you, Harry Potter, but I need you."

Voldemort's free hand rises, as if to touch his cheek, and he flinches away. But he doesn't get far. Voldemort's touch is gentle, belying his words. It's... not awful.

He thinks he could—

"Stop," Harry says, gasping, gripping Voldemort's wrist as if he could pull his hand away. It's too much. It's too— "Please."

Voldemort doesn't move. "I need you," he says again, and he sounds hungry for something Harry refuses to name. "And I *will* have you."

"You *won't*," Harry says, because it's easy. Because he doesn't know what else to say.

Or, he knows what to say, but everything in him wants to say something else.

He digs his nails into the thin skin of Voldemort's wrist, twisting his grip until the man releases him with a hiss and falters, stepping back. Harry takes advantage of his pain, shoving him even further off balance, until he has space to breathe again. He steps away from the wall and strides for the door to the room.

He doesn't know where it might lead, but he doesn't care.

He came here for a reason, but suddenly it doesn't feel like a very good one.

He wants to leave.

"Don't walk away from me," Voldemort commands, but Harry doesn't stop.

“Or what?” he asks, sneering over his shoulder. “You’ll kill my family?” It hurts, to use their deaths this way—a weapon against the man who killed them. He does it anyway. “Oh, wait. You’ve already *done* that. *Twice*.”

He reaches the door, extends one hand to grip the handle, and then—“I did as you asked.”

The anger is gone from his voice, Harry notes. He sounds... desperate.

So Harry waits.

“I stopped,” Voldemort continues, “I gave you what you asked for. I gave him back.”

And Harry... Harry lifts his hand from the door. “You did,” he says, voice flat.

Voldemort did as he asked; he gave Dudley back.

There’s a strange feeling rising in his chest, coiled tight and sharp where it sits between his lungs. It’s almost... heady. What else might Voldemort do? He takes a step back, away from the door, toward Voldemort’s waiting form. He feels more than hears Voldemort move forward, until he’s close enough to touch once more.

Harry takes a deep breath, holds it. This is his chance, he knows.

This is why he came.

“What would you do?” he asks, feeling as though he’s watching himself from some great height, as though it isn’t really him these words are coming from. “What would you give—?”

“Anything,” Voldemort says, snarling, bending closer until he can rest his weight against Harry’s back. He curls his arms around Harry’s waist, hands like talons where they grip at the bones of his hips, and Harry lets him. “I would burn this world away, until there’s nothing left but you. Until there’s no one in the world but you and I, and there is nowhere else to go.”

Harry swallows thickly, does his best to keep himself together, to do what he must.

It’s not fair.

It’s not fair, but he’s here. He pushes aside the part of himself that is terrified by the words spilling from Voldemort’s mouth. He can’t break here; he has work to do. “What if—” He closes his eyes, takes a shuddering breath and feels Voldemort’s body move against his own. “What if I let you have me?”

In his mind, Ron and Hermione are screaming, begging him to stop.

But Voldemort only sighs, his breath warm as he sways closer. “Oh, Harry,” he says, his voice distressingly soft. Harry thinks he might be smiling. “That is all I wanted. Only name your price, and you will have it.”

“I want you to stop,” Harry says, his voice firm because he can’t afford weakness. “Stop killing, stop this destruction, stop this war.”

“A high price,” Voldemort says, voice musing. He pulls away, just a little, and Harry turns in his hold, looks him in the eye. His breath catches at the fire he sees there.

But it doesn’t stop him. “And?” he prompts.

“For you,” Voldemort begins. He lifts his hands, cradles Harry’s face between them and bends down. For one breathless moment, Harry thinks the man is about to kiss him, and he wonders how it might feel. He shoves him away before he can find out.

Voldemort bares his teeth, reaches for him again, and Harry backs away. He holds out one hand, palm forward, as if that might stop him. “Promise me,” he says. His heart beats heavy in his throat.

“If I do this,” Voldemort says, and if it weren’t for the greedy light in his eyes, Harry might think him a statue, “you will be mine.”

It isn’t a question.

Harry hesitates, then says, voice as steady as he can make it, “Yes.”

Triumph burns across Voldemort’s pale face, and Harry wants to disappear, to wake. But he can’t. There’s no turning back, not now. Before he can flinch away, Voldemort grabs hold of him by his outstretched hand and pulls, forcing Harry back into the circle of his arms as he presses his thin lips to Harry’s forehead, his cheeks, his lips. His hands are heavy, warm against Harry’s body, and then he *moans*.

It’s a terrible sound.

Harry gasps for breath, and Voldemort takes advantage, licking into his mouth. He shoves at his shoulders, tries to turn his head away, but Voldemort doesn’t let him as his wandering hands settle to grip Harry’s head and neck, holding him in place.

This isn’t his first kiss.

If it was, he thinks he might have to shout, to cry, to vomit. He thinks he might anyway. Voldemort’s tongue is slick against his own, and he takes the opportunity for what it is.

He bites.

When Voldemort pulls away, he’s laughing; his lips are bloody. He grins, teeth red, and says, “We have a deal.”

“But, wait,” Harry says, and he can barely think through the echo of breathless panic. “How \_\_\_”

Voldemort’s hold turns gentle, and he rubs the pad of his thumb across Harry’s cheek. “Never fear, Harry Potter,” he says, tender in his triumph. He sways closer, presses a blood-wet kiss to Harry’s forehead. “I’ll come to you.”

The moment he wakes, for real this time, Harry sits up in his bed, gasping. In the bed next to his, Ron and Hermione lie, curling into each other like twin question marks. Something in him aches at the sight, but he shoves it aside. He doesn't have time.

He rolls to his feet, gathering his outer robe and shoving his shoes onto his feet, not bothering with the laces.

"Harry?" Ron mumbles, eyes squinting open at the noise Harry doesn't care to muffle. Hermione lets out a grumbled protest, still half asleep. "Wha's happening?"

"Wake the DA," Harry tells him, and if his voice shakes, he can't help it. He grabs his wand from his nightstand and heads for the door. "I have to find Dumbledore; Voldemort is coming."

"What!" All traces of sleep are gone as Hermione sits up, her curls like a dark cloud around her head. He hears the rest of his dormmates begin to stir at the commotion. "Harry—"

"Voldemort has a way into the castle. He said he'd—" Harry cuts himself off. He doesn't want to explain. He already knows what they'll say. "I need you to alert the DA." Hermione looks as if she might protest, so Harry turns back, kneels beside the bed and takes her hands in his, grips them tight. "Please, Hermione."

He locks eyes with Ron, but his oldest friend only stares back at him, eyes like flint.

"Please," he says again, turning back to Hermione. "I have to find Dumbledore; I can't alert the others. I can't keep them safe. *Please*, Hermione. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important. You know that."

"What about you?" Hermione demands, and Ron follows as she stands, moves to block his path. "Harry, what will you do?"

"Hermione—"

"No," Hermione says. Ron crosses his arms over his chest beside her. "Harry, no!"

"I have to—"

"You don't!"

"But Voldemort—"

"It's not fair," Hermione says, interrupting him again, angry tears in her eyes. She swipes them away, glaring. "Harry, it isn't fair."

"I know," Harry says, and he chokes on the words, because they're true. None of this is fair. "But Voldemort is coming."

This truth, like most truths, is an ugly thing. It sits in his chest like a stone, like rotten fruit.

He thinks he'll never be free of it.

“Okay,” Ron says, then. The relief of it almost knocks Harry off his feet, and then the shame curls in, because he knows what they want him to do. And worse, he knows what he must do. “Okay. What do you need?”

## Chapter End Notes

So you may or may not have noticed that it's been about two weeks since I've updated. All I have to say for myself is this: to anyone who's considering law school, don't do it. (To anyone who's going to do it anyway or is already here, I feel you and I believe in you.)

Anyway thank you to everyone who's left a comment or kudos!! And thanks everyone else for reading!!

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

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

He checks the map once before he leaves the tower, then he hands it off to Ron and Hermione, knowing it will be more useful to them than to him.

The last he saw of Dumbledore on the map, he was still in his office.

Malfoy's name was missing again.

He hadn't seen anyone who didn't belong, but who knows how long that will last.

Feeling lightheaded, he only mostly succeeds at fighting the rising panic in his chest as he makes his way through the dark halls toward Dumbledore's tower. His footsteps are muffled by a spell, but he still feels as if he's making too much noise.

In the silence, every breath is a risk. He imagines he can hear the rush of blood in his veins.

It's too quiet; it's too *loud*.

No ghosts cross his path. On the walls, the portraits sleep undisturbed.

He looks over his shoulder, but there's no one there. With a near-silent huff, he shakes his head, doing his best to shrug off the tension that's settled in his neck and shoulders. He's been walking these halls for years, now. He knows them. He's never been more at home than he is inside them.

There's nothing to fear.

But there will be.

He rounds another corner and stills, sinking back into the shadows until he's flush against the wall.

Before him, pale light spills across the stone floor. There in the light, as if he's basking in it, Voldemort stands, head tilted back with his arms outstretched at his sides. He looks more at peace than Harry has ever seen him.

He looks... satisfied.

He's like me, Harry thinks. Before Hogwarts was his, he knows, it was Voldemort's. The thought is like a bell to his tired mind, ringing bright and clear.

There's nothing to fear, he thinks again, and this time it might even be true. Nothing, not for him.

Not here.

But for everyone else?

Harry should do something, he knows. He should say something, but he only watches Voldemort breathe in the center of the hall. He lifts his own hand, presses it to his chest over his heart, wonders if Voldemort can feel it beating. Wonders if he can hear it.

Voldemort sighs, then. Half-shadowed as his face may be, Harry sees it when he opens his eyes; the red of his eyes catches the light and gleams.

He doesn't look Harry's way, but Harry is certain the man knows he's here, watching.

What is he waiting for?

Harry lifts the spell on his shoes and steps forward. In the silent hall, the sound of his footsteps against the stone floor is almost enough to make him flinch. Voldemort doesn't move, doesn't even look at him.

"Say something," Harry commands, voice as firm as he can make it.

Voldemort finally turns to him, then, and he smiles. There is triumph there in his expression, and why shouldn't there be?

He's getting everything he wanted.

"Hello, Harry Potter," Voldemort says. The man isn't touching him, but he may as well be. The weight of his gaze as it tracks down his body is almost enough to make Harry flinch away. "It's been too long."

"How did you get into the castle?" Harry asks.

Voldemort ignores him, because of course he does.

The man paces in a circle around him, drinking in the sight of him, and Harry clenches his fists to keep himself from lashing out and ruining this before it's even begun.

"I didn't realize it would feel this way," Voldemort says, musing, and he reaches out one hand, drags his fingers down the knobs of Harry's spine through his robe. Harry shivers—half fear, half something he refuses to name. "Having you here, in the flesh."

He stops when he's facing Harry once more, standing closer than before. He reaches out then, too quick to dodge, and cradles Harry's face in his hands. He pulls him closer, until they're stood chest to chest. The press of nails against his cheeks, so close to his eyes, is enough to make Harry's breathing pick up, though he fights to keep it steady. He feels Voldemort's chest move against his own.

It... doesn't help.



“Tell me,” Voldemort says, and his thumbs brush softly, slowly, across Harry’s cheekbones. “Is it different for you, too?”

Voldemort is a monster, Harry thinks. He’s proven it, over and over again. And now, he’s in a school full of children who cannot protect themselves. There is only one answer he can give.

Harry tells him what he wants to hear.

“It is,” he says, and Voldemort sways forward, as if he could breathe in the words. Harry refuses to close his eyes, but he wants to. “It feels...”

In his dreams, he could fight and shout and make Voldemort bleed. And then he could wake up, and it would be over, and he would be safe. This isn’t a dream.

This is *real*.

Voldemort grows impatient in the silence. His hold on Harry’s face grows tighter; the fire in his eyes burns hotter. Harry grabs his wrists, squeezes, and for a moment, the man is calm again.

“It feels real,” Harry tells him. Voldemort sighs, then, satisfied. He leans down, pulls Harry onto his toes and presses their foreheads together. Harry watches as his eyes slide shut, and then he watches him breathe. He asks again, voice hushed, “How did you get into the castle?”

Voldemort hums in thought, and Harry feels the vibration in his hands, his face.

“A classmate of yours,” Voldemort finally tells him, indulgent now that he has what he wants within his grasp. “I tasked him with finding a way to bring my Death Eaters into the school.”

Harry narrows his eyes. “Malfoy.”

“Yes,” Voldemort says. He opens his eyes, pulls away but keeps Harry on his toes, so he has to lean against the man’s chest for balance. He grins, as if any of this is funny. “In all honesty, I expected him to fail.”

For a moment, fury breaks through, and it takes everything Harry has to keep still. He takes a deep breath, then another. “Did you come alone?” he asks, and he almost doesn’t want to hear the answer.

“No,” Voldemort tells him.

Harry feels as if his heart drops from his chest to land at the floor between his feet. “What?” he asks, voice faint. He digs his nails into Voldemort’s wrists. “Where are the others?”

Voldemort laughs, and there’s an edge to his glee that Harry doesn’t like at all. He says, eyes gleaming with pleasure, “Infiltration was not his only task.”

Harry shoves the man away, stumbles back and doesn’t regret it, even when Voldemort’s glee quickly turns to rage.

He draws his wand, points it at Voldemort's chest. "Tell me where they are."

Voldemort bares his teeth, doesn't answer. When he moves as if to step forward, Harry slashes his wand toward the floor at their feet and cracks it, sending a spray of dust and stone fragments into the air.

"Tell me," Harry says, and he's shaking but his wand is as steady as his gaze.

For a long moment, he thinks Voldemort might lunge for him, regardless of the wand pointed at his chest, and he knows that as close as they are, he'd probably catch him. Though Harry is certain that in the meantime, he could at least cut off a limb. Then the man throws his head back and laughs, and Harry lets himself relax, just a little. Because he knows what Voldemort sounds like when he's angry enough to kill, and this isn't it.

"Oh, Harry," the man says. He doesn't seem to mind that Harry has yet to put his wand away. "Such a delight."

Harry grits his teeth, keeps his glare up.

Voldemort holds out his hand, and Harry looks at it, confused. Voldemort sighs at him, then says, "Walk with me."

And Harry...

Harry takes his hand.

Harry ghosts up the stairs to the Astronomy Tower at Voldemort's heels, wand gripped tight in his free hand. When Voldemort holds the door open for him, he steps through reluctantly, bristling at having the man so close to his back.

What he sees would make him falter if it weren't for the way Voldemort presses forward against his back.

Dumbledore stands near the parapet, back to the night; he still has his wand in hand, but he isn't using it. Malfoy is stood before him, wand hand outstretched and trembling, and Snape is poised between them, as if unsure where to look, who to help. Near the door, the remainder of the Death Eaters wait, watching, and Harry feels his heart beat faster because he's surrounded now. If Voldemort changes his mind, decides to hurt him after all, there's nothing he can do.

And Dumbledore, trapped as he is at the tower's edge, will likely be of little help.

As Voldemort ushers him forward, Dumbledore's gaze alights on his hand in Voldemort's grip.

"Harry," Dumbledore says, voice remarkably even, considering, "What are you doing?"

Harry doesn't want to justify himself to Dumbledore or to anyone, not when it's their fault he's here, but he feels as if he needs to, and he hates it. He hates the way Dumbledore is looking at him, pity and despair warring for the lion's share.

He takes a trembling breath, and says, "He promised—"

"And you believed him?" Dumbledore interrupts him, but he isn't looking at him, not anymore. Instead, he's watching Voldemort. "He hasn't changed, my boy. He never will."

"I know." He knows this better than *any* of them. "But—"

Dumbledore speaks as if he doesn't hear him. "Tell me, Tom," he says, and Harry wishes he wouldn't. Voldemort's grip on his hand tightens. "Do you regret what you have done?"

And Voldemort laughs.

"Why should I?" he asks. At least he sounds amused, Harry thinks—curious instead of angry. "Why would I, when it has brought me here?"

At this last word, he pulls Harry back against his chest, wraps one arm around his waist and drags his free hand through Harry's hair as his wand presses against Harry's stomach. Harry stands as still as he can in his hold, thrumming with the need to run, to fight.

But there's nowhere to go.

"Is this not what you wanted?" Voldemort continues. He uses his grip on Harry's hair to bare his neck and bends down, ghosting his lips over Harry's pulse as he watches Dumbledore with a mean smile. Harry can feel it pressed against his skin. He lets it happen; he doesn't know what else to do. "Is this not what you intended when you slipped your potion into my cup?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry sees the way Snape stills, just for a moment.

It's barely noticeable, but when Voldemort's wand hand twitches where it's still pressed to his stomach, Harry knows he saw it too.

Dumbledore doesn't give in to the provocation beyond the tears that gather in his eyes.

"Harry," he says, and his voice breaks. "My dear boy, I am sorry."

Harry swallows down the sudden lump in his throat, does his best to keep himself steady in Voldemort's hold because he can't afford to make a mistake, not here.

"It's okay," he lies.

It isn't, but nothing he or anyone can say will make it better. All they can do is live with it as long as they can, and Harry intends to make the most of the time he has, of the power Dumbledore's mistake has given him, as vile and tenuous as it may be.

"Harry," Dumbledore says again, and he sounds *devastated*. Harry can feel the way Voldemort grows less and less patient with this conversation. "Will you close your eyes?"

When Voldemort laughs, the Death Eaters at their back jeer along. Malfoy, who has inched his way back toward them, as if desperate to leave Voldemort's sight, doesn't make a sound.

But Harry doesn't pay them any mind.

"What's wrong, Dumbledore?" Voldemort is asking, vicious in his glee. "Afraid to let your *chosen one* watch as the life leaves your body?"

Instead, Harry looks at Snape, and so he is the only one to see the way he frowns—to see the way his eyes widen, first in realization, then in horror.

"No, Tom." Dumbledore's voice is heavy with regret of his own.

Snape is looking back at him, now, and Harry doesn't understand what could put such a desperate look in his dark eyes.

But he's starting to.

"Harry, please" Dumbledore says, and Harry finally turns to look at him, finally meets his gaze. He stills at what he sees there. "Close your eyes."

Harry finds he can't speak, so he only shakes his head. He's wrong, he thinks. He must be. But he isn't, and there is a part of him that knows it, the same part that had planned so callously to trade his life away to keep his friends safe. His heart is beating like a drum in his chest, now, and time slows. At his back, Voldemort finally catches on, realizes that something has gone wrong. That this will not go as he planned. That he has been overconfident, as he has always been.

But it's too late.

Dumbledore raises his wand.

Spellfire, bright and acid green, screams through the air.

## Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: in addition to listing this as a prompt fill for mith, i also came very close to listing this as a fill for this prompt by cybrid: Canon divergence at the end of sixth year. Rather than leaving his minions to do all the work, Voldemort leads the invasion through the Vanishing cabinet. When Harry and Dumbledore get back, it's Voldemort they face, not Draco Malfoy . . .

But then I decided it might spoil this chapter, and anyway it isn't a perfect fit, so I decided against it



# Chapter 12

## Chapter Notes

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

Albus Dumbledore dies with a look of surprise on his face.

In the moment before the killing curse strikes his chest, the whole world is lit up in green. Harry thinks he'll remember the light of it reflected in Dumbledore's eyes forever. When the curse lands, his body is sent flying with the force of it, over the parapet and into open air. For a moment, he seems to simply hang there, a dark spot against the starry sky, washed out and sickly looking under the Dark Mark that curls above the tower.

Harry breathes in, and the body falls.

He breaks free of Voldemort's hold and races to the edge of the tower, collapsing against the low wall to look down below, as if he might be able to see the body where it has fallen into the darkness.

The silence lasts for just a moment longer, and then it's broken with a cry of triumph.

The Death Eaters are celebrating.

Harry doesn't look at them. He can't look at them.

Firm hands grip him by the arms, force him back and away from the edge. Harry tries to shove free, but he can't. His head feels as if it's full of static. He thinks he might be crying.

"Potter," Snape says, voice low as he struggles to keep Harry still. "Potter, listen."

"Get off me," Harry snarls. Snape's hands are still on him, and Harry can't stand it. He jabs one elbow into Snape's ribs, and the man grunts before grabbing his arm and wrenching it behind his back, grip painful.

"Potter," Snape repeats, voice urgent, out of breath. "For once in your life, use that wretched brain of yours and *think*."

Harry stills. Not so much because of what Snape said, but how he said it. He sounds... worried. Desperate. So Harry does as Snape says, does his best to wrest his brain back from the edge of panic and think.

He doesn't like what he finds. "Dumbledore was going to kill me," he says, voice so quiet it's a wonder Snape hears him.

He feels Snape nod, the movement so small only the sway of his hair brushing against Harry's neck gives him away. Harry stares blankly over the edge of the tower.

Dumbledore was going to *kill* him.

As he considers this, he feels as if he is outside his body, looking down at the world from a thousand feet above. He feels remote, like nothing can touch him. It's a horrible thought, a horrible truth, but he doesn't feel it.

Dumbledore was going to kill him, but why? What did he know?

What could be so important, except... Harry lifts his free hand. Before he can touch his scar, Snape grabs his wrist, nails digging into his skin.

"Careful, Potter," Snape says, voice low. Harry clenches his eyes shut, struggles to breathe as he scrubs even the memory of the thought from his mind.

Whatever Dumbledore knew, Harry realizes, Snape knows it too.

And Snape killed him for it.

And Harry... Harry can't know it, not with Voldemort so close.

Harry turns his head, looks beyond Snape's shoulder to see that the Death Eaters are still laughing, crowing over Dumbledore's death, over the way his body fell, limp and powerless in death as he never was in life. He almost expects to see Voldemort laughing with them, but he isn't.

Instead, he's watching Harry, eyes gleaming as they trace the way he's trapped in Snape's hold.

Harry feels it when Snape notices Voldemort's attention; his whole body stills, muscles tense as if preparing to run and take Harry with him.

Then, Voldemort speaks.

"A magnificent show of loyalty, Severus," he says, voice dangerously soft.

Snape shifts, puts Harry between himself and the man, and Voldemort notices. He bares his teeth, and it could almost be a grin but for the look in his eyes. Harry bristles in response, his whole body thrumming as the tension picks up. He tries to shrug out of Snape's hold once more, but Snape doesn't let him.

Voldemort isn't done. He paces forward, and Snape takes a careful step back toward the tower's edge, dragging Harry with him. The other Death Eaters have fallen silent, eager to witness the newest bloodshed, whatever it may be.

"But I'm afraid it's too late," Voldemort continues. He doesn't take another step. His gaze is trained on Snape's hands where they grip Harry's arms. "Tell me, Severus, did you think I would not know?"

Harry holds his breath. He didn't tell Voldemort of Snape's role in Dumbledore's plan, but he supposes he didn't need to. Who else could have gotten so close?

"My Lord?" Snape asks, voice flat.

“There is no mercy for traitors. No redemption,” Voldemort tells him. He narrows his eyes, and his grip on his wand grows tighter. If he weren't in the way, Harry is certain Snape would be dead by now. “So tell me, Severus. Why did you kill Albus Dumbledore?”

Snape's hands clench tighter around Harry's arms. Harry's eyes widen as he realizes what's about to happen.

Before he can brace himself, Snape shoves him forward. Voldemort snarls, swoops forward to catch him. As soon as Voldemort has him, Harry grips the man's arms, keeps them still and goes limp in his hold, forcing Voldemort to choose between supporting Harry's weight and letting him fall to go after Snape. Snape takes advantage of the man's indecision, and Harry looks just in time to see him leap over the tower's edge. Where Dumbledore fell, Snape flies, and before anyone can move to attack, to follow, he disappears into the darkness beyond the Dark Mark's glow.

Harry feels a trembling sort of triumph rise in his chest.

Snape killed Dumbledore, it's true. But Dumbledore was going to kill Harry, and Voldemort was going to kill Snape. It's enough, Harry thinks, that this kill has been stolen from Voldemort's grasp. Around him, Voldemort's arms shift to pull him tighter against his chest—almost tight enough to hurt.

“My Lord?” One of the Death Eaters steps forward. “What should we do?”

“Let us search for the traitor, my Lord,” another says, eager. “We'll find him.”

Harry ducks his head and grins where no one can see, because he knows they won't.

“No,” Voldemort tells them, and he sounds almost thoughtful. If Harry were in any state to feel concern, he thinks he would. “Leave him.”

“But—”

“It matters not,” Voldemort says. He bends, presses his face to Harry's hair and breathes in. “Let him run.”

Harry locks his gaze on the Death Eaters, and they stare back at him, incredulous. None of them know what to do, now that the danger has passed. Now that Voldemort seems content just to keep Harry close. A particularly brave Death Eater clears her throat and asks, “What now, my Lord?”

Voldemort sighs and says, “Wake the students—”

“No!” The protest is out before Harry can think, but as the echo of it hangs in the air, he decides he doesn't regret it.

The DA are prepared to fight; he knows this, but he came here to keep them *safe*.

“No?” Voldemort asks, voice dangerously soft.



Harry turns in his hold, grips at the hands that have fallen to his hips. He stares into Voldemort's burning gaze and says, "You promised."

For a moment, he thinks the man might lash out. Then he relaxes, triumph breaking across his expression because he knows what this means. Harry is giving in.

Fully.

Finally.

"Yes, I suppose I did." Voldemort turns back to his followers, and he barely sounds interested at all as he gives them new orders. "Wake the professors. Gather them in the Great Hall."

"What then?" the same Death Eater asks.

As Voldemort stares her down, the Death Eater takes a small step back. Voldemort grins and says, "Then you wait."

As soon as the last Death Eater disappears back into the castle, Harry lashes out, putting just enough space between them that he can unsheathe his wand and press it to Voldemort's throat. Voldemort only laughs at him, and Harry presses harder, until he thinks he sees the man's eyes begin to water at the pain of it. "The professors won't let any harm come to the school," Harry says. He twists his wand, watches the way it pulls the skin of Voldemort's throat taut over his Adam's apple. "You've sent your Death Eaters to a fight they can't win."

"Have I?" Voldemort asks. He tilts his head, leans into the press of Harry's wand. "Well, then. I suppose I've done as you asked." He grins and says, "Again."

Harry takes a breath, lets it out slowly. He has power here, he reminds himself. And he came here to *use it*. "You have."

He lowers his wand just enough that it no longer digs into the man's skin. Voldemort hums in pleasure, grips Harry's wrist in one hand and holds him there. "Come, Harry Potter," he says. "Let's talk terms."

Harry doesn't even think to start small.

"I want you to end this war," he says. He keeps his voice firm, his back straight. "I want Lord Voldemort to disappear."

Voldemort bares his teeth in a snarl, and his nails cut into Harry's skin.

"You ask for much," Voldemort tells him. There is a darkness in his voice, in his expression, that makes Harry long to shy away. But he doesn't. Because this is *important*.

If he's going to give himself away, he wants it to be worth something.

"Will you do it?" Harry demands. He doesn't want to make any ultimatums, not yet. But he will if he needs to, and the tower's edge is only a short distance away.

Voldemort only looks at him, considering.

Then, he wraps one arm around Harry's back, too quick to escape, and uses his hold on Harry's wrist to draw him close. He leans forward, down, presses an insistent kiss to Harry's lips, and Harry doesn't flinch; he doesn't fight. He lets his eyes slip shut and yields, parting his lips as Voldemort presses even closer than before.

He doesn't know how long it lasts.

He thinks he should be afraid.

He thinks he should be fighting.

But Voldemort's lips are soft, softer than he thought they'd be as they move against his own, and the heavy press of his hands is enough to drive even the most persistent thoughts from his head. When Voldemort releases him, Harry takes a gasping breath, feeling dizzy. He leans forward to duck his head beneath Voldemort's chin and does his best to ignore the heat of the man's hands on his body. He shivers and pretends it's from the wind. It's strange, Harry thinks, to be so close without drawing blood. He supposes he should get used to it.

When he finds it within himself to look up at the man, there's a flush across Voldemort's pale cheeks. "I will do this," he says, now that he has Harry's attention, "Because you have asked it of me, and because I *love you*." His eyes are burning. "But know this, Harry..."

Harry takes a trembling breath, and although he doesn't want to, he asks, "Know what?"

Voldemort sways forward, cradles Harry's face in his hands and drags one thumb across Harry's bottom lip. When Harry doesn't flinch away, he sighs, and his breath is warm against Harry's cheek.

"They slipped this love for you into me like a poison, Harry Potter," Voldemort tells him, voice soft, like he's sharing a secret, "But Amortentia doesn't last forever."

Harry swallows through a sudden lump in his throat. "Then why—?"

"I don't *know*," Voldemort snarls. He pulls Harry impossibly closer, wraps himself around Harry's body as though he wants to burrow under his skin and fester there. "When I find out, I will cut myself free of you. I will take the heart from your chest and *burn it*."

Harry trembles in his hold, reminds himself he's here for a reason. Reminds himself it's too late to run.

Voldemort sighs, then, and his hold grows gentle once more.

"But until then, Harry Potter," Voldemort says, trailing one hand down Harry's throat and across his chest. "Until then, what may we do?"

And here we are, at the original end of this story. This *was* going to be the official end, but because I've decided to add an epilogue, there is technically one more chapter. So stick around if you'd like more :))

Thanks to everyone who's left a comment or a kudos! To everyone else, thanks for reading!!

@ mith!!! I hope this chapter has lived up to the rest!! it was all sparked by your lovely prompt, so I'm happy you've enjoyed my fill :sluglove:

# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

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

Three years ago, Lord Voldemort died atop the Astronomy Tower. Three years ago, he fell in love with Harry Potter, had this love slipped into him like a knife to the heart, and it is as though he fell into a dream. Nothing was real. Nothing was worth keeping. Nothing, that is, but his boy.

He wonders if this is still true, and it is this wondering that tells him something has changed.

He has never had to wonder before.

Beside him, Harry Potter sleeps on, unaware. It seems almost unfair to him, that he should be at peace in this moment, defenseless because he thinks he can afford to be. He lifts one hand, rests it across Harry's throat, imagines squeezing the life from him. He could do it, he thinks; it would be easy. He has dreamt of this moment, has longed for it and thought it impossible.

It is not so impossible now.

His hand twitches, and Harry wakes. For a moment, he looks confused, but it doesn't last. What does his love see, he wonders as he stares into those wide, green eyes. What is he thinking?

"Voldemort," Harry greets him, voice soft, and it enough to set him aflame where he lies.

Lord Voldemort has been dead for three years; this is as true as anything else.

He is not dead now.

He presses down, and Harry holds his breath, swallows heavily against his palm. He has loved this boy (this man, now) for three years. He thinks he might still.

Harry grips his wrist in one hand, but he doesn't try to pull away. He only lies there, watches him with solemn eyes, and asks, "What will you do?"

He doesn't know.

He knows what he would have done, back in the beginning, what some part of him still longs to do, and yet... This bed where he lies is warm, and Harry's skin is soft. He can feel the beat of his love's pulse, steady against his palm as he waits.

There is a spell, he knows, that will let his hand tear through skin and bone like they are nothing, that will let him take Harry's heart in his hand and crush it with no effort at all. He imagines speaking the words. He imagines how it would feel: the wet heat of Harry's blood on his hands, in his mouth, the way it would cool and then dry against his skin, until it was nothing more than a stain to be burned away.

He imagines the weight of Harry's still-warm heart in his cupped palms, the knowledge that it would never beat again.

He doesn't use the spell.

With his grip on Harry's throat, he pulls his love across the bed, until he can bury his face in Harry's hair, until he can feel the solid heat of him, closer than before. He says, "Go back to sleep."

And Harry does. He is trembling, and then he is still. His breathing slows; the hold on his wrist grows lax.

And the man who was Voldemort, who might be Voldemort still, presses his lips to Harry's forehead. "I will kill you, my love," he says, and he means it. "But not tonight."

When morning comes, he decides, he will keep his promise. When morning comes, he will kill Harry Potter.

Or maybe he won't. And then this choice is taken from him.

In the morning, Harry is gone.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has left a comment or kudos! To everyone else, thank you so much for reading!! Now that finals are done and I feel like a person again, I'll do my best to respond to any comments you feel like leaving!!

I had a few different ideas for how I could end this fic. I decided on this one because I'm a sucker for an open ending and it's the happiest end this fic probably deserves. I likely won't *officially* write anything more in this verse, but it may show up again on [tumblr](#) or discord (who knows, really).

I had so much fun writing this fic, so I hope you all enjoyed reading it :))

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!