

Returning the Favor

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/29818929) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/29818929>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Major Character Death
Categories:	F/M , M/M , Multi
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationships:	Harry Potter/Voldemort , Harry Potter/Tom Riddle Voldemort , Lucius Malfoy/Narcissa Black Malfoy , James Potter/Lily Evans Potter , Bellatrix Black Lestrage/Rodolphus Lestrage
Characters:	Harry Potter , Tom Riddle Voldemort , Lucius Malfoy , Narcissa Black Malfoy , Draco Malfoy , James Potter , Lily Evans Potter , Sirius Black , Regulus Black , Remus Lupin , Severus Snape , Bellatrix Black Lestrage , Rodolphus Lestrage , Rabastan Lestrage
Additional Tags:	Slow Burn , Slow Romance , Time Travel , Age Difference , Possessive Behavior , Possessive Tom Riddle , Sane Tom Riddle , Cinnamon Roll Harry Potter , Sassy Harry Potter , One-Sided Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter , Bottom Harry Potter , Top Tom Riddle , Harry is Top Bait , Casual mention of Black family incest , For comedic purposes , Or Is It? , Harry doesn't put up with Tom's shit , Tom Riddle is His Own Warning , expansion of magical theory and worldbuilding , BAMF Narcissa Black Malfoy , Unexpected Sex Symbol Snape? , It's more likely than you think! , Somnophilia , Frottage , Tom has a Madonna Complex , And I mean Madonna as Harry , Soft Non-con , Oral Sex , Tom is a dirty old man , Zombu Approved , Hand Jobs , Fluff , Angst , Rimming , Intercrural Sex , Pedophilia (mentioned) , Bisexual TomCat Marvolo Riddle , Alternate Universe - Voldemort Wins , Unreliable Narrator , Action/Adventure , Romance , Keep an eye on the tags y'all , I might throw spoilers in there , Trans Character , Learning Disabilities , Mystery , Drama , erotic asphyxiation , Choking , Genocide , Torture , Cannibalism , Ritual Sex , Murder
Language:	English
Collections:	Tremendously Thrilling Tomarry , Top-tier Tomarry , Everlasting Harrymort and Tomarry , Tom and Harry- HP.TR , Top 10% , Avidreaders HP WIP faves , Thursday's Favorites collected for quick find , HarryPotterfav , The Overly Toasted Bagel Collection , S-Grade Tomarry Fics! ♡ , Hp random love , HP - Tomarry: solid reads 10/10 , tomappi _ay , Amarillie Harry Potter Fanfictions , Tomarry\Harrymort , Tomarryslash , great harry potter fics , the best fics I've read on ao3 , Tomarry , rereads that are great , The Read Agains and Agains , Wan Shi Tong's Spirit Library , thiccboimork's harry_potter reading list , thiccboimork's reading list , Harry Potter fanfics to binge read at night , Favorite Harry Potter Fanfics , How the fuck happened this?! - Voldemort and Harry , Tomarry Fics For Later , HP WIP

Stats:

Published: 2021-03-03 Updated: 2022-07-10 Words: 152,038 Chapters:
33/?

Returning the Favor

by [ClasslessTulip](#)

Summary

The Dark Lord did not expect Lady Malfoy to solve a 50-year-old cold case.

Possibly reaffirm his suspicions, but it would be a long shot.

Lucky for him, Lady Malfoy does not see failure as an option.

Notes

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

- Translation into Español available: [Returning the Favor - Traducción](#) by [Verano](#)

In the Begining

Narcissa stood twenty paces before the Dark Lord's desk, back straight and her hands lose at her sides. Behind the desk stood the lord in question, standing straight and tall, his hands clasped behind his back, the hand holding his wand making small, gentle, absentminded swirls as he looked out of the windows lining the wall. His head, while bowed to observe the courtyard below him, was wreathed in light, the sunlight streaming inside haloing his hair and showing it as the true, dark brown it is and not the black most think it appears as.

She has stood in the same spot for nearly ten minutes, but that does not bother her. Where others would have shifted and sighed, she, as a Daughter of the House of Black, was far above such things.

When her Lord was ready to speak, he would do so.

"I have requested your presence, Lady Malfoy," he began softly, "because you have a reputation for discretion."

Knowing it as the rhetorical statement it is, she stayed silent. His broad shoulders, caped in a dark green damask, straightened as though he has come to some sort of decision. "What I am going to request of you, must not be shared with anyone. Including your lord husband."

"My Lord?" While there are not many Marked Lady's in his ranks, it is an open (and expected secret) that those of his married followers will oft request the assistance of their wives to fulfill certain goals and tasks.

What is it he is going to request of her, to require such discretion?

"On the desk is a green folder. Inside it is your briefing, along with any and all information that I have deemed necessary for your work. Any questions and concerns that you need to be addressed are to be brought to me, face to face." The entire conversation he continued to look out of the window. Undoubtedly he has been observing her through her reflection, but his lack of meeting her square on is telling.

Stepping towards the desk, her manicured fingers lifted the file. It felt light, and if it were not for his Lordship stating otherwise, she would assume that it was empty.

"...is there a required time for completion, my Lord," she queried.

"The sooner the better, but do not fear to rush." Bringing his hands to his front, she watched with no small amount of trepidation as his free hand gently caressed the yew wand. "I have the, feeling, that there may be many dead ends you shall meet and that there may be no conclusion."

Sitting in her Drawing Room, night robe cinched around her waist as her slippers feet sat before the cold fireplace, Narcissa sipped her tea before setting her cup aside, instead occupying her hands with the file.

She had looked at it earlier, befuddled at what was inside. A few bits of scrap parchment, covered in the scrawl that contained the beginnings of what would eventually turn into the Dark Lord's elegant script and the scratchings of another youthful hand, made up the bulk of the papers. Nestled inside was a newspaper clipping, muggle-made due to the lack of movement, showing two boys, the youngest of whom looked startling like her Lord, the elder a scrappy wisp of a thing. Both looked wan and thin, making her heart twist. The elder was sitting on the curb of a paved road, the double-ended needles of a Shetland knitter nestled at his side as he reached for the youngster scampering away. What few words of the article that she could read sounded as though the writer was commending the older boy for watching his brother as he 'contributed to the war effort.'

Mixed in was also a scrap of fabric tacked onto stiff cardstock, the red thread used showing up bright against the grubby, grey knitted fabric.

She had to secret the file away from Lucius' eyes, but she knows that he knows she has been tasked with an important errand. Keeping it out of her son's prying eyes was much more difficult; her little Draco was much too nosy for his good. She will have to work harder to help him control his impulses, for all the good that they do bring him.

Still...

Opening the file again, she took more time to read the scraps nestled within. What relation the boy had to his Lordship is unknown, for she can tell even through the faded photograph that this was not a case of a boy and his brother.

A caretaker? Maybe an early mentor? While not much is known about the Dark Lord's early years, just based on the timeline of events from his campaign's and his schoolmates' recollections (her own, aging mother had shared a House with him) that this must have taken place during the very late '20s, perhaps the early '30s.

Regardless, she only has a photo and a name to go by.

Harry J. Potter, just who are you?

Leaning back in her chair, Narcissa sat up as straight as possible, her back letting out a long series of cracks as her spine adjusted from being bent over the *micro-film viewer* she had spent the last three hours fiddling with.

It has been nearly a month since she received her assignment from the Dark Lord, and she has made no progress from her first week.

Seeing the name 'Potter', she had looked into the birth records of all male babies born between 1915 to 1925 in the Department of Lineages at the Ministry, assuming the boy she

was searching for to perhaps be an offshoot of the Potter Family. The only records of a 'Harry Potter' she could find were one *Harold John Potter* born circa 1783, and the since-deceased first Potter Heir, who was lost during the last skirmishes of the Dark Lord's Revolution. Seeing that the boy was either a bastard or a muggle (which, upon learning that the surname 'Potter' was a fairly common one in muggle England, sent Narcissa into a titter), she had no choice but to move her investigation wholly into the muggle realm.

It had taken her only a few days to get the location of her Lord's childhood home. *Wool's Orphanage*. Such a...a **muggle** name. And to imagine that he came from such humble beginnings...

The thought of a magical child being left alone in such circumstances made her teeth itch. The system in place now is MUCH better!

Located in west London, the drab, red-bricked building had still stood tall, with only a few patches of lighter brick denoting repairs done after the event known as the *Blitz*. Not understanding the name of the event, just knowing that much of muggle London had needed to be rebuilt, she had glossed over the event, only needing to know what the building currently is.

Being discontinued as an orphanage back in the '50s, the building had then been turned into a post-World War II resource center, and then in the late '80's a museum and archive. Touring the building showed a place that was clean and well-kept, with rows-upon-rows of bookshelves on the ground floor, and displays on the second, with the third floor and steeple being off-limits.

Looking at the displays and reading the placards had, quite frankly, horrified Narcissa. To think that MUGGLES would commit such atrocities, to go to such lengths, simply showed how barbaric they were, and that The Separation was an excellent choice.

...and she always thought there was *something* off about those Germans.

It was during her tour that she ran into one of the archive attendants. Despite being a muggle, money recognizes money, and Lady Madeline Martin was quite happy to chat Narcissa's ear off, even leaning in and whispering how *'it's so NICE to meet another Tory. Labor just doesn't know how to handle these things!'*

Not knowing (nor caring) about 'Tories' and 'Labours', Narcissa soon had steered to conversation towards her research. Upon mentioning doing research for her Lordship, Madeline had lit up with a look that many a Malfoy is familiar with. Quickly ushering Narcissa to the basement level, and to a large room that contained large, glass screens set on desks, and long rows of shelves with metal canisters.

"This is the microfilm room! Every newspaper gets copied and stored for archival. Now, let me see that folder of yours, Mrs. Malfoy!"

A scant hour later, Madeline had all the microfilm canisters for the timespan she had narrowed down the news clipping to, had shown Narcissa how to use the microfilm viewer, and even provided additional paper and pens for note-taking.

"That should be that, but if I may, Mrs. Malfoy, what exactly is your Lordship looking for?"

"I am currently doing a research project on behalf of my Lordship," Narcissa reiterated in clipped, short tones. "He resided here when this place was used as an orphanage, along with an old childhood friend, but that is the last known link."

Madeline *tsked* in sympathy. "Well, I would wish you luck, but depending on when that article was released, his friend may be long since dead. Once Britain entered the war, every adult male was drafted to fight, and in many cases, they just hauled you off the street, even if you weren't *quite* the right age."

"His friend is most likely long dead."

That was weeks ago, and her research has since stalled. From the time the archive opened to the time it closed, Monday to Friday, she was buried down in that musty, dreary basement. Out of the nearly 1000 newspaper films on hand, she has scrolled through about half of them with little success.

But dear MERLIN the dreams. Lucius has had to wake her from visions of bombs falling from the sky and blown-out homes too often, as of late.

Madeline has let slip that she may be able to wrangle more assistance, in return for a "sizable donation" to the archive. Apparently, funding has been cut quite a bit throughout the years, and while there are many generous donations from private citizens, it doesn't change the fact that the archive *'needs a bit of a boost*.

Her Lordship may doubt her abilities, but Narcissa will be **damned** if she doesn't give this the attention it deserves.

A small donation of a little over 40,000 galleons (almost £200,000) and five days later Narcissa had been presented with a copy of the newspaper her article came from, one listed for nearly a decade later with a 'Missing Persons' notice about little Harry, along with a list of names of the orphans who resided in the building going on for a decade in either direction of the two articles.

Filled with relief that she now had a new direction, that relief had quickly fled upon seeing the notice. Seeing the small portrait included in the article, she could see that the little waif had grown into a stunning (if thin) young man, even if one does not discount the horrid glasses he was wearing.

Still, a little voice in the back of her head kept saying *'Potter. He's a Potter. He has the Potter hair!'*, and it was getting difficult to ignore. He has to be a bastard child, she would eat her Opaleye slippers if she were wrong. His projected birth year does put him as a possible bastard of one Tristan Potter, the elder half-brother of Robert Potter. The man had been quite scandalous, living very loosely in the bedroom before being shipped off to the Continent.

If Narcissa's memory serves her right, the Potter Family lost quite a bit of their wealth because of all the *bedding fines* and child support they had to shell out because of Tristan's ways.

Which, coincidentally, also lost them their Sacred Twenty-Eight status.

Scandals aside, she now has another roadblock. One that may be abetted with the list of orphan names she had been given, but which may be insurmountable. Madeline had suggested that those who had been living at the orphanage at the time may have more information that wasn't mentioned in the notice, but Narcissa isn't too optimistic about that; muggles live much shorter lives than wizards and suffer from age-related maladies much more frequently. Even if she were to find one such still living, the likelihood of them being able to tell her anything is nil.

She stands corrected. A junior employee of the archive has done the scutwork for her, eliminating the deceased orphans from the list, notating the ones who were not there during the time of Harry, or who were not in a fit mental state to speak of their time.

Still, it left her with a disappointingly short list.

Three names.

Striking off the second name on her list, Narcissa sighed through her nose in frustration. She had to fight the urge to throw her crystal fountain pen across the backseat of the Malfoy Coach, reminding herself to rule her emotions, not let them rule her. Allowing herself to go through a few breathing exercises, she eventually sat back against the supple black leather of the Coach's bench seat before rapping the cab roof with her knuckles. With a soft sway, the Coach pulled away from the curb of the block of flats she had just visited before merging with the flow of muggle traffic.

Sipping on the chilled lemon water that the Coach provided her, Narcissa mentally went over what she had learned, absentmindedly looking out of the tinted windows of the cab and watching the noisy, unsophisticated muggle automobiles pass by.

Linda Meldon had been a complete dead-end, too young at the time to truly observe the goings-on around her. Sarah Cummings, while only a few years younger than Harry had been upon his disappearance, hadn't interacted with him much; her "crush" on the boy had kept her from speaking with him, and shortly after he went missing, she had been taken in by distant relatives. Both women did agree that he was a very kind, hard-working young man, working his fingers to the bone to make sure that everyone was fed and clothed to the best of his abilities in the face of a drunkard orphanage matron. Not only could he knit a sweater in a day (when wool could be had), he also could stretch out what little meat they got and helped the younger orphans learn their letters and numbers between visits of the priest of the attached church.

What they ALSO agreed on was that the young Dark Lord was a "little shit" who only listened to Harry. *And that he got worse after Harry left.*

Which, considering what Narcissa knew of her Lordship, was an apt if crude, description.

Hopefully, this *Amy Benson* will be able to give Narcissa more information.

Narcissa laid in bed next to her snoring husband, unable to sleep due to the whirlwind currently making itself at home in her mind. She should be resting, for both herself and Lucius have a busy day tomorrow; Draco will be visiting for the Easter holiday, and Narcissa needs to make arrangements for tea with Lord and Lady Greengrass to talk more about a possible betrothal, along with making her weekly meeting at *The Lady's Parlour* and visiting Saint Mungo's for the monthly donation.

But every time she closes her eyes, she's transported back to the *awfully* tacky Drawing Room of Amy Benson and the sub-par tea her caretaker served while Narcissa interviewed the muggle.

An interview that had not only been eye-opening but had also twisted the path of her investigation upon its head.

"Oh, Harry, you said you were looking for?" Folding gnarled, spotted fingers over a ratted lap blanket, Mrs. Amy Dowels nee Benson blinked rheumy eyes behind her thick glasses, looking owl-like.

Narcissa set her watery tea down upon its matching, cracked saucer. "Yes. My Lord grew up at Wool's and was quite attached to Harry. He wants to know what happened to the boy." Surrounding them was the cramped Drawing Room, years of clutter turning a once-spacious and bright room into something claustrophobic.

Amy's face screwed up in a scowl. "And I bet your 'Lord' is that devil child, Riddle." Snorting, she cleared her throat. "That boy was always obsessed over Harry. If I didn't know any better, I'd have said he was bent for the lad, but that would mean Riddle could feel things more than rage and sadism." Leaning back in her wheeled chair, Amy twisted over her shoulder, "TINA! BRING US SOME BISCUITS! THE GOOD TIN!"

Once the desired tin was placed in the center of the little tea table, Narcissa continued her questioning; "What, exactly, would you define their relationship as?"

"If Riddle could own Harry, he would do so in a heartbeat! That boy always had to be the center of Harry's attention, and would do anything to get it." Refilling their teacups with shaking hands, she continued. "But, Harry was also the only one he would listen to. Which isn't saying TOO MUCH, considering that he and Amelia Cotton, one of the other minders, were the only ones keeping the building going. Lord above knows that Ms. Cole was too drunk to do anything." Ignoring Narcissa's conciliatory murmurs, Amy picked up a stale ginger biscuit. "Between you and me, Riddle was just waiting to age out of the system before

sweeping off with Harry. He was convinced that they were both too good for us 'common folk'. He got even worse when he started going to that godless school."

*"And, Harry's disappearance?" While she desperately wanted to learn more about her Lordship's background (Riddle! Such a MUGGLE name!), she **needed** to know what happened to Harry.*

Amy got quiet, her spotted fingers playing with her teacup. Narcissa fought her grimace at the sound of cheap porcelain scratching against itself.

"Not too long after Riddle left for his second year, Harry started getting skittish. A few of the others thought the bobbies were keeping an eye on him, would drag him off for the war effort. Denny Abraham and Marcus Miller were taken earlier in the summer, and Billy Stubbs followed the next year, but I saw some poncy man in fancy clothes talking with him, once, near the front gate. He kept on touching Harry's arm, and I SWEAR he pet his hair. I think he was a rich fop who was looking for a pretty boy to bed."

Narcissa's eyebrows nearly hit her hairline. While she was expecting Harry to be drafted, getting snatched by some rich muggle was NOT in her list of probable outcomes.

Seeing her guests look, Amy nodded. "Poor Harry kept getting accosted by the bloke every time he left to do the shopping. A few of the girls his age were quite envious, saying that they would jump at the chance to be kept by a handsome, older rich man. A few of the boys even agreed, with Billy himself saying 'food is food, and a boy gotta eat'. But, it's obvious why he would go for Harry. He may have been thinner than a rake, but he was easily the prettiest out of all of us."

Keeping Amy talking, Narcissa tried to get a name or description of the man, but Amy couldn't provide more than 'tall and handsome, dressed in some of the ponciest clothes she'd seen outside of Buckingham.'

Drawing upon some passive Legilimency skills, Narcissa skimmed the woman's mind and nearly dropped her teacup. While she doesn't recognize him per se, the man in question was unmistakably a Black. Most likely from a tertiary branch, and with Prince ancestry, if his patrician nose was any proof of it. But the frosted grey eyes and black curls were a dead giveaway.

In truth, she should be reporting her findings, but her fingers clenched in terror at the thought. While it does not happen as often now, at the beginning of his reign the Dark Lord had a habit of killing the messenger. Narcissa does not want to meet her end because she's related to the man who abducted his (possible) childhood love and may have done many unsavory things to him.

Gaining access to Grimmauld Place was both easier and harder than expected. Easier, because the current Head of House Black was cousin Sirius, and harder because the current Head of House Black was cousin Sirius.

After meeting up with the Black Heir, cousin Regulus (and Sirius' younger brother), it had taken much convincing to get him to deliver her request for access to the family tapestry to Sirius. It was only her mention that she was in the midst of a cold missing person case that he finally relented.

Sirius, on the other hand, was as difficult as ever. It was only when Narcissa arrived on his front stoop and got into a shouting contest with him (and rousing the portrait of Walburga, treating all and sundry to her legendary caterwauling) that she was granted entry.

Standing in the foyer, she took in the remodeling Sirius subjected the townhouse to in the aftermath of his mother's death. Gone was the dark and gloomy atmosphere of her childhood visits. Now, cream walls matched with warm, rosy woods and floors, Gryffindor-esq colors, and decorations littering the place. Light poured in from the windows and was reflected further into the house via reflecting mirrors, and the famed house-elf heads that used to be mounted near the stairs were gone.

Walburga's portrait, on the other hand, was still in the entryway.

Making brief chat with Aunt Walburga, Narcissa made her way up the stairs, knowing by memory where the family tapestry would be hung. She soon acquired a shadow in the form of James Potter, the soon-to-be Potter Head and former Senior Auror who has been Sirius' friend since their first journey on the Hogwarts Express. Seeing him up close for the first time in over a decade reminded her of her hunch that Harry must be a bastard Potter; the hair and brow ridge were too close to be a coincidence, and both shared the sharp cheekbones of the Blacks, although Harry had a more fox-like arch to his brow that he must have gotten from whoever his mother was, along with having slightly offset cheeks, giving the lower half of his face a gentle heart-shape.

Ignoring her tail, she entered the tapestry room, pulling from her pocket and enlarging the file therein. Flipping to the last page of her notes, she ignored the creak of Potter's boots as he stood in the doorway, and then the huff he let out as she continued to ignore him.

Apparently, he never took to heart the lessons Aunties Euphemia and Dorea tried to instill in him.

Finding the range of dates she jotted down, she backtracked on the Family tree to the mid-1800s while also looking for any mentions of 'Prince'. Much like her husband's associate, Severus Snape, the Black in question had the quintessential patrician nose, although he seemed to have missed out on the other hawkish features common to the line, making it possible that he gets it from a grandparent.

Looking at the stitched portrait of an 'Andarius', Potter finally broke the silence. "What are you looking for, Narcissa?"

Shooting him a glare from the side, her lips twisted into a sneer. "I do not remember giving you leave to address me so informally, Lord-In-Waiting Potter."

"Oh, come off it," he snapped back, crossing his arms. "As much as I don't want to admit it, we're related. And keeping up with this stuffy formality does nothing for us."

"That '*stuffy formality*', as you so succinctly put it, is simple **manners**, *James*," she drawled. Rolling her eyes at his huffed out *whatever*, she continued her observation. "And no doubt you heard what I told Lord Black; I am investigating a cold case. One that has its roots in the muggle world, and that an ancestor of ours may have some information on, oh-!"

While speaking, her finger had been tracing different branches before landing on a Marcellus Prince. One of his daughters, Lucretia, married one Altair Cepheus Black, and they had three children; Belladonna, Vega, and Antares. Belladonna had gone on to marry a Longbottom, Antares had died young, and Vega lived to the ripe, old age of 137.

He had actually just passed a few years ago. His portrait, if not located in his country home in Cork, Ireland, should be in one of the many Black vaults. A simple missive to Gringotts should tell her.

Making a note on a bit of scrap, Narcissa soon shrunk and replaced the file in her pocket. Turning to face Potter, she arched a brow at his standoffish posture. "I have found what I needed and shall be on my way. I can see myself out."

"Oh *no*, Lady Malfoy, I must insist that I escort you out," he made a sweeping bow as he mocked her. "After all, it's just good *manners*."

Exiting the Floo of *Kinsale Cottage*, Narcissa *Vanished* the little bit of soot that clung to her icy robes. With another flick of her wand, she had the Cottage shutters and windows open, a magical breeze freshening the room of its cloistered smell.

Looking around her, she made a mental note to have an elf come out and see to the Cottage; while it hasn't even been five years since Vega's passing, *Kinsale Cottage is* an Old Property, and such places collect dust like a Zabini does ex-spouses.

Exiting the Floo Room, Narcissa entered the Grand Entry, going up the sweeping staircase before heading over to the Left Wing. According to the record that Gringotts sent, Vega's main portrait frame should be in the Smoking Room, overlooking the coast and out onto the *Celtic Sea*.

Locating the room, she repeated the shutter-and-windows acts from the Floo Room, the sudden light streaming in alighting on Vega's portrait.

He had been painted at the magical prime of his life, looking to be anywhere between forty to sixty in muggle terms. He had faint crow's feet near his eyes and slight greying at his temples, just enough signs of age to denote experience, but still youthful. The sharp nose balanced well with the 'bedroom eyes' and tight ringlet curls not uncommon to the Rosier line, leading overall to a very attractive package.

Narcissa can understand just how the man was able to despoil so many Pureblood daughters; one quirk of the lips and they'd happily tumble into his bed, angry fathers be-damned.

*Or, at least he would be, if he wasn't currently sprawled in an overstuffed chair, mouth hanging open as he made the most Merlin-awful **snore**s!*

"Ah-HEM!"

"**BLOODY FUCK!**" Jolting out of his slumber, Vega fell to the floor, the painted tea table next to the chair blocking him from Narcissa's view as he cursed up a storm in Gaelic.

"Hello, cousin Vega," Narcissa intoned as the portrait got back to his feet, the dark blue and silver overrobe he was wearing still flipped up over his head. "I have a few questions for you."

"Feckin' 'ell, moth! Warn a man, or at leas' have a scoop ready for 'im!" Flipping the heavy fabric back over his head, Vega's long fingers danced about his person, smoothing out wrinkles and fixing drapes before he glanced at Narcissa, doing a double-take with wide, frosty eyes before he smiled a just-this-side of sleazy smile, leaning his hip against the tea table as he pushed his hair back from his face. "'ow's it goin', burd?"

"...Vega, we're **cousins**."

"Tha' never stopped a Black before, now, 'as it," he tossed back, reaching over to a crystal bottle filled with an amber liquid. "Besides, I don' think this is a social call."

"You are correct. I am investigating a missing person case, and you were-"

"I only shagged Olivia the once!"

"What? No, Olivia has nothing-"

"And Bernadette is a lying slag!"

"Who in the name of Merlin-"

"If Bannor Gryffinnest is saying shite, he better watch it because he watched me stick it to his Missus during that shesh!"

"Vega," she shouted, face pink at the im-promptly gained knowledge of her **relative's colorful** sex life. "I am looking for him!" Holding up the copy of Harry's missing notice, she walked closer to Vega's frame, letting the man get a good look at it.

"Oh! Yes, I recognize him. Quite the beautiful boy. Had very fetching green eyes. A bit on the skinny side, but a few good meals would give me something to grab onto as I had him," Vega chuckled as he poured a few fingers of whiskey, his accent calming as he settled down. Tossing back the shot, he poured another. "I'm pretty certain he was a Potter by-blow begat on some muggle woman. I could feel *his* magic, even though it felt off."

Narcissa scrunched her nose at Vega's baldfaced mention of wanting to bed the boy before processing his second statement. "So, you had the same suspicion?"

Nodding, Vega sipped his drink. "It's why I approached him in the first place. Two of Tristan's love children had been found the month previous, both about the same age. Considering how utterly *annoying* the Potter's had been up until that point, everyone was looking for anything to rub in their faces. Seeing his pretty face and hearing his sweet voice just made me want to get under the Potter's skin by making him my *catamite*," he grinned wolfishly at her quiet, inelegant, and derisive grunt. "Listen, pissing off Robert Potter would just be a bonus to having that pretty thing bouncing on my co-"

"Yes, that's nice to hear, Vega! Now can you tell me about the last time you saw the boy?" Narcissa had forgotten how oversexed some members of her family could be.

But that bit about Gryffinnest could open some doors. She always thought Bannor's youngest son, Gwain, didn't look enough like his father.

Vega's face scrunched as he thought. "Hmm. Yes. He was coming back from the grocery, pulling a dolly behind him. Mother but he was a *tiny* thing, I could pick him up with one arm! Skittish as all Hell, too. The damn muggle Auror's were snatching every eligible male off the streets they could for their bloody war." Pouring another shot, he held it as he got a faraway look in his eyes. "It was still warm out, and my boy had worked up quite a sweat. I was going to offer to help him home when he bolted, dropping the dolly. I tracked him to a dead-end alley, but he had disappeared before I could turn the corner." Shuddering, Vega sipped his drink. "Don't know what my boy did, but he did *something*. Made a Fold, or something close enough. Regardless," he sighed, putting his crystal tumbler down with a heavy thunk, "I couldn't open it. And not long after a feeling of, well, *get out* took over the alley."

FINALLY. A real, tangible lead! And if Harry truly IS magical (which, if Vega's assertion about Harry *Folding* is correct, he has to be), then she may be able to deliver the boy to the Dark Lord himself.

One-upping the other families of his Inner Circle certainly doesn't hurt.

"Where is the alley?" Bringing out the folder, Narcissa pulled out an old topographical map of the area surrounding Wools circa 1953. While some things had changed during London's reconstruction, this was the closest map the archive had to the '40s layout.

Holding it up close to Vega, she stood stock still as he looked over it. She could hear faint muttering and a few Gaelic phrases as he thought, along with a curse that he couldn't physically handle the map.

"There's a few spots it could be," he began. "The map's not quite right. One spot is by the intersection of Pickling and Stratham." Narcissa turned the map before tapping the spot indicated. "Another is just off of Newbury and Horn. But, the third may be in the building that went up just to the west of the orphanage. About four left and two up. There used to be a dead-end, there, but the map shows something went up. From the things I felt, I would first look for an abandoned building, and then for any intersections that have high accident rates."

Quickly marking the other areas, Narcissa soon had everything filed away and stored in her pocket. "Thank you, cousin, for your help. The Dark Lord will be pleased." Hearing Vega

snort, she shot him a look, wringing another chuckle from him. "I take it you have more information?"

"Oh, nothing more than a warning," he sniggered. "If you do manage to peel back the Fold, be prepared to catch a corpse! Even at the height of my power, I would only be able to exist in a Fold for about a decade." His snickering died down, his face relaxing into something close to a remorseful expression. "If he hasn't been Dissolved, can you give him a decent burial?"

With a nod and a muttered promise to send a few elves to take care of the cottage, Narcissa left the Smoking Room.

As she threw Floo powder and called out for Malfoy Manor, she could almost make out the mournful tones of an old lament.

Pulling her cloak tighter about her shoulders, Narcissa breathed out into the dark night. She stood out in front of a dilapidated storefront, the windows and doors boarded up and the tattered awning that once covered the facade since faded. If she squints, she could just make out *Bramblebump's Fine Uptowne Market!* in golden cursive.

She shivered, both from the faint breeze that blew past playing with an empty tin can and from the feeling of **wrongness** buzzing up her spine. All of the hair on her body wanted to stand on end, and the heavy weight of something watching kissed the back of her neck.

Already she is regretting not informing the Dark Lord of her findings and asking for backup. Whatever Harry had done had twisted the area, leaving one with the feeling of their grave being stepped on. The normal almost stretched electric tingle of Space being folded upon itself had been perverted into something reminiscent of a black hole.

"Well, there's no turning back now," she muttered under her breath. The anti-muggle wards she erected will only last for the next hour, and she has her work cut out for her.

Steeling herself, she *Vanished* the wood boarding up the front door before pushing it open. Glass crunched under her booted foot as she ducked under a tumbled-down light fixture still half-hanging from the ceiling, the long bulbs inside flickering and buzzing, the contraption lighting up briefly as she pushed the door closed and casting eerie, ghostly lights and shadows over the room.

The hum of muggle machinery was the only sound aside from the lamp, the cold boxes muggles use to keep their foods cold or frozen still somehow working, despite the place being shuttered for over a decade.

Picking her way across the floor, stepping over fallen ceiling tiles, tumbled adverts, plaster, and other scraps, she started down an aisle. The barren, sheet-metal shelves bracketed her in, making her wonder how ANYONE can shop in such an enclosed space, magical OR muggle.

Stepping around a cardboard advert of a woman holding a bottle of something called *Coca-Cola!*, Narcissa then made her way between two check-stands, ducking through the doors labeled 'Employee's Only!'. The wrong feeling from earlier was getting stronger, her heart beating like a rabbit's as she walked into the storeroom. Large, empty racks lined the space, a few packages of product their only occupants. The only light shining in came through broken windows high up on the walls, with the wind faintly whistling past the shards of glass still embedded in their frames.

Sweeping her eyes across the wide room, Narcissa stopped on a patch of air near a set of delivery doors. The feeling of wrongness emanated from there, two feet up from the concrete. The longer she looked at it, the more unsettled she became.

Whatever Harry tried to do, it went so *wrong*.

Narcissa should have taken this directly to the Dark Lord. Damn her and her pride! She always tells Draco to mind himself, to think before acting, and yet here she is not practicing what she preaches! She needs to leave, to get home and not leave her husband a widower and her son motherless! She needs-

"Timebo mala!" With a sharp jerk down of her wand, followed by a swish and swirl, Narcissa cast a Charm of Fearlessness.

Instantly it felt like a cloud lifted, and the almost Dementor-like atmosphere vanished.

"You really didn't want to be found, didn't you? Oh, poor boy." Remembering Vega's warning that he may already be dead, Narcissa resolved to give an offering on Samhain to little Harry. "Regardless, I must disturb your rest." Bringing her wand to the fore, Narcissa started casting runes for Protection and Fortitude, drawing upon all her knowledge of Runic arrays to protect herself from possibly being eaten by this magic-centered black hole.

Seeing her ward shimmer into existence, she jabbed sharply at the dead space, pushing her magic down and out her wand. The misty, ethereal blue of her magic slammed into the Twisted Fold, and a roar like that of a cyclone exploded into her ears. The garbage littering the ground was picked up and flung into the walls, and the Fold started to twist and shimmer, like heat waves rising from the stone paths lining her favorite garden. Dark, dusky, sooty black mist fizzled into being, with lightning-like waves of *Avada Kedavra* and flashes of liquid gold like Time-Turner sand rippling over the surface like a stone dropped into a lake.

That feeling of being watched increased ten-fold, whatever being of esoteric origin this *thing* was focused on her with laser-like precision and flooding the very air with sheer, unadulterated **malice**. If she didn't know any better, Narcissa would say the newly-formed orb of Wild Magic was seizing her up and has found her lacking.

*"Oh no, you **fucking** don't!"* Wrapping both hands around her wand, she **pushed**, dipping into the depths of her willpower and screaming *NO, YOU CAN NOT HAVE HIM!* She cast her magic, not with flashy wand gestures and long, convoluted spells; she hurled her magic at this **thing** like a Beater smashes a Bludger, and willed it to go *through*.

A high-pitched wail erupted, ringing all of the metal in the room with its pitch. Narcissa felt her ear pop and something warm and wet trickle down one side of her neck. Arcs of green lightning, looking **frighteningly** like the *Avada Kedavra* curse, erupted from the sphere, and waves of sandy gold splashed outward, crashing upon her shield like a tsunami on a rocky shore. Licking her lips, she tasted blood, her nose bleeding. At the same time, her vision started to shake and blur, seeing double and triple of her surroundings. Her bones started to feel like lead, and she knew if this goes on for any longer she would die.

Making one last, desperate attempt, Narcissa ***pushed*** everything she had left in her at the Twisted Fold. The string of her magic connected to the orb burst, flaring out like a fisherman's net and wrapping around the construct. Yanking downwards she dragged the Fold and made it **HEEL**.

With a sound like a broken Sneak-o-Scope dying, the Fold expanded out to twice its size before rapidly shrinking in upon itself. Once it was only the size of a quaffle it dropped to the floor like a stone before exploding into twisted ribbons of light and night, and an arch of flailing magic hitting her and sending her careening into the wall. Her head bounced off of the painted brick with a sickening crack before black overtook her vision.

When she came to, it was still night. Sirens in the distance throbbed in time with her pulse, the thudding of her heart making itself painfully known in her head. Pushing herself up onto her hands and knees, she coughed. Plaster dust hung in the air, and laying over top of her were the twisted remains of one of the storeroom racks. An electrical buzz thrummed throughout the air, and the source of the sirens got closer. Far off, she could hear a man's voice call out.

Forcing herself to her feet, Narcissa hissed. Her left hip throbbed and creaked, and she knew that something was fractured, at the very least. Stumbling over twisted metal she squinted her eyes towards the Twisted Fold, her face going slack in surprise.

In a ring of torn-up concrete was a body. The messy hair of who can only be Harry J. Potter was colored grey in plaster, and his limbs splayed out like a doll carelessly thrown by a child done with their play.

"HELLO!? ANYONE IN HERE!? HELLO!"

Shaking herself, Narcissa forced herself to move. Stumbling over to Harry, she had to bite back her cries; she can't let them be seen by the muggles.

Her hip snapped and she fell with a choked back shout, taking only a few moments to catch her breath before pushing herself over broken glass and shrapnel to her Lord's boy. Distantly she heard movement in the storefront behind her, more voices joining the first and spurning her on.

*Just...a few...more...paces... **THERE!***

Falling onto her front with a cry, Narcissa grabbed Harry's arm while her other hand gripped the top button of her robes, the portkey anchored to it activating and whisking them away with a thunderous clap.

The Dark Lord of Great Britain, Ireland, and the Faroe Isles strode down the hallway. His long stride ate up the carpeted ground, and the weighted hems of his robes swished and swirled around his legs. Coming to the staircase that would take him from the Third Floor directly to the First he took the stairs two at a time, the natural length of his legs easily eating up the distance. A small voice in the back of his mind mused how funny it is that most others have to struggle to keep up with his natural stride, at times trotting in an effort to keep up with him, but he banished the thought with a shake of his head, his signature curly forelock coming free from the pomade he usually uses to corral it and bouncing against his forehead.

Twisting and passing the various doorways and hallways of Slytherin Demanse, he soon came upon the room his elf Zarba directed him to. Leaning heavily against the jamb was Lady Malfoy, her appearance in alarming disarray, plaster and dust and glass utterly covering her as blood seeped through various cuts in her robes and from one of her nostrils. As he came closer he could see her struggling to focus on him, one of her pupils blown in a sure sign of a concussion.

"M'lord," she slurred as she tried to curtsy, only to nearly fall over if he hadn't caught her in time. "I...I foun' 'im. I found 'im!"

"Lady Malfoy, you are unwell. Zarba! Escort the good Lady to-," he cut himself off as she grabbed his shoulder, chipped nails digging into the silk brocade of his robe before yanking him down with surprising strength.

"Harry," she ground out. "I. Found. Harry."

His heart stopped for one, two, three beats, before thumping like a hammer against an anvil.

"I found him. Alive. *Safe*," Lady Malfoy hissed. "Was lost. Folded. For decades!" She winced, her other arm grabbing onto his bicep as she started to sink and sway. "In bed," she gritted out before pushing away from him to lean against the bedroom door.

With a pop, Zarba appeared. It only took her a moment to see the state of Lady Malfoy before she let out a high-pitched gasp. "Masters Lady Malfoy! Zarba be's helping yous! I takes yous to Healer Parky!" With a snap of a long, slender finger, Zarba and Lady Malfoy disappeared.

Once alone, the Dark Lord straightened up. Behind the door in front of him lay a person who he has thought dead for over fifty years, someone snatched by war from him. Someone who had possibly been on the front lines in France before Paris fell, or flying bombing missions and shot out of the sky, maybe even sent to one of those *camp*s, shoved into a gas chamber after he was no longer fit for labor, clawing at the concrete walls or clinging to a fellow prisoner as the gas that would end their lives was slowly pumped in.

He had had nightmares for decades, the uncertainty of Harry's disappearance strangling him like a noose around his neck. Not knowing what had happened to the only other orphan who was just as special as himself, despite his lack of Hogwarts letter, had nearly driven him to make choices that would have sent him down the path to insanity.

He had not expected Lady Malfoy to find any answers, and if she had, that they would have all ended in death. Over 380,000 British soldiers had died, nearly a full percentage of the United Kingdom's population at the time. Even if Harry hadn't been drafted, being caught up in the Blitz would have surely been his death.

Shaking himself, he took a breath and pushed open the door.

Inside was a nice if simple guest suite. All of the windows had their curtains pulled back, allowing the new dawn rays to stream in uninterrupted. To his left was a small sitting area, a low table, and two chairs placed upon an ornate area rug, a heavy wooden bookcase on the wall to complete the picture. Further along, the wall was a large fireplace, a fire crackling and chasing away the morning chill, the warm glow brightening what the sun cannot. Everything was done in tasteful neutrals, but no less opulent for its simplicity.

Looking to his right, his gaze froze. Nestled under the plush comforter of a breezy four-poster was a face straight out of his memories. Messy black hair, the ends twisting in a failed attempt of a curl, stuck out like dandelion fluff from a face that was thin and pale, never noticing in his youth just how **starved** Harry had looked. He was nearly birdlike in appearance, and so *small*. The bumps made by his feet under the covers showed Harry would be lucky to come up to his sternum, his own nearly-inhuman height be damned.

Coming around the foot of the bed, he sat, one hand resting on a down-comforter-covered ankle. "To think," he murmured, "that we had all looked up to you like an adult when you were still a child yourself."

Settling onto the bed, he gathered up an armful of boy and blankets, dragging the lot into his lap as he leaned against the headboard. Harry's slack face peered up at him, long sooty lashes fluttering as his eyes darted about under thin lids. Occasionally his left eyebrow, the one bisected by an old scar, would twitch.

"You took care of me for twelve years. I think it's about time I returned the favor."

And then there was Light

It took Narcissa nearly three days to be considered 'mostly recovered' by Healer Parkinson. During this time she was confined to her bed, and not permitted to use ANY magic whatsoever. Not only were her physical injuries extensive, but her very link to magic itself had been nearly cannibalized. If she had maintained her connection to the Twisted Fold for much longer, she would have been rendered worse off than a squib.

She would have been *Muggled*.

Her Lucius had been nearly beside himself when he had been informed of her status; a concussion, a compound fractured hip, burst eardrums, numerous contusions, and it was not just blood that had been leaking out of her nose. The thin skin of bone and membrane that separated the nasal cavity from the braincase had been perforated, and cerebrospinal fluid had been leaking out.

She had had to beg Lucius to stand down from challenging the Dark Lord himself (just as she knew he would, as any **good** Pureblood husband would, she also knew he would lose. *Badly* .) Her injuries were her own fault, she admits, she had been given **clear** instruction by his Lordship that she was to come to him for anything additional she may need, and that included back-up. Just because she was foolish enough to do as she had does not mean her husband can just go careening off to 'avenge' her. Her cousin Sirius does enough galavanting about and starting fights, she doesn't need another man doing the same.

The face Lucius had made at that comparison reminded her very much of his favorite peacock in a snit.

During her second day of convalescence, she started writing up her report. She included everything, from the information file she was given to the maps, notes, and microfilm copies she had made during her research. She even included the names and addresses of the muggles she interviewed, in case the Dark Lord wanted to send out *Obliviators* to tidy anything up.

She had debated writing up what she knew on Folds into her report, and her hypothesis on Harry's Twisted Fold, but given the clandestine nature of her assignment, she decided to leave that out. When she goes to meet with his Lordship she will give him a verbal overview and let him decide what to do from there.

Between those were the tests, having her left hip partially *Vanished* and regrown, Parkinson and her husband very **carefully** extracting the slivers of wood, metal, and glass embedded in her skin, and two nerve-wracking hours with a Cranial Specialist rebuilding her nasal cavity.

The third day was exclusively for rest and relaxation. Lucius had been banished from the bedroom, for the time being, the connection they have as spouses would have strained her magically at this point, but he was still permitted time for visitation.

As it were, she had a lapful of one of his new cloaks in hand, part of it stretched in an embroidery hoop so she can finely stitch in various runes for protection and safety, and he was giving her a much-appreciated foot rub following a pedicure.

It was as he had moved up from her foot to her calve (and she knows his game quite well, thank you very much) that they were interrupted by Zarba popping in with a noticeable but discreet crack.

"Master's Lady Malfoy, Master is wishing for you to be seeing him tomorrows after yours breakfasts! Is Master's Lady Malfoy permitted by Healer Parky's to be goings out?" Zarba's bat-like ears were flapping so hard that it wouldn't be a surprise if she flew away.

"If his Lordship would permit me access to his Floo address, Healer Parkinson would have no objection. He is very firm that other forms of magical transport would not be permitted for the time being." Nodding hard, Zarba disappeared. Finishing her current rune, Narcissa had enough time to snip her thread before Zarba returned. "Masters is being okays with the Floo'ses. He is be wishing that yours are feeling better!"

Lucius snorted after Zarba left. "If he was truly sorry, he wouldn't have asked you to take on this assignment," he grumbled.

"Oh, hush. You're just mad you have to sleep in a guest room."

Finally happy that she can eat something more substantial than oatmeal and a small amount of fruit, Narcissa dressed before Floo'ing to Slytherin Demanse. Unlike Wiltshire, Cumbria was cool and chill, frequently seeing more than its fair share of rain.

Slytherin Demanse was a solid, stocky structure, built more as a war fort than a place for pleasure, and anchored into the North Western Fells. Rumor has it that Hogwarts was quarried from the same stone, the Slytherin line at the time being grand stonemasons and gem cutters, and it was only upon the completion of Hogwarts that more members of their family were able to be formally taught other forms of magic.

If she remembers her history right, it was about two generations after Salazar left that his family expanded into warding and enchanting. A Black cousin (supposedly) has a pendant from the time, said to be crafted by Angus Slytherin, but Narcissa has never seen it, and Leo has always been a bit of a storyteller.

The Floo chamber was quite simple and bare, with only a plain rack for cloaks off to the side. Most of the stonework was left uncovered, a soft light given off by the small gemstones that are naturally embedded in the stone revealing the room. Exiting through a heavy wooden door, she was met with more bare stone, but more light-producing stones lit the way, a small faceted diamond placed at each corner-meeting of stone brick gave off a soft, whitish-blue glow, while organic glowing moonstone runners lined either side of the hallway floor.

As her foot hit the floor, the lighting on the left got brighter and turned a golden color. Following the lights, she went up a small staircase, with only the occasional tapestry or

landscape portrait as decoration. It is only as she followed the glowing path to the second floor that tall, narrow windows were seen, and they were dark as a black cloudbank rolled in.

She passed the set of doors for the room she had deposited Harry in, her path lighting the way further up. Floor after floor passed her as she climbed staircase after staircase. It was only after her path led her to a set of heavy double doors that she realized she was now before her Lord's personal chambers.

Knocking firmly, she waited a breath before pushing one open. Inside was an opulent sitting room, lit in blues, greens, and whites by more gems. The furniture was dark and solid, upholstered in heavy silks, leathers, and wools. A wide stone fireplace took up most of the space on the side, a roaring fire spitting out more light and heat while the opposite had a plethora of bookcases, along with an ornate reading station and a large lounger. Even now, heavy woven blankets and furs littered the space, and a thick Persian rug covered the stone floor. The far wall was nearly all glass, letting out to a balcony that was currently being pelted in rain.

Stepping further into the room, a well-padded reading chair turned towards her. Gingerly sitting, she sighed as a heavy chest opened and a blanket slithered out and over to her, laying over her legs like one of her obedient wolfhounds. A few minutes later, a second set of doors over to the left opened, the Dark Lord walking through from what must be his bedroom.

On a normal day, Narcissa can appreciate his fine bone structure. High cheekbones balanced out a straight nose over a wide mouth with a full set of lips, the lower one quite thick, countered by arching brows and deep-set blue eyes. Add to that a head full of thick hair and a tall, fit physique, and it is understandable just how so many women (her own sister included) are smitten with the man, with *Witch Weekly* declaring him '*The Most **Desirable** World Leader!*' for over a decade running.

Now with the soft, glowing light of the room paired with shadows, he looked otherworldly.

She made to rise just to be stopped with a gesture. Resuming her seat, he waved his hand and a tea set appeared on the table next to her, another chair 'walking' over. Taking his own seat, he quickly prepared two cups before passing one over.

"I would like to thank you, personally, Lady Malfoy, for the great service you have done for me." She inclined her head in acknowledgment. "It was undoubtedly difficult, what with the state of your injuries. You will be reimbursed for your treatment, along with all other expenses incurred on your assignment."

"If I may inquire, my Lord, what of Harry? Is he well?" She had grown rather attached to him during her research.

Pouring out another cup of tea, he added a spoonful of honey, slowly stirring it in before sipping. "Asleep, still. He has been since his arrival. I will be fetching a few Healers and Severus if his condition does not improve soon." His head had turned in the direction of his bedroom as he spoke, and something incredibly hungry and raw overtook his face.

Setting her cup down, Narcissa's shoulders hunched. "My Lord, forgive me, I should have-

"He was in a Fold for longer than a significant portion of the people I rule has been alive," he cut her off, turning back to face her, his expression once more composed. "While Space and Time magic are not my forte, even I know that he may not come out unscathed. At this point, all we can do is wait."

"If his Lordship requires it, I can supply some small amount of books from the Black Family Library, but I fear there is little known about Folds Twisting. I can only offer my conjecture, and send out a request for contributions."

"Please do so. Send me your hypothesis under a Level 5 lock."

Sitting at a wrought-iron table inside her solarium, Narcissa finished penning her letter. Giving it one last read-through, she nodded in satisfaction before tapping it, duplicating it over a dozen times before directing them to fold into their envelopes. Gathering them into a pile, she then brought a naked parchment before her, dipping her quill in preparation for her newest task.

"CISSSAAAAAAA! CISSY-BOO!"

Sighing, she replaced her quill in its stand, just in time for her sister Bellatrix to barrel in, followed by her young son Jasper. She gasped at the tight hug she was graced with, her muscles still tender even now. "Bella."

With a high giggle, Bella settled down in the unoccupied chair, hauling little Jasper up into her lap. The boy had just turned three and took much after his mother, but already Narcissa can see that he has inherited his father's eye color and jawline, along with his silken hair.

"Hello, Jasper," she smiled at her nephew, just to smile wider as he ducked his face and hid it in his mother's shoulder, burnishing his face into her robes further as Bella cooed at him.

"Jassy, say hello to your Auntie, hmm?" Bella huffed as her son stubbornly grunted out a 'no'.

"Why don't you go with Ennie and visit Uncle Lucius's peacocks, hmm," Narcissa suggested, the elf in question appearing by her side. "We have some new chicks that hatched. Why don't you pick one to name?"

Sliding from his mother's lap, Jasper dashed off, just to stop and rush back to give Narcissa a quick kiss on the cheek before rushing away.

"Hmph, little bratling. Too good to give his own mother a kiss," Bella mock-whined. Instantly she perked up, eagerly leaning forward, eyes bright. "So, I heard *someone* got to visit Slytherin Demanse! Tellmetellmetellme," she drummed her fingers on the table.

"There is nothing to tell. His Lordship requested my presence, I acquiesced."

At Narcissa's cool response, Bella's face screwed up in a pout. "Oh, come ON, Cissy! Spill it! Wait," she gasped before glaring. "He didn't **bed** you, did he!?"

"Don't be so crass," Narcissa chided.

"He DID!"

"Bella, hush!" Seeing her settle down with a mutinous scowl, Narcissa gave in to the urge to roll her eyes. "His Lordship had given me an utmost important assignment. *One that required discretion,*" she said through gritted teeth as Bella opened her mouth to argue.

"*HMPH!*" Throwing herself back into her chair, Bella crossed her arms with a pout, greatly emulating a Jasper who did not want to eat his carrots.

Narcissa sighed heavily, not wanting to deal with her sister's *obsession* with their Lord and her attempts to occupy his bed. It was no secret that the man had a voracious sexual appetite, but Bella's efforts to 'get a taste' have so far fallen flat.

"So, tell me, Bella, what you know of Folding? I fear I never had much of a gift of it, and you were the best at it aside from Andromeda."

Rolling her sleeve back down, Narcissa proceeded to re-adjust her robes as Healer Parkinson turned to his workstation, tipping the small phial of her blood into the cauldron full of a diagnostic potion. As she watched, icy blue sparks puffed up, fluttering through the air before coalescing into a vaguely humanoid form, areas corresponding to her injuries glowing a brighter blue while the area of her left hip was an almost purple color.

"Hm. Excellent. You're coming along quite well, Narcissa. Still have a care not to overexert your hip for the next week as the muscles finish anchoring to the new bone, but everything else is well." Handing the phial back to her, Parkinson's bushy eyebrows rose in inquiry, "how have the aches and pains been? Do you need any additional potions prescribed?"

"A muscle rub wouldn't be remiss."

He let out a belly laugh. "Trying to let your husband feel useful, hm? Ah, I joke, I joke," he waved off her quirked eyebrow. "Reminds me of my dear Isabella. To hear her tell it, having a Healer for a husband is worse. We don't stop shooting off diagnostic spells or shoving nutrition potions into your hands." Flicking his wand he set his station to packing itself up before walking into his bag. "You're cleared to use magic, but I caution you against doing things such as *Apparition* or human transfiguration for the time being. Do some of those, ah, children's magic exercises every morning to get a feel for yourself before doing anything big." Nodding his head as the last few things flew into his bag (his quill doing a loopy-loop before dropping), he let out a sigh, "I have heard that you'll be having tea with

the Greengrass's, soon. Is it too much to hope for there still being a match between my little grandflower Pansy and your boy?"

Narcissa tipped her head in the affirmative. "Yes, I'm afraid so. While they are good friends, they both have too strong of a personality, bringing out more the worse in each other, and not enough of the good. If we are to not just replace the wizards lost during the Revolution but grow our people..."

"Ah, it is what it is. Oh, and before I forget, here's the script to pass along to Master Snape. I added a recommendation to use mordel root that was gathered and ground during a lunar eclipse, but I'll leave that up to him." He leaned in close, voice dropping to a more conspiring tone, "I don't need an angry Yorkie telling me my input was wrong via a molotov cocktail to the face."

Two days later, Narcissa found herself summoned to Slytherin Demanse once more. Again, she was led by glowing stone lights to her Lordships chambers, and once more she entered his sitting room.

Unlike her last visit, this time an orb of silver light shined in front of his bedroom door. It bobbed excitedly when she noticed it, before fluttering between herself and the handle.

Knocking, she heard a belted '*Enter!*'. Steeling herself (Bella's accusations of bedplay still at the forefront of her mind), she slowly pushed the door open before stepping inside.

Much like the rest of the Demanse, the stone walls were unfinished with gemstone lights, but in addition to the moonstone runners going along the edges of the floor, the ceiling had a large moonstone mural, full of sweeping, organic shapes, some sort of metal framing emphasizing and differentiating different areas. Scattered along the walls were double-armed sconces, the globes on them giving off a soft white light. Along the sides of the room were wardrobes, chests, a few standing bookshelves, and a small writing desk. A fire roared in a deep fireplace, above which hung a tall but empty portrait frame, both opposite from the bed that took up a decent amount of room space.

In the center of the bed was the Dark Lord, lying propped up on a nest of pillows as he read through one of the books Narcissa had sent him. A cocoon of furs and blankets laid on his front and between his legs, a tuft of black hair peeking out of a creamy fur the only clue to their identity.

"Narcissa, please, sit," he waved at the edge of his bed before turning a page. "I thank you for the books that you have sent. A few of the concepts are similar to things I learned in passing while traveling in Parthia, so I have sent missives out. Copies of relevant information shall be provided to the Blacks, of course." After she murmured thank you, he continued; "reading into the concept of Folds and Twisted Folds leads me to believe that Harry may have some Black ancestry in him, but more importantly, it begs the question of why he never received a Hogwarts letter."

"My Lord?" The abrupt change in topic left her flatfooted.

"Simply put, the amount of magic and skill needed to create a Fold is quite large. Most wandless individuals cannot even perform the task, regardless of having Black blood, so the fact that Harry, an uneducated boy, was able to do so despite not having a wand is puzzling, and has opened up the possibility that we may have other magically-talented individuals slipping through the cracks."

That is...disturbing. While she does not care for *muggleborns*, Narcissa can acknowledge their necessity. Add in the possibility that high-powered, untrained individuals can be walking about and you have a recipe for disaster.

"If his Lordship wishes, I can pull together a small group to investigate the situation. At the very least, we can rule out Harry's situation as a fluke resulting from the wars going on, at the time."

"Please do so. I will draft an official Notice and Authority letter for you and have it in your hands within the day." He was about to continue when a quiet whimper was heard, Harry wiggling in distress from his place in the blankets. In an uncharacteristically tender gesture, the Dark Lord placed the book he had been holding aside to drag Harry further up his chest.

Narcissa has the feeling that Bella will be facing not only stiff competition for their Lordship's heart but that the game has already been lost.

And like all big sisters who love their younger sibling dearly, she is going to rub it in her *face*.

"Good morning to you, Lady Malfoy. The Dark Lord has forewarned us of your assignment and has bid that we give you unfettered access to the Hall of Magical Tracking and Assessment. If you require any assistance, please be sure to ring the gong by the Tracking desk. If you'll excuse me."

Watching the blue-robed attendant walk away after bowing, Narcissa chanced a look around; lining the long hallway that was the Hall of Magical Tracking and Assessment were sturdy, tall bookcases, groaning under the weight of books, scrolls, bundles of parchments, and stone or leather tablets. Every magical person born in the British Isles since before the time of Merlin has been recorded here, going from the time of birth and their first magic to other major outbursts of magical energy until they had reached adulthood. As their history progresses and their understanding of spells, charms, and enchantments grew, so did their ability to record acts of magic. The first records were lucky to contain a few lines of a person's magical history, but now it is not uncommon for a Hogwarts-bound child to have a neat booklet of their (untrained) workings by the time they receive their first letter.

Studying the brass placards attached to each bookcase, it took her quite some time to find the section dealing with squibs and those too magically weak to connect to a wand. It then took her a further hour to locate the file dedicated to a Harry J. Potter, which started in 1921.

Glancing at other similar files, she was not expecting much information. Not just because the system was relatively unsophisticated until a major overhaul in the late '50s (and thus was unreliable in recording), but because most who fall into the 'non-wanded' category have, at most, a file an inch thick by the end of their life.

Harry's was over **SIX** inches.

Dragging the heavy *book* over to one of the provided scholar's tables, she dropped it with an echoing thump. Batting away the dust that rose, she opened to the first page, just to be caught up short.

Name: Harry James Potter

Birthdate: July 31, 1980

Parents: James Fleamont Potter, Lily Rose Potter nee Evans

Well, no wonder it's so thick; the manifested records must have gotten mixed together. Narcissa has heard of it happening with twins, but not often outside of that. Possibly, because the Harry of the '20s never technically died, **and** was the first Potter to carry that first name (she is sticking to her "Harry is a Potter" theory like bloodworms on a dragon), the magical matrix of the system may have been, for the lack of a better word, confused on who did what, when.

Fingers flipping over sheets of parchments, she soon bypassed the dates that would correspond to Harry the Younger (ending on Halloween of '81, and rather *explosively* at that), then landing on the first record for Harry the Elder, dated for November 1st, 1921.

Still, for only being magically active for a little less than sixteen years AND despite never receiving a Hogwarts letter, her Harry's portion of the file made up the majority. Taking more time to examine the records, most seemed to be made up of low-level but near-constant workings, with large outbursts recorded randomly.

"*Merlin's pink frilly knickers,*" she cursed under her breath. It was just her luck that this all happened before the system had been fine-tuned and upgraded, it had been so unsophisticated that it couldn't tell her what Harry's workings had been. Records after the upgrade in '57 were able to include information such as if the acts had been wandless and what category of magic it fell under. And after the Dark Lord came into power, the system was upgraded again to record if the acts took place under duress or extreme emotional outbursts, along with providing near-exact detail on what precisely happened.

Still, all isn't lost. The thickness of Harry's record shows that he was powerful, in a way. The sheer fact that he was drawing near-constantly upon his connection to magic was proof enough. The lack of how just means that they would have to wait for the lad to wake so they could test him. Once she knows what she needs to look for, it would be quite simple for her to inspect the records of supposed *muggleborns* and squibs to see if there is a common thread.

While her Lordship will not be pleased with her lack of progress on one front, he would undoubtedly be satisfied to see proof of Harry's power, and may even relish the problem presented on just how to categorize it.

Severus Snape, Head Potioneer of the Ministry's Research and Development Labs (with a secondary Mastery in the Healing Arts), shook himself to be rid of the feeling of being watched. Apprehension dogged his every step as he stalked down the halls and up the staircases of Slytherin Demanse.

Very few have been granted access to the Dark Lord's personal domain, and Severus couldn't help but feel like he was walking to his doom. This was new territory for him, and he does not know what that means for himself. If this were the Dark Lord's offices at the Ministry or even his townhouse down Vertic Alley, then Severus would know his footing, would have an idea of just what their meeting would entail. This change in scenery has left him dangling off of the proverbial cliff, with no knowledge of how far down the ground was.

He's also *fairly certain* that, despite what Bellatrix LeStrange thinks, it is certainly **not** to grace the Dark Lord's bed!

"Pigheaded crackpot. If she wants him so much, she can have him. At least with her distracting him, he'll be out of my hair."

Following the damnable glowing path further and further up, he continued muttering under his breath about '*crazed witches*' and '*nosy dictators*' until stopping at a set of double doors. Pushing them open without knocking, he had taken about half-a-dozen paces inside before realizing that this was a *personal* sitting room.

And that, over to the left, was most likely the door to a certain Dark Lord's bedchamber.

Oh, bugger all this for a lark. I'm about to be had.

Eyeing his surroundings with suspicion, he gradually made his way over to the balcony doors. The view showed that he was in one of the two stone towers that the Demanse had, and was facing inward to a semi-wild courtyard.

"Severus."

Smothering his jump at the sound of the soft, sibilant voice, Severus turned towards the Dark Lord, inclining his head in a bow. "My Lord."

"Come."

Following the Dark Lord, it was only as he was passing through the bedroom doorway that Severus noticed that the other man was wearing nothing other than a silk house robe, a pale sliver of thigh flashing out from the black material, glowing warmly in the light given off by the fireplace.

*I am not paid **nearly** enough to deal with this. Where's Bellatrix when you need her!?*

"Stay."

Stopping near the side of the bed nearest the door, Severus watched as the Dark Lord continued to the far side, settling sideways on the edge before reaching for the large bundle of blankets in the center, the edge of his robe pulling and revealing a wide crescent of fit chest.

Before Severus could open his mouth to question (because, dictator of Magical Britain or not, he is not just going to 'roll over' for the man!), the bundle started to unwrap, the Dark Lord's motions oddly gentle if firm.

As more and more blankets (and was that a *Norwegian Star Bear fur!*?) were pulled back, Severus's eyes furrowed until nearly shooting up to his hairline as a *frighteningly young* boy's face was revealed. It was thin and pinched, but even with the lack of fat to fill it out and slack with sleep Severus can tell he would be quite the specimen.

Dear Merlin, but don't let Rabastan see him!

"I require a full exam of the boy. Use every diagnostic spell you know."

Readying his wand, Severus started making the motions needed to cast the first of what will, no doubt, be one of **many** spells he will cast. "Does my Lord have any additional information for me? A cause, or symptoms?" While it does not do well to question him, as someone who took an Oath upon completion of his Healing Mastery, it is a question he is required to ask.

"All that you need to know is that he came into my possession a little less than a week ago, and has not woken since."

Probably because you rode him too hard! Casting spell after spell, Severus *Summoned* a parchment and quill to record his findings. So far, the results coming back showed great magical strain, exhaustion, and prolonged periods of thirst and starvation, along with hard labor.

After exhausting his extensive list of diagnostic magic, Severus put his wand away with a sigh. "Exhaustion from magical strain, and no small amount of starvation. If the Dark Lord pleases, I will send along potions that can be spelled into his system."

"That pleases me." Flicking his hand, Severus watched as a simple bathing charm ruffled the boy's hair and scrubbed his skin, the static caused by it causing the hair to stand up like that daft bastard Potter's-

Severus choked.

"You are dismissed, Severus."

Nodding woodenly, Severus nearly fled the scene. Looking behind him, he watched through the closing bedroom door as the Dark Lord stretched out on the bed, his robe lose as he gathered the Potter boy into his arms.

I need a fucking drink.

Watching as Severus power-walked away as though he had a skrewt snapping at his heels, the Dark Lord turned back to his bed with a huff. His eyes immediately landed on Harry, who had started shivering as a result of being, for the most part, uncovered.

Hearing a small whimper, he started unraveling Harry more, absentmindedly spelling into his system some water with a diluted nutrition potion he had been dousing the boy with since he arrived. Sending a mental command out, he could feel the ward matrix of his quarter's tingle and start filling his bathtub with warm water. Bathing charms are all well and good, but the last one wasn't enough, and he *refuses* to let Harry wallow in his own filth; water was a luxury at the orphanage, and bathing often was just not done. Why dirty the water you needed to drink, cook, and clean your home with when you'll just get grubby again the next day?

Stripping Harry of the thin nightshirt he had been wearing, he scooped the thin (*thinthinthintoofuckinTHIN!*) body up in his arms, entering the bathroom door that just appeared. Padding over to the tub set into the floor, it rose up in silent command, allowing him to deposit his shivering bundle into the warm water. Quickly shedding his silk robe, he slipped behind Harry, rearranging him to lay back on his chest as the bathtub sunk back down into the floor.

Commanding more water to fill the tub, he laid back and looked closer at Harry's face. He has been doing a lot of that recently, trying to connect his memories from so long ago, that of someone who he had thought indomitable, someone made of pure **grit**, to the tiny, helpless *being* now curled up in his lap.

He knows full well that he has Harry to thank for helping him live to his adolescence. Not just him, but most of the other orphans, as well. The man (BOY!) had worked himself to the bone to swaddle and change the babies, stretch and cook what little food they had, sew and stitch and knit and fix their clothing so that they could be presentable to any prospective family looking to adopt a child and not a ragamuffin. He recalls the shouting and screaming matches Harry and Ms. Cole got into, not just over the money she was literally drinking away, but her treatment of himself. How Harry had snapped and snarled about treating all of the children like they were (which was children) and not like the '*spawn of Lucifer!*' that she always accused him of being.

Harry had been the only one who consistently tried with him, who didn't treat him like *lesser* or **other** for the things he could do or how he acted. Just like the other children, if he acted out, Harry would stick his nose in the corner or put him on Potato Duty.

And when he got his Hogwarts letter, and Dumbledore visited for that first time and set his wardrobe on fire, Harry had **lit** into him. It was like watching a kitten try and take on a pit bull terrier, but in this case, the kitten sent the big dog packing.

Coming back from his first Diagon Alley trip, shamed that everything he had was, at best, second-hand (his robes were *third-hand*), Harry had done his best to rebind his schoolbooks and tailor his robes to fit, and started to chatter on about getting scrap paper and ink so he could practice his penmanship before going away. He had even asked for him to read out his

books as Harry did the orphanage's mending, asking questions that had made him really **think**.

Reaching over to the side, he grabbed his shampoo, starting to lather the mixture into Harry's hair. Even with all of the bathing charms, dirt pulled up, and he was forced to wash the mop twice more before moving on to scrubbing his skin clean.

It was only after he had come back from his second year to find the older boy GONE that he realized how **important** Harry was to him. He had been angry, the letters he had sent back had been returned unanswered, and the anger he had felt at being snubbed was quickly replaced with fear. If he had thought his life before was hard, then it had turned downright **brutal**.

It was only as he had left for his Third Year that he realized he could categorize his life as *Pre-Hogwarts* and *Post Harry*.

Pulling the plug, he held the still-asleep Harry as he watched the water drain away, his mind like the whirlpool the water made as it was sucked away. Once it was gone, he pulled over the detached showerhead, rinsing them both off before getting out and wrapping them both in warm towels. Returning to his bed, he stopped long enough to pull out one of his nightshirts to slip Harry into, before pulling back the freshly-changed bedding and curling around his boy. Tucking the damp head under his chin, he commanded the lights to dim, burying his nose into clean-smelling hair.

He didn't go to sleep for a long time.

The occupants in one of the many Malfoy lounges jumped as the door was slammed open hard enough to bounce off of the wall. Narcissa, Lucius, and Bellatrix, in their evening clothes and having pre-bedtime drinks, all watched with astonishment as Severus billowed in, his robes snapping like a stormcloud behind him as he made a beeline towards the **good** whiskey cabinet.

Narcissa started to rise to her feet, setting aside her nightcap and with concern etched across her face. "Severus! What happened?"

"I need a fucking drink."

Bella started cackling as both Lucius and Narcissa's faces twisted into a sneer. "Really, Severus, such language is not warranted-"

"Oh, bugger off, Lucius! I just got back from *our* Lord's Demanse, and if I don't get some liquor in me, I'll set the manor on fire!"

They watched as Severus selected the highest proof whiskey the Malfoys had on hand (Blischen's *Blue Label* Firewhiskey, aged in dragon eggs!), before pouring a more than healthy shot into a crystal tumbler. Turning back to his captive audience, Severus raised his glass. "Cheers."

And started chugging the bottle.

"*GREAT MERLIN'S SAGGY NUTS, SEVERUS!*" Lucius nearly vaulted the drinks table in his effort to get the bottle away from the other. It had been nearly full before Severus got his grubby little hands on it, and now over a third of it was gone!

Severus fended the other off by grabbing Lucius's middle, hauling the spitting blond under his shoulder like a disobedient cat as he continued to empty the bottle of whiskey at an alarming rate, his adam's apple bobbing like a fishing lure with a catch. Finishing it with a grunt, he stalked over to the couch nearest him before tossing Lucius on it and brandishing the empty bottle like a knife, he growled, "Fuck off, you little blond bitch. I was just witness to one of our Lord's depravities, but am not skilled enough with an *Obliviate* to rid myself of the knowledge!"

"That does not give you leave to simply DEMOLISH a bottle of my most expensive whiskey! That probably cost more than your wages for a year-!"

"Narcissa! Peg your man back into submission! He's getting ideas above his station." He chuckled v-sign at Lucius as the other barked in outrage. "In the meantime, I'll be taking THIS," Severus stalked back to the cabinet before plucking up a bottle of the **Black** label Blishen's, ignoring Lucius's wail of despair, "and go drown my sorrows in a bathtub."

As the door slammed shut and Lucius muttered invectives under his breath as he righted himself, Narcissa turned towards Bellatrix. Her sister had been oddly quiet, and she could see how Bella's eyes were wide and her hands were wrapped tightly around her own tumbler, knuckles white as the crystal creaked.

"Bella?" Narcissa yelped as the tumbler shattered, glass and alcohol flying.

"Cissy, dear? Is Sevvie seeing anyone?"

"BELLA NO!"

The Alpha and the Omega

Jerking awake with a loud snort, he blinked his crusty eyes, trying to chase away the gritty film covering them. Looking up at the ceiling blearily, he shoved himself up with a jaw-splitting yawn, pushing the arm that had been across his chest away while making a note to talk to Lizzy about trying to sleep in her own bed, now that she was a big girl.

Swinging his feet over the edge, he starred in the direction of the windows, his brain trying to function but only making a hissing sound like one of those new gas stoves trying to turn on. He could feel a hand reaching for him, the fingers simply scraping his side. "Oi," he grunted, his voice gravely from his sleep.

His bladder twinged, making itself known, and he pushed himself off the bed, his feet hitting and sinking deeply into a thick, plush rug. Shuffling, he walked toward what he *thinks* is a door, but anything a foot away from his face becomes nothing more than fuzzy blobs and he can't be fucked to put on his glasses.

Once the glasses are on, it's time to work, and he'll be buggered to work at all today.

Finding the bathroom he turned on the light, squinting as light as bright as the arse-end of the sun filled the whole room. Shuffling towards the commode, he lifted the lid before squinting more, not wanting to mess up anything with shitty aim.

He already has a bunch of toddlers being potty-trained to worry about. He doesn't need to add his own misfire to the mix.

Getting himself prepped, he groaned as he started to go, his middle twinging as pressure was released and he vowed to NEVER go out with Dennis and Al ever again; especially if he has shopping to do the next day. The headache building at his temples and the abused innards just isn't worth fuck-all, regardless of who's buying the drinks.

Flushing, he washed his hands with a *really nice* smelling soap, making another note to talk to Tommy-boy about nicking stuff from the High Street *AGAIN*.

Dragging his feet, he shuffled back to bed, flopping face-first onto it before awkwardly pulling himself up as his feet dangled before rolling himself up like a roti with the blankets. A few wiggles later and he was settled in for sleep.

He watched Harry like a hawk, his eyes never leaving the form of the other. Seeing how the other woke before sitting for a think, then using the loo was like he had been transported back in time, like he was still twelve and it was summer, weeks before Hogwarts started, and Ms. Cole had sent him to fetch Harry just so that she wouldn't have to *'deal with your difficult arse for one lick more!'*

Everything Harry did was the same, down to the weird squinge of his eyes and his shuffling, half-asleep walk (his left foot dragging more than the right, while the right still had the wobble at the knee) to the bathroom, arms just hanging down at his sides and swaying in an oddly graceful, half-drunken manner.

Even the way he rolls up into the blanket is the same.

He should be at his desk, reading over the trade treaty between his Ministry and Austro-Hungary, or checking with Healer Parkinson on Lady Malfoy's condition, or hell, even just *Summoning* a lap desk and working on the backlog of paperwork festering in The Cabinet.

Instead, he reaches out and tugs the blanketed bundle closer, curling up around it and burying his face into what he's sure is Harry's stomach and going to sleep.

They can survive without me for a little longer.

When he woke again it was to himself sweating his arse off and feeling like a squid was wrapped around his middle. Tommy-boy must have gotten spooked and crawled into bed with him, they haven't shared a bed consistently since he started going to Hogwarts. After the first week or so of being back from school, he'd clung to him like a barnacle to a ship's hull but then got all huffy before ejecting to his own bed.

Regardless, he knows how the youngster clings, just like he knows how Liz sleeps on her stomach with an arm flung out, and Fitzgerald is young enough that he tries to reenact gymnastics and ends up stuffing a chubby foot under his chin, and Rosie likes to use his arse as a pillow.

But it's *summer* and he's wrapped up in a hefty *blanket* and he's *sweating* and **itching** which means he needs a wash. And if he needs a wash then so do the youngsters. Which means figuring out which ones get bathed first because water is EXPENSIVE and he's not going to waste it on the dirtiest kids and wash the ones who know how to keep themselves neat in old bathwater. And if he leaves it up to Ms. Cole then he knows it won't get done and he's not leaving the only other competent minder to the mercy of thirty-some dirty children!

"Oi, Tommy-boy, feck off an' le'me up," he wriggled, trying to turn out.

"No."

That ain't Tommy.

Bucking like a horse that had a firecracker lit under it, he flung himself to the side, only realizing as he fell that *oh shit no wrong side* and that he was about to make a very painful acquaintance with the floor-

Jerking with a squeak he spun, something or someone catching his blanket and he rolled out of it before meeting the floor. He moaned as his vision spun and his stomach roiled, his meager dinner of taters and beans from the night before debating on making an appearance.

Up above him he could see a dark head of hair peeking over the side of the bed, dark eyebrows arching high like Tom did when the little fucker did something wrong and he was trying to get out of Potato Duty.

Before he could call him out on it, he found himself hauled up and over, getting rolled over on before winding up on top as two long, fit arms wrapped around him and a nose was buried in his hair while the other muttered '*Harry, Harry, Harry,*' over and over like a mantra.

"Oi, mate! Who da 'ell ya fink-" digging his boney knuckles into unprotected ribs, Harry threw himself to the side, rolling off the other side of the bed and crouching on the floor. He heard scuffling on the bed before a man, handsome and tall popped over the side. "Lis'en, bruv, I don' know who ye fink I 'em, bu'-"

""ARRY!"

Getting ready to knock this bloke's square clear, Harry froze. And he looked. And he looked again.

Cute little dark chocolate curly-cue forelock? Check.

Cheekbones that look like they get filed nightly before bedtime? Check.

Permanent dimple near the right corner of the mouth? Check.

His mind jumping to conclusions like a fox with hounds on its tail, Harry did the only thing he could think of.

"Come out, 'Arry."

"I fink not, mate!" The metallic clang of something expensive hitting the tub echoed.

"Please." He jiggled the door handle, flexing his jaw. He had forgotten just how hard Harry's right hook can be.

""s'nah happen"! I already go' one rich dandy on me arse, I don' need anuver!" The sound of something large and heavy scraping across tile rattled the door before something shoved back against it.

""Arry. It's me. Tom."

"Las' I checked, 'e was an inch 'aller dan me an' wore shor' 'ousers! You, on de ov'er hand, probably caused an ex'inction even' wif de amoun' 'uv food ye stuff inter yer gob!" The high shatter of delicate porcelain meeting its end was quickly followed by the foulest oaths that can be imagined.

Rubbing his smarting jaw, Tom took a deep breath before holding it to the count of ten. "Arry. It **is** me. Tom." A muffled *prove it!* snuck under the door crack. "My favorite book was *The Lost Prince*, and you always fixed my jumpers so that the left sleeve was one-

quarter-inch shorter so it wouldn't get grubby from writing." Letting out a sigh, he let his forehead thump against the thick wood of the door before continuing; "for my birthday's you always made me a cupcake, so I wouldn't have to share with the others, the first snake I brought home you named Sanna because she was ' *a snake, and snake names should start with an S* ', which is *not true* by the way, my Nagini will tell you so."

"...when's me birfday?"

Tom snorted. "When you could be bothered to celebrate it, it was November 1st, although nobody knows if that's the actual day or Ms. Cole just used the date you turned up on." The woman had been notorious for assigning birthdays using the day you entered Wool's. It made it so much harder to forget the whole experience.

Silence rang out before the quiet sounds of bare feet on tile slapped out. "*ow'ed this happen, Tom? Las' I saw, you was 'eading to 'ogwarts avter flapping on 'bout tha' Malfoy ponce. It don' make sense!*"

"I know it doesn't make sense-"

"*Den make it make sense, Tom! You the magic one!*"

"I don't KNOW," he exploded. "It's been over fifty years, Harry! You went missing after I left for my second year! Everyone thought you had been drafted, and later, when the war came to our shores, everyone thought you were certainly dead. The Blitz absolutely *leveled* London! Even if you were still somehow in the city, you would have most certainly been killed." The heavy drag of whatever item Harry had barricaded the door with screeched over the tile before the door handle slowly turned, the door pulling back a crack.

"I asked someone I trusted to find out what happened to you. When I came back, nobody could say anything. *Billy* said you had run off to get away from me, even though everyone knew that that wasn't like you." He huffed, "after all, you took Father McGillicutty to task for trying to exorcise me, and the stare of *pure poison* you shot at Dumbledore during his visit was nothing short of legendary. You're made of sterner stuff than what I could break." He watched as the door opened fully and Harry padded over the few scant feet between them, peering up at his face with the *greenest* eyes ever seen on a human face. "I was expecting, at best, an obituary," his chest started to burn as Harry wound his thin (*thin thin thin too thin!*) arms around his waist and squeezing, "not to get you back."

Running his hands through silky chocolate strands, Harry sighed. The arm lying trapped under his waist was starting to dig into him, but every time he wiggled to get more comfortable, Tom just squeezed him tighter and buried his face deeper into Harry's middle.

Clingy little scupper.

After Harry came out of the bathroom, Tom had wasted no time in scooping him up before dropping onto the bed for a cuddle. Just like when he was younger and seeking shelter in Harry's bed from a bad storm, he had wrapped his arms around Harry's middle before burying

his face into his stomach and sliding them onto their sides, forcing Harry to wrap his arms around Tom's head and shoulders, just to have a place to put them.

It reminded him *so much* of when Tom returned after his first year. After their meager dinner, he had followed Harry into his bedroom before essentially tackling him to the bed. He had tried to get the younger boy to talk, tell him what was bothering him, but Tom had stayed stubbornly silent.

"Tom, I need to move. Your elbow is pinching me." Feeling the other move slightly, he sighed as the uncomfortable feeling disappeared. "Good boy," he murmured as he dropped a kiss to ruffled locks, just to apologize when he felt the other tense up underneath him. "Sorry, just, force of habit." He petted the hair under his calloused hand to soothe what was no doubt a bruised ego.

Tom's face, buried as it was in Harry's gut, flamed. Harry calling him a 'good boy' brought back some secret, hidden memories. Things that had happened when he was sixteen, and in his bed at night. Things that had left him sweaty and shaking in ways that he never achieved with his partners, both during and after Hogwarts.

Things that his body now wanted to do with the subject of his schoolboy fantasies before him, soft and pliant and comfortable. And who was wearing *his* clothes and was laying in *his* bed and covered in **his** smell.

*And it would be so **easy** to take what he wanted, right here, right now.*

Untangling himself from Harry, he pushed away. Harry peered up at him, his eyes **so** green, the left one, the one underneath the messy, thunderbolt-like scar that Harry has had forever, had motes of gold floating inside it, like Zeus himself had blessed the boy, marked him with his favor to be like Ganymede, but never took him back to Olympus to be his cupbearer.

Fine with him. Harry can belong to a different god.

*A **better** one.*

"om?" Harry's voice was thick with sleep, his eyes lidding like a cat in a sunbeam.

"You should eat," he said, tearing his eyes away from the other, focusing on one of his wardrobes. "Zarba, fetch a light breakfast for Harry, please. Something nutritious but easy." Seconds later a tray with a small bowl of porridge, blueberries in cream, toast, and two eggs popped onto his side table, a teapot and water pitcher quickly following. Listening to Harry rustle behind him, he *Levitated* to tray closer, his brow furrowing at the piece of parchment tucked under the porridge bowl. Plucking up the parchment, he read it over quickly before groaning.

"Everything okay," Harry questioned. Looking behind him, Tom watched as Harry inspected the floating tray, trying to twist and look under it.

Tom huffed before turning back around. "I have an unavoidable meeting today. As much as I dislike economics, it **is** important enough that I cannot shove it off onto one of my minions," his mouth quirked at Harry's snort over the description of his Knight's.

"So, you're leaving me. Again."

Tom whipped around, eyes wide at Harry's dejected tone. Quick like an eel, he darted across the bedding, one hand shooting out to cup Harry's chin and pulling it up so he could meet the other's eyes. "If this didn't have so much riding on it, I would still be here, abed with you. You don't know," his voice quivered. "You don't know **how** much you mean to me, how lost I was." The urge to curl back around the other was *overwhelming*, and he gripped his free hand in a fist.

A small hand covered the one holding Harry's chin, the ball of *something* buried deep inside him relaxing at the touch. Meeting Harry's gaze, the other gave a small smile. "I'll still be here when you get back."

Narcissa had been enjoying a large breakfast consisting of a gammon steak, breakfast potatoes, and a fruit salad when she was rudely interrupted by one of the Dark Lord's messenger hawks darting in through the open Breakfast room window and dropping its missive into Lucius's oatmeal bowl before darting back out.

Normally she would be tutting the bird's bad manners along with Lucius, but he had been giving her the stink eye after she requested what he considered a 'working man's' breakfast. He can think what he likes but if he looks at her plate ONE more time...

Watching as he fished the thick parchment out of his morning meal and spelled it clean, he passed it over to her. Cracking the green wax seal, she started reading it before stopping herself, re-reading from the beginning. With a smile made from a mix of satisfaction and relief, she set the letter aside before sipping her tea.

"Pleasant news, my dove?" Looking up, Narcissa spied Lucius's icy blue eyes peering at her from above his copy of the *Daily Prophet*. The main article seemed to be about their Lord's last visit to Italy and was wildly speculating about a *romantic connection* between himself and the Italian Minister of Magic's young trophy wife.

They'll have something new to gossip about, soon enough. "Very. My assignment has proven very fruitful, and another that I have been tasked with may soon prove so, as well." Nodding a thank you as Lucius poured her a new cup of tea, she tapped the letter with a (sadly) short fingernail, "he has requested my presence at his Demanse once again."

Finishing her morning meal, she quickly made herself presentable before Floo'ing to Slytherin Demanse, keeping in mind Healer Parkinson's dire warning to not over-exert herself magically. She hopes she'll be cleared for *Apparition* soon; the closest point she can get to the Demanse is still approximately a twenty-minute walk to the front gate, but she would love to take in the view and get a bit of exercise. Lucius's grandfather had tried to purchase land in

the same area of her Lordship's home prior to her husband's birth, but due to a land dispute between two other parties, had been unable to do so.

Upon arrival, his Lordship's personal elf, Zarba, escorted her to his chambers, the lighting within the Demanse having changed from the cool blue-white it had been into a warm, rosy-gold. Once she announced herself and was granted entry, it took her a few moments to locate both Harry and the Dark Lord, but once she spied Harry lounging on the bed with a breakfast tray she felt as though she had been punched in the gut.

His eyes were so **green**. Not the green of growing things, or jade, but the green one commonly associated with one of the Dark Lord's favored methods of execution. And the drawn, starved countenance Harry had just served to make them stand out more. Paired with his Potter looks (and a surprisingly soft and full pair of lips that had been hidden behind a pursed expression), he would be quite fetching with a bit of weight.

As it currently stands, Narcissa just wants to mother him.

"Lady Malfoy."

Sweeping her gaze to a chair that was pulled next to the bed, she bowed as low as she could with her aching hip.

"I would like to thank you, Lady, for not only completing your assignment but going far and above and doing the seemingly impossible to return Harry to me." Looking over at Harry, his Lordship reached out, his hand brushing through dark strands, "he is...precious, to me."

Narcissa averted her eyes, feeling as though she had witnessed something unspeakably intimate.

At hearing the rustling of heavy robes her eyes snapped back, and she bowed again as her Lord stood up to his full, imposing height. Only now did she notice he was dressed in a set of ostentatious robes, and she remembered that the meeting of the Magical Cooperative Conglomerate of Western European Magical Communities was taking place in Lisbon today, a group that the Ministry had been trying to join for a number of years.

"I must ask for your services once more, Lady Malfoy, and please see to Harry in my absence. I will trust your judgment and discretion in who you share your current assignment with."

"I will ensure that your trust is not misplaced." With a final nod, the Dark Lord turned towards Harry, quietly muttering something before leaving.

Hearing the heavy door close behind them, Narcissa looked closely at her new ward. Even abed as he was, Harry was a *tiny* thing, more skin, and bones than anything, and swimming in the nightshirt he was wearing.

He needs his eyes checked, she thought as she watched him squint at her. Who knows what happened to his last pair, or even if they were the correct prescription.

Settling into the chair vacated by the Dark Lord, Narcissa looked more, tallying up everything she needed to address. His skin looked a bit red and irritated like it had encountered something it was allergic to, and he needed to have his hair seen to, a regimen of food and potions created, perhaps a check-over by a Specialist in Prolonged Time Distortion.

Great Merlin, but Severus is going to make a tidy sum from the potions to be brewed.

Scooping up a spoonful of blueberries and cream, Harry worked on his breakfast as he watched the woman Tom referred to as '*Lady Malfoy*' from the corner of his eye. He must have made nice with that Abraxas boy at some point, if he was willing to associate, let alone entrust Harry's safety, to someone bearing the name Malfoy.

Knowing him, Tom probably had a great deal of blackmail or utterly terrified Abraxas into submission.

Going back to his food, Harry looked around Tom's room. The other must have done very well for himself, in the magical world. Everything was of extremely high quality and make, and he could feel a sense of time and history pressing in on himself from the very building he was in. His Tommy-boy had always had a taste for the finer things in life, and it looks like he had worked hard and crushed any who opposed him under his leather boot.

But I can't really call him 'Tommy-boy' anymore, can I? Tom had always been tall for his age, and it had often worked against him when families came to adopt; his height had made him seem older than what he was. After all, why adopt a seven-year-old when you can have a five-year-old? That gives you more time to mold them into the person you want them to be, and fewer bad habits to break.

But now? Tom was *giant*. The nightshirt Harry wore went far past his knees, hanging off of him like a dress, and the sleeves had to get rolled up multiple times, otherwise, they would have been caked in his breakfast. And it was so *fine* and *silken* and *soft*.

And Tom had grown not just in stature, but into his looks as well. He had looked just a tad awkward as a child, still handsome, yes, but he had needed time to grow into his face.

Now, though, he must attract women like cats to nip. Undoubtedly he must have a girl or fiancée, maybe a wife. The opulence of his bedroom shows that he would be able to support not just her, but her *entire* family as well.

Or maybe not. He HAD said he needed to go to the Ministry, and had muttered something about 'a meeting' and 'economics' and 'can't trust the minions'. Being so high up the chain would mean more responsibilities and less time for oneself. And the clothes he put on had looked like they cost more than any townhouse in London Town.

Setting down his spoon, he felt lost.

Once Harry had finished his breakfast, Narcissa had him stand on a footstool, arms out as she flicked her wand about. One flick shrunk the nightshirt to something more manageable, and another created a ribbon of light that snaked over and around him, glowing numbers manifesting themselves before fluttering over to hover next to Narcissa's shoulder. A third flick created another ribbon of light that acted similar to the first but gave off a cooling effect as it smoothed over his body, soothing his itchy skin.

"Looks like you're allergic to pine essential oil," she muttered as the soothing ribbon darted back to her before twisting into a few sets of words. "And you should have a high-moisturizing soap to wash with. A five-oil blend should do nicely." She'll need to inform her Lordship that he'll want to change out his bath care scents. While the pine scent is faint (used as part of the woody profile he favors), she doubts that he would like for Harry to be made unduly uncomfortable.

She'll also have to see about selecting scents for Harry, as well, once he's cleaned himself off. She'll have to make sure it doesn't include lemongrass essential oil, for that, too, would irritate his skin.

Watching as the tailoring spell continued its rounds, she took a good look at Harry; he was only about 160-or so centimeters tall, and had been dwarfed in a nightshirt meant to be worn by a fully-grown, adult man who was over 210 centimeters. And, as much as she doesn't want to admit it, the measurements she is being provided show that she will have to put off ordering a full wardrobe. As he gained much-needed weight, his wardrobe would end up having to be replaced multiple times. While money isn't an issue (for either herself or her Lord), from how Harry had been inspecting the room earlier, she estimates he would feel uncomfortable with the lavish expense being 'wasted' upon him.

"Zarba!"

With a pop, the elf appeared, startling Harry. "How can Zarba be's helpings Master's Lady Malfoy?"

"Please visit Beautic Alley and fetch a neutral bath set from *Spranger's Spring Spa*. And see about acquiring a couple of bolts of acromantula silk in blues, greens, golds, undyed cream, and black." Once Zarba popped out, Narcissa returned her attention to Harry, who had started fidgeting.

"Um, thank you, mi'lady, for helping my Tom out." His accent was rough around the edges, his words shaped by the low- and gutter-talk that had surrounded him during his formative years. It was very different from the crisp, deep and even tones her Lordship spoke with, a voice that was cultivated for a very specific purpose and goal. In sharp contrast to the powerful, resonant feeling the Dark Lord evoked, little Harry's reminded her more of a scrappy dock boy that could charm your pants off before heading out for a pint and a fight.

"It's my pleasure, Harry," she smiled.

Stalking out of the Wing of Economy, the Dark Lord known by the war moniker of 'Voldemort' scowled as all of the lesser *vermin* darted like fish in the presence of a hunting shark. He snarled as the corpulent form of Gonzalo Manuel, one of the *many* Under Secretaries to the Spanish Economics Minister, tripped over his overlong robe in his effort to get out of Tom's way.

Tom was *this* close to *Avada*'ing everybody in that room. The **sheer** amount of disrespect the Western Bloc had been bandying about bordered on obscene! If after their lunch hour their tones don't change, he WILL do a full closure trade embargo.

"Fucking *IDIOTS*," he growled as he entered the offices set aside for his use. "Let's see how they like losing their access to the *Stonehaven* cure! I'm sure it'll only take a few hundred of their children dying to change their minds!"

Throwing himself into the office chair behind his work desk, he started to rub his temples with a sigh. "ZARBA!"

"Master is be bellowing for Zarba?" Bouncing on her toes, Zarba's ears wiggled in the way that Tom had long since learned meant she was happy. "Does Master want to be knowing about Master's Hawwy?"

"First, if you could fetch me the *Stonehaven* papers from my office, then I would like to hear an update about Harry." With a snap of her fingers, a thick manilla folder only kept together by a long length of twine thumped onto his desk. A few seconds later a plate under a cloche appeared to the side, quickly followed by a pitcher of a watered-down sangria. Under the cloche was a seafood paella with a side salad.

"Thank you, Zarba. And how is Harry?" Sliding the file to the side, he quickly (but neatly) tucked into his meal.

"Master's Hawwy is being taken care of by Master's Lady Malfoy. She is be taking his measures and fixing his pinky skins and being soft to him."

"Of course she would be soft for him. She knows that I would not tolerate anything less than professionalism and courtesy from someone of her standing," he muttered, pouring out a glass of the sangria and taking a sip, humming in pleasure. While the Spaniards were infuriating to deal with, they at least knew how to feed their guests.

"No, no! Master's Lady Malfoy is being softs *to* Master's Hawwy! Not **at's**!"

Pausing in scooping up a mussel, one of Tom's eyebrows rose. "She is being...affectionate?"

"Yes!" He shouldn't be surprised, but he is. Given the Malfoy's stance on blood purity, he was expecting neutral politeness at best.

Then again, Lady Malfoy is a mother. Undoubtedly Harry is tugging at most of her heartstrings, given that he isn't much older than her Draco.

"Good." He waited for Zarba's excited ear wiggling to settle down. "Now, I will need you to get a list from Lady Malfoy on what she has determined needs to be done for Harry."

Gliding through Princemoor Townhouse, Lucius Malfoy sighed as he looked for Severus. After witnessing the other man's rattled demeanor the night before, he felt that, as the friend and former Slytherin House mentor to his younger (former) Housemate, that it was his duty to ensure the other didn't die from either alcohol poisoning, a freak drunk-brewing accident, or a combination of both.

Which was proving rather difficult because the berk wasn't holed up in any of his usual spots!

"Damn cantankerous mill-end. Flying off with some of my best! That bottle of Blishen's **Black** was meant to be opened on Draco's twenty-first birthday! Of ALL the bottles he could have taken..." Muttering under his breath, he finished his sweep of the basement lab, berating Severus the whole time before returning to the ground floor. "Let's see how *he* would like it if I made off with his *Birth Bottle*. GRANTED he needs to pop a sprog or two for that to happen, but still!"

Still not finding the Yorkshireman, Lucius ascended to the third floor. "And I know he knows how special one of those bottles is. He was with me the day I purchased it! Granted, I don't remember much of that day because holding little Draco for the first time overshadowed everything else, but it's the principle of the matter, damn it!"

Opening door after door, Lucius made his round. It was only near the end of his third (and final) sweep that he remembered Severus's mention of getting drunk in his bathtub. Mentally kicking himself, he skipped the last three doors and went directly to the guest bathroom. Slamming open the door and activating the lighting charms, he smirked in satisfaction at the pained hiss his quarry let out. "HELLO, SEVERUS," he said loudly, grinning sadistically as the pile of dark robes and long limbs writhed in discontent. "HOW ARE YOU, SEVERUS? WE WERE QUITE WORRIED ABOUT YOU, **SEVERUS**." A snarl was his only answer. Stalking closer, he grabbed one booted foot that was hanging over the claw-footed tub's edge, tugging it half-heartedly. "COME ALONG, SEVERUS. UP AND AT 'EM! YOU CAN'T BE LAZING ABOUT **ALL** DAY, WHAT WILL YOUR SUBORDINATES THINK- *oof!*" While pulling on Severus's leg, the other jerked it back, pulling Lucius off balance into a tumble. He fell on top of the other, both grunting from the impact.

"...I am having flashbacks to that one night in '85."

"No, Lu'cus."

"No? You mean you don't remember-"

Severus pushed his twisted-up cloak away from his face, teeth bared. "I said NO, *Lucius!*" Huffing, he shoved at the blond, "we said we wouldn't talk about that night **ever** again."

While trying to get out of the deep bathtub, heels clicked down the hallway, stopping in front of the half-closed door before it was pushed open to reveal Narcissa. Upon seeing their state, she arched a finely-plucked eyebrow.

"Lucius."

"Narcissa."

"Severus."

"Yes, Narcissa?"

"I seem to recall a similar *incident* from a while back. Do you happen to know what it was?" She swept into the room, primly settling herself on the rolled edge of the monstrosity Severus has the *gall* to call a 'guest bath'.

"Yes-," "-no." Cutting each other off, the two men shot glares at one another.

Bringing up one of her hands, she started to inspect her nails. "Let me refresh your memories." Both men winced at her arch tone. "Summer of 1985. After being sent on an assignment for our Lord, and reportedly completing it *early*, I awoke to find the both of you passed out in our bathtub, *utterly starkers*, except for my husband and the father of my child, wearing something that we actually didn't own. Do you *remember* what that 'something' was," the side-eye she shot them could strip *Bartleby's NeverFlake Paint!* from wood in a heartbeat.

Lucius stayed wisely quiet, while Severus uttered a quiet 'no'.

"It was to my *husband* wearing a pair of arseless Union Jack printed knickers. And the two of you covered in glitter and smelling like you swam in a whiskey aging barrel."

Both men stayed quiet.

"...do either of you want to say anything?"

"No." "No, thank you."

"Good," Narcissa said brightly before getting up and walking out of the bathroom. Pausing briefly, she turned around, "by the way, Severus, I will need your brewing skills. I've already sent off a list to your lab." Hearing the man grunt his accent, she continued away. "Come, Lucius!" Hearing the two behind her snap and snarl about elbows and knees in awkward places, followed by a shout as the showerhead got turned on, she smirked as Lucius hurried to her side, a few platitudes falling from his lips.

She'll let him stew in it for a bit longer. It's not too often she gets to have fun like this.

Leaving the Garden of Eden

Pushing his wet hair out of his face, Harry padded out of the *ridiculously opulent* bathroom and back into Tom's bedroom, feeling refreshed with the new bath set Lady Malfoy provided him. His skin and scalp no longer itched, and both have felt the *softest* they ever had, with his new soap specifically lathering up into a lush, rich foam that glided over anything he rubbed it over. The soap he made for Wool's was made out of whatever oil and ashes he could get his hands on, and more often than not could strip your hands to flaking, as that soap had triple duty (bathing, cleaning, and washing).

Hopping back onto the bed, he grabbed one of the many blankets and pulled it around his shoulders, shivering in his nakedness in the cool air. He had meant to re-wear the nightshirt, but when he had reached for it, it was gone. In its place was a thick and fluffy towel, large enough to be a blanket for him, but once he had finished with that, the moment he set it aside it had vanished.

So there he sat, naked as a jay, wrapped up in a blanket and wondering when Lady Malfoy would return from her 'brief errand'. He had just dozed off when the bedroom door opened. Turning, he watched as the afore-thought woman entered, a large garment box floating behind her.

"Hello, Harry. I hope you are feeling up to a bit of an adventure." Flicking her wand, the box floated over to the bed, settling down before popping open to reveal its tissue paper-wrapped contents. "We'll be taking a short trip to Diagon Alley, along with a few side streets, and getting you a few sets of clothes, along with a brief stop with a Healer."

As she spoke, Harry had scooted across the bed, keeping one fist closed around the edges of his makeshift wrap. Poking a boney finger inside of the box, he moved some tissue aside, his finger grazing a silken fabric. "What are these, ma'am?"

"*Magic Free* robes. These are worn by witches and wizards who cannot have magic cast on or at them for health reasons." At her answer, he looked up at her, a questioning look on his face. "There are a few spells and charms that can be done, but these robes are a warning to others unfamiliar with the wizard in question that you are healing and on restriction. For anyone but your parent, guardian, spouse, or, in my case, sponsor, to try and cast on you ANYTHING without permission, can lead to serious legal and social consequences."

Harry's eyebrows shot up at that. "Nice to know that, but what about things such as security charms?" At her inquiring look, he ducked his face downwards with a blush. "I helped Tom with his summer work after he came back from his first year. His Potions text had mentioned using a shield charm to keep debris from falling in, and I just assumed that, well, it just makes sense that there were things like that to stop theft and break-ins."

Clever boy. "Indeed, you are correct. A few years back, legislation was passed that all new ward matrices for public buildings and non-member businesses had to reconfigure their measures to accommodate. Permits could be granted for buildings who had matrixes that

would be near-impossible to modify due to their age or anchoring foundations, but they must find a way to still address the needs for those in such a state."

"Ah." Pawing through the tissue paper some more, Harry eventually pulled out two robes, one black and one white, a pair of white over-the-knee stockings, a short white under-robe that looked like a cross between a slip and an undershirt, and a pair of slip-on slipper shoes in black. Everything was made out of the same heavy silken material, with the white pieces having a lustrous shine. Looking at the slipper shoes, he saw they were a silky outer layer. Flipping them over, he saw the stiff leather soles were a bit worn and scuffed like they had been worn on a few outings, but only a few times.

"Ah, these were once worn by my Draco. Had a bad case of Dragon Pox when he was younger that took nearly forever for him to recover from. Resizing charms don't work well on footwear, and you look to be the same size he was at the time."

Now *that* is something he was familiar with. Shoes were one of the few clothing articles that are nearly impossible to alter. *Looks like the more different things are, the more they are the same.* "But, um, we seem to be missing something?"

Humming in concern, Lady Malfoy leaned over the bed, sorting through the tissue. "Hmm, under-robe, over robe, shoes, and stockings. Well, a cloak wouldn't be remiss. It may be warming up but there's still quite the chill in the air..." Finished with her inspection, she looked over at him, "no, no, everything seems to be in order."

"Um, well, that is," his face burned up. It's one thing to address Ms. Cole with requests for underclothes, but to ask a *Lady*? "Where are the underdrawers?"

"The what?"

*Oh good Lord, but this is **embarrassing**. She even pronounces the 'h' in 'what' and I'm asking after a pair of skivvies.* "You know, underwear? Draws? Pants?"

After a few moments, she let out a peal of laughter. "Oh, I forget, you're muggle raised!" After taking a few moments to calm herself, she let out a small, amused huff. "While we do wear a skin layer, what this undershirt is," she flicked a hand at the short white shirt, "most magical folk don't wear trousers, thus not necessitating the need to wear such a layer. The closest we get to your 'pants' are leggings, and those are worn by both sexes as an article of clothing, not as 'underwear'." She started laughing again at the look of dawning horror on his face. "Why don't you go and change? I'll see about getting you a light breakfast. Oh, and here, a little gift from myself to you," she passed over a flat wooden box, a dark wood that had natural things such as leaves, trees, and flowers carved into the top.

Shuffling back off to the bathroom, he opened the newest box to find a simple men's grooming kit. Inside was a wooden paddle hairbrush, a wooden boar bristle hairbrush, a hand mirror, a brushing wand, a tin of what should be brushing powder, and a shaving set. Everything was made with the same dark wood as the box, with pale metal accents or bindings. Quickly brushing his teeth (that simple act left him feeling more refreshed than his shower had), he debated tackling his hair but decided dressing first would be best.

Slipping on the robes was easy enough. Each outer robe only had two simple buttons at the back of the neck, and simply slipped over the head. After the undershirt, the black one went on first, and while fairly fitted to the chest and shoulders, its sleeves and skirts quickly ballooned out. He was also surprised to see that a dust ruffle was attached to the inside hem, but once he stood up straight and buttoned himself up, it made sense; the robe hem literally ended just a sixteenth of an inch above the floor.

The white over-robe, while similar to the first but lighter in weight, had sleeves and a hem that ended almost a good six inches before the black ones, but was measured so closely to the underrobe that they acted as one unit. Once he had both on and settled, he was surprised at how **heavy** everything felt, but he wasn't sweating himself silly.

"You really shoulda though' dis one through, eh 'Arry," he muttered when it came time to the stockings. He hadn't realized until now, but they weren't knitted with ribbing to keep them up. Instead, they were woven, with a seam running up the back like the ones worn by Ms. Cole and minder Amelia, despite not being sheer. They had a black silk ribbon run through buttonholes that tied off just an inch under the cuff.

It was going to be bloody difficult to get them on with his skirts.

"Oh, well. Nuffing for i'." Pulling his robes up as far over his thighs as he could, he placed his foot on the top of the commode before rolling up the stocking to the foot. Bending over his knee, he slid it over his foot before gliding the excess material up his leg and over his knee, the stocking ending a whole handspan past his knobby knee. It took him a few tries, but he eventually got the garter ribbon tied off just right, and he proceeded to do his other foot.

Once finished, he trotted over to the long mirror hanging next to the door. "Oh me bloody stars, I look an altar yob. Cor, but Tom is going to be giggling his mug off an' calling me a dilly boy."

"Well, I think you look quite nice!"

Harry nearly leaped into the sink beside him, looking around himself wildly. "Oi!" Hearing a quiet '*yoo-hoo*', he turned back to the mirror just to see his reflection waving back at him. Harry blinked once, twice, before sighing. Bringing over his brushes, he ran the paddle brush through first, and for the first time since he could remember, his hair was easy to untangle. After a few swipes, he moved onto the boar bristle brush, and after a few minutes, he had hair that actually didn't look half bad. Granted, it still stuck out all over the place, but now he could see it was in an effort to turn into some sort of curl, and that he may have a natural part near his scar.

"You know if you got just a BIT of *SleekEazy's*-"

"Oh, feck off, nebbish." Ignoring the huffed out '*rude!*', Harry left the bathroom.

POP! "Hello, Master's Hawwy!"

Narcissa sipped from her teacup, doing her best to hide her smile. After Harry had gotten startled by Zarba and scared them both silly with his shouting, it had quickly turned into an apology contest, with Harry and Zarba trying to make nice, but Zarba getting distressed the more Harry said 'sorry', which just made Harry more upset and apologetic, which in turn set Zarba off again.

Once that was finished, Harry tucked into his lunch, studying Zarba intently in fascination. Every snap of her fingers he jumped, his mouth opening and closing like he had a dozen questions that were fighting to get out.

As Harry watched Zarba watching Harry, Narcissa took a moment to look him over. While the stockings were new, everything else Harry wore was from when Draco was sick at twelve. Her son had had an early start on his growth and had been a handful of centimeters taller than everyone else in his year (and none too few of the following), and having real, tangible proof that Harry, at the age of eighteen, was the same size her son had been at the start of puberty was *disturbing*.

Seeing he had stopped eating while the plate was still half-full, Narcissa hummed to get his attention from where he was currently watching Zarba dust the bedroom. Seeing he was now looking at her, she tipped her cup at his plate. "We'll be leaving as soon as the Malfoy Coach arrives. I would suggest finishing your meal." While she had no issue purchasing something for him in the alleys if the need arose, it doesn't hurt to start the trip with a full stomach.

"Oh, sorry, Lady Malfoy, but I'm a bi' full, now." Seeing her disbelieving look, he pinked. "Food was usually pretty ligh', and I was always giving a bi' more of mine to Tom. Some of th' older boys had a habi' of nicking his shares."

Oh, but he's so precious. "We'll just have to see about supplementing with some potions, then." Setting down her cup, she dabbed her mouth before standing up, "come along then."

Hopping off of the bed and slipping on his shoes, Harry trotted after Lady Malfoy. He was excited; he would be seeing a world that had belonged strictly to Tom before now. Having never received a Hogwarts letter (despite Tom's affirmation that yes, Harry was *magic*), he hadn't thought it was proper for him to go with the younger boy on his first foray into what would be his future home.

Instead, Harry had fretted and tossed himself into cooking and cleaning until the time to pick up Tom came. And then it was to do everything possible to reassure the boy that he was worthy of going to school, regardless of the state of his belongings. The closest Harry ever got to Tom's world was helping the boy decipher his schoolbooks, and then acting like a springboard for the youngster to toss his thoughts at while doing his summer coursework.

"Master's Lady Malfoy, yous be forgetting somethings!" Stopping right before leaving the Dark Lord's bedroom, Narcissa and Harry waited as Zarba snapped her fingers, plucking out of the air a mid-sized wooden jewelry chest. "Master's Hawwy should wear these because he's now a part of Master's House!"

Accepting the chest, Narcissa opened the top and peered in before closing it back up. "Thank you, Zarba, you have excellent taste, and are a credit to your Master."

"Zarba be's going back to Master, but if you needs me, just be's asking!" With a quick bow, her doll-like nose nearly touching the ground, Zarba popped away.

"Well, let's hop to it. It wouldn't do to keep the Master's Twilfit waiting." Passing the chest over to Harry, Narcissa placed her left hand between his shoulders to guide him into the large sitting room and library her Lordship has as a final barrier between himself and the rest of his Demanse. She made sure to hide her small smile as she heard Harry mutter *'well feck me, Tom, I can't see far bu' I can 'ell you've done well for yerself. Pillock,'* under his breath.

As they started going down the flights of stairs, she watched Harry squint at his surroundings. "Um, Lady Malfoy? Where is everybody?"

"Hm?"

"This...building? It's so large. And empty. Why aren't there more people?" Passing by a painting of Xenia Slytherin, Harry blushed as the busty portrait gifted him a heavy-lidded stare and a sultry wink. Narcissa gave a whisper of a laugh; apparently Slytherin's as a whole have a fascination with petit, green-eyed boys. As they crossed another landing, a portrait containing Norman and Bettony Slytherin, dating from the late sixteenth century, had started leaning towards Harry's passing back from their position on a lovers lounge, for once distracted from their usual fornication by a pretty youth.

"Sadly, our Lordship is the last of his line. Or, at least, the last to have enough blood to claim it." Reaching the ground floor, they started crossing the wide entry hall, their steps echoing off of the stone. "But, I do believe that, with you here, Harry, it won't be that way for long." As they approached the main doors, they opened of their own accord, spilling in clear, if slightly weak, sunlight.

Blinking his eyes, Harry squinted at his new surroundings. From what he could tell, Tom's...fortress? Had been built partially into the side of a mountain, the front only having a shallow stone porch that bled into a sloping, winding staircase. Great shoals of rocks and boulders were buttressed against the sides of the fort and the nearest part of the stairs down before being replaced by rolling, verdant grasses and wildflowers, the starting of a forest far off in the distance.

As they started to near the end of the run, Narcissa could see the Malfoy Coach idling for them. Being in the Malfoy family for centuries, the Coach has gained its own sentience, and the ability to change itself to fit the times. When Narcissa had married her Lucius, it was in the form of a Mercedes Benz 500SEL (according to the helpful booklet the Coach had produced upon request). But once she started her search for Harry, it seems to favor the appearance of a Rolls Royce Cullinan.

All in a respectful black with silver accents, of course. The Malfoy's like to show off their wealth, but they are not *gauche* like the Smith's.

Taking back the jewelry chest and helping Harry slide onto the back bench seat, Narcissa took one of the singles facing him. The Coach produced a thin woolen blanket and folded it over his lap as he looked around the Coach's interior in awe, one of his hands gliding over the polished, supple leather of the bench seat.

Once the Malfoy Coach started moving, Narcissa set the jewelry chest on her lap. "Now, let us see about getting you fitted." Seeing Harry cock his head, she smiled, "in this chest are several sets of Slytherin Family jewelry. Zarba was right; as far as my Lord is concerned, you are family, and as such should be wearing the symbols."

Watching her flip the chest open, Harry was astonished as she pulled tray after tray of gem-encrusted jewelry out, each expanding from their shrunken state of the size of a matchbox to that of ones seen at the counters of quality jewelry counters. Metals in all sorts of colors, set with gems in more colors than the rainbow, lay on trays that floated contentedly in the air, like a well-loved cat curled up in a person's lap.

"Hm, yes, these should do nicely." Getting to the last tray, she surveyed it with a critical eye. It was a full ensemble, with a necklace, earrings, ring, and bracelet, and was a contrasting set of the Lord's set. Where the Lord's set was composed of platinum and blue diamonds (with black opal accent stones), this opposing set was done in gold, diamond accent, and imperial jade.

Plucking up the ring (whose imperial jade stone was the size of her thumbnail), she reached for Harry's hand. "Let us see your right hand. For you, this would go on your right ring finger." Sliding it onto his thin finger, she smirked in satisfaction as the band shrunk down in size, thickening in width. "Hm, thought so. This set quite likes you. If it didn't, it wouldn't have let you wear it." In Harry's case, if Narcissa had been wrong in her assessment of her Lordship's affections, it would have simply slipped off his finger. For most, the ring would have taken the finger with it. "These sets have been crafted by the Lord's and Lady's of Slytherin for their family and close friends for generations. To wear a set while not bearing the name shows that you are held in high esteem."

Taking a moment to examine the ring, Harry rubbed his thumb over the green stone. The ring gently warmed, and a feeling of safety and contentment fell over him. "This is quite a nice set. I assume tha' Tom wears the Lord's set? Tha' mus', I mean," he stressed his enunciation, "that must mean that there is a Lady's, or Wife's, set?" Accepting the matching necklace, he passed it around his neck, his fingers fiddling with the unfamiliar clasp before allowing the large medallion to fall to his sternum, where it shrunk-up to settle at the center of his chest.

"Yes, although it is commonly called the Spouses set, along with there being a Consort's set." Leaning over, Narcissa helped Harry clip the bracelet around his left wrist. "While House Slytherin never let something such as sex be a deterrent for who can lead, sexuality has had an impact." Plucking up the earrings, she debated on whether or not to pierce his ears. "A fair amount of their Heads had a liking for their own gender, either fully or just liked dipping their toes in, so to speak. And none too few took a lover on the side to indulge in this hunger." Seeing Harry wrinkle his nose, she laughed. "Such a thing is done, even now. While a love match is desirable, most marriages between the Noble Houses are done to cement

business dealings, treaties, and to bring allies closer together. Not having an outlet for one's desires and affections can be... detrimental to the new family's health." From the frown on her face, Harry estimates she may have been witness to such a situation.

Harry fiddled with his necklace, the weight of the medallion warm and comforting. It had a pleasant heft to it like it would be hard to miss if it went missing. "It's hard to imagine Tom with earrings."

"He's not often seen with the full set, outside of important functions. I do believe that he typically wears just the ring, along with his line, the Gaunt's, family ring."

Nodding, Harry turned to look out the window closest to him, scooting over the bench seat towards the door and folding his feet up beside him after toeing off his shoes. As they had been speaking, the scenery had changed from the countryside to urban, the Malfoy Coach now boxed in by automobiles of an unfamiliar make to him. Central London rose tall and formidable around them, the sun not blocked out by skyscrapers taller than anything he's ever seen was bright, golden, and fierce. A great contrast to-

"Where is Tom's home located? What county?" It can't have been too far, even with changes to transit, an auto can only go so far, so fast.

"In Cumbria." His head twisted so fast, Harry could hear it snap. "The Malfoy Coach can cross any terrain, any distance, and any conditions, in a most *timely* manner, to get its passengers to their desired destination. A few measly hundred kilometers is nothing for such a construct." She patted her armrest affectionately.

His head feeling like it was swelling, Harry dazedly returned to his window watching.

Exiting out of *Pauline's Patisserie* down Vertic Alley, Harry took a few moments to blink his eyes as he fingered a newly-pierced earlobe, not quite used to the weight of something hanging there. While it had been painless, the skin still throbbed, like a leg that had been sat on for too long.

The Coach had pulled into an underground car park, one that could only be accessed by the wealthy witch or wizard. Narcissa had explained that while the primary access point for the main magical thoroughfare was *The Leaky Cauldron*, there were several other public or semi-public entrances to Diagon Alley and its other feeder streets. Saint Mungo's, the primary magical hospital, had an entrance point specifically for employees and patients, there was a dock-like entrance for merchandise drop-off where magical transport would be detrimental to the items, and thus muggle transport was used, and two entrances for the elite; one maintained by Gringotts Bank, and the other built and maintained by the Noble Houses as a shared expense.

This last one connected to *Pauline's*, and it was not uncommon for new arrivals to stop in for a pick-me-up before going about their business.

Being sure to keep Harry on her left, Narcissa guided the young man outside of the cafe. "We shall stop off first at the opticians. That will be located down Medic Alley. Afterward, we will visit *Twilfit and Tattings*, and see about ordering you a small change of clothes. By the time we finish there, your new spectacles should be finished and we will then visit a trusted Healer to get you seen and pick-up your potions."

Curling his right hand around Narcissa's offered forearm, Harry stayed close to her side as they plunged into the flow of people. While Vertic Alley was not packed, per se, many of the well-dressed visitors gave the two a wide berth upon seeing Harry's robes.

Vertic was, while doing brisk business, quiet compared to the wall of noise that made up Diagon. Harry felt like he had been clocked by a steel sheet pan, the noise was almost like a literal force. Unlike Vertic, the shoppers in Diagon pressed in on all sides, and if it wasn't for his hold on Narcissa, he would have been lost in the throng.

Thankfully they only had to cut across Diagon. Medic Alley was like putting earmuffs on after closing the door to the Under Fives room at Wools. Logically, he knew the noise was there, but whatever charms or wards were used to buffer it were doing a bang-up job.

Looking at Medic Alley, Harry was starting to sense a theme. Vertic Alley was very reminiscent of the Victorian aesthetic, with tall and hulking silhouettes and angled roof lines filled with tall windows and lots of wood, Medic Alley was its opposite in art nouveau. Somehow the stone buildings were made to look like spun sugar glass, the copious amounts of windows and the delicate metal framework pulling it all together reminded him of a dragonfly.

What little he saw of Diagon just screamed *chaos*, which, considering the current bend of his life, he could do without for the time being.

Walking down the wide boulevard, Narcissa brought them to *Octavian's Optometry*. Ducking inside, a quiet chime announced their presence. A large, long-eared cat perked up from its spot on the nearby purchase counter, yawning as it ruffled its silver-tabby coat before letting out a loud meow.

"Why don't you look at the frames available? I would like to speak to Octavian before your exam."

Dismissed, Harry wandered off to a glasses display, the cat from earlier jumping off of the counter and trotting over to him with an mrrp. As he stopped to look at frames that boasted to let one see-through clothes, '*including most invisibility cloaks!*', the cat stood up, resting its forepaws on his hip before extending its neck to him and purring. Rubbing its head, he heard quiet voices behind him and turning he saw Lady Malfoy speaking with an older tall, thin man with a hawkish complexion with salt-and-pepper hair pulled back in a low tail and a mustache.

Turning back, he continued looking, soon picking up the cat after it started meowing daintily at him. Once he had his arms full, the cat started rubbing its cheek against his, its purring getting louder and louder. As he examined a rack of wire-framed specs, the cat had curled up, resting its head on his shoulder while it wrapped its paws around his neck.

He jumped when a hand fell on his shoulder, the cat meowing in discontent. Looking up, he met beady, dark grey eyes set under a heavy brow.

"So, young master, what can you tell me about your eyes? Near or far?" His voice sounded deep like a church bell, and that was before taking in the volume he had to speak at to be heard over the train engine Harry was carrying.

"Well, sir, I can only see about a foot in front of my face. Then everything goes to pot." Harry could hear Lady Malfoy sigh while the optometrist barked out a laugh, his face transforming from the dour countenance it previously was.

"You. I like you. Come along, laddie, and let's get you looked at. The name's Octavian Prince-Fallowine, but just call me Octavian." Scooping the cat out of Harry's arms, he ragdolled it around his shoulders, "and this is Gwen, queen of the shop and my owner."

Harry perked up as Octavian led him into an office in the back, hopping into the optometry chair that looked both the same yet wildly alien from the one he remembers. "So, you're from Yorkshire? Finally, somebody who speaks proper feckin' English."

Octavian laughed. "Canna' hide th' accent. Us Prince's have 'eld the Dales since before tha' Merlin upstar' started swingin' 'is dick abou'." Pulling over the butterfly viewer, Octavian started fiddling with some knobs as Gwen leaped off of his shoulder and onto Harry's lap. "Where you from, sonny?"

"Not too far from th' Eas' End, bu' too far for proper Cockney. We jus' 'alk loud'n'fas'." Petting Gwen, Harry settled in.

"Sa righ' you. I know where ya are. Nearly murried a burd from th' area." Finished with his fiddling, Octavian pushed the viewer onto Harry's face.

"Wot happened?"

"She gone off an' murried some feckin' *Carlsbone* arsewhipe. Then I met a 'wee bonnie lass' from Scotland who could drink me unner th' table, but she turned me dow' because I was a bit too 'Dark Aligned' for her."

"Feckin' 'ell."

"Eh, it all worked out. We're friends again, and take 'urns ribbing me grea'-nephew. All righ', we're done 'ere."

Squinting as the viewer was pulled away from his face, Harry shot Octavian a look. "Bu', we didn'-?"

"Wot, like them muggles do? Nah, laddie, we're better an' fas'er." He waved his hand, one that Harry saw held out a parchment. "Now tha' I got your script, it'll only be abou' an hour."

"...I have to talk all hoity-toity now, don' I?"

Octavian snickered. "Sorry."

Heaving a sigh, Harry gently set Gwen down on the ground before slipping out of the chair. Shimming to settle his robes, he straightened his shoulders before striding back into the main shop, Octavian trying his best to smother his amusement as he followed.

Looking into the mirror, Harry cocked his head as he admired his new set of specs.

His first of *three*.

While he had been getting his exam, Lady Malfoy had been browsing and selected ten pairs of frames. Once Harry rejoined her, she teamed up with Octavian to whittle down the choices offered when Harry had appeared overwhelmed. When the dust settled, they settled on two pairs of round frames, and one that was rectangular. For everyday wear, Narcissa selected a pair of gold wire, oversized frames. The end pieces were set inline to the temples, with the hinges disguised behind dainty gold lily's whose stems flowed into the temples and temple tips. The other circular frames were smaller with a bolder gold border and black temples, and the rectangular ones were naked lenses attached to gold temples with three small emeralds embedded in a triangular formation on the outer lens corners.

Lucky for Harry, Octavian had a rejected pair of the oversized frames that he could easily modify to fit Harry's face. Apparently, they had been meant as a gift for the original purchaser's husband for special events, but there was supposedly bad blood between the husband and one of Octavian's relatives, so they had been soundly rejected. Harry's script was nearly identical, but a simple bit of optical transfiguration flexing the lenses one seventy-sixth of a degree concave and another to 'bring in' the width of the frames solved those issues.

"I'll need about an hour-and-a-half, closer to two hours, for the other lenses and frames. One of my setting stones shattered due to an over-enthusiastic apprentice, so I'll be moving a bit slow due to your complex script. To make up for it, I'll throw in one of Clarissa's eyeglass chains." Pulling out a velvet-lined tray holding strand after strand of chains that Harry is *pretty sure* are used primarily by elderly people to keep track of their specs, Octavian slid it across the counter. "Don't know what the kids see in them, but I'd be stupid to turn down extra galleons." Lady Malfoy murmured her agreement.

"Anchor different spells, charms, and wards to them, I imagine," Harry said as he picked up a gold one. Landing next to his elbow, an iridescent green beetle started cleaning its antenna. With a pointed index finger, he gently scooped it to the side. "*Don't want to squish you, now, you're far too pretty.*" Lady Malfoy and Octavian turned to look at him. Feeling eyes on him, he looked up, "what? Also, it would be a nice, extra way to dress the face."

Octavian cursed under his breath, but Lady Malfoy gave Harry a considerate look. Leaning forward, she plucked up a chain that was a fine gold chain interspaced with small emeralds and diamonds. "Add this to his order, along with a copy done with imperial jade, if you could."

Taking back Harry's glasses, Octavian started adjusting the chain loops to fit the temples. "Billed to the account we discussed earlier? Smashing. Alright, sonny, let's see how you

look." Turning Harry's face back and forth, he gave a satisfied smile. "Alright, I'll see you both back in a few hours."

Leaving Octavian's was literally like entering a new world. Never before has Harry seen everything so *clearly*. The cobbles under his feet had a warm, almost sandy texture to them, and the flowers in a nearby planter were not just orange, but they had brown spots near the base of the petals.

He could see the individual leaves on the tree across the boulevard.

"Come along, Harry," he jumped, looking up at Lady Malfoy's face. "Once we finish our errands, I'll see about settling you in the Demanse's courtyard."

Hopping on his toes, Harry had to restrain himself from pulling Lady Malfoy, reminding himself that he didn't actually **know** where *Twilfit and Tattings* was located. Blushing at her chuckle, he followed her back to Medic's Diagon connection. It was as they were joining the throng of shoppers that they nearly got bowled over.

Keeping hold of Harry's arm, Narcissa leaned back, not having to struggle much to keep her charge standing. Twisting on her foot, she rounded to lay into the careless idiot that nearly tripped them, her right hand ready to unsheath her wand, just to stop with a sniff. "Lord Black," she said flatly.

"Cissa." Scruffy as ever, cousin Sirius glowered at her. "I'd say you should watch where you're going, but that would imply that I care. Which I don't."

She scoffed, her downturned lips going into a sneer. "I would recommend that you take your own advice, *cousin*. Not many would be as forgiving as I."

"*Forgiving!* Ha!" Sirius threw back his head as he barked his amusement. "Sorry if I don't believe you, **cousin** fairest! But you? **Forgiving!?** Since when did you get a sense of humor?"

Narcissa flattened her expression. "Regardless, I have places to be. Come, Harry, we need to get to your fitting." Turning them both away from Sirius, Narcissa reaffixed her grip with Harry's hand, only jerking to a stop when a hand gripped her right upper arm.

"Now, Cissa, what-, Oi!" Shaking his hand, he turned to glare at the little shit that had bent back two of his fingers to near the breaking point, just to freeze.

"Oi, guv, th' Lady 'as fins to do. Change th' tunes afore I pink yer knickers." Harry **hates** people who get handsy with the fairer sex. He's had to go knock noggin's together before when some of the local boys decided one of his charges who turned them down for a date tried to get physical, so he's no stranger to squaring up with shicers. Taking a closer look, his eyes went wide, "oi, you look like th' finocchio who was swee' on me."

Jerking, Narcissa swore quietly under her breath. *Of course. Vega is one of Sirius' great-grandfathers.* Getting ready to drag Harry away, personal image be damned, she was astonished to see Sirius go through some sort of mental fit before dashing off, looking like Old Shuck was on his tail.

Not looking a blessing in the mouth, Narcissa fixed herself up before tugging on Harry's hand. "Well now. We'll need to make our apologies to Old Master Twilfit, but he should still be amenable to seeing us."

"JAMES! JIMINY-JAMES! JIMBO! JIMMY! PRONGS!"

Snapping the quill he had been writing with, James Potter facepalmed, leaning hard on his elbow as he tossed his broken quill near the vicinity of his wastebasket. "UPSTAIRS, PADDY." Hearing the other man frantically pound up the stairs, he tiredly turned towards his youngest daughter, Daisy, as she grunted up at him from her place in her playpen. "What did your Uncle Paddy do, now?"

"JAMBOREE WHERE ARE YOU!?"

"Not this shit again. MY STUDY!" He nearly fell out of his chair and onto his toddler daughter as Sirius burst into the room, hitting the door so hard it bounced off the wall, denting the plaster before slamming into Sirius' face and laying him out on his back with a loud thunk.

Daisy started cackling, like babies who witness another person's misfortune do, and James just groaned before covering his face as Sirius started swearing oaths left, right, and center. "Not in front of the baby, Pads."

"Fuck that-, OW!"

"Not in front of the baby, Siri." To make up for the stinging hex, Lily Potter flicked her wand and a loud crack was heard as Sirius' nose realigned itself. As the man in question writhed in pain on the floor, she nimbly stepped over him before gliding over to Daisy's playpen and plucking her giggling daughter up before leaning against James's desk. "Now, what are you bellowing about now, Siri? Did you get into a scuffle with Lucius again?"

"No."

"Was there another silly paternity suit," James drawled.

"Oh, Morgana no! Besides, I disproved the last one a month ago."

"Was there a *successful* paternity suit?" Only getting a painfully groaned 'no', Lily smiled. "So, now that we have established that you haven't gotten a girl up the duff, which, given your *dog-like* habits," she grinned at the twin groans her pun netted her, "what emergency-that-isn't currently has your knickers in a twist?"

Shooting up into a sitting position, Sirius took a deep breath. Lily and James settled in to hear the latest bit of bullshittery Sirius has no doubt gotten up to, and considering the state he was in as he stormed their home in Godric's Hollow, it would, at the very least, be entertaining.

"Isawaboythatlooked-"

A toilet flushed.

The door to the small bathroom connected to James's study opened, and a third man walked out, rubbing his hands to help clear them of the last bit of moisture left from his wash. Reading the room, he smiled brightly, "I see we were to be treated to another rendition of Sirius' adventures."

"Remus!"

Walking over to Lily, Remus scooped up Daisy before plopping into one of the chairs before James's desk. Taking his time to get comfortable and get Daisy settled, he only stopped when Sirius started drumming his heels on the floor. "Continue, Pads!"

"I *said*, I-saw-a-boy-that-looked-really-pretty-in-Diagon-but-he-was-with-Narcissa-also-he-was-really-thin-like-he-was-sick-oh-and-he-was-wearing-magic-free-rob-es-but-he-had-BEAUTIFUL-green-eyes-like-Grand-Pappy-Vega-always-talked-about-his-favorite-boy-had-so-anyway-I-bumped-into-Cissa-and-I-swear-he-looks-JUSTLIKEJAMES-so-I-think-he-might-be-a-Potter- **inhale** - ANDHEWASWESRINGTHESLYTHERINCOURTSHIPJEWELRYSET-which-just-confirms-the-Minister-is-a-depraved-monster-because-if-that-boy-is-legal-I-will-marry-my-brother-don't-go-there-Moony-I-swear- "

James held up his hand, stopping Sirius's spewed shibboleth of words. "Sirius?"

"Yes, Jiminy-cricket?" Sirius steadfastly ignored the long sigh the newest nickname earned him. He has a reputation to maintain.

"The *Reader's Digest* version, if you will."

"Ooooooh, Lily taught you a new thing!"

"SIRIUS!"

"Oi, alright! Fine," Sirius pouted. "Cissa is playing tour guide to the *Minister's* new squeeze, and not only is he pretty, but he's also underage AND he looks like James, but if he stuck a fork in a light socket."

"Oi!"

Before James could scramble around his desk to put Sirius into a headlock, Remus smacked his arm. "Hey, last we knew, it was just you, right?"

"Remember Tristan?"

"Damn bloody Tristan," James growled, crossing his arms and glaring mulishly.
"Couldn't keep it in his pants. Cost us Sacred status, he did!"

"...you think there could be more Potter's out there, and we just don't know it?" Sirius wouldn't be surprised; his own Grandpappy Vega literally **doubled** the Black Family through his sexual shenanigans alone.

It started a couple of land disputes, but that's par for the course.

Lily sighed. "We would have to go through the Ministry archives. See what families took umbrage to his *'defiling of their daughters'*," she rolled her eyes at the phrase, "and go from there."

"If Tristan could have kept it in his fucking pants-!"

"FUCKING!"

Stopping their arguing, everyone turned to look at little Daisy. Once she saw she had everybody's attention, she giggled before clapping her hands. "FUCKING," she crowed again.

"JAMES!"

Memory I: First Meetings

Harry peered around the open doorway, his green eyes wide from the loud crying that erupted from the room. The beat-up crib that was the source of the noise was shoved towards the far corner, bracketed on two sides by windows that, yes, were closed, but that little Harry knew quite well were actually very drafty.

Squinting into the darkness behind him, he checked to make sure Ms. Cole wasn't going to sneak up on him before he tip-toed into the room. He made extra sure not to step on the squeaky boards, he didn't want to upset the new baby any more than it already had.

As he got closer and closer, the baby's crying had started to turn from the loud, strident howl it originally was into something high and reedy. Reaching the side of the crib, he peered through the bars to see a wet little screwed-up face, one that was quickly turning purple from the prolonged crying fit.

"Hey," Harry cooed, pushing a rail-thin arm between crib bars that were starting to show signs of dry rot. "Why you cryin'?" He started to pet the messy mop of hair covering the baby's head, "you don' smell, so you don' nee' a 'ange. Oh, blimey bu' ye col'." As his fingers grazed the baby's scalp, he could feel how icy it had gotten.

Walking to the end of the bed, he squinted at the piece of board that had been tied to it. "Tom. Marovolo, Marvo, Marvolo! Riddle. Jr. Tom Marvolo Riddle Junior," he quietly crowed, air whistling through the gap where he lost a tooth just yesterday. "Cor bu' 'a's a moufful." Returning to the baby's side, he looked at him again. While he had been reading out the name, the newly-named Tom had quieted, still sniffing, but no longer sounding like his voice would give out. "Well, 'a' does i'. Ye comin' wif me."

Walking over to the only other furniture in the room, Harry dragged the chair closer to Tom's crib. Standing upon it, he had to use both hands to undo the metal clips keeping the side rail up, and he nearly startled himself into a fall when the side dropped suddenly.

Being careful to get all of the bedding, he wrapped his thin arms around Tom and his blankets. "Oof, bu' ye 'eavier 'an ye loo'." Once he had a firm hold of Tom, he pulled him against his chest before squatting, slipping first one leg and then the other out from under him and then scooting off of the chair. Taking a moment to readjust Tom, he then trotted out of the singular nursery and down the hall before turning into his room. Once inside, he closed the door behind him, then walked the scant few steps towards his wrought iron bed and set Tom down on it before looking down at him.

Since Harry had picked him up, Tom had quieted, only giving out a quiet grunt when shifted. Right now, he stared up at Harry with eyes that had already darkened from the pale blue of new sight to a darker, almost oceanic blue.

Seeing Tom now content, Harry grinned. "Alrig', Tommy. Looks as you'll be stayin' wif me from now on. Don' know wha' Ms. Cole was thinkin', keepin' you in th' coldes' room we haf." Arranging Tom's blankets into a nest, he then pulled over and folded in half the large,

ratted, holey wool blanket he had been given. He had to curl up around Tommy so they could both fit under it, but it just made them both the cozier for it.

"Well, looks as 'ough is only you an' me. Don' worry, I'll take care of you."

Return to Paradise

To Harry's chagrin, *Twilfit and Tatting's* was located on Diagon. From how Lady Malfoy had re-emphasized making their appointment on time, he had been certain that it would be located in an area like Vertic. Especially considering how her own clothing seemed to be of exceptional quality and Diagon, while nice, didn't scream 'wealth' and 'opulence'.

Twilfit and Tatting's was located more towards a central area of Diagon, and while Harry could have done without the press of people or the noise, he did appreciate the opportunity to take a closer look at the alley. Storefronts varied from wide, bulking things to widths barely wider than an average doorway. And just as there were the different sizes, there were the different styles. Some were like a more rough version of Vertic, a few that looked futuristic, like something out of those 'Mars colonization' fiction books, another that looked like it was the submarine from Jules Verne's *10,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and one that looked like some strange, mechanical blimp in a caricature of two redheaded men brightly called *Weasley's Wizard Wheezes*.

As he followed Lady Malfoy, they soon broke through the throngs. In front of them was a wide storefront, sharing a style similar to Vertic, but painted in a rich, almost black dark brown. Wide, brightly lit windows showcased the offerings available, and in gold calligraphy on the top of the windows was *Twilfit and Tatting's: Official Tailors for the Minister of Magic*.

As they entered, a bronze bell hanging over the door gently chimed. The inside was elegantly appointed, the floor a dark brown wood with a slightly warmer, gold-tone trim, the color combo getting pulled up to the walls and ceiling. A bronze gas chandelier lit the wide showroom, giving everything a warm, golden wash. In front of both banks of windows were mannequins dressed in full outfits, showcasing that *Twilfit's* provides clothing for men, women, and children. Bronze racks with ready-to-wear items were spaced throughout the room, and rolls of different fabrics were stocked in tailors cubes around the sides and back of the room. Towards the back was a doorway, leading to what Harry guesses are fitting cubicles.

"Ah, Narcissa. I was almost afraid that you would break your appointment." Looking over his shoulder, Harry watched as a wizened old man emerged from the back. He was bent with age and had a long, white, snowy beard that hit his slightly paunchy middle. On his face was a golden monocle, and his gnarled hands were straightening out a measuring tape. He was dressed in simple but elegant purple robes with gold trim. On his head was a cap similar to the *yarmulke* Harry had often seen in the Yiddish neighborhood just up the block from Wools, but it was bigger and shaped more like a pull-on cap than the half-cap that they looked like.

Narcissa inclined her head. "Pardon me for our lateness, Master Twilfit. We were unfortunately held up."

He waved her apology away with a chuckle. "All is forgiven. Lord Black had left us not long ago and in quite the mood. Undoubtedly you caught the brunt end of it." Hobbling closer, he bent over to take a closer look at Harry. "So, this is the young man we need to see to?" Holding out his hand, he and Harry shook as his eyes danced over Harry's appearance, lingering on the jewelry before moving on. "I am Master Tailor Theodore Twilfit, sixth-generation owner of *Twilfit and Tatting's*. We'll see you dressed and on your way soon enough, young sir."

"Thank you for seeing us, sir. Lady Malfoy has been most kind to me, and I would hate for her to have missed an appointment she has gone to the trouble to make for me." Harry made sure to put on his best Upper London impression. He didn't want to embarrass Lady Malfoy by sounding like the guttersnipe he was.

"Now, *there* is a lad with proper manners," Master Twilfit pronounced as he led them towards one of the fabric walls. "Not many seem to have them, these days."

"Indeed. Did you receive the silks I *Floo'ed* you about? I wish for my charge to have at least two sets of robes before we must make our way to his healer," Narcissa's voice was crisp and ringing, making Harry feel very self-conscious of his own verbal shortcomings.

"Oh, yes, along with the measures you provided. I and one of my grandsons, Terrance, have mocked up a few ideas. Ah, here we go." Walking into the back, Master Twilfit pulled back a curtain to a fitting room. Inside was a wooden stool set in front of three angled mirrors. The room looked bigger than what it was, making him think that magic was used to create more space.

"Alright, up you go, my boy," Master Twilfit held out his arm to help Harry step-up onto the tall stool. "Now, you present a unique challenge. Narcissa said that you are recovering from illness, which I hope you do so quickly, nasty business that, but in the meantime, you still need a few changes of clothes. Can you hold your arms out, please? Thank you."

Doing as instructed, Harry watched out the corner of his eye as Lady Malfoy sat in a padded armchair off to the side. A tray with a glass of an orangy-pink chilled juice floated into the room, hovering off to the side after she picked it up and sipped.

"We'll need to change the arm length a bit, but, if you could, young man? Strip down to your under-robe? I'll be fetching the mock-up along with Terrance. It will just be a few moments."

Undoing both sets of buttons behind his neck, Harry struggled a bit to pull both over-robes over his head. As he finished, he could hear Lady Malfoy giggle at his appearance, his hair sticking up every which way. Passing his robes over to her, he tried to flatten his mop out as he straightened out his undershirt, but from how her giggling increased, he stopped with a sigh, knowing a losing battle when he saw it.

Turning back to the mirrors, he winced. No wonder Master Twilfit wished him a speedy recovery; he looked damn near skeletal.

"Don't worry, we'll have you plumped up soon."

Turning towards Lady Malfoy, Harry cocked his head. Before he could ask her more, Master Twilfit and a man who must be Terrance returned, Terrance carrying a few bundles of a plain, silken material over his arm. Snowy hair must run in the family, for Terrance had snowy waves brushing his shoulder. Harry felt his hackles rise at the look he received from Terrance. It was a haughty, over-the-nose one, similar to the ones Harry and the other orphans would receive from the upper-class passers-by.

He does *not* like this guy.

"Alright now, Harry, slip this on," Master Twilfit cheerily asked, passing over one of the bundles, the gleam of pins peeking out of the folds. "This goes on similar to a coat, so you won't have to worry about poking out an eye trying to get it on or off. We'll close up the front once we have everything properly seamed up."

Gingerly slipping the mock-up on, Harry then followed the directions Master Twilfit gave him, changing positions as requested or holding still as folds and pins were adjusted. Master Twilfit kept up a pleasant stream of chatter, asking both Harry and Lady Malfoy questions.

"Alright, now that we have that out of the way, let's select your colors! Narcissa, is it permitted to cast color-changing charms?" Receiving an affirmative, Master Twilfit lit up, "wonderful, wonderful!"

Harry watched with wide eyes as jet after jet of color was shot at the mock-up. After going through several different shades of blue and green (with Master Twilfit getting excited over the different shades of green), they moved onto other colors. Harry particularly liked the red, it was an intense, true red, reminding him of the color used in the children's history book with the chapter on the Romans he had scrounged out of a rubbish bin near an old bookshop.

Once Lady Malfoy and Master Twilfit agreed on colors and robe design, Harry was allowed to redress. As the Twilfits left the room, he sighed in relief. While Terrance never said or did anything improper, just how he had looked at him rubbed Harry raw. He did his best not to let his discomfort show, he didn't want to give the bastard the satisfaction of knowing he got under Harry's skin, or disappoint Lady Malfoy.

Following Lady Malfoy out into the shop proper, he drifted around the fabric walls, at times letting his fingers rub against the edge of a bolt as she and the two Twilfit's spoke. While he was familiar with the feel of wools, cottons, muslins, linens, and leathers, he greatly enjoyed the smooth texture of silks and woven furs. Rubbing one royal blue fabric, the paper tag labeling it *Swiss Cloudwool*, made him wish to grab his sewing kit, just for him to freeze with the sudden knowledge that all of his things were gone. Everything, from the sewing kit he used to make or mend the orphanage clothes, his hard-acquired yarns, his knitting needles, were literally lost to history.

He had been making sweaters for the upcoming winter when whatever happened to him happened. He had even managed to get a bit of green yarn that he was going to accent Tom's sweater with.

"You okay there?"

Harry jumped, spinning around. Behind him was a tall...man? Woman? The clothing and grooming say man, but the features were soft enough to say, woman. The facial structure makes them look similar to Master Twilfit, and Harry already met Terrance, so this must be the other grandson.

"Oh, sorry, yes," Harry stammered, not wanting to be called out for his staring. The fashions of wizarding society are different enough that he doesn't want to insult any of the Twilfit's, even inadvertently. "I'm Harry. Harry Potter. I'm with Lady Malfoy. Are you related to Master Twilfit?"

"I'm his other grandson, Tarragon." He held his hand out, his grip firm as Harry shook it. His voice sounded a bit off, like when one of his charges were playing *Grown-Up* and the boys wanted to sound like they were big tough guys, but Tarragon didn't sound nearly as ridiculous.

Taking in Tarragon's outfit, Harry lit up. "Oh, a suit! And quite a nice one, at that! Quite sharp!"

And indeed it was. Before rationing went into effect, the style was big and baggy for the upper crust, with the lower classes who could afford a suit mimicking what they could. The seaming and darting were quite different, and there were more clean lines, but Harry recognizes a good three-piece when he sees it. The charcoal black with lavender accent went well with Tarragon's fair coloring, and the chunky silver pinky ring and pocket watch pulled it all together quite nicely.

"Finally, someone who can appreciate a good suit!" Clapping his hands together, Tarragon gave them a hearty rub. "I'm not much one for muggles, what with their atom bombs and all, but even I can admit that they have us beat on fashion evolution!"

"I'm pretty new to wizarding fashion, myself, but so far everything I see seems to be based on the fashions of the late sixteenth century to the reign of Queen Victoria."

"*Exactly*," Tarragon emphasized his point with a finger-snap.

"*A-HEM*. Tiffany," both jumped at the sudden appearance of Terrance behind them. He stood with crossed arms, eyeing them both with contempt. "Don't you have some *dresses* to be making, **sister**?"

Oh. Harry had thought he was talking with a homi-poloni, but that looks to not be the case. He remembers that there was an old queanie a few streets over who liked to dress up in lady's things before heading out to the bars, but he doesn't think this is the case.

Wonder what happened to Cheney? Oh well. "Oh, I thought this was Tarragon! Your name *is* Tarragon, right," Harry stressed. Cheney would get into moods about names at times.

"Yes," Tarragon ground out from between gritted teeth, his hands balled into fists at his sides.

"Oh, good! I didn't want to call you by the wrong name!" Picking up the wool bat he had been fingering earlier, Harry threaded his left arm through Tarragon's right, dragging the other with him as he left Terrance to splutter. "I'm looking to make a simple bag, you know, to get back into hand sewing. Do you have any kits, as well? Or bobbins of thread?"

"Uh, we," Tarragon cut himself off with a cough, his voice breaking and hanging on what was his original tone. "We do." Taking the lead, Tarragon led them over to a folding door, passing by his grandfather and Lady Malfoy with pink cheeks. Sliding it aside showed a long but slim room, packed to bursting with storage racks of bobbins of thread, lace, buttons, inserts, and so much more. In a basket under a table groaning with scrap fabric were shiny black leather cases. Passing one over to Harry, Tarragon busied himself with sorting some of the scrap fabric. "We also sell thread by the bobbin and yardage. Cotton on the far left, silk on the far right."

Heading towards the silk threads, Harry quickly picked out a blue similar in shade to the fabric, along with red, green, and gold. "Tell me, do you work on commission? Or does it all go into the same family fund?"

Pausing in his sorting, Tarragon hummed a bit before answering. "A slight combination of both? Grandfather pays everybody an hourly rate, but we get monthly bonuses based on how much business we bring in."

Harry wandered over, his eye caught by one of the fabric scraps that turned out to be the beginning of a waistcoat. Turning it towards him, he examined how the three layers of fabric had been pad stitched together, and the neat lines of backstitching that started up one side. Putting down his goodies, he gently peeled the seam allowance apart, tugging at the stitches just to find that they did not budge. "Excellent work. Nice and even. How many backstitches per inch?"

"On average, fourteen stitches per two-and-a-half centimeters." Seeing Harry's confused look, he elaborated, "Muggle Britain went to the metric system back in the mid-sixties. When the current Minister came to power about twenty years ago, he signed a bill to move Magical Britain off of the old Imperial system. Which, made sense, because metric allows for better, more accurate weights and measures."

Harry nodded. "Makes sense. I imagine there was a LOT of pushback, though."

Tarragon moaned out a sigh, covering his face with one hand as Harry snorted. "You have NO idea. But, it was a boon for most of the industries. Especially when it comes to the potion brewers. There were a lot fewer explosions, and with us tailors, we were able to get more exact measurements. I mean," he flung out an arm, "there is a BIG difference between saying someone is, say, 5'8", and 172 centimeters. Technically, both are correct, but the imperial measure could vary anywhere between 172 to 175 centimeters! It's madness, I tell you!"

Feeling the back of his neck prickle, Harry turned to see Terrance looming in the slim doorway. His eyes kept darting from Harry to Tarragon, and it was irritating him something fierce.

Coming to a snap decision, Harry gathered up his bobbins and bat before marching out of the bobbin closet, plowing past Terrance when the man refused to get out of his way. Striding towards Lady Malfoy at her place before the combination cutting counter and check stand, he smiled at her. "Pardon me, Lady Malfoy, but I was wondering if it would be possible to add a few things to our order?"

Narcissa raised an eyebrow, taking in the smile that didn't reach Harry's eyes. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, right now. Looking behind him, she saw Master Twilfit's grandchildren arguing under their breaths in the doorway to their notions room. Spying the bat and notions Harry held, she put two and two together and got five. "But of course. How much fabric do you require?" Her eyebrows nearly hit her hairline as Harry *blushed*, and her estimation of him rose. To have enough self-control to *blush on command* shows that he has a cunning streak nearly on par with the Dark Lord.

Wonder who taught who.

"Well, it has been quite some time since I was able to make something for the pleasure of it. I hope you would not object, but would it be possible to purchase the whole bat? And these full bobbins and kit?" As he spoke, his speech and accent got more crisp and clear, sounding almost sinister at how cold and detached it sounded. "I would feel *horrible* if I couldn't finish a project due to a lack of fabric, and it does feel lovely..."

She inclined her head, "of course."

"Always nice to see the newest generations keeping the fine art of tailoring alive," Master Twilfit said as he slid the bat into a special carry bag. "Do pardon me for asking, but do you have any special projects in mind?"

"There are a couple bopping about, but surely you know how it is; I won't know until I start what is going to take over," Harry shyly glanced down. "Perhaps a project bag. I used to knit quite a few things for young orphans I helped care for. It would certainly give me something to do as I recover."

Master Twilfit nodded sagely. "It's also an excellent way to keep the mind sharp. Reading, while quite nice, can get a bit dull. *Unless you're reading one of those books, hm?*" Narcissa gave a polite laugh behind her hand while Harry just smiled.

"Indeed. Oh! And is it possible for Tarragon to get sales credit? For my added things, at least. He helped tremendously. He also has lovely stitchwork, and I would like to see it in my clothing items, please."

Master Twilfit grinned wide enough to showcase a snagged lower bicuspid. "Why yes, I can certainly do that!" Tapping away on his mechanical register, he soon provided a receipt to Lady Malfoy. "Here you are, Narcissa. I'll have everything sent to Malfoy Manor. Two sets of robes and their accompaniments, with another three later on in the week."

"Thank you, Master Twilfit. I'm sure everything will be exceptional, as always." Pulling her vault key out of her pocket, she tapped the receipt with it, which glowed for a moment before duplicating. Putting everything away, she placed her left hand on Harry's back,

ignoring a choking sound that came from further back in the shop. "Let's be on our way, Harry."

"Thank you for seeing us, Master Twilfit. I look forward to my new robes." Smiling, showing off a dimple under his right eye, Harry followed Lady Malfoy out of the shop.

"What this august body **must** determine, is whether or not we should extend membership to the territories of Great Britain, Scotland, United Ireland, Wales, and the Faroe Isles, under the administration of the Dark Lord Voldemort. Several members have expressed concerns, *some* more diplomatically than others, but none-the-less questions have been raised." Standing in the pulpit of the Ministry of Economics's main discussion chamber, the voice of Comtess Alba del Rono, the mediator assigned for this meeting, rang out. The older woman bore herself with the regality of someone who has generations of monarchical history and power behind them and had been the primary voice of control and enforcement in regards to the situation at hand.

She's also damnably ethical. Tom had spent a lot of his own personal time and resources trying to gain anything that could bring her under his thumb, but aside from a supposed affair that occurred when she was young and unmarried, he had nothing. If it wasn't so vexing, he would be impressed.

"Lord Voldemort. Several members have expressed interest in granting your nation's entry, but due to your controversial ascension, are torn. Two economic sub-bloc's wish to hold further hearings on the subject."

Standing from his place in the Petitioner's Gallery, Tom bowed his head to her in respect before sweeping his cloak across his chest and over his shoulder. "While I acknowledge the concerns raised by those members," his voice belted out, startling many around him at the volume he was able to summon without a *Sonorus* charm, "it leaves one wondering how to address these issues. Just to be HEARD by this association, hundreds of thousands of pages of proposals, plans, and such must be submitted a minimum of six-months prior, so that the member states can determine if the Petitioner would be a boon to the current system." Snapping a finger, three massive stacks of parchment slammed onto his table, only kept together with a combination of twine, ribbon, and muggle rubber bands. Each stack rose over his head by two hand-spans, and one started to lean precipitously. "As her Ladyship can see, I have gone above and beyond, not just including documentation of what I bring to the table, but including several 'Ten-Year Plans' to address different aspects of my magical society, along with the positive effects these would ripple-out to the other member states." As if on cue, the bindings on all three stacks disappeared, each piece of parchment floating up and away from the table. "Simply put, this is a ploy by other states that wish to keep to the status quo, to stay at the top of the pile." As he spoke, the parchments started lining up along the ceiling and walls, evoking an image similar to a housewife wallpapering her home. "I can already name five different groups who would lose their economic might to superior British potion brewing, higher-quality Scottish metals, and cheaper, higher-quality Welsh fleeces." The chamber started to dim as the windows were covered in parchments, a few witches and wizards lighting up their surroundings with *Lumos*'. "That is not taking into account the

Stonehaven cure, which Magical Spain itself benefits from, to the tune of nearly SEVEN HUNDRED children saved from mineralization per year." The last parchment slid into place, plunging the room into total darkness. A dim blue glow lit up his face, the large, emerald-cut blue diamond hanging from his necklace radiating a cold light. Those close enough could see his lips twisted into a cruel smirk.

"It would be a shame if something... *happened* to it."

Harry and Narcissa returned to Medic Alley, stopping at Octavian's long enough for the optician to do a final fitting for Harry's two remaining sets of glasses. Harry was forced to rescue his beetle friend from earlier when Gwen trapped it under her paws, so he made doubly sure to escort it outside.

Walking towards the Healer's office with a small bag holding his other sets of glasses, Harry had to stamp down on the overwhelming desire to skip and swing Lady Malfoy's hand. He was still pink-cheeked from his presumption that she would purchase his bat and bobbins earlier, he doesn't need to devolve into a child *completely*. From the small upturn of her mouth, he must not be doing too well.

The Healer's clinic was only distinguished by a hanging wooden sign that had a mortar and pestle engraved on it, with the name *Parkinson* curving along the underside. Just like the rest of Medic Alley, the clinic was leaning heavily into the art nouveau aesthetic but was made primarily out of a warm brown carved wood and stained glass windows. Harry was so happy for his new glasses; even if he still had his old, second-hand, ones, he probably wouldn't have been able to truly appreciate the architecture surrounding him.

Much like the outside, the inside of the clinic was brown woods and stained glass. Glowing golden orbs danced around the light fixture, occasionally letting out chime-like giggles. The seating area was full of comfortable, overstuffed chairs and benches, a coffee table providing ample reading material.

Unlike the few doctor's offices Harry has been to, the receptionist for this one wasn't a woman, let alone human. A golden automaton was perched on a wooden outcropping, a faint blue sheen creating a barrier between it and the rest of the room. It was shaped to look human-like, but not quite. It put Harry in the mind of how the Tin Man from the *Wizard of Oz* book was described.

One of the giggling orbs drifted down, darting into the gaping space where the mouth was, and after a few clicks, the automaton sprung to life.

"Hello. Name, please."

"Lady Narcissa Malfoy, accompanying Harry Potter, to see Healer Faydenrich Parkinson."

"Thank you." The automaton's head tilted with a loud, mechanical click before it vomited out a thick, rectangular square of parchment. "*Room... 1-6 ...please.*" With a jerk, the automaton lifted on a short pedestal before rotating and sliding to the back and side. Behind it

was a brightly lit hallway, and the orb in the automaton darted out and down it, stopping to flutter outside of a doorway.

Gently tugging on Harry's hand, Narcissa walked them towards the door indicated, tugging on his hand again when he stopped to watch the automation close. Entering the examination room, she sat on a spare chair as Harry plopped onto the fainting couch that Parkinson prefers to use over the usual medical tables. She applauds the man for his choice; Saint Mungo's, while a vastly improved institution from what it was before the Dark Lord's rise, still lags when it comes to patient comfort.

They didn't have long to wait. Harry had been contemplating taking a closer look at a supply case that looked more like a china display cabinet than a doctor's keeper when Healer Parkinson waddled in.

"Hello, hello! I am Healer Parkinson! You must be Mr. Potter? Narcissa has told me a bit about you," he said as his eyes rested on the ring on Harry's right hand, his eyebrows going wide. He held out his hand, nearly shaking Harry's arm out of its socket. "We'll be doing a, hopefully, simple exam. I've already prescribed some potions for you to take, to help with your little, hm, '*weight issue*', " he wagged his hand towards Harry, "but we want to make sure nothing else is lurking."

Harry kicked his feet, feeling a bit nervous. "Thank you for helping me, sir, but I don't really know what more I can tell you." Which is the truth; Tom's remarks say he traveled forward through time, but Harry has no idea *how*.

Parkinson turned towards Lady Malfoy, "Narcissa?"

She inclined her head. "After quite a bit of research, including interviewing a Black ancestor, I tracked Harry down to what I surmise to be a Twisted Fold located in an old muggle grocer."

Parkinson winced. "Alright, then. Not just a full physical, but a magical check-up, as well." Pulling out his wand, he flicked it a few times before rainbow sparks shot out of the tip. With a swish, a brown spark turned into a parchment, which Parkinson examined briefly before swishing in the opposite direction, this time a purple spark morphing into the most *ridiculously* plumed pen Harry has ever seen. "Okay, so, I have your name as Harry J. Potter, coincidence that, your sex is male, and your age is fifteen-"

"Seventeen, sir. Wait," Harry blinked. "Maybe round that to eighteen? It was September when the time travel happened, and my birthdate is November first." He frowned, "of course, we *could* go with an age somewhere in the seventies, to get technical..." he trailed off.

"Not to worry, we'll cast a spell to determine your age, Mr. Potter."

Harry perked up. "Can it tell me my actual birth date? I just assumed that November was it because that was when I came into my orphanage's care." His feet started dancing on air; he can find out his real birthday!

"Of course, of course," Parkinson laughed out. "Now, then! Just sit back, and watch the show! And if you feel a bit dizzy from all the colors, that's what the couch is for!" Twirling the tip of his wand counter-clockwise, he then jabbed it at Harry. A silver jet shot out before splashing onto Harry's chest before bouncing off, then scrolling into the air.

"So, July 31st...1980? Well, that can't be right," Parkinson muttered.

"Perhaps, Faydenrich, due to his extended trot through time, the spell cannot get a proper read," Narcissa offered. It is widely known that people who have extended Time-Turner use will have unusual results with anything related to age-tracking spells. It is entirely plausible that that would be the case with Harry.

"Hm, possible. Well, let's crack on, then!" Going through an extended series of swishes, flicks, twirls, and bops, Parkinson eventually shot a bright, rainbow-colored light at Harry.

Within seconds, Harry's head began to spin. His vision was completely overtaken by shifting hues, one minute green, the next orange, followed by purple. Soon his head was throbbing, and his stomach made its irritation at the whole situation.

Closing his eyes, he leaned back on the couch.

Harry yawned as Narcissa guided him back to the Dark Lords rooms. She would have to take extra care to ensure that he eats something before dropping off. In addition to the nutrition potions and stomach soothers, Faydenrich also prescribed potions to assist in fat absorption, a calcium supplement, and a magic soother. He had stressed to her the importance of Harry taking each dose with a meal, and he had even gone so far as to write out a diet plan and meal schedule.

"Lots of fats and proteins, but small servings. Stomach soothers can only do so much, so until his stomach expands, instead of the standard three meals, we're bumping him up to six small ones." Flicking his wand, Faydenrich conjured up a folder, and another flick saw several sheets of parchment sliding into it. "For recommended meals, go with fatty red meats and lots of starches, the richer the better. If my eyes don't deceive me, then perhaps he can share our Lord's plate," he wagged his eyebrows suggestively.

Narcissa smiled coyly before looking at the napping Harry. "I do believe that our Lord will take...great delight, in fattening up Mr. Potter."

Rousing him from his impromptu nap hadn't been hard, per se, but she felt like a criminal after being on the receiving end of his sleepy, kittenish glare. Not even Faydenrich had been immune, he had offered the boy one of the nutrition potions disguised as a lollipop he kept on hand for the children who needed a pick-me-up after their visit.

Now to just get him to eat something before tucking him into bed. The hard-sided carry-case full of potions phials clinked with each of her steps, reminding her that he needs to drink one of each of the eight potions he had been prescribed.

Coming to the front entrance of the Demanse, she noticed a little green beetle on Harry's shoulder. With a shoo'ing motion, she sent the little hitchhiker on its way. Once inside, she quickly summoned Zarba to inform her of Harry's care, passing over his medical file as she did so.

"Zarba be's making Master's Hawwy a small plate, but she's not be's the best cook-cook. Master is being easy to care for, but Master's Hawwy needs better." As she spoke, her ears drooped and her lower lip wibbled.

"I will send along a list of elves who specialize in cooking. In the meantime, a small plate of anything with meat will do. Healer Parkinson, while he would prefer us starting on Harry's meal plan tonight, will understand if there is a slight delay." Gently tugging Harry to her side, she sighed. "However, I need to get him undressed and to bed."

"Zarba be's having Master's Hawwy's plates ready soon!"

Shuffling Harry along up the different staircases, and ignoring the coos of Slytherins past, she soon had him sitting up in bed and in one of her Lord's nightshirts. Before Zarba popped in with a small bowl of some sausage, rice, and greens dish, Narcissa had watched as the young man sleepily tugged up his collar before slipping it over his nose to sniff it.

Cute.

After his first few bites, she coaxed him into drinking his potions, which luckily for her had already been portioned into single-dose phials. Once he had eaten his fill (which was still not the full bowl that had been provided, which would have, perhaps, been enough for a light snack for her Lucius), he had quickly turned in, despite it only just now turning to evening. The sunset was quite nice, and the bright colors drew Narcissa towards the windows.

"Master's Lady Malfoy?" Narcissa turned away from the window, looking down towards Zarba. "Master's be coming home lates, tonights. But Zarba be's watching Master's Hawwy!"

"Thank you, Zarba." Gently patting her pockets, she then returned to Harry's side, not resisting her urge to tuck him in. Brushing his hair away from his face, she dropped a light kiss to his brow before walking out and shutting the door firmly behind her.

Sitting behind his office desk, Tom leaned back in his chair, one long leg crossed over the other, and his fingers laced loosely in front of his mouth. He looked over them with a steady gaze, his blue eyes a mix of mischievous and sadistic as he looked at the Comtess seated across from him.

After his last address, it was near-unanimously voted to allow him membership; too many other bloc's rely on him to provide the *Stonehaven* cure. His nation is one of the largest providers for several key ingredients, let alone a finished potion. Only the Han and Shuhan Dynasties have any of them in large enough quantities to do mass brews, but their ingredients pale in comparison to Britians.

The only hold-outs to his vote were Spain itself, and a few smaller, insignificant parties. Some of the non-member observer states cast 'silent support' votes in his favor, including the *Portugal Liberation Party*, Franc Aragon, and San Marin.

After the voting, Comtess Rono had followed him back to his office. At first, he had thought it was to pass over an official copy of the vote for him to take back to London; standard procedure.

Now he's not so sure.

"I will cut to the chase, Gaunt of Slytherin. Many in that chamber have put you at the top of their shit lists."

At her crass statement, he grinned wide and wolfishly. "I do so aim to please." He shifted in his chair, leaning towards the side and propping his chin on his fist. "Although, I admit to some surprise. Your lack of chastisement towards my small bit of blackmail is uncharacteristic."

"Spain invaded my kingdom before publicly executing my husband. The more dead Spaniards there are, the better," she stated.

Shooting her a wry half-smile, he leaned over, opening the deep drawer located at the bottom of the desk. Pulling out a bottle of gin and two glasses, he twisted the bottle cap before flicking it to sail across the room. Pouring a shots-worth into each glass, he passed one to Rono before kicking his feet up on his desk, before saluting her with his glass. "Cheers."

The Temptation of Eve

Chapter Summary

>:D

Tom's return to the land of the living was not the suddenness of his usual awakening, but warm and slow like he was drifting on a warm ocean current. He was pleasantly weighted down, and he was torn between jostling his blanket in order to stretch or to just drift back into sleep. Shifting a bit, he was preparing to do the former when a quiet, breathy coo floated past his ear.

Oh.

He had returned late from Lisbon the night before, and upon seeing Harry sweetly tucked into his bed (*where he **belongs***), he had quickly changed into a nightshirt before spooning behind the other. The light but solid weight of a sweetly dreaming Harry in his arms was a physical delight and had quickly sent him to slumber.

Now, sometime during the night, Tom had ended up on his back, Harry flopped on top of him. His hands somehow found a home wrapped around the thighs splayed over either side of his middle, and a gentle squeeze showed that, yes, while thin, Harry did have some muscle on him, a gift of all the hard labor he had done up until his frolic through time. He gently rubbed his hands back and forth, taking in the smooth but soft texture below them, gently pulling them up to cup just under the crevice where thigh and rear meet.

*They're so **small**.* Right now, Tom would nearly be able to wrap one large hand around Harry's thigh. Even just thinking about it sends his fingertips tingling, and the pointer and middle fingers of his right hand rubbed at Harry's smooth inner thigh while his thumb braced against a boney hip.

"Mmmmm..."

He froze, Harry's moan tickling his ear as the other shifted against him.

Changing the angle of his hands, Tom soon had his thumbs bracing against either of Harry's arse cheeks while his hands gripped supple inner thighs, either of his index fingers pulled up between the v-shape created by Harry's soft balls and his legs. He wanted so **badly** to grip and spread the cheeks under his hands, to sneakily slip two fingers into what was undoubtedly a tight, pink hole and make his Harry pant and cry in pleasure.

Something about the ***sinful*** turn his thoughts had taken must have translated to his touch, because Harry breathed a soft cry before his hips had started moving, grinding his awakening erection into the firm stomach below him.

Tom freed one of his hands from its position, gently dragging his fingers over a taunting sac, soft perineum, and gently dipping slightly into a tight little rosebud before gently tugging up the shirts trapped between their stomachs; he wants Harry to cum against his abdominals, and he wants to soak Harry's groin in his own emissions, and he won't have two thin layers of the finest silk available keep him from doing that.

Placing his hands on either of the still-sleeping Harry's cheeks, he helped his boy rut against him, breathing hard at each little moan and gasp Harry blessed him with. He could feel the other fist the sheets on either side of Tom's ribcage, and he can't wait for the day where those same hands are buried in his hair as Harry wails on his cock.

Harry's hips stuttered a few times before he shuddered, his thighs straining and pushing him up Tom's torso before helping his hips start to smoothly dip and roll. Tom grunted, biting his lip to keep quiet at the smooth, liquid motions Harry's hips, back, and thighs went through. It would put even the most skilled bellydancer to *shame*, and Tom's cock twitched hard when he wondered what it would be like for Harry to do that while sitting on Tom's **face-**

Grunting again, Tom reached down and shifted, sliding his cock from under Harry before pumping it. His other hand cradled Harry's head, keeping it close to his ear so he could hear every noise his boy uttered.

"Ah, Tom!"

Moaning, Tom's fist flew along his shaft as Harry shuddered through his orgasm. Tom fought hard to keep quiet, nearly biting through his lip as he felt Harry grind his cum onto Tom's gut. Right before he himself came, he reached down with his free hand to spread Harry's cheeks further apart, his hips jerking with each pulse of thick, pearly cum he shot off, and the mental visual of that tight little hole getting glazed in ribbons of his jizz nearly had him cumming again.

After a few minutes of breathing hard and feeling little puffs of air against his sweaty neck, Tom gently slipped Harry off of his front and to the side. The other whimpered at the loss of his pillow and rutting toy, but Tom needed to get them both cleaned up before Harry roused for the day.

Pulling his wand from under his pillow, Tom flicked a few cleaning charms over Harry (his mouth watering at the amount of his cum that managed to cover Harry's rear and thighs) before charming his hand clean. Turning to his stomach, Tom allowed himself to indulge in his desire and scooped up a bit of Harry's now-cool cum before sucking it off of his finger. It was salty, as expected, but was tinged with an almost citrusy sweet aftertaste.

*"That would require a more, **in-depth** investigation,"* he muttered to himself while glancing at Harry while licking more of his boy's cum. *"Preferably fresh and directly from the source."*

Deciding it was close enough to his usual wake-up time, he decided to forgo a final cleaning charm and went straight to the shower. By the time he's finished, Harry should be waking for the day.

If he spent an extra ten minutes indulging in a fantasy of a ripe, juicy, sweet boy on his knees before him, then that is nobody's business but his own.

Scooping up a spoonful of roast beef hash, Harry dipped it into the runny fried egg in the center of his bowl before popping it into his mouth. Behind him, Tom shifted, and Harry could feel the other frown at one of the parchments in his hands.

After waking up, Harry had stretched like a cat before lounging back against the bed. He was contemplating getting up and having a wash to get rid of the oddly dry but sticky feeling covering his skin when Tom had exited the bathroom, one dark towel around his waist while he used another one to dry his hair.

Harry had choked, turning it into a cough when he saw just how **grown** Tom was. Broad shoulders tapered down to a slim-but-not-too-slim waist, that then flowed into the longest set of legs Harry has ever seen. What wasn't covered by plush cotton was fit, a figure that showed its owner regularly partook in physical activities such as boxing or weightlifting, but not to an obnoxious degree.

He wonders what it would be like to get picked up by those arms-

*Don't go there, Harry. You used to change his nappies. He doesn't need his pseudo-parent to be **thinking** those sort of thoughts about him, what he needs is your **love** and **support**!*

While Harry had been having his little crisis, Tom had pulled on a black, almost caftan-like lounging robe before sliding back into bed, plucking Harry up and depositing him between Tom's legs and requesting some breakfast.

Along with their food was Harry's medical file. As he ate, Tom read through the synopsis of Harry's care that Healer Parkinson had written up. Getting to the meal plan and potion regimen, he made double sure that Harry had his potions before returning to his own meal.

Pushing away his bowl, Harry rubbed his stomach. The potions made it feel slightly sour, which was annoying but manageable. He was determined to follow his plan through to the end, upset tummy or not.

But now that he was finished, his skin started itching something fierce. Patting the outside of Tom's thigh, he got a distracted half-grunt of acknowledgment before Tom shifted, allowing Harry to slip off of the bed before trotting to the bathroom.

Prior to getting his glasses, he could tell it would be opulent, but actually *seeing* it made it all the more real. Just like the rest of the Demanse, it was all dark rock brick with small diamonds set where the corners met, making Harry think of the night sky. Unlike in the bedroom, chunks of moonstone hung in a squat, pale metal chandelier, the shape reminding him of a model of the solar system. Along the wall farthest from the door was a large oval sunken-in bathtub, carved from a combination of moonstone and mother-of-pearl colored geode. Rising tall from one end was a showerhead, in the same metal as the chandelier. To the left was a double-sink counter, in the same stone as the bathtub, and the mirror hanging

before it looked like someone had spilled quicksilver on the ground and thought it made an interesting shape, so they hung it up. To the right was an honest-to-god *vanity*, which made Harry giggle because it was a very Tom thing to have; even at a young age, he had been concerned with his appearance.

As he padded across the stone and onto a plush bath rug, the lighting automatically brightened. Once he reached the bathtub, he sat on the tub rim, reaching over to play with the switches needed to turn it from shower settings to the bath. As the tub filled, he stripped off his nightshirt, his nose scrunching at the slightly musty smell it now carried. He must have sweated at some point during the night, which could be a possible side effect of his potions.

Once the tub had enough water, he climbed in, sighing as muscles he hadn't known were sore relaxed. Spying the bath kit Lady Malfoy had been kind enough to get him, he dumped in a few drams of cleansing oil. It smelled fresh and crisp, but unexciting. Tugging over Tom's, he poked and prodded it until he found several phials of oils. Cracking each one, he gave them a good whiff, quite liking the one with lavender and cedar. Adding a bit of that, he was soon lazily lying back.

"Harry, are you alive," Tom queried while rapping on the bathroom door. Hearing nothing but a drunken hum and the splash of water, he cracked open the door, peering into the bathroom with concern before laughing as the smells hit him. Walking inside, he strode over to the bath, dragging over his vanity chair as he did so before taking a seat and looking at an, apparently, high-as-a-kite Harry. "I had forgotten that certain potions can make one susceptible to getting *Scent Drunk*," he chuckled as he leaned forward, settling his chin on his palm as his elbow rested on his knee.

"'ey, isall goo', Swee'ear'," Harry sloppily waved him off. "'m, 'm feelin' *real* goo'." He feels better than good; he feels fucking amazing. "Don' worry 'bou' me..."

Catching Harry's flailing hand, Tom held onto it before looking at it. He had seen something gleaming on it and-

Oh.

Oh.

Oh, fuck.

Harry twirled in a circle, the weighted hem of his short robe flaring out before slapping against his thighs. He could hear Tom snicker behind him, but he decided to ignore it, spinning again harder in the opposite direction. As he came to a stop he heard something thud behind him, but at this point, he just can't be fucked to bother.

He got his new robes!

As promised, the Twilfit's had delivered not just the two robes as agreed upon by Master Twilfit and Lady Malfoy, but two other, shorter ones had been included as well. With the additional was a note, signed by Tarragon, asking if Harry would be interested in trying on some of the ideas Tarragon had had for the upcoming summer fashion season? And to send his feedback?

Of **course!** Especially when Harry had excitedly thrown the tissue paper pillowing the goodies aside and found something most extraordinary; **pants!** Black, tan, and creamy white, he now had EIGHT pairs of underpants made out of that same silky material that his underrobe had been made of. The cuts for them were unusual, very short and somewhat skimpy, only covering his rear and the other important bits, but pants were PANTS!

Oh, and he got several sets of tall socks, but that's beside the point.

Happily sliding on a pair of white pants, he then took a moment to look at the short robes. They were square bodied, excess fabric meant for a loose fit and to be gathered with a belt. The hems would end a few inches above his knees, and the full sleeves at a bit past his elbows. One was black with emerald, gold, and ruby accents, the design around the neckline, sleeve edges, and hem reminding him of the poppies painted on Polish cookware, while the other was a creamy white with blue, green, and gold accents in the same areas, but the designs more like ocean waves. A cloth and leather belt matching each one would wrap around the waist to give it shape, causing faux pleats to give the lower half the illusion of fullness.

Currently, Harry was wearing the cream one. Despite the amounts of embroidery, sewn-own jewel accents, and the weighted hem, it was quite light and airy. He can easily see something like this being worn by the young, fashionable witch or wizard during the warmer months. And given the simple shapes used, easily customizable for the desired silhouette. He, personally, would go for something not quite as full, but he also isn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He may also still be a bit scent drunk.

Tom watched Harry through the doorway to his sitting-room as the other gleefully tore through the robe packaging. He had already read the note Narcissa left for him, so he knew to expect three additional robes to be delivered at the end of the week, but seeing the youngest Twilfit go out of their way to make something that, while simple, was still fashion-forward, raised their worth in his eyes.

The bouncy glee Harry had upon discovering pants in his order may have had something to do with it. While Harry didn't have much fat on him, he still had a perky bum, and Tom is certainly *appreciating* the hard work those little pants are doing to showcase said bum.

He can't wait for Harry to put on some weight...

Currently, Harry was swirling about, most definitely still scent drunk, but he wasn't going to complain- *sweet holy Mary, Mother of God!*

On his last twirl, the robe hem spun higher than anticipated, giving a tantalizing glimpse of a muscular thigh and just a hint of the pant-covered pubic bulge. It looked round and firm, like a ripe and juicy peach and Tom just wanted to get on *his knees and stick his head under that robe-*

His head swam, the edges going a bit dark and his heart throbbed out of beat. He gripped the doorframe hard, doing his best to not make it seem like anything was wrong as almost all of the blood in his body went south.

He crushed the wood under his hand as he fell backward, and the last thought through his mind was *'please don't let the papers say I died because of a bit of thigh'.*"

"My dove?"

"Yes, Lucius?"

"I think you should take a look at the latest edition of *The Daily Prophet*."

Setting down her gingersnap, Narcissa gently wiped her fingers clean on a linen napkin as her Lucius passed over the newspaper. While he didn't sound distressed, something in his tone said that she would be very interested in what she would find.

Unfolding the paper, her eyes immediately zeroed in on the front page main headline. While she is quite used to seeing the Dark Lord making headlines, either because of laws passed or speculation and gossip about his love-life, he seemed to be a bit of an afterthought while still being the main subject at the same time.

DARK LORD TAKES CONSORT AT LONG LAST!? WHO IS HARRY POTTER?

Special Correspondent: Rita Skeeter

That's right, ladies and gentlemen, you read that right! It would seem that our Benevolent Dark Lord, Minister T.M.R. Gaunt (aka He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named aka You-Know-Who aka Lord Slytherin) has finally decided to settle down and, as the kids say, 'put a ring on it'.

Just yesterday, Lady Narcissa Malfoy nee Black was seen escorting a rather petite young man in Magic Free robes about the Alleys, getting some shopping done. While that in and of itself, my readers, is not too far out of the ordinary (Lady Malfoy often hosts small excursions for children taking an extended stay at Saint Mungo's), the jewelry her guest was wearing WAS.

For those not In The Know, our Lord is the last mainline descendant of Hogwarts Founder and Magical Pioneer, Salazar Slytherin. The Slytherins started out as highly-skilled stonecutters and masons, and they carried on that tradition even as their magical repertoire grew! Nearly every member of their House had a custom set of jewelry to denote their rank, and our Lordship is never seen without his Head of House blue diamond and platinum ring.

However, for decades, he has NEVER shared a set with ANYBODY! No Friend of the House or Honored Allie piece has ever left his possession...UNTIL NOW! For you see, my readers, this young man being escorted by Lady Malfoy was wearing the one, the only, Slytherin Consort Jewelry Set! A set last worn by the prized courtesan of Agnost Slytherin, Marie Antoinette Betoncourtte of France, back in 1793!

Now, much like you, I was curious; who is this boy? Why have we never seen him until now?

Digging in, this reporter has discovered that this young man is, as you can see from this photo of him and Lady Malfoy outside of an optometrist's office, quite sickly! Perhaps our Lord had been keeping him tucked away safely somewhere until he was strong enough to make an appearance?

And his name! Harry Potter! Not to be confused with the tragic loss of Lord Potter's first son, who died during the last stretch of the Revolution, this Harry does look indeed like a Potter. He has the familiar fly-away hair and mischievous face of one. Oh, if only he were hale and healthy, we could see him as he truly is!

But, fear not, my readers, for this reporter has seen that this boy is no wilting lily! With a heart of gold and a take-no-griffin-dung attitude, he has won over the hearts of Master Optometrist Octavian Prince-Fallowine and Master Tailor Theodore Twilfit! And while showcasing quick wit, he showed off a sensitive side by rescuing a small little beetle from certain death at the dastardly, deathly paws of the fearsome Gwen the Kneazle!

Where this boy came from is a mystery; one this intrepid reporter will get to the bottom of. In the meantime, our Lord will have his hands quite full!

"Well now," Narcissa murmured as she folded the paper back up, "that is rather tame of Skeeter, is it not?" If she sounded smug and self-satisfied, then Lucius was too polite to point it out.

Said man didn't bother to hide his snort as Narcissa put together a plate of nibbles as they shared tea. "Don't let Severus see that. You *know* how he feels about anything Potter."

Tom had forgotten just how big of a fussier Harry could be. Not that he was complaining, after all, a fussing Harry means a Harry who is wholly giving you his attention, and nobody at Wool's, regardless of their age, would object to 'Harry Fussing'. 'Harry Fussing' entailed getting plied with the warmest possible blankets, a wee bit extra for your meals, night cuddles, and if you were lucky?

A new pair of socks.

While Tom wouldn't say no to extra socks, he does very much desire having 'Harry Cuddles'. He would be ecstatic to do more than that, but aside from this morning, he was going to properly Court Harry. He respected the other too much to not honor him with such a process...as much as he may want to **thoroughly** bed him.

But he can't do any of that if Harry's not here!

After his embarrassing loss of self-control, Tom came to in his bed, a frantic Harry at his side while Zarba did her best to calm him down. Not wanting to dig his grave even further, Tom played it off as a case of low blood sugar.

Horried that he had distracted Tom from eating a full, filling breakfast (which was true, but not in the manner he was thinking), Harry had demanded Zarba show him the kitchens. Recognizing a baking snit when he sees one (and his mouth watering at the thought of tasting 'Harry Bread' for the first time in *decades*), Tom had ordered Zarba to show Harry, and assist him as desired, to the kitchen.

That was over two hours ago. Aside from a bowl of sausage and bean soup (which he knows was made by Harry, the sausage was cut the same way as he always did), he hasn't seen hide nor hair of his boy.

And he was getting cranky.

"Okay, Zarba. Do you remember what I would like you to do?" Sliding the top of the basket in place, Harry made extra sure nothing would wiggle too much before passing it over to the elf.

"Yes, Master's Hawwy! I be's stoppings and givings breads to Master's Lady Malfoy, Master Twilfitties and Master Twilfitties Tarragon, Healer Parkey, and Oppy Occy!" She wiggled her ears, dislodging the light dusting of flour laying on them.

"Yes! Oh, and you can just call me Harry, Zarba. Considering how we both take care of Tom, it would be silly for you to spit-out such a long name for me."

Zarba's eyes grew to the size of saucers. "Ma-, Master's Hawwy says to just call him Hawwy? *MASTER'S HAWWY IS TOO NICE TO ZARBA!*" She started to cry big, fat tears and honk out horn-like sobs.

Harry froze. He hadn't meant to make her cry! He was just trying to be nice! "Oh, no! Zarba, um! You don't have to call me by my name if it makes you upset! You can call me whatever you want!" Reaching over to grasp a clean kitchen towel, he squatted and dabbed her red cheeks.

"MASTER'S HAWWY IS SO NICE! ZARBA BE HONORED TO CALLS HIM HAWWY!" And with a loud pop, she disappeared to deliver the fresh loaves of bread Harry had baked.

Holding a tray with a few small fresh loaves of different breads, a few jams he found in the pantry, two bowls of soup, and a selection of meats and cheeses stored in the cold chest, Harry wandered up from the basement-level kitchen and towards Tom's rooms. He took his time walking, taking in the unique architecture of the Demanse, and filled with both

happiness and awe that Tom was able to find out who his family was, even if he was the only one now standing.

He must have been excited. Tom had always insisted that he was different; special. And he proved it over and over again. First with his ability to speak to snakes, then his ability to make things float or make small orbs of lights in his hands (Harry put the kibosh on the floating thing right quick; he did NOT need a repeat of the *Rabbit Incident!*), and then his letter to a school for magic.

Harry had been so excited for Tom and had been eagerly anticipating his first letter back. Seeing the barn owl wing over to his bedroom window was out of this world, and his feet had been dancing while it got closer and closer.

And then he felt his heart get crushed.

Harry shook his head, trying to literally banish his negative thoughts. Tom needs an actual meal and he himself is due for one of his small meals. And he should see about changing into something better meant for lounging. While he had worn an apron and Zarba had magic'd his appearance to stay neat, it still wouldn't be apropos to lay in bed and eat sandwiches while wearing such a fine outfit.

Stopping on a landing, Harry shifted the heavy tray in his hands. He was getting ready to continue up the stairs before he heard a coo. Looking at the wall beside him, he saw it was the portrait of Xenia Slytherin, who had thrown him sultry looks from her heavily lidded eyes just the day before. She was very beautiful, with full, red lips, high cheekbones, and big, bountiful black curls framing it all. He doesn't know exactly *how* they are related, but she and Tom shared the same shade of blue eyes, and the curve of their jaw echoed each other. Looking at her, he felt embarrassed, thin, drab, and scruffy, so he dropped his gaze as he blushed.

"Awwww, don't be shy, darling little fae. How else could we see your pretty eyes?" Harry's eyes darted up just to drop down faster than a rock chucked into a well; Xenia had leaned forward in her frame, the *scandalously* low cut of her dress's neckline nearly spilling her bountiful breasts out and into the open. His face went redder than her painted lips, and his ears started burning as she cooed about him being a '*sweet, filial boy. Perfect for their Lord*'. He doesn't know what she's talking about; he took care of Tom, and now Tom's taking care of him. Stammering out something about getting Tom his lunch, he quickly trotted away, his face going even redder as she laughed, calling out '*come visit the Gallery, little fae! We will love you!*'

"Crazy rich nobles..."

Tom utterly demolished not just a second bowl of soup, but two loaves worth of bread in the form of sandwiches, half-sandwiches, and jam samplings. He favored, as always, the textured honey wheat, which had been a unanimous favorite at Wools. The earthy, nutty, and sweet flavor of the firm but fluffy bread lent itself to both sweet and savory uses, so Harry

had been constantly baking it, even when he had to swap real honey for his homebrew faux honey when rationing hit Britain hard.

Harry only managed to eat his bowl and two slices of his orange cranberry bread experiment. Before Zarba had popped off, she had charmed the baskets holding the bread to stay warm, and Harry greatly appreciated it when his pat of whipped butter simply *melted* into his slices.

After stealing another of Tom's under robes, Harry lazed against his chest like a kitten who gluttoned itself with a bowlful of rich cream. Tom chuckled as he manhandled Harry to slip under the covers, wrapping his arms around his boy to get his dose of 'Harry Cuddles', especially considering how Tom will have to go into the Ministry tomorrow to oversee the creation of his new trade bloc's oversight commission. He'll send a letter to Lady Malfoy to see about keeping Harry company; aside from his overgrown courtyard, there are numerous trails surrounding his Demanse, and he has a solarium. Getting fresh air and sunlight will be nothing but good for his boy.

It was as Harry was dozing and Tom had finally gotten around to reading *The Daily Prophet* (and he just KNEW he was going to have a massive headache dealing with the fallout of Skeeter's article), that Zarba returned. Thumping onto the floor beside her was a large, cloth-lined wicker box and several sets of rolled canvas cases. Peering over Harry's head as the other sleepily nuzzled into his chest, Tom raised an eyebrow as he took in the unexpected delivery and Zarba's flapping ears.

"Zarba be's done doings as Hawwy wants, and Master Twilfitties be's giving Hawwy a gift for Hawwy's breads!"

Hearing his name, Harry perked up. Untangling himself from blankets and Tom, he hopped out and onto the floor before wandering over. Kneeling, he pushed back the top of the basket before his feet started eagerly drumming against the floor. Leaning forward to scoop the basket occupants up, Harry then leaned so far back that he tumbled. In his arms were many large and squishy skeins of yarn, in all colors of the rainbow, and he was happily squishing his face into them as he hummed and rolled around.

Following Harry over, Tom gently used his foot to keep Harry from rolling back and into one of the corners of the bed. Smiling, he leaned over and picked up one of the rolled canvases, opening it to reveal full sets of the very long double-pointed knitting needles favored by Shetland knitters. Feeling a tug at his knee, he accepted the folded parchment Zarba presented him, flipping it open as he watched Harry dive back into the basket that must have an Expansion charm on it because his boy was currently waist-deep in it, his hips wiggling as he looked inside.

Quite a nice visual, indeed. Reading the note, his eyebrows went up; Master Twilfit must be quite pleased with Harry, for him to have gone and done this. "Harry? This is from Master Twilfit. Would you like me to read it to you, so you can continue your," he waved the note at the other, " '*exploring*' ?"

"Yes, please," drifted up from the basket, muffled as it was from all the wool.

Clearing his throat, Tom started from the beginning. *"Mister Potter, I was quite delighted to receive your gifts! Not many bother to practice the art of baking anymore, and I am excited to try each one you sent me, especially the glazed cranberry-almond!"*

"Because I believe one good turn deserves another (and don't think I didn't see you stand up to Terrance on behalf of my Tarragon!), I think my late wife's yarn collection will find a good home with you! She was a Master Knitter, creating works of art for many of the wealthy. She spent her last few years making things for children in Saint Mungos and young unwed mothers."

"I am entrusting you with my Lucretia's painter's pallet, if you will, and I hope you continue to be kind."

"Master Theodore Twilfit"

Once finished reading, Tom looked over to Harry to see him holding a half-finished baby bootie and the needle it hung on. Harry was absentmindedly petting it, his gaze far away as he thought. After a few moments, he sprung to his feet, ripping open different canvas needle cases until he found a tape measure. He then started measuring Tom, getting his arm length and the circumference of his waist, and Tom went with it, still familiar after all these years with the beginning stages of Harry gearing up for sweater knitting.

"Not that I'm complaining," Tom muttered, "but I'm not exactly hard-up for one of your sweaters, as nice as they were." Harry stopped, halfway finished with getting Tom's chest measurement. His knuckles were white from how hard he was pinching the fabric tape, and Tom looked down at him in concern. "Harry...?"

"I-," Harry choked, looking down at the ground as his eyes started to burn. "I was working on your sweater. I had found a small bit of green yarn and was going to, to use it as an accent against the cream. So you would have something nice to wear." His chest felt tight, and just like yesterday at Twilfit's, the sudden realization that, most likely, everyone he had loved and cared for, that he had known, was now dead, hit him like a ton of bricks. Not only were his things long gone, but so were their recipients. Despite Tom being here, right in front of him, still somehow young even though he should be old and wrinkled, Harry has *nobody*.

Leaning down, Tom wrapped his arms around Harry. In all of his excitement in having Harry *back*, he had forgotten that, while it's been close to sixty years for him, to Harry, it was just yesterday.

"...I wouldn't say no to a pair of Harry Socks," he murmured into soft black locks. Tom relaxed a little when he got a teary laugh back. Feeling the other push at his chest, he leaned back, watching as Harry wiped his blotchy face. He cracked a crooked smile when the shorter brunette shot him a tired grin.

"I think a sweater would use less yarn. Your feet must be the size of a double-decker." Accepting the handkerchief he was offered, Harry dried himself. "But, I'll see what I can do."

Hiking her robes as she walked up the stone stairs, Lily made her way to the Hall of Magical Tracking and Assessment. This morning's article in *The Daily Prophet* about the Dark Lord's new Consort had lit a fire in her. While she doesn't put much stock in that rag, the picture included was like a punch to her chest.

That's Harry. That's her little boy. That's her baby that she and James never got to bury. He had James' hair, and with the new development of moving color photos, she could see that he had her eyes.

She had been convinced at first, based on Sirius' ramblings, that this was just a long-lost Potter cousin. Tristan Potter had been a lusty man, and as recently as her and James' Third Year, descendants of the man had been found and acknowledged. For a grandson or great-grandson to pop-up, while unusual, would still be plausible.

*But this is **Harry**. He has the same cowlick over his forehead that James does!*

Why does that bastard have my baby!?

Entering the Hall, Lily went straight to the primary reference desk. Behind it was one of the few attendants permitted to work with the records; the amount of ethics and honor vows one has to give just to be considered for *employment* is astronomical, let alone once selected. She doesn't want to admit it, but this is one of the few things she agrees with the Dark Lord on; those entrusted to keep and organize these records, their people's history, *must* be loyal first and foremost **to** the Hall.

"How may we help you, Mrs. Potter," an attendant intoned. Lily's hackles rankled. James, by birthright, has the title of 'Lord', while she is prohibited from being known as 'Lady' simply due to her blood status. While she doesn't believe that she should be handed anything on a silver platter, she has more than proved her worthiness to their society through her Charms research.

"I would like access to records for the birth of Harry James Potter, born July thirty-first, 1980." If there is no recorded death date, then that would be all she needed to snatch her son out of Voldemort's dirty, bloodstained hands.

Following the attendant down rows and rows of books, she accepted the record book recording the births of all magical children born in the second half of 1980. It was thin, showing that not many children had been born during that time. The final stretches of the Revolution had been in full swing, herself and James in hiding with little Harry. It was not a time conducive to making, let alone growing, one's family.

Flipping open the book, she turned to where the section for 'July' started. Only two other babies, to her knowledge, had been born, one on the sixth, and then her godson Neville on the thirtieth.

Her face folded in a frown. There was no entry for her Harry, which should be impossible. Turning, she jogged back to the reference desk. "Pardon me," she said. "But my son isn't listed in here. He was born on the thirty-first of July, but not even his name is recorded!"

Examining the book, the attendant quietly excused herself before walking through a doorway covered by a heavy drape. A few minutes later, she returned with whom Lily recognized as the Matron of Records, herself carrying an obscenely thick file.

"Mrs. Potter. I am Arana Pembroke, Matron of the Hall, and you shall refer to me by the title of 'Matron'. You stated your son is not listed in the book for the second half of 1980, correct?"

"Yes," Lily promptly answered, the clipped tones of the Matron reminding her of her old Transfiguration professor, McGonagall.

"And I assume the entry is for one Harry James Potter?" Receiving an affirmative nod, the Matron set the file down before opening it to the front page. "Yes, it was brought to our attention that the records matrix compiled his information with another Harry J. Potter, dating back to the 1920s. Due to how primitive the old system was, and the great similarities in name, we estimate that the archive was unable to differentiate the two people. We have been working on separating them for the last week."

"Can you tell me the date of death for the Harry born in 1980?" It hurt for her to ask this, but she needed to know. For years, she and James had mourned her sweet baby, a baby whose body was never recovered from the explosion that tore apart their home. A tiny coffin with a just-as-tiny headstone was all that remained, but a small part of her never believed he died on Halloween of '81.

"Unfortunately, we are still going through the records."

"What do you mean you're still *'going through the records'*," Lily barked. "It's just parchment! You pick it up, read it, then put it into one of two piles!" She shrunk in on herself as the Matron stood up to her full height and loomed over her, and only now did Lily realize the other was a full head taller than her.

"Mrs. Potter," the Matron hissed. "As someone who was a *Pureblood* would know, the matrix does NOT record information like a **muggle** computer." Rocking back on her heels, the Matron looked down her nose at Lily with a sneer. "EACH parchment is spelled to the next, to ensure all of the information recorded is attached to each even in the correct order. In this instance, we have happenings that occurred in the 1920s shoved in between the 1980s and vice versa. We have to **disconnect** each individual parchment from the matrix, organize the information presented upon it, and then reorganize the records and link them to only connect them to themselves BEFORE joining them back to the matrix. So, as you can see," she leaned back down, getting nose to nose with Lily, "it is much, **much** more than *'reading a parchment'*," she spat. Stepping back, she returned to her rigid, upright posture as she fixed her robes. "Now, if you don't have any more questions, I suggest you run along and continue demonstrating just why Purebloods detest *muggleborns*. We'll owl you once we are finished with our work."

Lily felt very small as she listened to the Matron walk away, her heels clicking sharply against the polished marble floor. She murmured a vague variation of 'goodbye' as she, too, turned to leave, her shoulders twitching at the disdainful sniff of the other attendant that

echoes towards her. As she came to the top of the staircase, she brushed shoulders with Lady Malfoy, neither pausing as they went about their tasks.

...maybe she'll take a half-day off.

The Madonna and the Child

Today is going to be a good day.

Striding down the hall with a slight spring in his step, Tom didn't even try to hide his good mood from the various minions, visiting dignitaries, and the common rabble going to and fro within the main Ministry building. He spent the whole of yesterday cuddling his Consort (and he will have to *properly* thank Lady Malfoy for providing Harry with the Slytherin Consort Set), lazing about in bed, eating delicious food, and napping. Where many would attempt to criticize him for not utterly molesting his boy at every opportunity (which he would fight them over, he had had some highly satisfying morning frottage!), there is something to be said for just existing in close proximity.

Waking up to a new pair of squishy, silky socks certainly didn't hurt. And in Slytherin green and silver, to boot.

*If anyone tries to bring him down, he **will** Avada Kedavra them.*

Ducking under the flying memo's bumping into his door and entering his lavishly appointed office, while weaving his head as the memo's rocketed inside and towards his desk, he tossed his cloak in the general vicinity of the cloak rack before settling into his highly comfortable office chair behind his desk. Neating-up the pile of crinkled memo's as they unfolded, he took a few moments to leaf through them and get an idea for how his day will go.

Interview request from The Prophet. Itinerary for the eco-bloc, full meeting tomorrow. Update on the dragon smuggling ring. Hogwarts curriculum assessment reminder-, oh. Near the bottom of the pile was a formal request by the Seelie Queen. Apparently she has some subjects of her Court that require human magic instruction, and she would like for him to meet with her emissaries to discuss the matter.

Tom grinned triumphantly. Where his predecessors failed to secure a 'friendly relationship' with either Court of the Fair Folk, he may soon be able to secure a tentative alliance. Quite a few of the Pureblood lines have some small bit of Fae blood in them, and even with the muggle-born integration laws he enacted, new blood is still desperately needed. With many of the oldest Purebloods still favoring Pureblood-Pureblood pairings, even at the expense of their own fertility, an injection of Fae blood will greatly slow the negative effects of rampant inbreeding.

His own lack of forks in his family tree is proof enough.

Sorting through the rest of his memos and responding to a few, he then pulled out the file he had started about the eco-bloc from The Cabinet . After nearly losing a hand to the foul thing, he had only gotten a few pages deep before his door was hastily knocked on and then opened. Power walking inside with a thunderous look on his face was Lysandus Black, one of his (many) former paramours.

Standing only at about 170 centimeters and with a slim, athletic build, Lysandus had the characteristic Black looks, mixed with his mother's Greengrass delicacy and new-shoots green eyes. He was fair to look at, and Tom had had quite a few tumbles between the sheets with both him and his sister, Lycoris (though separately).

"*Riddle*," Lysandus hissed, eyes blazing. "What the fuck did I read yesterday!? A *Consort*!?" Throwing his crumpled-up copy of yesterday's *Prophet* onto Tom's desk, Lysandus sneered while folding his arms, the posture rumpling his fine robes. "We were supposed to be **exclusive**!"

"Since when," Tom questioned, leaning back in his office chair and folding his hands on his knee. "I do not recall us ever having such a conversation."

"It wasn't one that we HAD!" Stalking around to the side, Lysandus leaned one hand on the corner of the desk, hunching forward with bare teeth like a feline on the prowl. "We've shared each other's beds for over two years! It's a foregone conclusion! I have the key to your Townhouse-"

"Of which I shall be recalling, thank you for the reminder," Tom coldly stated before snapping his fingers, an intricate wrought-iron key sparking into his hand. "And if you'll recall, I never said we were exclusive; I have had others in and out of my arms during our romps, as well."

Gaping like a fish out of water, Lysandus sputtered before charging on. "You asked me to accompany you to Ministry events-"

"Because you came from a family fit to be on my arm, and you were available. I have gone to parties with others and solo, before."

"I, you, well," Lysandus floundered. "He probably can't satisfy you as I can!" His face went red at the knowledge that he had to sink so low. "And you gifted me a *Bellacours* ring!"

Tom rolled his eyes at the juvenile argument. "I find more satisfaction in merely being in Harry's presence than I have ever found inside your body." Baring his teeth in a bloodthirsty grin, he hammered his point home, "and a *Bellacours* ring is far inferior to even the most ineptly-made Slytherin one."

His face going nearly purple in apologetic rage, Lysandus could only whistle between gritted teeth before stomping out of the Minister's office, nearly knocking over a teary Melanie Braghurst, another of Tom's conquests, in his rage.

Hearing the blue-eyed brunette snuffle, Tom sighed before facepalming. It looks like he won't be getting anything done, today.

Dancing around the sitting room, Harry bopped his head as old jazz tunes belted out from the record player nestled between two bookshelves. It was a familiar tune, if a different version, of "*It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)*," by Duke Ellington, and sung

by the strident tones of Ella Fitzgerald. The few times he had been able to sneak away from Wools to one of the local dancehalls, the original version was always played at least once a night. Not many of the older Brits liked the American music or the jitterbugging that went along with it, but with things heating up across the channel and rationing going into effect, they had more important things to worry about than 'what the kids were doing'.

Harry had a particular hall he liked to go to, one further out from the others. He figured out early on that he was a tad bent, and while girls were nice and all, just like them, sometimes he wanted to be held in a set of strong arms and have a large hand on his waist. This hall was used by a lot of people whose taste in partners would get them more than just a raised eyebrow or two. Two of his regular dance partners were easily able to toss him about; Maggie Mae, a mechanic who had arms as big around as his waist, and a rough-talking gent named MacDonough, who had the habit of picking Harry up and propping him on his hip.

Now that he thinks on it, a lot of the bigger, stronger dancers liked picking him up...

As the record finished, he swapped it out for a new one. The first song to come on was a slower number, like one his dancehall had used to play to slow the party down. Taking it for the hint it was, he plopped down on one of the many sitting room couches, picking up his knitting from a small basket he put together consisting of yarn scraps and the works-in-progress left behind by the late Mistress Twilfit. She had left behind several finished and unfinished baby projects, along with things like Fair Isle sweaters and lace shawls. Vowing to finish the baby things, Harry will have to ask Tom how he can contact Lady Malfoy. Master Twilfit had said his wife donated to Saint Mungo's and carrying that on would be a great way to use up project scraps.

It would also help him deal with his newfound hop through time. He had just received three new babies to care for, and he doesn't want to wonder whether or not they survived through their first winter.

The room brightened considerably as the outside darkened, a storm bank rolling through. This part of Cumbria gets more than its fair share of rain, with at least one storm per day. Whoever of Tom's ancestors created the lighting system for the Demanse had been a genius; the intensity and color of the lights change so that they are always perfect, but they seem to favor a blue hue most of the time.

Maybe that's Tom's current favorite color? The fireplace across from him snapped to life, the faux-ambient light shifting to create balance with it as Harry seamed together the arms and body of a pink baby cardigan. *It's also not as harsh on the eyes, and being a bigshot in the Economics department, he's probably under harsh lights all day.*

Hearing a small chime, he sat his items aside, just in time for a tray with his second breakfast, a glass of goat's milk, and a full pot of tea, to appear on his lap. After a few bites he took his potions, his stomach not objecting to them as much like a few days ago. Finishing everything (he ate everything on his tray!), he settled back to enjoy a cuppa as the storm broke, harsh lines of rain slamming onto the balcony windows. He snuggled deeper into the couch, tugging over one of the copious furs that littered the room as he watched the storm rage.

~~COLD!~~

Harry jumped, nearly spilling his tea. That *definitely* wasn't Zarba, and Tom hadn't mentioned there being anybody else here...

~~*Why did he choose such a cold place to nest? Just because this is the ancestor nest, that does not make it a good nest!*~~

Oh. This must be a snake. Now that he was properly listening, he could just make out the hissy undertone.

Setting his tea aside, Harry leaned over the back of the couch, perking up when he saw his serpentine visitor. ~~Hello!~~

Rearing back, the frankly ENORMOUS green and sandy gold banded snake that had been winding her bulk through the room dropped her jaw open in a threat display. ~~*Another Speaker!? How did you get in here!? I shall eat you before my Speaker returns, so he doesn't have to put up with you!*~~

~~Oh, are you my Tom's snake? He didn't say anything about you. Sorry if I'm in your way!~~

Rising up, the serpent leaned in close, flicking out her tongue to scent Harry, once or twice lightly flicking him with the end. ~~*You smell like my Speaker. Has he taken you for mating? You smell like his mating musk.*~~

Harry skipped right over pink and went bright fuschia. ~~No! We were nestmates! I cared for him as a young hatchling!~~ Tom, wanting him like... *that!*? Tom is many things, but wanting someone who took on a semi-parental role as a lover would be too far out, even for him!

The snake did a very human-looking cock of the head before her cheeks excitedly inflated. ~~*You are Harry! My Speaker has said many things of you! You were the Mother serpent for his nest!*~~

Slowly reaching out, Harry gently dragged his nails down the snake's head, grinning as she wiggled up into his palm. ~~Yes, I helped take care of the young hatchlings who were left by their brood. They were not ready to find their own nests, so I taught and protected them until they could.~~ Lightly scratching the base of her head, he found a rough scale and worked on it until it came loose.

~~*Yes! You are very good and important to him! So good that he wants to have you for a mate!*~~

"**WHAT!?**" Getting hissed at for his volume, Harry apologetically scratched her scales some more. ~~He cannot mate me! That would be like mating his...mother.~~ It burned his mouth to refer to himself with such a term, but snakes don't have a word for 'father', and their word for 'parent' is still feminine-coded.

~~Did you lay his egg? No! So you can go mate him. He is a good mate, he's had a lot of practice! You will be pleased with his skill and have no desire to seek another!~~

Burying his face into the couches fabric with a moan (and studiously ignoring her hissed 'yes, he makes his mates do that sound!'), he then flopped back onto the couch. As her triangular-shaped head peered over, gold eyes intently focused on him, he pulled back his blanket with a sigh. *~~Come in. I don't want you getting cold. I'll help you stay warm.~~*

~~Yes, you will be an excellent mate, sharing your warmth with Nagini! My Speaker has chosen a good one, not like those others...~~ Her hissing devolved into unintelligible words as she coiled up in Harry's lap.

Scrubbing his hand through his hair, Harry blew out a sigh before returning to his tea.

*I am going to commit **murder**,* Tom thought as he sat in his office, slumped in his chair as he propped his head up with his fist. He could feel his right eye start to tic, and the sane part of him was glad that he had placed his wand in the pen drawer of his desk, otherwise almost thirty Ancient, Noble, and Lesser Houses will have lost their heirs and marriageable daughters *hours* ago.

Once he had seen the *Prophet* article, he just knew he was going to get dogpiled by his past flames. While he never promised an exclusive relationship with any of them, in fact going so far as to blatantly state that he's just using them to scratch an itch or to accompany him to a function, quite a few still got it into their head that they '*had something*', and were feeling '*betrayed!*' by his unfaithfulness.

And what had started as an endless parade of 'scorned lovers' rotating in and out to bare their grievances to him has now devolved into a packed room and them snipping and sniping at each other. One pair he hit with a variation of a *Banishing* charm, sweeping them out of his office after they started throwing hexes at each other.

Coming to a snap decision, Tom stood up, collected his wand, secured his desk, and walked out of his office. Nobody noticed anything or stopped him, being as absorbed in each other as they were.

Why did I want this job, again? He really should increase the Department of Mysteries time travel research budget; he wants to go back and throttle his younger self.

I could also tell him how to find Harry. A much more fulfilling endeavor than trying to reform the cesspit known as Magical Britain.

Walking down the short hall that leads to the secretarial pool, he flipped the billboard floating above the lines of desks to show he was out and unavailable, before making his way up to the Atrium. Once there, he detoured to the Apparition point and turned on his heel, visualizing his solarium at his Demanse. Once there he will visit Nagini and perhaps introduce her to Harry. He may see about having her go with Harry when he leaves the

Demanse and Tom can't be with him. Lady Malfoy, while a formidable opponent, just wouldn't be as effective a deterrent as Nagini would.

Appearing in his greenhouse-cum-solarium with only a whisper of displaced air, he took a few moments to look for Nagini in her usual sunning spots. Not seeing her, he entered the courtyard proper and hissed out a command, but she still didn't appear. Feeling a tick of worry in the back of his mind, he pushed open one of many doors to the Demanse lining the courtyard before speed walking his way up to his tower. As he got closer to his rooms, he could hear strains of music float through the air and he slowed. That was one of the *Wizarding Wireless Network* stations, the fusion muggle and magical one that plays the most popular songs among the youth. Hearing it settled him somewhat; while he doesn't care about the pop style, it does mean Harry is up and about, exploring. The likelihood of him having gotten eaten by Nagini is nigh nil.

Gently pushing open the door, he peered inside, first feeling a profound sense of relief. Harry was indeed up and about, dancing even! Wrapped around him though was the not inconsiderate bulk of his Nagini, and they seem to be boogieing to some *dreadful* muggle pop song about a woman named Barbie and her 'plastic life'. Nagini herself was having quite a bit of fun; she was wrapped around his torso and he held her first few feet of coils up, and she swayed much like a cobra while hissing along to the tune. His relief soon turned to shock, however, when Harry joined with her verse.

In Parseltongue.

Severus's face started twitching as he stood outside of his Lord's office, listening to the caterwauling of the Minister's cast-aside bedpartners because the man got the idea to *Court* some underage, homewrecking **twink**.

Granted he can't entirely blame either the boy or his Lord for the number of tears being shed around Lord Slytherin's office, but he needs someone to blame and they're good enough!

All he wants to do is deliver his quarterly reports! Not listen to overpampered bints sob about something they never had!

Fortifying himself with a deep breath, Severus girded his loins before plowing forward. At first, he tried to go around people, but after the third person threw themselves at him like some heroin from a sordid bodice ripper before wailing like a banshee, he got pissed and started throwing elbows.

Finally getting to the other side of the fleshy mob, Severus was incensed to find that the asshole who was the crux of the whole issue wasn't *even here!*

Getting spun round, he soon found his hands full of a sobbing young man. "Please, sir! Tell me it isn't true!?"

Growling, the cantankerous potioneer shoved him aside, just to have him replaced by a screeching heiress. Pushing her aside, Severus soon found himself besieged by the casualties

of the local Dark Lord's libido, each time he extricated himself from one overly perfumed grasp, he found himself entangled with another. Already having issues with being touched, the notoriously short-tempered man soon found himself at the end of his already short fuse.

Those darting past the Minister's office soon found themselves treated to a loud bellow, followed by the sight of the double-doors flinging open as silk-clad bodies ran out, tripping and falling all over each other in their haste to flee. Those young men and women who didn't get out quickly were hurled out, with one unlucky woman taking down three people fleeing the wrath of the Ministry's top potioneer.

*"I DON'T CARE WHAT FAMILY YOU BELONG TO, BUT I HAVE **NEVER** SEEN SO MANY PUREBLOODS ACT IN SUCH A DISGRACEFUL MANNER,"* Severus snarled as he stalked out, one-armed flinging a man (a Rosier by the looks of him) by the belt loops onto the pile of bodies created by the stampede. Those lingering winced and hunched in on themselves, some of the oldest in the bunch remembering the short handful of years Severus had been in Hogwarts retailoring the potions curriculum and the *blistering* tongue-lashings he doled out.

"But sir," one 'maiden' warbled. "Our Lord has cast us aside, deflowering many a-" she squawked as a long finger was jabbed into her face.

"Ms. Dennison, I happen to remember that you bragged about losing your maidenhead to Heir Logan McLaggen during your Seventh Year." He quirked an eyebrow as the others snickered and Dennison's face turned a combination of pink and green at having been caught out in her lie. "Now, act like the adults you all claim you are and piss off! If I catch any of you," he pointed widely at the group, "lingering around here, your arses are **mine**."

With the threat of being used for human testing lingering over their heads, the hallway cleared. Watching as the stupid *children* that are the future heads of their people ran away, Severus sighed before re-entering the Minister's office. Closing the doors, he then flicked his wrist, unsheathing his wand and shooting off spells to fix furniture, righten turned-over plants, and re-sort the bookcases. His face screwed-up in disgust as he levitated a pair of knickers off of the chandelier before banishing them, doing everything in his power to keep them as far away from his person as possible. Eventually, he finished his round and focused on the hulking desk that was the focal point of the room.

Summoning his reports, he dropped them on the highly polished dark wood before sighing when he realized that the chair and desk had not escaped unscathed. With a few swishes and flicks, the rents in the supple leather were repaired, the suspicious drips littering the ink blotter were vanished and dried, and all that was left was for him to fix the one drawer that resists all attempts at a locking charm. Seeing how crookedly it sat on its track, he yanked on the handle to free it and refeed its guides but was stopped by the eye-watering *horrendous* smell that wafted up into his face.

"MERLINS SYPHILIS-RIDDEN DICK!"

Sitting out under the Rose Garden gazebo as a gentle rain misted, Narcissa turned the page of the slim fiction book she was reading. Her Draco had just oweled it to her, spying it in the bookshop in Hogsmeade during his last trip there. Apparently it had been written by a Housemate's uncle, and said Housemate had been going on about how her uncle had '*truly grasped the struggles a widowed young mother faces in finding new affections for her love!*', and Draco had thought she would be interested in tearing it apart.

Her son knows her so well. She will have to bring this to her next reading circle meeting for consideration. While she does not doubt that the author had intended for the book to be a heartbreaking treatise on the hardships a widow who is still spry and full of vitality faces in her quest for love while a child clings to her coattails, it instead comes across as very insipid and trite. Indeed, the character that he wants you to champion as the heroine spends almost twenty pages dithering on whether-or-not to accept an invitation to *tea*.

Riveting stuff.

But, some of the lines were hilarious, even if it was unintentional. That alone would get dramatic readings from some of the more theatrically-inclined members.

It was as she was weighing the pros and cons of her choice that she was joined by her husband. Flicking away the shield he used to keep the rain off, he settled onto the padded bench across from her with a sigh as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. Setting her book aside, she ordered a tea service and fixed him a cup. Her eyes went wide as he slipped a small silver flask out of an inner robe pocket, unscrewed the cap, added in a bit of the contents (that smelled *suspiciously* like turpentine) to his cup, and skulled the whole thing.

"Lucius, my love? What happened?" He groaned in misery as he leaned forward with his face in his palm. "The last time you got like this was when Draco was five and had a full-on temper tantrum in *Flourish and Blott's* over the realization that he couldn't grow up and marry his favorite dog."

"That. Is tame, compared to what Severus just *Floo'ed* me about." The absolute **misery** tainting his words could power an entire Greek tragedy. At her inquiring hum, he heaved a sigh and sat up. "As expected, the Skeeter article stirred the pot, and nearly everyone our Lord has diddled within the last *decade* showed-up in his office to bemoan his taking on a Consort." Fixing a new cup of tea, he then made one up for Narcissa before continuing; "at some point he just *left*, leaving his broken paramours to their own devices. Apparently quite a few were VERY upset with the Minister and made their displeasure know by," he started ticking off with his fingers, "hanging their knickers by the chandelier, destroying furniture and bookcases, upending the spider plant, scattering the succulents, tearing apart his office chair," getting here his face twisted in disgust, "and... *cumming* on his ink blotter."

"...what."

"Oh! And the *piece de resistance*! Someone shat in his liquor drawer."

"The *liquor drawer*!?" Narcissa was speechless. *This* was the next generation of leaders of their world? *This*!? Never, in all her years, has she seen such a disgustingly over-the-top

reaction to a person you didn't have an actual relationship with 'hitching their hippogriff' to someone.

*Great Merlin, she does not want to see what happens when he gets **married**.*

"And how EXACTLY does our dear Severus know this?" She has a feeling she already knows the answer, but like one being unable to look away from a carriage accident, she needs to be told.

Lucius winced. "He was pretty much tackled by the inconsolable masses while dropping off his quarterly's and was stuck cleaning up the mess. Apparently he literally threw the lot out when they started getting handsy."

Narcissa cringed. Severus does NOT like people. He's like an old alley cat; if you try to pick it up you'll get mauled, but with time (a LOT of time in his case) it'll give and receive affection. For Severus, who barely tolerates something as simple as a handshake (aside from a select few) to get beset on by such a group, and to then have to deal with *that*...

"Let's invite him over for dinner," she declared. "Knowing him he's going to try to self-medicate after holing up behind enough wards to put Gringotts to shame and scrubbing himself raw."

"And a new set of robes," Lucius added. "He's probably already burned the ones he wore."

Harry twiddled his thumbs, looking down at the floor as he nervously bounced on his toes. Nagini was coiled around his feet, glaring balefully as only a large snake can at Tom, who was sitting before the two on the couch Harry had created a little knitting nest on, sitting ramrod straight as he gripped his knees so hard his knuckles creaked. In the background, the strains of a muggle boyband tinnily shouted about being back.

While Harry thought Tom was angry at him for keeping his parseltongue a secret, nothing could be further from the truth; Tom had to cast a nonverbal twist on the impediment jinx to keep himself from pinning Harry to the nearest flat surface and utterly *defiling* him.

Hearing that sweet mouth and seeing those plush lips twine about the sounds for the serpent's tongue had woken up a deep, primal part of Tom. A part that **wanted** with a frightening ferocity, that nearly howled with desire. He knows who his ancestors are, and he knows that they only truly started turning to each other for partners due to the pull, the attraction, that parseltongue creates. Slytherin was not the only family that could serpent speak within the Isles, but they were the only ones that lasted. What followed were generations of couples and thruples that tried to make their lives work, that invited desirable non-humans to their beds in the hope a mixed-blooded child would be born to add just that little bit of fresh blood, until even that started failing and brother and sister wed and bed each other. His own maternal grandparents were sibling and cousin to each other but were no longer the tall and beautiful Gaunts, blood of Slytherin and the Dark Court, but instead twisted, vile things who knew nothing other than the **want** sparked by parseltongue. If his mother hadn't fallen for his handsome muggle father, she most likely would have married her

brother and uncle, continuing the downward spiral of his family until no seed would take and wombs were barren.

Tom had long resigned himself to either never settling down, or entering a marriage of convenience. Possibly begetting an Heir, maybe two. After Harry had gone and Tom had matured a little, deep down inside of the lonely child turned embittered teenager, he acknowledged what his affections were and had mourned the loss of what could have been (nevermind that, discovering this part of himself at sixteen, Harry would have been twenty-two, nearly twenty-three). Reading his family's journals as a fully-fleshed man had slapped him in the face with the facts of his family's nature.

But right here, right now, standing before him was not just Harry, but another **parseltongue** .

Fresh blood.

"Um, Tom? I'm sorry for not telling you. When you were younger." Harry bent over to pet Nagini's head as she let out a sympathetic hiss.

"And why didn't you tell me?"

He looked up at Tom, worried with how strange and thick his voice was. His handsome face was stony, and Harry flinched back from the glare the other sported. Going to shamefully drop his gaze, his eyes instead landed on Tom's hands, turned into claws with how hard he gripped his thighs. Heart in his throat, Harry turned away. "Um, well, I didn't want to take away from you the first thing that made you special. I don't think you would have been happy, then."

Tom wanted to spit out denials, to grab Harry and shake him. Of COURSE, he would have been happy! He already knew Harry was special like him! His magic was *different*, but he was just as special, **superior**, to the other orphans as Tom was!

But he had to choke that all back. He has had years, **decades**, to grow into himself, get tempered by not just time, but experience. As much as he doesn't want to admit it, Harry was right; Tom the Child would have felt outshone, outright inadequate, if Harry had revealed his shared ability. He would have seen the other as competition, even though he was over six years younger than Harry. Before he turned eleven and received his Hogwarts letter, he may have done something to the other boy just out of spite and avarice.

Lost in his thoughts, he jerked back and nearly cast nonverbally when Harry tentatively touched his left hand. Looking down he forced it to relax, at some point he had held onto himself so tightly some of his fingers had managed to push through his fine robe and puncture his skin. Softly, Harry picked up his hand, straightening his aching fingers before inspecting them.

Both had things they wanted to say, but the inability to express them. How do you tell the only other person that you have truly respected about the long and arduous road you had to walk to, not just know yourself, but to become *better* than yourself? To stare yourself in the eye and say no, there's another way? To cast aside plans and certainties and things you had thought to be immutable, intangible building blocks that created the core that was you? Or to tell that other person that you are sorry that you just weren't good enough, strong enough, to give them the things that they needed when they were young? And now you have nothing left to give, because they have become a full person in their own right, and you have nothing for yourself because you set aside becoming your own person to help others achieve that goal? And you now feel hollow and hanging?

"...I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to forgive."

You just move on.

The Hand of God

As much as he wanted to hole himself up in his Demanse and never leave, Tom knew that would be a *bad* idea. The temptation provided by a serpent-speaking Harry would most certainly be too much to bear, and while one would like to think that being the dictator for a country (despite the title of Minister, Tom knows what he is) means that he could just slack off, he DOES still have to put in his fair share of office hours.

But he doesn't WANT to.

Harry, just as always, solved his problem in the simplest, most obvious answer:

"Take me with you."

And so he did.

After changing into his *Magic Free* robes, tidying himself up in the bathroom, and putting a few projects together to keep himself occupied, Harry gathered up Nagini, he himself got gathered up by Tom, and they Apparated *en masse* to the Ministry.

Note to self; avoid Apparition at ALL COSTS. While in theory being able to instantly disappear and reappear where one desires sounds good, reality says otherwise in the form of a queasy stomach.

Once he settled, Harry was guided by Tom through the Ministry Atrium and to the elevators, bypassing the security checkpoint with nary a bat of the eye from the guards. Said guards wore deep blue robes designed for ease of movement and combat, with wide, deep hoods and metallic masks that covered their faces from the nose down, reminding Harry of a more futuristic and sophisticated gas mask. Most of them had silver trim and masks, but he spied one in gold, too. They breezed through the Atrium too quickly for Harry to get a good look, but his main impression is vast stretches of dark blue, black, and green marble, with towering columns holding everything up as sunlight streamed in from above through a glass dome.

As they passed the various witches and wizards bustling about, he noticed many of them went to the not inconsiderate trouble to give them a wide berth, bowing and uttering titles such as 'my Lord' and 'Lord Slytherin'. Exiting the crowd they strode to a brass elevator that had just disgorged its passengers, and not even bothering to wait in line Tom shuffled them into it, the few people who had already boarded it literally jumping out when they noticed the newest occupants. Just as the last cloak edge snapped out, the cage-like elevator door clattered shut before the whole thing jerked and they started to descend.

They went down many floors, he counted almost a dozen, before they came to a stop. Emerging into a singular lobby, Tom guided Harry with his left hand on the shoulder blades, snuggled under a few of Nagini's coils. Going through a set of revolving doors, they emerged

into a room with dozens upon dozens of desks, each with a head bent over it as people typed on typewriters, spoke into floating conjured flames, wrote upon stacks and stacks of parchment, or did any other number of things. Floating at the head of the room was a large billboard, a three-tier pyramid of names and portraits pinned to it with a bright and bold card in either red or green. As he watched, the card next to a *Weasley, Percy; Undersecretary* flipped from its previously green to red. As they walked underneath it, Harry was surprised to see that Tom's portrait was at the very top, next to the title *Minister of Magic*.

Oh.

Tom has some *explaining* to do.

Everybody should have a Harry. Tom sometimes has the habit of overthinking things, to the point of making mountains out of molehills. Add in the fact that Harry has always had a calming effect on him, and Tom has a newfound zeal and efficiency for completing even the most boring of tasks.

Once he installed Harry onto one of the office couches, he actually found himself *content* to sit behind his desk and go through **tax** proposals, of all things. The soft *click-clack* of Harry's needles as he banged out a baby blanket was both soothing and familiar, with the only stop in the repetitive noise being for his prescribed meals and potions.

However, this peace was not meant to last. After only an hour, a fierce storm in the form of Bellatrix LeStrange flung open the doors, seeming to skip into the office while she cackled in glee. Behind her trotted her little Jasper, wide-eyed and anxious at being in such a new place.

Tom had just enough time to move aside the file he was looking at before Bella threw herself upon his desk, wild-eyed as always. "Bellatrix. What can I do for you?"

She barked out a laugh, sounding much more like her cousin Sirius than she would care to admit. "Is it true, my Lord, that you were able to browbeat the Western bloc into submission? By threatening to withhold the *Stonehaven* cure?"

Pulling out his yew wand, Tom cast a localized sound ward before leaning back with a smirk of satisfaction. "Indeed, Bella, I did."

As the sparks from whatever spell Tom did faded away and their speech was cut-off like a door being closed, Harry chanced a look towards the little boy standing awkwardly near the door. He was a dark-haired little cutie, plump cheeked and glossy-eyed, showing he had a loving home. His robes were bright and colorful and looked as finely made as what Harry presumes to be his mother's.

Catching the boy's eye, he gave a little wave before returning to his work. He only has about a foot of length to add before he does the border, plenty of time to decide what sort of

edging he'll put on it for a finish.

The boy slowly wandered over, convinced that he'll be here for a while, judging from the amount of conversation Tom and Bellatrix were having. Eventually, he stood at the far edge of the couch, opposite from where Nagini had partially curled up in Harry's knitting basket, watching avidly as he knitted.

"Hello." The little boy jumped, blushing at having been caught staring. "My name's Harry. Do you want to take a closer look?" He smiled kindly as his little watcher looked skeptically at Nagini's bulk. Harry laughed, "she won't bother you if you stay quiet and keep your hands to yourself. Come on," he used one hand to hold his needles and patted the open spot on his left.

Hopping up, the little one scooted closer. "My name's Jasper, but Mummy calls me Jassy. I'm three," he held up four fingers.

"It's nice to meet you, Jasper. And I'm eighteen." Returning to his knitting, he finished his row before swapping his needles, slapping the naked one under his right arm in the Irish Cottage manner before winding his yarn around his right pinky, under his ring and middle fingers, and around his pointer. Bringing up his left needle bearing his work, he fed the tip of the right needle into the first stitch front to back, rested the butt of his right hand against the needle under his arm, flicked his hand to loop the yarn, and slid the old stitch off of the left needle and onto the right. After the first few stitches he sped up significantly, and Jasper's eyes went wide in shock at how quickly Harry's hand flew. In just over a minute and a half, he had knitted the full 250 stitches of the sock-weight yarn he was using for the blank from one needle to the other.

"Woouooooooooow..." Jasper's eyes were as wide as tennis balls. "Sooo fast..." He spent the next few minutes watching Harry complete row after row, scooting closer and closer until he was nearly in Harry's lap and was resting his head on his upper arm.

~~She is watching you.~~

Looking up, Harry jerked, swinging his needle on reflex at the wide blue-grey stare fixed on him, then panicking when he realized that he wouldn't be able to stop himself from knocking the block off of Jasper's mother.

Tom watched as Bella zeroed in on Harry, watching him like a hawk with her son. Tom knows there's nothing to worry about, Harry squared off with people three times his size in the past to protect the children under his care, and usually came out on top.

Which reminds me, I need to get him something to protect himself with, until Parkinson clears him for magic.

Bella prowled over to the couch, mantling like a hawk. As she got closer she went into a squat, balancing perfectly still on the balls of her feet, manicured hands resting on her bent

knees as her eyes unerringly tracked Harry's hands, from his impossible-to-see flicks to his other hand power-loading his yet-to-be-worked stitches up the left hand needle.

He nearly leaped from his chair when Harry startled and lashed out on reflex. He watched with dawning horror as Bella's left arm came up, blocking the swung solid stainless steel needle with a raised forearm and a loud crack of steel hitting her bony wrist joint. Surely she will retaliate and-

"How are you transfiguring the yarn?"

Harry blinked rapidly, breathing heavy, and Tom rounded his desk, ready to run interference.

"Your yarn. You're changing it. And you don't have a wand and you are not verbalizing anything," Bella said, her eyes focused on the dropped working yarn. Her free arm darted out, startling a squeak from Jasper as she picked up the ball of yarn. "This is *Johansson Beste Babee* yarn. It hasn't been made for nearly thirty years, the company folded due to the competition having a better product. This stuff could be used to scrub the rust off of metal, but you're *changing* it into something else." She jerked her head up, her curls bouncing with the motion, looking Harry square in the eye. "So, how?"

Harry shrugged as Tom came closer. Reaching over Bella's shoulder and feeling the ball, he grimaced; Bella was right, he could have used this to scour the dishes at the orphanage clean, no soap required. Pinching the yarn leading from the ball, he traveled up the strand. At *some* point, the wool changed, gradually becoming almost silky and it had a pearly luster. Feeling for the parts that he could define as being completely scratchy to completely silky, he then had bracketed between his hands a gap of around six inches where the transition happened.

A spark. "Harry, can you knit a few stitches, but slowly?" Receiving a nod, he twitched a finger towards a chair, beckoning it over with a curl of magic. Ignoring Jasper's coo of amazement, he sat and leaned forward, elbows on his knees with his hands dangling between his legs. "Proceed."

Feeling just a tad unsettled, Harry picked back up his yarn and slowly started knitting, fussing a bit with his badly bent needle. Both Tom and Bella watched the yarn feed into and then from his hand, both frowning in concentration.

"His *hand*," Bella gasped in excitement, drumming her hands on her knees. "His hand is the conduit! Oh, my Lord, I should call Roddy! He will have a field day with this!"

Three sets of eyes watched as Bella jumped to her feet before running from the office while screeching '*ROOOOOOOODDYYYYYYYY!*'. The door swinging shut behind her cut off her ear-piercing shrieks like a lightswitch. Tom's ears rang in the sudden silence.

"...Mummy?"

"SIRI? SIRI! SIRI-POO!? SIRIUS BLACK OPEN THE MERLIN-DAMNED DOOR!"

The formerly semi-polite knocking on the front door for Grimmauld Place had turned into a rapid staccato, reminding Sirius of the sounds of a muggle tommygun from old-fashioned gangster movies. He really did NOT appreciate the sound; the repeated thumping of the door within its frame combined with Bellatrix's high-pitched whines was giving him a headache.

"WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU- OOF!" Wrenching open the door, Sirius was prepared to snarl in his cousin's face before he got bowled over and shoved into the wall (and by default his mother's portrait), with nothing more than a giggly *'no time to chitty-chat, I need to raid the Library!'* to tell him who was responsible.

Listening to Bella clatter up the stairs with a tinny, joyous *'eeeeeeeeee!'* and his mother's ranting, he turned to see who was still on the front stoop just to curl his lip. "Rodolphus."

"Lord Black," the tall, gangly form of Rodolphus LeStrange intoned, staring blankly at Sirius. "Apologies for the unannounced call," he lowed, his voice easily cutting through Walburga's screeches, "but my wife required access to the Black Family Library for a research project." Up above, something heavy slammed into the floor.

Creepy arsehole. Don't know what Cygnus was thinking, putting the two together. The elder LeStrange brother had a strange, almost feral intensity to him, but his carriage was very, almost obsessively so, tightly controlled. Everything he does is done with deliberation, like he thought the action through at least three times before acting on it. He would be the exact opposite of Bella, except for the frenetic light in their eyes.

Thank Merlin Jasper seems to have been spared. Another thump followed by a bang, this one was loud enough to make Sirius wince. LeStrange, the bastard, didn't even blink.

"Oi, Pads, what's going on with- *LeStrange!*" Charging down the hallway while drawing his wand, James stood shoulder to shoulder with Sirius. The two engaged in a staredown with the other, trying to set Rodolphus on fire with their gazes alone while he just blinked serenely.

"OOF- "BLOODY HELL!"

"Thank you, widdle Siri and Jamie!" Thundering down the stairs with several tomes in her arms, Bella bulldozed between James and Sirius before yanking Rodolphus by the arm, twisting on the heel of her heeled boot before disappearing with a crack.

"...what the *hell* just happened?" As they tried to figure out what in blazes was going on (Grimmauld Place getting invaded by two of the three Black Sisters in a little under two weeks was a new record), Walburga continued to scream.

Jasper sat in Harry's lap, nibbling on an oat biscuit as he happily wiggled his feet. Mr. Harry had made him new socks! And they were purple! And they were soft and squishy and made his feet happy!

Harry, meanwhile, just looked at his bent needle sadly. It would seem that, as time changed, so did the standards of production. Soft steel must have been used to make these, that's the only reason he could think of as to why it had bent so badly when he had (accidentally!) whapped Jasper's Mum with it. Thankfully she seemed okay.

Tom just watched Harry as he had a snack with Jasper, his mind going a mile a minute. If Harry could wandlessly AND nonverbally transfigure yarn and not even know it, what *else* has he been doing? And why? Someone with this ability should have been a shoe-in for Hogwarts, Beauxbatons as well.

*He was always **really** good at stretching food. **Too** good. And there were times he had to fish out his whisk from the soap batter, and he was able to dip his hand into the incredibly caustic stuff and come away with only slightly pink skin. And Harry regularly handled hot pots and pans with his bare hands.*

*And he hit Bella hard enough with a **solid steel** knitting needle to cause it to bend.*

Tom likes mysteries, he likes riddles (apropos, given his name). He likes figuring out the how and why for something. Simple puzzles for children were quickly solved and set aside, and he quickly moved onto more academic things. It's been *years* since he found something as stimulating as this.

Harry shifted Jasper, settling the youngster to sit more sideways on his lap so as to make it easier for Harry himself to snack. After all of the excitement of the day, Jasper was starting to nod off, even though he was fighting it with the same ferocity that all young children do.

...Harry looks good with a kid on his hip.

Dear Mother,

The latest article in the Prophet has sent Hogwarts into a tizzy. Is it true? Has our Lord finally decided to settle down? If so, then when he eventually weds, the whole of the Auror department and many bands of Hit Wizards will be needed to provide security! Quite a few of my year-mates (and even those below) were heartbroken to read the news. For some reason, they all seemed to have the impression that they would be able to sweep the Minister off his feet!

And is it safe to presume that our Lord Consort is truly a Potter? I imagine that would make for an awkward ceremony, given that House Potter is so very opposed to the current regime. The Consort does certainly fit the Potter Look, but, given his current health, and the low-quality of the color photograph, once he has had some proper time to recover he may be far more removed from the current Family than we think. I sincerely hope for the latter, Gideon has been acting insufferable since it was published, although the twins are a bit more level-headed. Could you possibly tell me anything not currently public? Pansy has been annoying lately, and I wish to rub into her face that I have an inside source!

I would also like to thank you for the chocolates you sent, and ask if my assessment of the book I sent you was correct? Crabbe and Goyle, of course, absolutely demolished the peanut butter and black dragon truffle ones, and I must say the strawberry champagne ones were an utter delight.

Your Loving Son,

Draco L. Malfoy

My Dragon,

I am happy to hear that the chocolates were well received. Dobby, while he can have strange notions and be quite troublesome, is indeed a fine cook. I will see about sending more of his experiments to you soon.

Sadly, I have been debating on giving Dobby over, even if only temporarily. As you saw in the article, Harry is indeed unwell, but fast on the way to recovery. Healer Parkinson has prescribed him quite the aggressive potions schedule, and a rich, fatty diet, to get his weight up. Loaning Dobby to our Lord Consort would not only speed up Harry's recovery but also raise our family in our Lord's esteem.

Your Father pouted a bit about the idea, given that that means he would no longer have ready access to his favorite trifle, but he could use going without for a while.

Sadly, I am not currently permitted to speak on the issue. Our Lord is quite protective of Harry. All that I can say is that he is very kind and sweet with a core of steel. He will put up with no attitude directed towards those in his sphere.

And indeed, your estimation of my regards towards the book is correct. The author does have a gift with words but instead chooses to focus said gift towards the trite. If he were to actually study his subject of focus then he would have actually had quite the story on his hands. Instead, you can tell that the author, a Mr. D. W. Moon, has never been married.

I look forward to your visit for Ostara. Perhaps you and Harry can meet. I believe he would benefit from having friends his own age.

Your Loving Mother,

Narcissa Malfoy

Hefting a sleeping Jasper onto his hip, Harry followed Tom and Bella down a myriad of hallways that twisted and turned like nobody's business. Next to him slithered Nagini, somehow schlepping his knitting basket in her coils. She had done so magnanimously, under the condition that he made her a 'warm nest to den in'.

Both Tom and Bella were speaking together in hushed tones, both holding open one of the books Bella had returned with while the others floated in a pile next to her. Both had long legs, and Harry was having trouble keeping up with them while also carrying Jasper.

~~Speaker! Slow your legs! Mate Harry cannot keep up! You will be a horrible mate if this is how you will treat him while he carries your hatchlings!~~

~~NAGINI!~~ Harry has never been happier that parseltongue is so rare. The *looks* they would get if those around him could *hear* her!

Her admonition did have the desired effect of slowing Tom's stride. In fact, he came to a complete stop before levitating his book and then gently plucking Jasper from Harry's hold. Tucking the child into his side, he then curled his free arm around Harry's shoulders before leading them on, his pace slowed to better match his shorter Consort.

All while still conversing with Bellatrix.

Harry's head jerked to the side when he noticed a flash, but couldn't discern its origin. The hallway, while not packed, did have enough activity where a simple turn of jewelry or shine from glasses could have been the source.

Eventually, they found themselves in the Sub-Ministry of Magical Research and Development. With her sharply clicking heels, Bellatrix led them to a door that was labeled *Transfiguration*. Barging into the stark white and glass room with a high, gleeful cackle, she shouted at the top of her lungs "*ROOOOOOODYYYYY!*" The rows of researchers at their desks and cubicles didn't pause in their work for even a moment, leading Harry to believe that this was a normal occurrence.

Before his ears could stop ringing, a tall, dark man walked over. Similar in coloring as Bellatrix, this man also had eyes as deep as the grave. "My Lord." His voice was just as deep as one, too. Holding out his arms, it was soon made clear that this was little Jasper's father. Bella cooed from the side as Jasper woke while being passed over long enough to blink blearily at his father before yawning and snuggling into his shoulder.

Beckoning Harry forward, Tom made introductions. "Rodolphus, this is Harry Potter. Harry, this is Rodolphus LeStrange, Bellatrix's husband and the head of Transfiguration research."

"Hello." Rodolphus just stared down at him, eerily still.

"Roddy, Roddy! This is the one I told you about," Bella batted like a kitten with string at her husband's arm as he slowly turned to face her. "The one transfiguring the yarn with his hand!"

He snapped back to Harry, his fine, silken dark hair fluttering around his head and shoulders while an almost manic look crawled over his face. "*Reallllyyyy...*" Turning about-face, he floated down the main walkway of the room before abruptly turning left between a bank of desks, one of which had a tap-dancing cabbage doing a risqué number on it while the

other had three researchers clustered around a fourth person who looked like they had attempted to turn into a potato, just to change their mind halfway through and got stuck.

They have stalks for eyes, Harry thought as they followed. Entering a smaller lab, Harry sat in a chair Tom conjured for him while Rodolphus handed over Jasper to his cooing mother. Conjuring a chair and table of his own, Rodolphus sat across from him. "So, as my Lord states, you are changing the yarn you are knitting with, correct?"

"I guess? I'm not doing anything on purpose."

Rodolphus cocked his head, dark eyes nearly glowing. "Are you thinking of anything in particular? Perhaps, that you wish the yarn was nicer? Smoother? Do you have a ritual, of sorts, before you begin?"

Harry frowned in thought. "If I'm thinking of anything, it's not consciously. And I always start my projects the same way, by casting on the amount of stitches needed."

"Show me."

Nodding, Harry fetched his basket from Nagini, gently rubbing her jaw in thanks. Pulling out a shorter set of his needles, he intentionally picked out the roughest ball of yarn he currently had, setting it at the center of the table so Rodolphus could feel it and confirm that it was, indeed, quite scratchy. Casting on fifty stitches with his favored long-tail cast on, doing so slowly as all three watched intently, he then took his time knitting the first row, holding his working needle in a pencil grip, before stopping.

"Continue."

Doing as he was told, Harry soon was flicking his right hand back and forth, and in minutes he had an inch and some of knitted fabric. Pausing when Rodolphus raised his hand, Harry then sat his work down on the table before withdrawing his hands from the surface fully.

Using just the very tips of his index fingers, Rodolphus dragged the knitting towards him. Leaning over, he nearly smashed his nose into the fabric, eyes squinting slightly as he inspected the soft, silky, squishy fabric to that of the almost twine-like substance the yarn was in the ball. "I would like to keep this for experimentation. It is possible that these items may be destroyed."

Harry sighed. "Can I at least get my needles back?"

"Sorry," Rodolphus looked anything but, "that is not something I can promise. However, replacements will be provided, in the event, the needles are destroyed."

"Ooh, ooh, and a gift card to *Fabulous Fibres*," Bella hooted. "Look at what ickle Harrykins made Jassy!" Sidling to her husband's side, she stuck one of Jasper's unbooted feet under Rodolphus's nose before wiggling it. "He made our widdle baby sockies," she simpered. Jasper, like most three-year-olds in the clutches of their nap, didn't even notice.

"...that can be arranged."

Curled up underneath silk sheets and warm blankets, and listening to the fireplace crackle, Harry watched as Tom finished hanging up his robes, the dance of flame and shadow along his profile turning it stark. The simple action reminded him that he should go through Tom's full wardrobe and see what he has from *Twilfit and Tattling's*. From what he's seen so far, it's all very nice and high quality, but something about it just didn't look right. He's pretty sure Terrance is the one who had a major hand in it.

Fuck, Terrance.

"So, *Minister*, huh?" His lips pulled up in a wicked little half-smirk when Tom froze, his shoulders and neck twitching in that oh-so-familiar *'I KNEW I forgot something!'* way that hasn't changed for all these years.

"...I forgot to tell you?"

"That sounds like a question." Wiggling his toes in glee, Harry snuggled down into the bedding.

Tom hunched forward with a sigh. "I forgot to tell you." Finished hanging up his cloak, he closed the wardrobe before skulking over to 'his' side of the bed. Slipping under the covers, he then dragged Harry over to his side. "How did you figure it out?"

Harry hummed. "That floating board, with the green and red cards." He smiled when Tom cursed under his breath. "Well, I guess I can forgive you. After all, you do have the habit of forgetting things while in the throes of excitement."

"I do *not*." If Tom didn't sound so offended, Harry would have thought it was cute.

"The first time you went to the bog by yourself, you were so proud you never pulled your pants back up before running to get me." Little Tom had sprinted through the orphanage shrieking at the top of his lungs and sans trousers and pants about *'doin' a wee all by mysef!'*

"NO!" Oh, but Tom's indignation was *delicious*.

Harry burst out into giggles, burying his face in his hands as he rolled over onto his side. "Yes!" He squealed as long fingers dug into his sides and tickled him mercilessly.

"I *never!*" Working his fingers over every spot he could remember, Tom grinned as Harry thrashed beneath him, his nightshirt hiking up from his knees to his thighs as he tried to twist out of Tom's grasp. After a few minutes he relented, a ball of satisfaction burning in his belly at the flushed cheeks, panting breaths, and wide, open smile Harry sported. "You take that back," he poked Harry on the tip of his nose as he flopped onto his side, scooting closer before wrapping the other up in his arms.

Harry just snickered. "What would the papers think if it gets out that I used to change your nappies," he yawned out.

"They probably wouldn't believe you," Tom whispered as Harry fell into sleep with a sigh. "Or that I could love you. After all," he waved his hand towards the fireplace, gently banking the flames so as to keep them warm, but not disturb their sleep.

"I'm heartless."

Memories II

"HARRY!"

"YES MS. COLE!?" Not looking up from the washbasin, Harry continued scrubbing the pair of short pants in his hands against the washboard, his hands red and irritated from the caustic soap.

"COME AND GET YOUR DEMON CHILD, HE'S HISSING AT THE GARDEN SNAKES AGAIN!"

He sighed, dropping his washing back into the soapy water with a splash. "JUS' 'ELL 'IM TO FIN' ME! 'ELL COME!" She just screeched his name again, and the eight-year-old nearly threw the washboard away from him as he stood up from the stool he had been perched on. Walking over to the open wash shed window, he poked his head out, eyes scanning for a familiar mop of dark brown hair and bellowing out a loud 'TOMMY-BOY! 'ERE, AL'IGH'!

Watching the toddler run over to him, Harry opened the door, catching the child-sized missile before it could run into his wet front. "Oi, Tommy? Wha' 'ave I tol' you 'bou' 'alkin' to your snakes, again?" Seeing his tow-headed charge just stubbornly glare down at the floor, Harry sighed. "Go on, ge' your friend. You can bof lis'en to my 'ories." As Tom ran off to get his newest, scalie friend, Harry plopped back down onto his stool, getting back to his scrubbing. Once Tom ran back in, his little hands cupped together, Harry nodded towards an upturned crate off to the side.

"So, Snow Whi', she was a Princess who was th' faires' in th' land, bu' her step-mum, th' Queen, was JEALOUS of 'er..." Harry started when Tom sat down, holding out his little friend so they, too, could hear. "An' th' Queen, she 'ad a magic mirror..."

Paradise Unsettled

Chapter Notes

>:D

Harry hummed, stretching under the blankets as soft lips nuzzled under his ear. A whisper of a kiss touched his pulse point before those same lips started journeying down his neck, stopping only long enough to nip at his collar bone before a wet tongue dragged up to swirl under his Adam's apple. His mouth opened in a pant as a large hand curled over one of his thighs, the thumb rubbing circles scant millimeters from his groin as the long fingers massaged and pinched the sensitive inner thigh.

"What, who-," he gasped before biting back a cry as teeth buried themselves into the until-now neglected side of his neck. "Oh!"

"Harry..."

His eyes cracked open, catching a glimpse of familiar chocolate waves. "Tom! What are-," he squealed as the hand on his thigh sneakily darted up under his shirt, palming and massaging his pant-covered erection as Tom nibbled his ear and ground his own hardness into his thigh. "No, Tom! We can't!" He tried to grasp the hand doing such wonderfully *sinful* things to his cock and balls, the large palm and long fingers easily gliding over the silk material as he leaked an embarrassing amount of pre-cum, but Tom's other arm caught his wrists before pinning them above his head while he slotted between Harry's wide open legs, his hips jerking when the pads of wicked fingers pressed into the soft patch of skin between his balls and hole. "This is, this is wrong!" As he said this he dug his heels into the bed with a moan, rutting up into the hand that had pulled down the thin band of his underwear before wrapping around his wet cock.

"Who says," and but *Jesus* did Tom's voice sound so good growling into his ear.

"Uh, well, that's- oooooohhhhhh," his eyes rolled and he shuddered as the hand wrapped around him started pumping his shaft. He could feel more than hear the chuckle of satisfaction Tom let out as Harry spread his legs as wide as they could go, his hips trying to pop up and down in a reflexive desire to fuck into Tom's fist.

"That's it," Tom cooed as Harry surrendered, slithering his hands out of Tom's large hand and sliding them up and under his shirt to pinch his nipples as Tom buried his face into Harry's neck with a moan. "I'm going to take... *such* good care of you." Kissing as much of the skin under his lips as he could as he slid down Harry's front, he soon was dipping his tongue into Harry's navel. Letting go of the weeping cock in his grasp, he then buried his nose into Harry's pubic thatch, right at the base of the now-aching cock, breathing deeply.

"Merlin but you smell so good," he gasped out before flattening his tongue and licking up from root to tip before deepthroating.

"TOM!"

Harry woke up alone, shaking and wild-eyed. His thighs quivered and his chest heaved, and he was panting so hard he was afraid he would hyperventilate. Feeling wetness at his groin he ripped the blankets back, turning red in mortification as he saw the large moist spot clinging to the front of his nightshirt.

He had had a wet dream. About someone who he had fed, and burped, and bathed, as a baby.

Panicking he turned to Tom's side of the bed, relieved beyond measure when he found it empty. Stumbling from the bed, he walked on wobbly legs to the bathroom, stripping completely so he could shower off the remains of the most **satisfying** orgasm he has ever had.

Returning to bed, he found a small note folded up where Tom *should* be.

Harry,

*Sorry to leave you so early, but I have several required meetings to get to. Narcissa will visit around lunch to keep you company, perhaps bring you to visit her home. Her husband's Family has an expansive library, much more informational than my First Year booklist, so I quite think you would appreciate seeing just what **our** world has to offer.*

However, with the weekend coming up, I do have a few things that I wish to do with you.

Tom

Okay, he can admit that what he can do with yarn is *something*, but he's clearly not magical enough to have received a Hogwarts letter. Maybe he's more like a brownie; good at small, little workings, but that's about it. That doesn't make him 'magical' enough to belong to Tom's world!

Regardless, he has a few hours to kill before Narcissa comes for a visit, and he is still buzzing with the remains of humiliated arousal. He'll need to find some way to keep himself occupied after he has his first breakfast and set of potions.

Entering her Lord's sitting room, Narcissa looked around for Harry. Not finding him, she then checked the bedroom before pursing her lips when she didn't find him there, either. Returning to the sitting room, she was just about to call for Zarba when she saw a flutter out of the corner of her eye. Turning, she saw that one of the tall, slim doors to the balcony was open. Walking out, she could hear the sounds of someone cursing echoing up from the courtyard below. Leaning over the carved stone railing, she spied Harry down below, struggling to rip up a dead shrub.

Trying to find a way down, she heard the grind of stone against stone. To the far left, a stone slab jutted out of the side of the Demanse, on level with the balcony, glowing blue glyphs twinkling in the center. Once she stepped on it, it slowly started to descend. Once it touched the flagstone path winding around the courtyard, she briskly walked towards Harry, taking in the loose linen shirt and simple trousers, sun hat, and thick leather gloves he wore. "Harry?"

In the middle of tugging on the core of a long-dead, prickly shrub, his butt sticking out like he was in the middle of an epic tug-of-war battle, Harry jolted at Narcissa's appearance and his hands slipped, and he flew backward, ending up on his back with his ankles over his shoulders as he tried to get his bearings. His hat ended up flopping over his face and he groaned in embarrassment.

Holding out a hand, she tugged him up, noting how, already, she has to put more effort into it compared to the beginning of the week. "I didn't mean to startle you, dear," brushing off dust and dirt from his clothes as he fixed his hat, she saw off to the side a pile of plant waste. "Got a niffler in your trousers, hmm? Just don't over-do it. My Lord would be very put out, otherwise," she joked, just for her eyes to widen in surprise at the furious blush that overtook Harry's face. *Oh-ho?*

At that moment Zarba popped in, holding a tray with a tall glass of watered-down fruit juice. "Don't worry, Lady Malfoy, I won't. I'm just...not used to lounging around? There were always things to do at Wools. And I think Zarba would put me to sleep if I did too much." Said elf gave him a determined look before nodding firmly.

Nodding in understanding, Narcissa started guiding Harry towards the rock platform. "Judging from your appearance, you're probably due for a sit-down and some food. Why don't you tell me what you're up to while we eat?"

Freshly scrubbed and wearing the short black robe Tarragon had sent a few days earlier, Harry dug into his second breakfast. After eating his full plate of a proper English breakfast, he then proceeded to snag a few more rashers of bacon, a fried egg, and toast before combining it into a sandwich.

Narcissa watched him carefully from over the rim of her teacup, assessing. It's not even been a full week and already Harry has put on a decent amount of weight. His face is filling out nicely, and when she saw him fussing over his scarlet over-the-knee socks earlier, she can see that he'll already need replacements. The tops were digging into his thighs, and his calves were straining the red silk. Not to mention the minor but noticeable taught pull of his robe at his shoulders.

*Which shouldn't be possible. They were sized so that it would take, at least, a few **months**, for him to outgrow them. The potions Severus provides Parkinson's clinic are good, but not that good.* Toss in his hair texture softening and showing a healthy gloss and curl, with red and gold lowlights, and she is certain that there is more to Harry than meets the eye.

She frowned as he wiggled, his face showing slight annoyance as he nibbled on an apple. "Is everything alright? Your potions aren't bothering you, are they?"

Harry blushed, trying to hide behind his apple. "No, Lady Malfoy. It's just, um, I recently got my socks and underclothes and already they don't fit? I knew magic was pretty useful, but I think I'll outgrow most of my new robes before I've even had them for a fortnight!"

Setting down her teacup, she hummed. "I know that this may seem a bit forward, but, would you consent to me giving you a physical while you are bare? It will be visual, for the most part, but if I need to lay hands on you you will be forewarned." She smiled gently as he flushed again. "Before I married my Lucius, I had been enrolled in the Mediwitch program at Saint Mungo's. At the very least I'll be able to confirm if you're having a reaction to the potions or just taking very well to them."

He swung his feet a few times as he thought. "I, guess? I just, I'm going to be starkers in front of a *Lady*! No offense to you, but, well, still! It's not proper!"

Oh, but Merlin bless his little heart. Our Lord will cure you of any moral decency the moment he can lay his hands on you proper. "I'll do my best to make it quick."

Once Harry finished his food, he rinsed his hands before getting up on the stool Narcissa conjured. He was still red in the face and wearing his socks and pants, but she'll give him a few more moments to get used to the idea of having to bare it all.

Until then, she started her inspection and was surprised at what she found. While he still needed to add on at least another ten or so pounds, he was filling out at an astonishing rate. Already he had a thin layer of healthy fat over his previous whipcord muscles, making him look more like a fit but pampered housecat than the neighborhood stray. His shoulders, especially, were more rounded at the bend where they flowed into his arms, softer, instead of the razor-sharp just they had been previously. And instead of looking like they had been stamped on with a mallet, his pectorals and abs were softened, the much-needed weight doing its part to make him look more human and less like an in-progress carving. The only signs on his torso showing he wasn't quite there were at his ribs, clavicle, and wrists; they were just a tad too bony for her taste.

But now she understands why he was fussing earlier; his lower half had *filled out*. The life of labor he had previously led had packed muscles onto his legs, showing he had known how to properly lift and move heavy items. The socks, which would have ended at his mid-thigh and needed to be threaded with ribbon garters to stay up, were straining against thighs that now more closely resembled holiday hams than anything else. They also struggled to wrap around strong, sculpted calves, and she felt a bit of envy because little Harry has a better set of legs than most women, she included.

Walking around to his back, her envy came out in full force; Harry had been blessed with both good legs AND a nice arse. She didn't bother to hide her pout as she saw his big, round rear eating his smalls, the waistband nearly whimpering from trying to go around his hips while digging into the flesh. She could just make out pale gold stretch marks on each cheek, showing that this was a recent development.

"Harry," she said. "I'm just going to help you out of your socks. They look mighty uncomfortable. Are your pants bothering you?" They looked *tight*, the bit of fabric used for the back had disappeared completely between peachy cheeks, and she imagines that there are some terribly sensitive spots getting pinched, right now.

"Um, no. They're fine." Oh, but the poor thing sounded absolutely embarrassed.

Gently touching his knee to let him know she was there, Narcissa let him use her shoulder to steady himself as she tugged the silk fabric down. The skin was an angry red from where the tops of his stockings had dug in, and she could hear his audible sigh of relief once they were gone. "I know that this is, well, not ideal," she murmured, "but, aside from taking so well to your potions, everything is fine."

*No, everything is **not** fine*, Harry wanted to shout. *I time-traveled, everyone I know except for Tom is **dead**, you and he are wasting vast amounts of money on me, and I'm supposed to be magical! Oh, and now I'm having wet dreams about someone I took care of as a baby!* He bit his tongue, trying to keep himself from crying, but couldn't hold back a loud sniff.

Narcissa looked up and her eyes went wide at the teary look on Harry's face. "Harry!?" Not fighting the urge, she gathered the young man up in a hug. "What's wrong, sweetie? Are you hurt? Is it something I said?"

"*No, no, I,*" Harry warbled. "I just," he wiped at his eyes with the heel of his hand, hiccuping when she gave him a handkerchief. "I'm, I don't know why I'm here! And I only have Tommy-boy, an' 'm sick an' magical, an' you an' 'im 'ave been so nice, bu' yer spendin' all thi' money on me tha' I can never pay back, an'," he trailed off with a sob as he buried his face into the soft cotton and linen of her hanky, barking out a laugh. "An' I can' even wear me clothes!"

"Oh, no! No, no, no," she squeezed him hard, petting his hair. "Harry, it's fine! We knew this would happen! Oh, kitten," she cooed as he just started crying harder. Gently tugging him, she guided him off of the stool. "Zarba! Draw Harry a bath, hm? Come along, Harry. Let's get you a soak, and then we'll gorge ourselves on some sugary sweets."

As Harry soaked in the bath, Narcissa requested a quill and parchment. While she only got her Mediwitch certification before she had to fully step into her role as Lady Malfoy, she has **never** seen or heard of someone taking so well to nutrition (and other related) potions such as Harry currently is. Severus, while an amazing brewer and brilliant potioneer, just simply is not capable of getting results like this. Something else has to be going on, but she can't make heads or tails of how.

Severus,

Your potions, as always, are top of the line, but, and do correct me if I'm wrong, it would take approximately one-and-a-half months for a patient (such as our Lord's Consort) to make healthy and significant weight gains, correct?

Narcissa

"Zarba, would it be possible to have one of the Minister's hawks bring this to Master Potioneer Snape of Prince?" If she could have Zarba or Dobby do it, she would go that route, but the Potion Labs have anti-elf wards even tighter than the Ministry's Administration Wing; an elf simply popping in could be enough to set off a negative reaction. And the bombing of the lab's back in '83 is still pretty fresh in the Ministry's memory.

Zarba scrunched her face in thought. "It's being good, but Zarba wants to show Hawwy Master's hawkies. Master is going to be's adding his Hawwy to his Gringotts vaults, and Hawwy needs be knowing of where the hawkies is."

Narcissa had to stop herself from whistling like some low-born witch. Her Lord is **serious** about having Harry as his partner. She had been expecting him to set up an allowance account like many other Family Heads do for their spouses and/or consorts, but what Zarba stated implies that Harry is going to have full, equal access to everything the Dark Lord does.

"I see. Well, in the meantime, I have a partner for you. Dobby!" With a pop another house-elf appeared, this one with large, tennis ball eyes, a long, pointed nose, and a very nervous demeanor. She sneered down at the cowering thing; Dobby has always been extremely odd. The only reason he never received clothes was because he was such a talented cook. "Dobby. This is Zarba, the personal elf of the Dark Lord. Until you are recalled or we decide to hand you over, you will work with her to prepare meals for Lord Consort Harry. Do you understand?"

Wringing his hands as he winced, Dobby rapidly nodded his head. "Yes, Mistress Malfoy."

Narcissa watched as Zarba eyed Dobby shrewdly. "Dobby! You's is having an important job! Master's Hawwy is being getting well, but needs good food! Hawwy is very nice, so we must be making good foods for him's!"

Dobby blinked at her, gaping. "You call him by his *name*!?"

Zarba nodded. "Hawwy gave me *permission*." Narcissa wanted to laugh at Zarba's smug tone. "Now, I show's you to the kitchen! Hawwy is feeling sads, so we's be making him many small treats to feels betters!" Grabbing onto one of his hands, she then looked up at Narcissa. "After I get's Dobby to the kitchens, I show's yous and Hawwy to mews!"

And with a pop, they were gone.

Darting a look towards the bathroom, Narcissa made her way over to her Lord's primary wardrobe. Opening it, she riffled through it before finding shoved into the back a robe that, while not hideous, was certainly **not** his style. It was done in a pale, creamy white, almost gold-toned, and it had flounces of lace and floaty gauze. Not only was the color not right for him (with the Minister having cool, blue and purple, undertones), but the style and cut were

just wrong. The most powerful man in western Europe would not cut an imposing figure in diaphanous silks and flouncy lace.

Making a note to figure out who gifted this to her Lord later, she flicked a few resizing charms and simple tailoring charms at it before nodding in satisfaction. The color and style would work well on Harry, the creamy golden white going well with his peachy complexion. And she estimates that he will still look quite delicate when he's given a clean bill of health, so the gauze and lace will work well with that. The designer of these robes was talented and she would like to acquire a few other robes in this style for Harry. It's just a shame that someone thought these would look *good* on the Minister.

Summoning Harry's socks and pants, she frowned. Resizing and tailoring charms can only do so much. They rely, mostly, on having enough fabric to 'thin-out' when going up a size (or compact, like the robes she just did for Harry). Regardless of how big or small you need to make the clothing item, if the item is only a few ounces, it doesn't matter how big you need to spell it, it's still going to weigh the same, and therefore the fabric in question will have no choice BUT to get thinner and thinner the bigger it is sized. Examining the pants, she could tell that they are meant for support more than modesty, to do things like keeping Harry's privates safely corralled (which she can see the appeal; she'll get a pair for Lucius and see what he thinks). But, hitting the tiny scraps of fabric with the resizing charm will just cause them to stretch unevenly, and thus negate their purpose.

His socks, on the other hand, may be doable. But she'll have to wait for him to emerge from the bath; with how fitted socks are, she needs to have him wearing them so she can make sure they will conform to his legs correctly. Luckily, his underrobe needs only some subtle fixes at his shoulders.

She felt a little sad, though. His last robes were to come today, and it looks like they won't even be worn. Thankfully the second-hand clothing market is booming. With how expensive clothing is, ponying up the money for a new set is always greatly planned out for most of the families (even for some of the Ancient and Noble), so she will be able to unload these with only minimal loss on her end.

With that plan in mind, she took a seat, absentmindedly looking at the empty portrait frame above the fireplace as she mentally planned out her following week.

Harry felt emotionally wrung-out as he and Lady Malfoy followed Zarba to the mews, after dressing in the robes Lady Malfoy had produced. He had perked up a bit when the diminutive elf had announced their visit, but that quickly passed.

The mews were located on the mountain-side of the Demanse, opening up to the west. He had been a bit surprised to find out that the part of the Demanse he was most familiar with was only a small part of a whole complex. Out of the whole area, only about a tenth of the whole thing was outside of the mountain, the rest tunneling in and down. In the past, the Demanse used to house entire families and subfamilies bearing Slytherin blood. The current Lord or Lady, their spouse and children, siblings of the Head and their families, and so on. According to Zarba, who was told this by her mother Zany, who was told by *her* mother Zyla,

upwards of a thousand people once lived here, living and loving and working, spinning yarns, smithing weapons (the Demanse sits on top of an *active lava tube!*), or trading spices. Many married into advantageous families, like the Medici's, a Pharoship, and one to the son of a Holy Roman Emperor.

And now it's just Tom.

"Here we be's," Zarba chirped as the heavy door to the mews opened. The room had been hollowed out of a natural cavern, and had a wide-open window cut out so the birds may come and go as they please. Stands and nests lined the room, and Harry could only identify a few of the raptors that called this place home.

"He has a lot of birds," he murmured, seeing things like kites and kestrels to large seahawks. All of them were looking at the newcomers, heads cocked to the side or bobbing themselves up and down to take advantage of their binocular depth perception.

"Many is being pressie from suitors. But," Zarba sniffed imperiously, "they not's being **good** enough."

Holding out her letter, Lady Malfoy asked, "which one would be best suited to take this to the Ministry Potions Research labs?" A merlin over on the side scree'd, bobbing a bit to get her attention as Lady Malfoy waited for an answer. Before Zarba could respond, a MASSIVE set of wings flapped, and their owner hopped from one bird stand to the other. Lady Malfoy looked at the creature in apprehension, the large talons bigger than her hand. Harry wracked his brain, trying to name the species. Oh, it was on the tip of his tongue-

"*A Golden Eagle*," he exclaimed. "Oh, he's a beautiful one, isn't he?" He had to clasp his hands behind his back to keep himself from reaching out.

"He's be named Gregorian, and he be's Master's *prized* eagle!" The eagle in question clacked his beak before hopping towards the merlin, muscling the smaller raptor to the side before snatching the letter from Lady Malfoy's startled grasp. "He ALSO be's **rude!**"

Just as Gregorian turned and spread his wings for take-off, a grey-white blur shot across the room. Piping like a squeaky toy in an angry dog's maw, an angry ball of feathers the size of a tennis birdie got in Gregorian's face, squeaking loudly and angrily enough that everyone knew the big guy was getting read the riot act. In retaliation, Gregorian mantled his wings and opened his beak to hiss, dropping the letter, just to jerk back as the MUCH smaller bird landed on the stand and started getting into his space, making him back up. Harry wanted to laugh, it's not every day one of the world's top apex predators, the top of the food chain wherever it chooses to live, gets cussed out by a bird that weighs, at most, three ounces. As Gregorian cowered, the merlin from earlier darted by, snatching up the letter before bursting off.

With one final, angry squeak, the David to Gregorian's Goliath hopped away before fluttering towards Harry. Holding out his hand, his new favorite raptor species alighted on his curled fingers before looking up at him with big, marble eyes before fluffing up. Chirping once quietly, it started preening.

"Oh, yes, I like you," Harry chuckled as he rubbed his thumb up and down the bird's front, smiling as it nibbled him and trilled. "What's their name," he asked Zarba.

"She nots be havings a name. She bes a gift to Master from a Nubian princess, but Master doesn't uses her." Peering over the bird, Zarba cocked her head. "She be's an *African Pygmy Falcon*, and they's be whites and greys, with the girlies having browns on their backs, but she donts be having the browns."

Scratching the falcon's head, Harry hummed. "Well then, that just makes her more special. Which means she needs a special name." He thought as she walked up his hand to his wrist, before fluttering to his shoulder. "How about Hedwig? You certainly have the fighty part down. And there were quite a few old queens named Hedwig. A queenly bird deserves a queenly name." Getting a nip to his ear, Harry smiled, "okay, Hedwig it is!"

Tom sighed as the last witch filtered out of the meeting room, relaxing back into his chair as he rubbed his temples. He could use a drink and a Harry Cuddle after dealing with the sheer *stupidity* of the people who were submitted to head the Western Bloc Economics Committee. Glaring at the large pile of applications next to him, he decided that, if being the dictator of a nation doesn't let him set his work hours then it's not worth it, and got up. Banishing the applications to his desk, he traveled to the Apparation point and left with a disgruntled crack.

Landing in the solarium, he could not find Nagini, leading him to believe that she had holed herself either with Harry or deep in the Demanse. Peering into the courtyard, he saw that someone had started clearing away dead growth, and made a mental note to get a small composting bin for Harry as he did whatever he decided to do.

As he was traveling up the final set of stairs to his rooms, he ran into Lady Malfoy as she was going down. "My Lord? Oh, but, I must sincerely apologize! I hadn't realized that this would happen, and I-"

"Lady," he cut her off with a raised hand, "what happened? It certainly isn't an emergency, otherwise, Zarba would have sent for me."

Folding her hands in front of her, Lady Malfoy nodded. "You are correct, there is no emergency, and Harry is fine, but..." she sighed before pinching the bridge of her nose. "I decided to loan my elf, Dobby, to be a cook for you until Harry was well, and..." she trailed off with an embarrassed tone.

"And...?"

She snorted and threw her hands up. "I forgot to tell him no alcohol, so he prepared a charcuterie board and a bottle of wine for lunch. Now Harry is three sheets to the wind. As I was leaving, he was trying to teach Zarba and Dobby a two-step and Hedwig was nesting in his hair."

Tom blinked. Okay. That's not quite what he was expecting. And, "who in blazes is Hedwig?"

"The African Pygmy Falcon that took a liking to him, while we visited your mews."

Well, then. "You are dismissed for the day, Lady Malfoy. I'll be residing here for the weekend, so unless I call for you, I will see you again on Monday." Waving off her curtsy, he nodded to her before resuming his ascension.

"My Lord?" Pausing between one stair and the next, he cocked his head in acknowledgment. "Harry was a bit, sensitive, earlier. He's already grown out of his clothes and is feeling embarrassed about it, so I had to resize one of your unused robes for him." Nodding, he continued his way up.

Entering his sitting room, he was met with the aforementioned sight of Harry swaying and bobbing in place as Zarba and who must be Dobby swung around each other, a lively jazz tune belting from the record player. As he watched Harry sip what looks to be a rosé from his wine glass, he could see a small, feathered ball perched in his hair, pipping along.

He was only able to watch for a few moments before Harry spotted him. "Tom!" Swaying around tables and chairs, Harry wrapped his unoccupied arm around his waist before burying his face in his sternum with a drunken giggle. Hiccuping, he looked up with a flushed face. "Hi!"

Tom laughed before wrapping one arm around Harry and gently cupping his warm face with the other, pushing his fingers up into ebony locks and dislodging Hedwig, who bounced up to one of his shoulders. "Hello. I see *somebody* is enjoying themselves." Harry just snort-giggled before nuzzling back into his chest. "Narcissa apologizes; some of your potions will help you get drunk quicker." Waving away the two elves, he tried to guide Harry towards the couch sitting in front of the table holding a nearly-finished charcuterie spread, but Harry only pouted up at him before holding his arms up in the universal expression for 'carry me!'

Not seeing any reason to deny his Consort, Tom easily hefted him up onto his hip, echoing Harry from all those years ago while he cared for the children at Wools. Harry sighed, sloppily kissing his cheek before relaxing his head on the broad shoulder he rested against. "I missed this," Harry muttered.

"Hmmm," Tom inquired, sitting down lengthwise on the couch, setting Harry's nearly-full wineglass on the table as Harry curled up in his arms, all delicate lace and floaty gauze and clean smells.

"Get'ting picked up. Me dance par'ners liked t'pick me up. Was nice."

Tom hummed again, running one hand heavily up and down the outer thigh it had curled around. "I don't remember you going out to dance."

Harry yawned, booping Hedwig on the beak as she hopped into the hollow created by his neck and chest as he curled up for a nap. "Wen' ou' when th' bligh'er's wen' t' bed. They always liked t'pick me up, 'cause I was so small."

He wanted to growl but pushed that aside. Most of those people are long dead, or close to it. "We can go dancing together. We have a Summer Ball coming up, and you'll have no shortage of partners." *Me. Just me. Everybody else is unworthy to even be **stepped** on by you.*

Wiggling, Harry sat up on his hip, peering up at Tom with glassy eyes, flushed cheeks and wine-stained, plump lips. "anks, Tom." Leaning forward, he must have misjudged his angle, because he ended up laying a kiss on Tom's lips before snuggling back down and falling into sleep with a smile.

Tom didn't move for a long time.

"Oi, pup."

Sirius ignored the portrait, trying to concentrate on the latest bullshit Gringotts has the *gall* to call a bank statement. He's been trying for the last twenty minutes to make heads or tails of this one charge-

"Don't ignore me! Rude whelp, ignoring one of his favorite Grand Pappy's..."

The charge was from a shop in Pleasure Alley, that much he knows. And he was there multiple times last month, so getting a charge isn't what's tripping him up...

"Sirius Orion Black you had best stop ignoring me!"

"Oh, feck off," Sirius shouted at the portrait frame Grand Pappy Vega had invaded. Great-Great Aunt Winnifred just sniffed at their shouting from her perch on the couch almost but not quite out of frame, trying to stay out of Vega's way. "I'm trying to do, uh, 'adult stuff', and your old botty isn't helping and- oh! That right," he snapped his fingers before checking off the charge with a flourish.

Vega just threw him a quizzical look.

"I had forgotten that I took Callista to *Bottoms Up!* to pick out some 'playthings'," Sirius waggled his eyebrows lecherously, getting a harrumph from Winnifred but a crowed 'nice!' from Vega. "Aside from all that, what's got a bug up your arse, you dead bastard?"

Vega sneered over exaggeratedly, "That's *drop* dead **gorgeous** bastard, to you." Tossing his mane, he flipped his curls a few times while Sirius made gagging sounds. "But, hold up that newsie, boy. Someone on it looks familiar."

Looking over his desk, Sirius found that day's edition of the *Prophet*. He didn't have time to read it today, but an article in it had upset Lils, and she and James ended up getting into a (now rare) shouting match about little Harry. Since the first article about the Dark Dork's new squeeze came out, she got it in her head that he kidnapped their first son and had been keeping him hidden.

As much as Sirius wants his first godson back, he has to side with James on this one; little Harry is **dead** and has been for a long time. Granted, the name and strong Potter genes make

for an uncanny coincidence and had even freaked him out, but as much as Lils may wish it otherwise, it's just not happening.

Pulling the newspaper forward, he found front and center on the front page what had set Lily off and had Grand Pappy's knickers in a bunch; a photo of the Minister with his Consort, Bella following. Gaunt was holding cousin Jasper on his hip as he guided his lover, and the whole thing made for a very domestic picture. Hell, the way Gaunt was practically *hovering* over his petit lover made the bastard seem like he had a heart and was capable of *feelings*.

Blech!

Levitating the paper over to the portrait, he watched as Vega tried to lean out of the frame he was invading, his eyes darting all over the picture before they went so wide Sirius thought they would roll out of Vega's head. "*It's him,*" Vega drummed his hands against the magic that keeps a portrait separate from reality. "It's my boy! I KNOW it! *Merlin* but he's beautiful-!"

"What do you **mean** that that's your boy," Sirius barked. Winnifred huffed before leaving her frame, tired of the two men shouting at one another.

"Oh, yes, I'd recognize those eyes ANYWHERE! He looks so happy and plump I just, **ungh!**, I could have *had* that!"

Wow, Sirius thought as Vega threw a fit. *He had it bad*. "So, uh, how could the bit of jailbait that you were an absolute *failure* at picking up," he grinned unrepentantly at the grossly affronted look Vega shot him, "and THIS boy be the same? Contrary to popular belief, I do have a brain and I know how time works. Shouldn't he be, uh, *older*?"

Vega eyed him hard, and Sirius could almost imagine the poor hamster working double-time to turn the rusted wheel that was Vega's brain. After a few moments, Vega snorted before saying pithily, "Cissa found him in a Fold gone *oopsie*." He cackled as Sirius incredulously mouthed 'oopsie!?' before fleeing the frame, but not before tossing over his shoulder, "if you meet my boy again, tell him I want him to have me cottage!"

Sirius' eyes bulged. "*WHAT!?* Vega! No, you can't just, *aaaRGH! THAT'S IT,*" he threw his hands up, "*I'm going to go live in a cave!*" Flopping into his chair, he let his head loll about until he spotted the newspaper and winced.

Right after I tell Lils the news.

The Tempting Serpent

Harry sat at the edge of the bed, kicking his feet as he nibbled an apple while Tom glared at his primary wardrobe. Narcissa's mention of Harry's clothing situation still rung in his mind, and he was trying to find a solution until he could get one of the Twilfit's to give Harry a new fitting as soon as possible.

Remembering his shrunken robes from yesterday, he dug into the back, frowning before letting out a disgruntled sigh and fully walking into the heavy wooden piece. He'll need to reset the *Recall* charm on it soon, he doesn't have TIME to go trapezing through a magically-expanded closet just to get dressed!

Also, direct Zarba to purchase more types of apples, he thought as he saw Harry discard the core and pick up a fresh Golden Dragon apple from the fruit bowl Dobby had brought along with their now-finished breakfast.

Fighting with his wardrobe, he soon emerged victorious with five of his frilliest, unfit robes. He snickered when he saw the look of fascinated disgust on Harry's face, and he couldn't blame him; these robes were gifts from old suitors and brown-nosers who had too much money and not enough taste. Each has only been worn once, just long enough for a single short public appearance before he changed into something far less irritating. He supposes that he *should* be grateful that he never found a way to unload these, aside from the size, many were in colors far more suited to Harry's complexion. A few alterations here or there to the style and they would be perfectly serviceable.

"We'll be heading out to Diagon today. One stop will be at Gringotts, the bank, and then perhaps a bit of light shopping. Lord and Lady LeStrange sent along a gift voucher for you, to make up for the destruction of your items and as a 'Thank-you' for their Heirs gift." Bella would NOT stop cooing about her son's socks. He had thought she would put up more of a fuss, but she either hasn't seen the Consort ring on Harry's finger (and *Merlin* if that doesn't *do it* for him!), or she was overlooking it because Jasper just seems enamored with Harry.

Harry cocked his head as he nibbled his apple, holding it gently with both hands and reminding Tom of some small and fluffy woodland creature. After a few moments, it clicked. "Oh, they didn't have to do *that*," Harry exclaimed. "He's just a little boy, a baby, really, and all babies need a good pair of socks!"

"Nevertheless," Tom dismissed Harry's objection with a toss of his hair, "they have sent a gift. And undoubtedly Bellatrix will try to fob her son off on you again, at some point." And the next time she does, he'll arrange for a little public excursion; both Bellatrix and Rodolphus are fiercely protective of Jasper. For Harry to be seen towing their son around without either of them present means that they trust Harry, and anyone who messes with Harry will earn the ire of House LeStrange.

Conjuring a stool and motioning Harry towards it, Tom shot each robe with a levitation spell, setting them to hovering just to the side while he hit each with freshening- and wrinkle-

release charms as he heard Harry slip off his nightshirt.

"Tom? I seem to have forgotten to grab me underrobe. Can you fetch it, please?" The sounds of bare feet slapping stone echoed behind him.

Spying the robe in question hanging over the arm of a nearby couch, Tom summoned it to his hand before turning to present it. "Here you go, and what color- **ngh!**" He choked on his spit when he saw Harry's current state.

Narcissa was right when she said Harry had already outgrown his clothes. In only a week he had gone from looking like a famine victim to a damn pin-up model! Lightly muscled arms connected to a back whose musculature made his teeth **itch**, and he currently had a foot propped up on the stool as he walked his sock up and over his knee to rest at his thigh, the black fabric now sheer as a result of the resizing charms those *poor* stockings had been subject to. And the band **dug in to** the fat and muscle of Harry's thigh, making a little bubble of peachy flesh stand out, and *oh Merlin he wants to sink his **teeth** into that leg and-*

Bending over to retrieve his other sock, Harry then graced Tom with a view of the most **wonderful**, ripe, firm, and tight-looking arse he has ever had the fortune to see. High and tight, those cheeky cheeks utterly ATE the fabric of Harry's pants, those bubbles big but certainly *not* flabby as they gently jiggled when Harry hopped up onto the stool.

*Sitonmyface, sitonmyface, sitonmyFUCKING **FACE**-* "Tom? Are you okay?"

Snapping back to reality, Tom blinked. Harry was looking at him in concern, Hedwig perched in his hair as they cocked their heads in unison.

"Of course," he replied with a grin. *No, I'm not*, he wanted to shout. *Your legs aren't wrapped around my head and that is a **crime**.* "I'm just surprised to see how far your weight has come along. Healer Parkinson will be happy to see your progress." *And I will be happy to be smothered by your thighs as I eat you out-*

"Oh, um, okay. It's just," Harry scuffed his foot on the smooth wood of the stool, Hedwig fluttering towards the bed. As his foot dug in, his leg tensed and Tom could *feel* a few neurons snap as he held himself back. "I feel *horrible* making yourself and Lady Malfoy spend so much on me. I don't think I could make it up to you," he peered out from under his eyelashes, the apples of his cheeks flushed a pretty pink.

*You can make it up to me by taking my name **and** my di-* "Don't worry about it." Selecting a soft lavender with emerald trimmed robe, he eyed it so he would have an excuse not to look at Harry and drool, before frowning in concentration as he debated trimming the gold lace ruffles at the neck, sleeves, and hem. "I have far more wealth than I will ever be able to use in my lifetime, and I've already arranged to repay Narcissa for her work." Humming in affirmation, he resized the robe slightly before flicking it towards Harry. With two sharp jabs, the fabric melted over his Consort before continuing to resize. Once the charm had run its course, he was delighted to see that it worked perfectly on Harry as a spring season fashion robe. He'll have to ask the Twilfit's to make it a permanent alteration.

Hopping off of the stool and giving a little spin, Harry took the time to admire his outfit for the day before going over to his side table. He took his time slipping on his jewelry (except for his ring, which he never parted with), so Tom went about selecting his own robes for the day. He was debating going with either a dark grey with silver piping or the deep purple with amethyst when Harry pipped up. "These ones," he flicked the hanger holding a set of jagua blue with dove grey and ebon accent robes. "I think you look nice in blue," he murmured shyly.

"Blue it is, then." Pulling the hanger out, he crushed his urge to smile wickedly; these robes buttoned up the back, requiring the wearer to either spell the buttons closed or to enlist another pair of hands. While he knows the spell to do up buttons, he doesn't wear this set often because the spell does them just a little *off*.

*But he has **Harry** to help...*

Slipping off his own nightshirt while taking extra care to flex his physique (disguising it behind stretching), he watched out the corner of his eye as Harry *blazed* before quickly looking away. Smirking to himself in satisfaction, he debated on using an underrobe before deciding against it; he wants Harry to get an up-close look at his back while buttoning him up, a back that he knows is quite nice due to comments he's received from past bedmates.

Stepping into his robe, he slid his arms into the sleeves. "Can you help me with the buttons? The spell can never get them *quite* right?" After a bit of rustling, he felt tugging at the small of his back. With each button Harry did up, Tom could feel light brushes of his thin fingers, and something deep inside him purred. He can easily imagine them spending the rest of their lives doing this, helping one another dress and undress, a quiet intimacy not found when indulging in the wants of the flesh.

Due to their height differences (Harry only being on the tall end of 5'3" in the old Imperial system while he himself stood at around 7'2"), he ended up kneeling so that the other could comfortably reach the last buttons. He smirked when he heard Harry curse his height, and then his eyes lidded as those same fingers pushed through his hair, trying to neaten it up. He hummed in bliss before frowning as Harry left for the bathroom, retrieving a brush, a comb, and a light styling pomade. He snickered at Tom's new perch.

During that short trip, Tom scooted the conjured stool from earlier over, adjusting the height so he could sit but still be low enough for Harry to fix his hair. What ended up happening was him sitting on a squat little chair with his long legs splayed out in front of him, like a parent having a tea party with their young child and sitting in a little chair meant for a four-year-old.

As Harry's snickering continued, Tom just raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him, causing the shorter man to choke on a snort, but he soon got the message. Walking between Tom's spread legs, Harry handed him the comb and pomade before he tackled the chocolaty waves with the brush. After a few moments, he gave a quick scalp massage, grunting in amusement when blue eyes closed and Tom's face went slack. "Even now, you turn to putty like a cat getting a pet," Harry murmured.

"Mhmm." He grunted in dismay when clever fingers left his locks, but they soon returned, covered in a thin layer of pomade. After pushing it through, Harry took back the comb, pushing Tom's hair back and away from his face instead of parting it in his trademark style.

After a few more minutes of futzing about, adding a bit more pomade here or crunching his curls there, Harry leaned back with a satisfied smile. "Whoever your parents were should get a medal," he murmured, tilting Tom's head here and there with a gentle touch on the chin. "You must have hundreds of admirers." Seeing the flat look on Tom's face, he paused. "...I take it you found out who your parents are?"

"Were."

Ah. Folding his arms around Tom's shoulders, Harry hugged the other to him, cradling his head in the hollow of his neck and shoulder. "Do you wish to talk about it?" Getting Tom to talk when he doesn't want to is like trying to pull teeth from a tiger. But twice as deadly.

Tom nuzzled into Harry's neck, breathing in the fresh non-scent of his bath kit and the warm, comforting smell that can only be described as Harry. *Home.* "Maybe later. Maybe never," he muttered. He doesn't want to scare off Harry after only just getting him back with the knowledge that he was a murderer at the tender age of sixteen. That was a rough age for him, and looking back on it with the life experiences he now has, he can't help but **cringe** at how 'edgy' he was. There are times he wishes he could go back, pull his younger self aside, and tell him how **stupid** he was being.

Or, better yet, how to find Harry so *he* could tell him how much of a dumbass he was.

But, knowing his lusty younger self, Harry may have been pinned to the nearest flat surface before being chained to his side.

Dropping a light kiss to Harry's pulse point, Tom reluctantly pulled back. The other looked down at him with a faint pink tinge on his cheeks, and while he wanted to deepen the color, not only did he vow, even if only to himself, to properly Court Harry, they do have an appointment at Gringotts and the goblins are *sticklers* for time. They wait for no one, neither man nor Minister. "We should get going. I planned to take you to a café for brunch before heading to the bank."

I STILL hate Apparition, Harry thought as Tom brought them to the point at the beginning of Diagon Alley, just to the left of the entrance from the *Leaky Cauldron*. It was a point only available to certain members and classes of the Ministry, traditionally used to expedite any necessary Ministry business in a timely manner, but outside of certain designated times, was free for personal use by said people.

Obviously, being the Minister, Tom has access, and being that he is *also* the 'Benevolent Dictator' of his country, will also see about granting Harry access, once he is cleared and tested for magic.

They were given a wide berth by the milling shoppers, many bowing and greeting them as Tom guided Harry along. Quite a few were gawking, many still in disbelief at how a man such as Gaunt, Lord Slytherin, and the *Minister*, one famed for being a hardarse and utterly ruthless, could be so soft towards another person. As the couple passed, the Minister tall and imposing, his Consort small and swamped in a fur-trimmed cloak that many recognize as being the Minister's **favorite**, bystanders stopped to whisper to each other. A few shot Harry dirty looks when they thought no-one was looking, envious that this no-name Potter bastard had snagged the most eligible bachelor in the whole Western world, while just as many stared at the green-eyed, ebon-haired beauty huddled by the Minister's side. A few hearts even stuttered as the Consort laughed at something the Dark Lord whispered in his ear, a sound that was human and young and full of good humor, although a few besotted fools would swear that it sounded like the ringing of bells.

Harry was enjoying this stroll much better than his last visit with Lady Malfoy. The crowd parted before them like the Red Sea to Moses, and he felt like he could actually *breathe* and *look* without suffocating. Stores were lined all higgly-piggly, and the cobbles beneath their feet were worn smooth by time. Across the Alley was a shop full of squawking birds, a wooden sign proclaiming it to be *Eyelop's Owl Emporium*. Perhaps they can stop in later, he would like to see about getting a proper stand and nesting box for Hedwig, and maybe thick gloves and leather guards for handling the other raptors; it would be good to have them on hand in case they need to be handled more than the standard letter pass-off.

Coming to the juncture of Diagon and Vertic, Tom led them to a restaurant whose facade was covered in blooming flowers and climbing ivy, the name *Avalon* written into gold metal calligraphy that floated over the wide-open and doorless entryway. The greenery continued inside, and magic of some sort opened up the space to resemble a castle fallen to ruin, nature gently taking back what had once been used by man. The ground level imitated that of a flagstone courtyard, not too unlike the one at the Demanse, with a 'ruined' staircase going up to a second half-floor, the rest taken up by a water curtain that flowed into a shallow, lazy stream that wound about the floor, dividing dining tables from one another. An illusory sun hung bright in the 'sky', shafts of golden light breaking through the trees and plants.

There was no host or checkstand, only a wooden door set into the undergrowth. Not stopping or hailing anyone, Tom led them up the stairs and to one of the many free rounded tables that sprouted from the ground on the second level. After helping Harry into his chair and setting his cloak aside, he spent a few moments watching the other look around in fascination.

"Seeing all of this really makes me want to hit a library or bookstore," Harry muttered. "It's definitely bigger on the inside than it should be. Einstein would have had a field day with this..."

Gently tapping the table, two delicate menus flared into being before floating to Tom's hands. "If we have enough time, we can certainly visit *Flourish and Blott's*. The Demanse library, sadly, doesn't have much in the way of modern beginners primers," he passed one menu over to Harry as he spoke. "And, Einstein? I wasn't aware you had been familiar with his work."

Looking down at the menu, Harry pursed his lips as he read. "I was always good with numbers, and his theories were actually pretty simple when you look at them. A lot of it is just simple logic and causation-based extrapolation of the 'press button A, get B outcome' thought experiment, but cranked up to the nth degree." Flipping the menu over, he tilted his head, "I read what I could between taking care of you kids, but it wasn't until you went off to school that I could really sink my teeth in." Sighing, he turned a plaintive look to Tom. "I *really* don't know where to start. The entire menu looks delish!"

Chuckling, Tom smiled at Harry's pout. "How about a sampler, with lemon water?" Accepting Harry's menu back, he conjured a quill and jotted a request in a menu's margin before tapping the stiff pieces of velum on the table. As he watched Harry buzz in delight at the simple dispellment, he leaned back into his chair with a thoughtful look on his face. "I'll send out for Einstein's work, along with other physics' and the like. Much about mathematics has advanced over the years, for both good and ill," reaching over to pour a cup of fresh, cool water from the jug that just appeared, Tom then slid a slice of Iranian Honey Lemon onto the rim before serving it to Harry. "I'll also see about acquiring arithmancy books. It's, essentially, magical math."

They chatted about mathematics and arithmancy, with Tom telling Harry about the similarities and differences between the two. After about fifteen minutes, the table expanded in size and nearly a dozen dishes popped into place. A satisfied buzz made itself known deep in Tom's belly as he saw Harry perk-up at the sight of things such as roasted quail, pork medallions in a herb and white wine sauce, asparagus wrapped in bacon before being baked in herb butter, and many more.

Yes, this is how it's meant to be, he thought as Harry used a dainty seafood fork to spear a baby shrimp swimming in butter. *And I will make it so.*

"Oh, *stop* grumping, Severus, and just accept the damn gift," Lucius rolled his eyes as his friend and godfather to his one and only child glared disdainfully at the wrapped package on the empty chair between them. He wanted to shake the Potioneer; the man has always been sensitive to gifts that he deemed 'expensive', but one would think by now that after over *twenty Merlin-damned years* he would be used to it!

Circe forbids somebody would like him.

After a few more moments of curling his lip up like someone had shoved a dirty nappy under his nose, Severus snorted before picking up his fork and returning to eating his Greek grilled chicken and pilaf.

Finally! Tucking back into his own meal, Lucius scooped a spoonful of his gazpacho. "By the way, Narcissa wants you over for dinner sometime soon. She wants someone she can complain about the current generation of Heirs and Heiresses with. I told her about what happened in the Minister's office." He graciously ignored the death rattle-like sigh Severus let out at that reminder. "We would also like to have you over for Ostara, after your events with the rest of your family, of course." Not getting a reply, he looked up. "Severus?" Seeing the

other looking across the room surreptitiously, he turned to see what caught the other's attention.

Oh. Their Lord was out on a brunch date with his paramour. And from what Lucius could see of the Consort at this distance, not only was he well on his way to being a shining beacon of health, his looks strongly favored that of a Potter, but just a smidge *off*. Something about the cheeks and brow? Maybe the jaw? He can't quite put his finger on it, and it irks him to no end. Knowing him, he'll end up shooting up straight in bed at 3 a.m. with a shouted answer and Narcissa will smack him for rudely awakening her.

"Oh, how *scandalous*," Lucius whispered as the Minister fed his Consort a bit of nibble from one of his plates. *And from a fork that had just been in his own mouth.* "Narcissa is going to kick herself for missing this." Off to the side and across the first floor, he watched as a young lady covered her face in a napkin and turned away, her shoulders shaking as she quietly cried.

"I still don't get why any of them thought they had a chance," Severus said silky, not bothering to keep his voice down but still maintaining a proper, indoor conversational tone. "He's been the Minister for nearly two decades and has been involved in government since before either of us was born. You would think the fact that he had never been in an exclusive relationship before now would have clued them in." *Honestly*, while the man had indulged in his desires like a tomcat and rubbed-up against anyone attractive and interested, he had always made it clear that he was not looking for a relationship.

Ordering a glass of syllabub, Lucius settled in to watch events around them unfold. The crying woman now was tugging on her dining partner's arm, trying to keep him in his chair. From the strong resemblance they shared, they may be siblings. A brother trying to defend his sister's honor, perhaps. Licking his spoon, he turned back to the second floor when his eyebrows drew up in surprise; the Minister had styled himself differently! Oho, perhaps his little lover had taken an interest in his appearance? Maybe, even, *dressed* their Lord!? *Oh, when Skeeter sees this!* The woman has been the foremost reporter on everything Lord Slytherin since she entered the news scene, giving everyone the lowdown on the designers of his robes, any changes he made to his cologne, and the one time he switched his provider of feeding rabbits from *Pericles Prey Providers* to the *Magical Menagerie* after receiving a sick rabbit in his stock for Nagini (where Skeeter had prattled on that this was a fine sign showing he would be a good father, if this is how he treated his snake).

But, while many things about Lord Slytherin can and will change, he has *never* altered his signature hair part. It is as iconic as the Malfoy bloneness and Dumbledore's eye wateringly-bright robes. Young, fashionable wizards go to great lengths to get the right type of curl put into their hair and ensure the most precise part possible with use of a straight-edge. An ENTIRE sector of the beauty industry has built-up around the sophisticated and classic 'do, with actual 'wars' breaking out between different barbershops.

And it's all about to come tumbling down. But, what a way to go! Such a simple change, just pushing back the hair, makes the Dark Lord look so *different*, and puts his facial structure on great display. Without the chocolate curls to frame his face, you are treated to an unfettered view of an aristocratic and sultry face. Lucius estimates that once this new,

unfettered view of their Lord hits the papers, many men are going to be booking appointments with Cosmetic Healers to get even just a *hint* of sharp cheekbones, fierce brow ridge, or even a **dimple**.

"You and Narcissa are **horrible**," Severus sighed out, resigning himself to a future filled with gossip, speculation, and scheming involving the man who is literally his boss and the bit of jailbait he decided to take-up with.

Is it too late to convert to Catholicism? I fear only the muggle God can help me now.

Rosy-cheeked and smiling, Harry leaned into Tom's side as they ascended the stairs of Gringotts Bank. Feeling a bit sleepy with a belly full of good food, he didn't pay much attention to the outside appearance of the building except to note that it looked like a crooked version of an ancient Roman temple.

The inside, though, was a different story. It **demand**ed to be looked at, with diamond and gold chandelier's hanging from the ceiling, black and white swirled marble making up the floors and walls with Ionic columns lining the main walkway, whose floor was covered by a complex and sumptuous Persian rug. The ceiling was left open, covered by a glass dome that refracted the light streaming in and bouncing off of the chandeliers and casting prismatic splotches around the massive hall.

Tom guided them past the queues of people waiting to be served by *goblins* at the mahogany teller counter, and to a tall set of gold double doors. Reaching into a pocket, he pulled out a platinum and blue-diamond medieval-style key, the bow and bit made of the dark blue stone while the shaft was composed of the clear metal. Inserting it into the keylock, he opened it, revealing a simple platform and a massive cavern, with a railroad track and a **minecart** of all things waiting at the edge.

He blushed as Tom helped him into the metal contraption, partially in embarrassment and partially in shocked arousal. He was too short to easily step over the cart's edge (he's eighteen! An adult! And he can't climb into what is basically a metal box on wheels!), forcing Tom to lift him inside, reminding Harry that Tom was an adult. A tall, fit... *very fit*, adult.

He lifted me with one arm-, nope. Not going there. Bad Harry!

They had to snuggle together, and he had to choke back his sniggering as Tom cursed and growled as he tried to get in, his legs so long he ended-up folding them up to his chest. "I swear, those bastards do this on purpose," he huffed before shooting Harry a glare as he snorted. "And if you tell *anyone*-!"

"Your secret's safe with me!"

Rolling his eyes, Tom then inserted his vault key into a slot sticking out of the cart between them. With a jolt, the cart slowly clacked forward, and Harry's eyes bugged as he saw them come to a nearly vertical drop. "Tom," he whimpered.

Tom chuckled darkly.

"Um, is this? Tom? What's-?"

"Payback's a bitch, *Harry*," Tom purred.

Jerking to a halt with a loud, metallic clang, Harry squeaked before clinging to Tom's arm. His breathing sped up as the cart slowly inched forward with a succession of jerks, each one sending Harry's heart rate skyrocketing. "I don't like this, Tom! Can we-" he cut himself off with a scream as they dropped, Tom's **evil** laughter mingling with Harry's terror as they hurtled into darkness.

"Tom! Tommy! Tha' was feckin' bril! When can we do tha' again!?"

Tom pouted as Harry bounced on his toes, hands gripping the edge of the cart as Tom climbed out. After the first few seconds, Harry had lightened up, soon whooping in glee as they twisted and turned deeper and deeper into the Gringotts vault system. After the first two minutes, Harry had had the *gall* to release his hold on Tom's arm, eyes wide as he looked at their surroundings, at one point even shout-asking '*is that a **dragon**!?*' when they passed a tunnel spouting white-hot flames.

He had quite liked Harry clinging to him.

Before them stood a very large, and very old, round door. It was circular in shape and made of metal and stone, gears and pipes littering the face. Veins of precious metals and gems shot through it, glimmering in the flames of the torches that lit themselves upon their arrival. In the center and on eye-level was a coiled stone snake, made of malachite and copper, curled up like a python using itself as a pillow and blanket.

Standing before it, Tom Spoke; **~I bring New Family, so that they may be granted use of Our Vaults.~** Turning to Harry, he saw the other looking up at him in nervous anticipation, his face still red from their ride. "Say hello."

~Hello? It's nice to meet you.~ Ignoring Tom's snort, Harry reached out a hand and caressed the head of the snake. ~You are very beautiful. Whoever made you did a good job.~ If he didn't know any better, Harry would say the snake was preening.

~**Move aside.**~ As the snake slithered away with a sound of stone rubbing on stone, Tom pulled out his key. As the snake's tail pulled away, a keyhole was revealed. Inserting the key and twisting, a loud hiss, like steam in a pipe but much louder, rang out. A loud and low grinding rang out, and the massive stone door slowly slid to the side. Bright light shined out, first as a sliver of a crescent before getting wider. Harry had to close his eyes, the light was so bright, but after a few moments he opened them and gasped.

The revealed vault was enormous, so large and deep he had nothing to compare it to. Light that shined from nowhere and everywhere illuminated piles upon piles of gold and silver

coins, piles of ingots in materials that Harry couldn't name, jewelry was strewn across ancient and antique furniture and statues, and piles of rolled-up rugs and batts of fabric.

And that was just the main chamber! He can see more branching off! Harry jumped at the feel of Tom's hand on his lower back, blushing hard at being caught gawking.

Following the other in, he stood awkwardly in the clear space that was just inside the door, keeping his hands behind his back so he didn't reach out and upset a pile of precariously-leaning coinage. Tom had continued forward, heading toward a wooden stand that held rows of keys in different precious metals, with one peg empty. Beside it was another stand, this one holding an old book.

While Tom did whatever he came to do, Harry looked around in amazement, and felt lacking.

Opening the Slytherin Family Ledger, Tom flipped to the page containing his House's current status. At the top, it listed himself as the Head, along with the date he took ownership of his Family. Below it were blank lines, each to be used to denote things such as a Spouse, Consort, Heirs and Allies. All were currently blank, and had been for over forty years.

Today, that is changing.

Summoning a quill, he penned '*Harry James Potter*' into the Consort slot. Deep inside, in addition to his connection to his Family magic, he felt a new thread take hold. It was new, and weak, but it still shined with so much potential. Potential that settled him.

Turning to the key rack, he selected the key hanging next to the peg that once held his. And just like his key, Harry's was the same but made out of gold and Imperial jade. He held it in his hand, fingers curling around the shaft; this was a step he never imagined taking. He had thought that, if he ever did marry, he would at most set up an allowance account. A generous one, yes, but an allowance all the same. They would not be able to enter his funds into legally-binding agreements and transactions, or siphon funds away for nefarious purposes, or petition for a divorce and be granted a sizable sum of his assets. It would have been a good and proper Pureblood thing to do, and of course his spouse would be free to engage in whatever economic activities they wished and gain their own money through their career of choice.

But now he has Harry. Someone he never thought he would have, but does. And he **trusts** Harry as he never has anyone else before. He knows the other would judiciously guard their assets, and not waste it on lavish and frivolous things (even though Tom has vaults upon vaults of wealth, riviling most magical and muggle ultrarich families). That he would use it as a tool to keep them safe and content, to be *happy*. Giving Harry this key is making him Tom's **equal**.

And I hope he knows that.

"Harry."

Twisting on the ball of his foot, Harry looked at Tom. The other man had a serious look on his face, his blue eyes looked onto Harry's own green and gold ones. In his clenched fist was a key that matched Harry's jewelry, and Harry's gut was telling him that something fundamental was about to change between them.

As Tom walked towards him, Harry searched the others' faces, hoping for some clue for what is about to happen. His stomach flip-flopped as Tom went to one knee, and a voice in the back of Harry's mind giggled hysterically about marriage proposals before he shoved it into the corner.

"Harry," Tom said *sotto voce* . Grasping Harry's right hand, the one with his Slytherin ring, Tom placed the key into his palm before using his now-empty hand to close Harry's fingers around it. "I want you to have this vault key. Everything I can do, and have access to, is yours as well."

Heart in his throat, Harry shoved that now screaming little voice even deeper inside. "Tom, I-, why? This is..." he looked up and froze as blue eyes pinned him in place, freezing the rest of the words in his throat.

"You are my equal in every way. Better than me, in many respects," Tom murmured, carefully tracking each microexpression that darted across Harry's face. "I know that you would treat my, *our*," he corrected himself, "money well."

Harry pushed out a strained chuckle, turning away as his mind started connecting different dots at lightspeed. "I don't see how I can be your equal, let alone better. I'm not magic enough to have received a letter. I doubt the public would tolerate a magicless partner for their head of state." His eyes felt hot and he jumped as a large hand cupped his cheek, turning his face. His heart thumped in his chest at the raw, vulnerable look the man who was once his demon child sported.

"I'm not a good or kind man," Tom whispered. "You know this. Everything I have I got through blood and death." He rubbed his thumb over the cheekbone under it, watching sooty eyelashes tremble like a thirsting man watches water flow. "The world I have now is one I spent the better part of my adult life crafting. Tearing down old and rotting institutions and building-up something new, something **better**, *forcing* much-needed change upon a society that let itself stagnant while muggles surged forward at a breakneck pace." Leaning forward, he brought their foreheads together. "Do you remember those fiction books you would read us? About cities on the moon?" He felt more than saw Harry nod. "On July 20, 1969, muggles landed on the moon," he chuckled as he felt Harry gasp in shock. "The rockets the Germans had engineered were transformed, and not even a generation later man was in space, orbiting the earth and walking on the moon. And wizards didn't even *know*. The last great, magical innovation occurred during the time of Queen Victoria, and it was a *fucking hair tonic*." He gritted his teeth in anger before letting the rage leave him in a breath. "I am the one responsible for molding and shaping their world. If I want you as a partner, they will bow their heads." Squeezing the hand still in his grasp, he tilted his head before dropping a chaste kiss to the soft lips below his.

"If you'll have me?"

A Deal with the Devil

Harry blinked as Tom brought them back to the brightly-lit lobby of Gringotts. He felt... floaty. Disconnected, like his head was stuffed full of wool and his face still felt warm, and the burn of Tom's hands and lips still weighed on him, burning like his skin had been kissed by coals. His face went candy-apple red as Tom's promise echoed through his mind;

*"You don't need to answer me now, and regardless of your decision, you will **always** have a home in Slytherin Demanse," Tom murmured against Harry's skin as his nose drifted over his cheek before burying itself behind his ear. Harry's stomach jolted and his groin stirred as Tom growled into him. "But know this; I will do **everything** I can to make you enthusiastically join me in my bed." He nipped the earlobe below his lips, chuckling as Harry jolted. "I will **touch** you," his hands found their place on Harry's hips, slowly skimming around his thighs and back, one hand grabbing the tender and sensitive area where the back of the thigh joins the soft, upper-inner junction, the sudden move making Harry gasp. "I will **tease** you," he skimmed the fingers of his free hand up Harry's robe-clad chest, the nail of his index finger dragging over his nipple and wrenching a whimper from Harry's throat. "And I will **taste** you," he breathed into Harry's ear before sealing his lips against his neck, startling a cry from him as he sucked and bit the sweet skin under his mouth.*

Harry shook himself out of the memory, forcing himself to **not** think about the heavy weight of Tom's hand on the small of his back, the pinky and ring fingers drawing light circles just scant millimeters above his rear. Shifting, he heard the gentle clink of his chatelaine rustling, the vault key attached to one of the leads shifting from its place in his pocket.

Emerging from the bank, Tom led them towards Vertic Alley. Harry's shoulders relaxed as they left Diagon, the wall of noise produced from the main Alley falling away. They passed *Avalon*, and Tom stopped them to greet two men exiting the restaurant, one pale blond and a taller brunet. "Lucius, Severus." Bringing his arm up to curl around Harry's shoulders, he conducted introductions. "Harry, this is Lord Lucius Malfoy and Master Potioneer Severus Snape-Prince. Gentlemen, this is Harry Potter."

"Hello," Harry held out his hand for a shake. "You must be Lady Malfoy's husband. She has been good to me, and I hope you know how lucky you are to have her." His lips quirked as Lord Malfoy preened at the compliment to his wife and Master Potioneer Snape-Prince just huffed a put-upon sigh. "And I imagine being a Master Potioneer is no small feat. Congratulations on all of your hard work, sir."

"Indeed, it is not," Tom stated. "Lord Malfoy is on the Hogwarts Board of Governors and serves on the Domestic Finance's Committee, while Master Snape-Prince is the Lead Potioneer at the Ministry, overseeing not just the mass brews for Saint Mungo's, but also conducting research and development."

Harry whistled. "Sounds pretty dangerous! I remember Tom complaining about classmates flicking extra ingredients into his cauldron during his First year. I can't imagine how much

more dangerous someone in your position must have it."

Lord Malfoy and Master Snape-Prince shared a look, but it was so fast Harry didn't have time to interpret it. "It is quite dangerous, indeed," Master Snape-Prince stated. "Although I fear the political side is by far moreso." Both blinked in surprise as Harry snorted.

"Yeah, I imagine so. Especially if Tommy-boy is your boss." The looks both sported at Harry's nickname for the darkest wizard to grace their shores was nothing short of comical. "Does he still have a habit of hissing like a teakettle when he gets bad news?" Harry grinned like the cheeky devil he is as Tom just sighed. "Don't answer that. He probably still throws temper tantrums when things don't go his way. The next time he has a fit, just let me know and I'll stick his nose in the corner."

"*Harry*," Tom growled from between gritted teeth.

"Yes, *Tommy*," Harry peered up from under his eyelashes, smiling cherubically.

Lucius and Severus just looked at the boy who referred to the Dark Lord's towering rages as simply as 'temper tantrums'. While not as regular an occurrence as they once were, their Lord's *fits* had resulted in a few bodies that needed disposal.

And his flippant quip about noses and corners? If he's this casual about the Minister's murderous tendencies, then what does that say about the *Consort*!?

Both men straightened-up as the contest of wills between Lord Slytherin and his diminutive Consort came to an end, with their Lord just looking away with a huff.

He... *conceded*!?

"We will let you return to your activities. I have still yet to key Harry into my Townhouse before we visit some of the shops. Harry?"

"It was nice to meet you both. Perhaps, Lord Malfoy, if you have the time, I can take lessons on money management with you? Tom may have no worries about the money ever running out, but I'm not so inclined, and most of my knowledge deals with muggle funds." Upon receiving an affirmative, he smiled widely before giving a little wave, "then I hope you both have a nice day!"

Watching as their Lord and the Lord Consort continue on their way, both Lucius and Severus let out relieved sighs. Neither man knew *quite* what they were expecting, but Mr. Potter **certainly** wasn't it. And-

"Did he just ask for *financial management* lessons?" Severus's incredulous tone was thick enough to get buttered.

"Indeed, he did."

Wheels and cogs turned in their minds, and both came to the same conclusion simultaneously.

"Money laundering." **"Money laundering."**

Looking at each other, they turned on their respective heels and Disapparated to the Manor. There is a new player on the field, and both men know that Narcissa is the only one with any knowledge about Consort Potter who can tell them what to expect.

Stopping at the front door of a stately townhouse, Tom pulled out his wand before gently taking Harry's left hand in his. "We'll only be here for a brief moment, but I wish to key you into the wards. I use this place primarily for entertaining guests and conducting personal business, but what is mine is yours."

Gently running the tip of his yew wand along the fleshy muscle just below Harry's thumb, a shallow cut followed. Gently squeezing his Consort's hand, Tom then pressed the much smaller palm against the door. After a few seconds Harry squealed and jumped back, his hair standing up on end as though he had been hit with a lightning hex. "Tom, th' bloody door licked me, it did!" Seeing the look he received, Harry's cheeks pinked in an embarrassed pout. "It felt as though summat had a huge tongue an' gave me a good lickin'!" Catching sight of Tom's leer, Harry blazed when he realised the connotation of his statement and Tom's proclamation in Gringotts of what he wants to do to him. "Not like that, you horned-up tomcat!"

Tom just snorted in amusement before looking back down at Harry's hand which was still in his grasp. Leaning over, he dropped a kiss onto the shallow cut, pushing a bit of his magic into the wound to speed-up the healing process. He smirked into the soft skin under his lips at the quiet moan his Consort let out, filing away the new little tidbit about Harry: magically sensitive. Standing back up, he motioned for Harry to open the door. Just as he anticipated, the moment Harry's hand touched the knob, the lock clicked and the door swung open. Nodding in approval, he pulled the door back closed. "You'll be able to see more of the place on monday, when the Twilfit's come to do a private fitting."

As they continued further down Vertic Alley, passed the residential areas, Harry saw that it was similar to Diagon, but it clearly catered to the Upper and Noble classes. Clothing shops, art galleries, an architect's office, even a small nursery bursting with flowers and plants of all different sizes.

As they were preparing to cross a small access lane, a young woman hailed them. "My Lord? Sir?" She was sitting at a small café table, but got up and crossed Vertic in a trot. Harry could see she carried a file folder of some sort. "Oh, Sir, I am so sorry to bother you while you're out, but I am at my wits end!"

Tom waved her off. "Ms. Solia, I trust that this is a serious issue, if you're willing to call upon me whilst out for a pleasure stroll."

"Oh, it is, but," she wrung her hands as she bit her lip, her eyes darting between Tom and Harry. She clearly felt bad for interrupting them.

"I'm sure it's something you can both solve easily. I'll just purchase a cuppa and have a sit down, while you two work it out." Harry cocked his head, "any recommendations?"

Less than ten minutes later, Harry had a cup of wildberry tea and a scone and had parked himself at a little table on the edges of the café's outdoor seating area. Right next to him was a large stone planter box that divided the café from the shop next to it, and butterflies and bumblebees lightly bounced from flower to flower.

It was as Harry was inspecting the flowers (something similar to a *Bleeding Heart*, but the white inner petals shined like actual **tears**) when someone joined his table. Looking up, he saw it was a young man, dark-haired and green-eyed. He was handsome, in a delicate way, as odd as that sounded. He wore rich robes in silver with navy piping, and wore a heavy gold medallion around his neck.

"Hello," Harry greeted. The stranger just sneered at him, in return. "Right, feck you, too, arsehole." Mr. Rude gaped at him in utter shock. "The feck were you expectin'? A damn parade? Obviously, your parents didn't love you enuff to teach you some bleedin' manners," Harry sipped his tea as his unwanted guest sputtered.

If there's one thing Harry hates the **most** in a person, it is a lack of *manners*.

"I don't know what he sees in you," the Mannerless Man shot out.

"Who?" Harry has no idea who this arsehole is, so he hasn't the foggiest on who he's blathering about.

"*Him*. The Minister. Why would he want someone like **you** instead of a Black, a *proper* Pureblood?"

What the hell is this guys prob-, *oooooh*. "Bitter ex?" Harry smirked behind his teacup as he sipped his drink. It was a pleasant blend, not sour or bitter like some berry-based tea's can be.

Black gritted his teeth, grinding them so hard Harry could hear them creak. But like water, Black's face smoothed out as it took on a haughty expression. "It must bite, surely, to know that you are *far* from the first to grace our Lord's bed. In **fact**, when the news came out about your involvement with him, a drove of his past lovers threw themselves upon his office floor." Leaning back in his chair, Black over exaggeratedly looked at his nails, buffing them on his chest. "A shame, but I shan't worry for much longer. He'll have you, find you lacking, and discard you."

Harry just laughed, not a joyful one, but an ugly one that ended in a snort. Black just looked at him in disgust as Harry wiped his mouth on a napkin with a chortle. "Says the bloke who got kicked to the curb, to the man who has Tom' **vault** key." Harry smiled with a hint of tooth and held-up his key to Tom's vault while the other stared at him in a mix of

dismay, incredulity, and rage. Just to rub it in, Harry jangled the key on the end of the chatelaine lead. "Also, he added me to his townhouse wards."

Black shook in rage, his lips pressed into a thin line like he had just sucked a lemon. "That doesn't change the fact that he's had others! Ones undoubtedly more skilled in the bedroom than you," he bit out.

"Of course he has. The man's in his *seventies*. That's a **long** time to remain 'chaste'," Harry snorted before biting into his scone. "To expect ANYONE to be celibate for that long is just cruel. Although," he muttered as he stared at Black, "he could have been a bit more selective."

With a sound like a cat hissing, Black jumped out of his chair, grabbing Harry's arm and wrenching the short man out of his seat. The sudden movement tipped both of their chairs, and Harry's teacup rolled off the side of the table. The commotion drew the attention of a fair few people, many wondering what was happening before their eyes widened at the sight of a Black manhandling Lord Slytherin's Consort.

"Listen here, you little slut," Black growled. "I don't know what you did, but you're going to release his Lordship-"

"HARRY!"

Turning, Harry saw Bellatrix striding towards them, Jasper up in her arms. Jasper was smiling widely, waving his little hand. He was as happy as a clam to see Harry again, and he was letting all and sundry know.

In contrast to her son, Bellatrix didn't look happy. In fact, she looked *furios*. Snarling like a wolf on the hunt, Harry could feel the air around her crackle. People literally jumped out of her way as she stormed towards them.

"*Lysandus*," she hissed.

The now-named Lysandus let go of Harry's arm as though he had been burned. He turned to run, but only got a few steps away before a guttural growl rolled out and a hand with a vice-like grip wrapped around his bicep and twisted him. He fell with a shout, and when he looked up all he could see was a face of twisted fury filling his vision.

As Bellatrix dealt with Lysandus, Harry plucked Jasper from his mummy's arm. Stepping away from the scene, he felt little arms wrap around his neck before Jasper plopped a kiss on his cheek. "Hi, Harry!"

"Hello, Jasper," Harry muttered into Jasper's soft hair. "Are you okay? Your mummy looks pretty mad." Jasper just giggled before burying his face into Harry's neck with a muttered 'I'm fine'. Feeling a hand on his back, he looked up and saw Tom.

"Did he hurt you," Tom asked in a tight voice.

Harry was hesitant to answer. While Lysandus had certainly acted out of line, Harry fears what the other will face. Tom looked *furios*, murderous, even. "No, um, I'm fine. More startled, than anything."

He must have taken too long to answer, because Tom's face twisted into something hateful. Stalking towards Bellatrix, he didn't hesitate to bring his yew wand to the fore. Before he could cast anything, Harry darted forward and grabbed his wandhand, ripping it to the side. As Tom's face twisted towards his, blue eyes wild, Harry's own locked onto his.

They stayed like that for what felt like an eternity, both breathing hard, with Tom determined to **hurt** Lysandus for daring to touch Harry, and Harry as equally as determined to stop him. The crowd that had gathered to watch stood with baited breath. Many are old enough to remember when their Minister had walked as Voldemort, the man who had crushed the old ministry under his heel before reshaping it. Consort or no, will Harry Potter walk away unscathed?

Exhaling heavily, Tom stayed his wand before pulling Harry (and by default Jasper) close, burying his nose into his Consort's hair as the crowd breathed a sigh of relief. "Bella," he called.

"Yes, my Lord," she piped up, partially confused but fully gleeful.

"Summon Lord Black and his Heir to my Townhouse. There is a discussion to be had." Jabbing his wand towards Lysandus, heavy ropes snaked out of the end before wrapping around the disobedient Black. "And tell them that that is an *order*."

Tittering in glee, Bellatrix swished her wand a few times before flicking twice. A little cloud formed at the tip before it swirled and darted off, sailing high above the alley.

Pulling back from Harry, Tom fished in his robe before pulling out an envelope made from thick cardstock. "This is the voucher the LeStrange's got for you. The shop is just a few up Vertic. Why don't you and Jasper see what sort of trouble you can get up to?"

Accepting the envelope, Harry passed it to Jasper to hold onto as he surreptitiously looked at Tom. The other man, while his face was in a carefully controlled blank expression, was anything *but*. His shoulders were still stiff, and his hand had moved robotically as he had pulled out the envelope.

Taking a gamble, Harry stood up on his tippy-toes and curled his free hand around Tom's neck, bringing the taller man down a bit. When he was close enough, Harry dropped a kiss onto his cheek, and he felt a great amount of tension bleed out. A few of the more romantically-inclined bystanders cooed at the sight. "Don't be too long. I may end up buying the whole shop," he quipped. Getting an absentminded hum in answer, Harry jogged Jasper higher up on his hip. "Say bye to mummy, Jasper. She looks like she'll be working hard. Maybe you can help me pick out a gift for her, hm?"

Watching Harry walk away, Tom's face twisted into a sneer as he straightened up. "Bella," he snapped. With a gesture, she levitated Lysandus, and all three made their way to Tom's Townhouse. The door jumped open, revealing mint green walls and ebony wood doorways and accent panels. Entering his public study, he sat behind his desk while Bella dropped Lysandus unceremoniously into a chair, giggling sadistically.

Shortly thereafter, the Floo off to the side chimed. Nodding at Bella, the witch skipped towards it while humming a nonsensical tune, pulling down a lever that stuck out of the dark brickwork. With a dull metallic rub and hiss, green flames lit up before spinning, spitting out two men, one after the other.

"Minister Gaunt! How can I help?" Lord Sirius Black's tone was anything but enthusiastic. Tom didn't bother to hide his sneer at the man; the current Black Lord has been a thorn in his side from day one, and he would much prefer doing business with Lord Black's younger brother and Heir, Regulus Black.

"My Lord," Heir Black inclined his head in greeting.

"Bella," Tom nearly hissed, folding his hands on his desk so he doesn't reach out and **choke** Lord Black for the indolent look he was currently wearing. "Why don't you... *inform*, Lord and Heir Black, about what happened?"

Both men tensed as Bella let out a high giggle. "Widdle Wysandus put his *filthy* handsy-wandsy's on our Lord's Consort." She giggled again when both men went pale, Sirius grimacing. "The only reason he's not **dead** is because Consort Slytherin is a soft-touch."

"We are thankful for the intervention that Consort Slytherin provided," Regulus stated when Sirius stayed silent. He sideeyed both his brother and younger cousin, "House Slytherin, of course, is due recompense. Is there a price Lord Slytherin has in mind?" The sudden and sharp grin that sprouted on Lord Slytherin's face reminded Regulus of a shark, and he swallowed hard.

"I can think of a few things..."

A little brass bell rang daintily as Harry and Jasper stepped into the shop. It was an open, brightly-lit one, with wide-open picture windows displaying skeins of yarn, finished projects, and fibre tools for sale. A sign over the door had declared the shop to be *Fabulous Fibres*, matching the name in gold calligraphy on the cardstock voucher.

Plush carpet covered the floor, charmed to slowly go through the colors of the rainbow. Cubes and displays lined the walls and created little islands of squishy goodness throughout, and there were two large tables where people of all ages sat and knitted, crocheted, or embroidered their projects while chatting over tea and snacks.

Setting Jasper down, he grabbed a stiff cloth basket from a pile near the door, looking around and trying to decide where to start. Jasper had zoomed over to a display packed with yarns in different shades of purple, so Harry followed the excited boy over.

"Harry! Can you make me more socks?" Jasper hopped on his toes as he looked up, dark eyes big as he begged.

Looking inside the voucher, Harry saw it was made out in the sum of a thousand galleons, a princely sum. "How about you help me pick some colors for some projects? And I'll make you more than just some socks?" Smiling as Jasper let out a little 'yay!', the boy didn't hesitate to scoop out a whole row of sock and fingering weight yarns before dumping them in Harry's basket. "Slow down, now! We should look at colors other than purple." At Jasper's nod, Harry followed behind the little boy as he examined each and every skein he could see from his short height, at times pulling out a few he liked before setting them in Harry's basket. At random little coo's rang out as the other shoppers watched the procession.

"Hello." Looking up from Jasper solemnly petting two different colors of creamy white yarn with an intense look of concentration on his face, Harry's eyes met that of a young woman, looking to be in her mid-twenties. She had strawberry-blond hair and blue eyes, and was quite a ways into a pregnancy. "I'm Felicia Bell, co-proprietor of the shop. You must be Harry." At Harry's inquiring look, she laughed. "Lady LeStrange had stormed through here babbling about someone making her Jassy some socks, while her husband had quietly asked to purchase a voucher."

"Ah, yes," Harry blushed, seeing Jasper out the corner of his eye try to hop-up and pull down a bright scarlet yarn. "Let me get that for you, Jasper!" Picking it up and passing it over, he ran his hand through Jasper's hair as the boy intensely investigated this newest choice.

Felicia giggled, "Lady LeStrange rarely lets her son out of her sight. She must trust you."

"She and Tom are taking care of some sudden business." Feeling a skein of lace-weight yarn that felt incredibly soft, he frowned. "The voucher was a thank-you for whipping up a pair of socks, and an apology for destruction of some materials. Which was hardly necessary!" Spying Jasper trying to roll into a basket of display yarn, Harry shot out, "Jasper, no. Why don't you help me find a nice green yarn?" Watching the precocious toddler dash over to a rack holding skeins of emerald green yarn, Harry sighed. "I apologize for any mess he makes, and will help clean it up. I had forgotten how fast children at this age could be."

"Oh, no worries," Felicia waved him off. "Quite a few Lords and Ladies bring their squeakers to *Knit Nite's*, so we had charms installed to help keep things tidy." She stopped as Jasper brought over two different skeins of Aran weight in different greens. Once Harry pointed at one, he dropped the other and dashed back to get more. The abandoned skein wasn't even sitting on the ground for longer than thirty seconds before it zoomed back to its spot. "Dead handy, that."

"Thank you, Jasper," Harry said when the child brought over nearly every skein of the green yarn Harry had picked. "Do you think you can help me pick another color to go with this? I want to make a nice sweater for my Tom, and could use the help!" Getting an excited 'yes!', Harry turned back to Felicia. "Can you show me where your needles are? And can you recommend any good books? Particularly ones for sweaters?"

Linking her arm with his, Felicia waddled over to their notions display wall. "So, we have needles made from wood, bone, metal, glass, and chitin! Which ones do you want to see, first?"

Smug about the deal he had secured from Lord Black in return for not turning one of his family members inside out, Tom secured his Townhouse before heading over to *Fabulous Fibres*, Bella hot on his heels as she hummed.

To be honest, Tom has no idea what to make of her. It's fairly public knowledge that she's been wanting into his bed for years, but she has absolutely no issue with Harry's presence. She knows that Harry's his Consort, even announced it during their meeting with the Blacks. So why isn't she throwing a fit over it?

Did Harry making her son a pair of socks endear him to her? No, there has to be more to it than that...

Coming to the shop door, he opened it before beckoning Bella before him. Call him old fashioned, but Harry had ensured he learned his manners as a young child and he wasn't going to let a little thing such as changing times stop him.

Ducking inside, he took a few moments to search his errant Consort out, finding him sat at a table with many other patrons. He had little Jasper in his lap, the child napping while Harry and the other's chatted away, Harry's hands shooting back and forth as he worked on a pair of socks, two different strands of yarn in his hands as he did so.

"-not that I don't disagree, Heir Golden-Mane, but really, think about it," Harry stated. "What incentive do squibs have to stay in the magical world? If the facts you quoted are correct, then they have nothing to look forward to with such high unemployment rates."

Oh. He had forgotten that Heir Baldur Golden-Mane came to the shop twice weekly. While not a full blood supremacist, he didn't go out of his way to make things any easier for non-purebloods and squibs.

Golden-Mane was actually sitting back in his chair, arms crossed as he **looked** at Harry. Their little bubble only had him, Harry, and a few Lesser Heirs and Heiresses, but Tom could see Dowager Lady Longbottom listening in from the end of the table. "And what do you suggest we do, hm," Golden-Mane barked. "Just give anyone who asks a job, regardless of their qualifications!?"

"No, you dolt," Harry shot back, brandishing an empty double-pointed knitting needle at the older man while a few listeners snickered. "What I *am* saying is that Magical Britain needs to get its priorities straight. Does *every job* require a full Hogwarts education? HMM!? Is it a requirement for, say, a shop clerk to know how to block a blasting curse? Or for an accountant to be able to transform a teapot into a tangerine?" A few listeners chimed in, with one woman muttering 'he does have a point, Bal'.

Golden-Mane huffed. "I conceded that no, an **accountant** doesn't need to know Transfiguration in order to do their job, but a clerk CERTAINLY needs to be able to defend their shop!"

"Baldur, when was the last time a shop clerk took down a damn dark wizard," Gordon Lightfoot, a middle-age wizard with a MagicMail arm (and the inventor of MagicMail) demanded from Golden-Mane. "Expecting a damn clerk to provide security beyond catching shoplifters for two-hundred galleons bi-weekly is ludicrous!"

As Golden-Mane and Lightfoot started squabbling, Harry readjusted Jasper before turning towards a young pregnant witch. "I swear, magic is not the be-all, end-all. There's always going to be something that a person does better. Just give a person that job so that a witch or wizard can be freed up to focus on something more important." They both nodded while watching Golden-Mane and Lightfoot start to get more animated, only piping down when Harry shushed them with a pointed look at Jasper.

"Jassy," Bella cooed as she slowly slipped her son from Harry's lap. The child scrunched up his face, grunting at being disturbed before falling back into his nap.

"Darling," Tom called, bringing Harry's attention away from the LeStranges. "Have you found everything you're interested in?" At Harry's blushing nod, he held out his arm, "we should get going, then. I've had enough excitement for the day."

"I'll get you rung up, then," the pregnant witch said, heaving herself out of her chair with a bit of help from Harry. "I'll talk to hubby about seeing if we can find anything like you were describing." Shuffling behind her counter, she started tallying-up Harry's purchases, and Tom raised an eyebrow at the amount of not just yarn, but books and needles Harry was buying, as well. "The muggle crystal crafters, Swarovski, are the only ones I can think of that do that, but I think that there are a few Czech wizarding families who do so, as well. Oh! And one in Vienna!" Once everything was counted and rung, the witch *Conjured* a linen bag, and with a few swishes had everything shrunk and flying inside. "But, Lord Slytherin may be able to come up with a list of names for a possible commission. He did recently have a new table made for his Townhouse, correct," she directed her last statement towards Tom.

He looked down at Harry, in his spot under Tom's arm. "I take it you want some woodwork done?" At Harry's nod, he hummed. "We'll talk over dinner. Depending on what you have in mind, we may need to go with a different carpenter."

"Aaaand, your total is 3,274 galleons, 20 sickles, and 7 knuts," the witch chirped brightly. And she has every reason to, Tom estimates that she's just made a full week's-worth of sales in one transaction.

Passing over the voucher, Harry then readied his vault key for the rest owed. Tapping the receipt, just like Narcissa did at Twilfit's, it duplicated after accepting his charge. "Thank you, Felicia. Especially with that pattern recommendation! I'm excited to try it out." Accepting his purchases, Harry followed Tom towards the door, waving good-byes to the other knitters at the tables as Bella propped the door open.

"Was my Jassy a good boy? What am I saying, of course he was," Bella cooed.

Harry beamed at her. "He was an excellent little assistant. I promised to make him a few things for his help. Would it be okay for me to send a hawk, later in the week?" Watching her buzz, Harry took it as an assent.

Coming to the Diagon Alley Apparition point, Bella and Jasper disappeared first, leaving just Tom and Harry. Taking it for the opportunity it was, Tom wrapped his arms around Harry, bringing him obscenely close before spinning them away.

Sitting in the Private Lounge of Princemoor Townhouse, Severus and the Malfoy's were enjoying after-dinner drinks when a polite-sounding knock rang through the room. Excusing himself, Severus left the room for a few moments just to return with Regulus Black.

Lucius watched with a discerning eye as Severus all but shoved Regulus onto the couch Severus had just been sat at, before heading over to the wetbar and expertly fixing up a complicated-looking drink. After adding a bit of lime zest, he passed it over to an exhausted Regulus before resuming his seat on the couch, sitting *awfully* close to the Black Heir, twisted to face the other and give him his full attention.

Lucius exchanged a look with Narcissa before leaning back in his seat. "Regulus. You look like something the kneazle dragged in."

Regulus let out a pain-filled sigh, sipping his drink. "A cousin got... *handsy* with the Minister's Consort." He nodded resignedly at the gasps and muttered curses his statement earned him. "Lucky for Lysandus, he's still alive. Unlucky for my brother, he has been forced to either abstain or vote for additional Auror oversight."

"And I take it Black has been doing nothing but bark his displeasure," Severus muttered. Regulus let out a pain-filled grunt, closing his eyes as his free hand came up to massage his temple. Severus pushed back the other man's long locks, burying his long fingers deeply in Regulus's soft hair, his eyes sharp as he examined every pained wrinkle and taught grimace. "I'll set up a room for you here. Black, undoubtedly, has stomped off to Godric's Hollow to complain to *Potter*," he spat, "on how unfair life is, at the moment." Getting another pained grunt, Severus pushed his hand down to the nape of Regulus's neck and stood, using his new grasp as leverage to drag the other man to stand. "Lucius, Narcissa? I'll be just a moment."

As the heavy clicks of Severus's boots left the room and echoed down the hallway, the Malfoy's looked at each other in shock.

"Did you-," Lucius began.

"No, he never-," Narcissa whispered frenetically.

"When did this-,"

"Regulus never mentioned-," they quieted as they heard Severus approach, doing their best to act normal. Unspoken, they agreed to not badger the intensely private man about his lovelife, knowing that he'll only speak when he's good and ready.

Sitting down with a sigh, Severus picked back up his abandoned drink. Sipping, he pulled a face when noticed the ice in his tumbler had melted, watering down the smooth scotch. Leaning forward to tip more scotch into his glass, he looked up when he felt eyes on him, seeing both Malfoy's watching him with a look he couldn't decipher. "What?"

"Nothing, nothing," Lucius said a little too loudly. "So, back to our earlier discussion? You mentioned a delay on the *Skele-Grow* for Saint Mungo's?"

Stuffed full of a delightful pork loin dinner, Harry was perched in one of the overstuffed wingback chairs littering Tom's personal sitting room, a fire chasing away the early spring chill as he worked on the start of a Fair Isle sweater. He was feeling warm and content, the heat from the fire on his bare legs a comforting warmth.

He had already dressed for bed, wearing another of Tom's nightshirts shrunk to fit. The other had shrunk the hem a tad *too* much, but Harry wasn't going to give the other the satisfaction of a snit.

Hearing the door between the sitting room and the bedroom sigh open, Harry looked up briefly to see Tom wandering in, towel-drying his hair. Even in his own loose nightshirt and with his arms up, Harry could tell that the other was still a tad upset over the whole Lysandus situation.

"Eh, Tom?" Getting the others attention, he beckoned the other over. "Sit," he indicated the spot on the floor in front of him.

Throwing a saucy smirk towards Harry, Tom did as he was told. Sitting with his back to Harry, he was shocked when the other threw his legs over his broad shoulders, bracketing Tom's head with his muscular thighs. "Harry-," he cut himself off with a groan as quick and clever fingers buried themselves into his damp hair, nails gently digging into his scalp as Harry settled in to give the other a scalp massage. Relaxing, he wrapped his hands around Harry's lower thighs, right above the knee bend before bussing his cheek into soft and smooth skin.

"Hush," Harry muttered, his fingers working efficiently. Within seconds, he had turned Tom from a grumpy old cat into a purring mess. Harry smirked; looks like even after all these years, this is still an effective 'off switch' for Tom's temper.

Going to tilt Tom's lolling head, Harry's breath caught in his chest when he noticed how the light from the fire caught the curves of Tom's face, highlighting in sharp relief his refined structure.

Oh, fuck.

Falling from Heaven

Chapter Notes

>:D

Tom woke up to a cold and empty bed.

That isn't supposed to happen. Unless he has to be away from his Demanse, when he wakes up, Harry is supposed to be burrowed into his side. Maybe fulfilling the role of big spoon. POSSIBLY sleeping on top of him.

Regardless, Harry is supposed to be *right here*, and he isn't. If Harry doesn't have a good reason for not being tucked up under silky sheets and heavy blankets, Tom is going to give him a spanking.

Which, now that he thinks about it, sounds utterly delightful.

"Zarba," he called out from his place flat on his back in the middle of their bed. With a quiet pop, she appeared beside him. "Where is my Harry?"

"Hawwy is beings out in the courtyards making it be pretties."

"...and why is he out in the courtyard at," he cast a silent *Tempus* charm, "seven o'clock in the bloody morning!?" He swears to Merlin-

*It's fucking **Sunday**. The ONE day of the week he has made sure to be undisturbed from work! He should still be asleep!*

"Hawwy is wantings to be making the courtyards into a gardens! With appley trees and herbies and a pools!" Zarba bounced in place, clearly excited about the prospect.

Tom just sighed, covering his face with his hand before ripping it away in disgust as he got a whiff of his morning breath. "Has he eaten," he asked resignedly. "And had his potions?" Getting a perky 'yes!' in answer to both of his questions, he sighed again, louder, before pushing himself up onto his elbows. "Select something appropriate for yard work for me to wear. And something to eat with a lot of protein. I'll be joining Harry after a quick cleanup."

"*Actually, this isn't too bad,*" Tom muttered from his spot in a sun lounger, across the courtyard from where a shirtless, shorts-wearing Harry was working. "*A lovely view.*"

"YOU CAN COME OVER AND HELP, YOU KNOW," Harry shouted, still bent over from where he was getting ready to pull up a dead shrub.

*And miss **this**!? I think not!* "Oh, don't worry about me, Darling! You look like you have everything under control!" Smiling his practiced 'Politician Smile' and giving Harry a little wave, Tom grinned at the huff of disgust he received before Harry dropped into the most **gorgeous** squat known to man before *heaving*, his muscles bunching and straining as he slowly pulled out the deep roots of the shrub.

Reaching to the ground below him, Tom picked up the Sunday Edition of the *Prophet*, turning towards the gossip pages. While he doesn't put too much stock into such a thing, with the emergence of Harry into the public eye, he wants to keep tabs on public opinion. Not much has been published involving Harry yet, but it'll only be a matter of time.

Folding the paper open, he was incredibly surprised. Harry was the subject of nearly ninety percent of the gossip columns (with Tom himself making up the rest), two sections recapping the earlier Skeeter articles while the rest were opinions of other *Prophet* writers and letters from the readers. Nearly EVERYONE was enamored with his Consort, from little old witches concerned for his health to some comments from wizards just-this-side of inappropriate.

At this rate, Harry's going to be worshiped like a god of old.

And I will be first at his altar.

It was while he was reading a submission from a Mrs. R. S. Crocombe that he chanced a look up. Harry was standing in profile, arms on his hips as he surveyed a decorative granite boulder. It was about three times the size of a professional quaffle, and Tom knows how heavy it and the other boulders littering the yard were because one was on top of a ward matrix stone, and he had to move the bloody thing sans magic in order to reset part of the wards when he inherited the Demanse.

As he was getting ready to get up and offer his assistance, Harry bent over and just...picked the thing up.

Just like that.

Like an errant lamb getting plucked up by its unworried shepherd.

He felt his chest start to burn, and it was only when he choked out a cough that he realized that he had stopped breathing. As he watched Harry pick up and move the boulders from their current resting places and into a pile near the solarium, he started to feel hot under the collar. Watching those dewy, bunching arm and back muscles flex and flow, picking up and throwing rocks that weighed more than most Hogwarts students, was...really... *nice*.

Fanning himself with his newspaper, he noted that it was starting to get hot out.

"Alright, that's enough for today," Harry said while dusting his hands off. Looking around, he was satisfied to see that he was making good progress on cleaning up the courtyard. He may be able to turn the solarium into a fully-functional greenhouse, growing herbs and a few staples year-round, and the rest of the courtyard into a pleasure garden. It would be nice to have a flowering tree as the centerpiece, and he'll have to ask Tom if he has any preferences. A Japanese cherry blossom or magnolia, maybe.

He also wants to see about hiring an actual gardener. Zarba and Dobby already have enough on their plates, and having someone whose sole purpose is the maintenance of the courtyard just makes sense.

"Hey, Tom," he called out. "What do you think of-, oh my goodness, are you okay!?" Catching sight of a red Tom, Harry darted over, taking the limply-waving newspaper in hand and fanning harder. "What's wrong? Do you need a healer?" Tom just strangled out a moan before covering his face. "Oh no! Is it the sun? Heat? How do I-"

"Harry," Tom bit out.

"Ye-, yes?" Stopping his fanning, he leaned closer.

"Go take a shower. And put a shirt on."

"What? *Why!*? What's-," looking Tom over, he chanced a gaze down and saw the other man's issue. "Oh. *Oh!*"

"Just...fucking go."

"O-, okay. Yeah. Um, I'll just be, in the shower. Um. Bye!" His face redder than a brick, Harry stiffly turned around and marched away, dropping the newspaper as he did so.

A couple of minutes later, as he was sitting on a stool in the shower and scrubbing his shoulders, he couldn't stop the thought from forming;

*How fucking **big** is Tom!?*

With a moan, he thunked his forehead against the rim of the tub.

Despite taking care of his 'issue' whilst Harry was in the bathroom, Tom's blood still ran hot. If he could go back in time and thank whoever Harry's non-human ancestor was, he'd do it in a *heartbeat*. Seeing the other toss those boulders like they were **nothing** was giving him *ideas...*

*I want to wrestle him to submission and **make him** feel good.*

He needs to stop thinking, otherwise, he's going to have to wank again.

Sighing, he decided to go down to the Slytherin Forge. While he may have stated that he was going to 'touch, taste, and tease' Harry in order to woo him, if he were to see his Consort

right now it would only result in him assaulting the other. He's got to go work off that steam.

Penning a note, he then changed out into something more appropriate for working with a lava forge. He's had a few things to craft in mind for a while now, and this is as good a time as any to try them out.

After toweling off, Harry tucked into his brunch (grilled salmon with greens and rice) and drank his potions before grabbing his sweater project and plopping into his favorite chair. He already had the ribbing for the bottom hem done, and now he was moving onto the first block of colorwork, and he was very excited. The sweater was primarily in the darker shade of royal blue, with the rest of the colorwork being done in emerald green and gold. He was going to have a band of colorwork about two inches tall above the ribbed hem and sleeve cuffs, and then colorwork going from the yoke to the neck, leaving a large swath of the sweater in plain stockinette. It seemed to be a nice jump up from the little bit of colorwork he had done in the past.

Wrapping the blue yarn around his right index finger and the green around his left, he looked intently at the first row of the pattern before slowly starting his stitching. The first row was very simple, and he soon fell into the simple repetition and let his mind wander.

He was now more conflicted than ever before about his feelings for Tom. The other had made his thoughts more than apparent towards him, making it *clear* that he wants Harry in his bed.

And Harry is...starting to find that **appealing**. For once, somebody wants to take care of HIM. Provide a home and shelter for HIM. Make HIM happy. He won't have to break himself to itty bitty pieces and be content to live such a meager existence.

Give HIM pleasure, in all its forms, instead of having to bend and scrape for the smallest bit of affection.

But he used to change the man's nappies!

Coming to the end of the first pattern row, he took a moment to check the row. Satisfied with his gauge, he studied the second row before continuing.

But, as much as he may want a handsome, wealthy, and incredibly charismatic man to take care of him, aside from the fact that he cared for the man as a baby, how can he be sure that his own feelings for Tom were genuine? He doesn't want to lead the other on, just to shatter him by being unable to return deeper feelings. From how Tom had sounded in Gringotts, he must have been harboring these feelings for years, **decades**, even, and Harry doesn't want to utterly destroy him by only feeling a shallow, physical attraction. If his estimation of Tom's devotion is even just a tenth correct, then he deserves to have someone who cares not just for his bedroom performance, but his thoughts and ideas, and personality. Someone who cares for him as a genuine person, and does things for the other because they like to see their partner smile in happiness, even if it's over something silly and stupid. Doing something, like making-

Stopping with a jerk, Harry's eyes widened behind his glasses as he slowly looked down at his hands. He was making Tom a sweater.

A sweater in a blue that closely matched Tom's eyes.

And was accented in green and gold, like Harry's own eyes.

And the colorwork pattern was called 'Lover's Knots'.

Shrieking, he tossed his project away from him and onto the coffee table. He curled up and burrowed into his chair, looking at his work like it was the devil while blushing madly.

Oh no. No, no, no. No. No way.

Covering his face with his right hand, Harry shrieked again when he felt the band of his Slytherin ring touch his cheek. If not for the fact that it was on the wrong hand, it could be mistaken for a wedding ring!

Moaning like a dying animal, Harry curled up on himself. And now he was thinking about the sweater curse, and wondering how that would work between himself and Tom, considering they're not dating, but also pseudo-married so would that thwart the curse and-

He sighed. Looks like he had already made up his mind about Tom.

Pumping the bellows with his right leg, Tom looked through his diamond face shield as he held down the rope hanging from the flume, holding open the vent to the outside in order to hyper oxygenate the forge. He had a crucible full of melting copper on the end of his forge pole, and he was keeping a close eye on it. If it got too hot, then it would bubble over and he'd lose the batch.

Tilting his pole, he saw he was at the right consistency. Stopping his bellows, he quickly pulled out the crucible and tipped it into a stone circular sheet mold just off from the forge. Steam rose up as the super-hot metal met cold stone, and he could feel sweat trickle down his back under the heavy dragonhide blacksmithing apron he wore.

Once the last of the copper poured out, he pulled a chain hanging from the forge ceiling. A hole in the ceiling opened, leading to the outside, and the modified breeze charms installed on the mold started an upward cycle of air movement, cooling the metal.

As the metal cooled, he walked towards his grinding station, setting his pole and crucible aside. Looking at the various clear jars filled with powders and minerals, he drummed his fingers as he thought. After a few minutes, he selected a container filled with a silver wire, one full of cracked green rocks, and one with a fine azure powder. Two he set aside, but the one with the green rocks he brought over to a magically enhanced muggle hydraulic press. Pulling out a handful of small stones, he loaded them up into a mold before setting it onto the press deck. Pulling down the press release lever, with a metallic roar the press head slowly

descended, and after a slight adjustment, it fitted into the mold. Over the sound of the press, the whine and grinding of the rocks getting crushed barked out.

Releasing the handle, he waited for the press head to clear before peering into the mold. Seeing the fine gravel everything had been reduced to, he then dumped the mold out into his large metal and granite mortar and pestle. After a few minutes of grinding, he finally had a powder fine enough to work with.

Investigating his copper, he saw it was now cool enough to handle with just his gloves. Prying it out with an awl, he brought it over to one of his larger anvils. Pulling from the wall a solid, half-cone mold, he stuck it to the flat edge of his anvil with a sticking charm. Summoning a hammer to his hand, he fitted the edge of his copper sheet over the cone before pressing down to make a divot, then bringing his hammer down.

He worked the sheet over for what felt like forever, his shoulders aching when he was not even halfway done, but he plowed through. By the time he was finished, he had a flat-bottomed bowl, about eight inches high and a foot wide. The sides were waved in and out, like the petals of a trumpeter flower, and he was quite satisfied with what he had so far. All that's needed is to grind the metal down to a smooth finish, add a decorative patina to the outside and polish the inside. Maybe add a few decorative slits so Harry can feed his yarn through.

But first, lunch.

Harry really should be paying attention to his food. After all, poor Dobby had spent who knows how long putting it together, but if you were to ask Harry what he had eaten, he wouldn't be able to give you an answer.

And it was all Tom's fault! The man had shown up smelling like fire and ash with a metallic tang and drenched in sweat. Literally! The loose, thin linen shirt he had been wearing underneath a leather jerkin stuck to his skin, nearly see-through with how wet it was. And his hair was nearly plastered to his scalp. When Tom took off his jerkin Harry nearly had a heart attack.

He has such pretty pink nipples!

No, bad Harry! The poor man's exhausted! He doesn't need you ogling him while he's *sweaty and hot*, and, and in a see-through shirt.

*I want to fucking **lick** him-*

Dropping his fork onto his plate, he squeaked out an excuse to Tom before fleeing the table.

Shaking his head in confusion, Tom returned to his meal. He'll need to see if he can buy Dobby off of the Malfoy's, the elf knows how to **cook**. While the baked quail in red wine sauce is a better fit as an evening meal, Tom still appreciates it all the same; he had worked up an appetite while in the Forge and needed all of the fatty, rich foods he can get in his mouth.

Now that he thinks about it, the quail, the potatoes dolphin, and roasted carrots were perfect for lunch. Until they meet Healer Parkinson on Tuesday, they still need to keep up the high-fat and high-protein diet Harry was prescribed.

For dinner, he'll want to see how far Dobby's talent goes. Tom's thinking about a large, marbled steak to share. Oh, and they'll also want something for dessert. Maybe chocolate cake? Harry never really got to enjoy sweets at Wool's, but the few times Tom remembered he did, it was always the smallest morsel of chocolate.

Now that I have Harry, he can eat all of the chocolate he wants. He'll need to inform Dobby that something chocolate should always be on hand from now on.

Dusted in flour from head to toe, Harry worked the dough underneath his hands. Kneading the start of his trademark honey wheat bread, his arms bunched and flexed as he stretched and folded the dough before rolling it out, just to do the same again. Set in front of him were bowls full of different types of flours and herbs and spices, each with a cup of water with yeast bubbling away as it woke up and ate the sugar suspended inside it.

Poor Dobby had fluttered around his knees as Harry stormed in, going straight to the baking cupboard in a frenzied desire to work out the heat boiling in his blood. In order to prevent himself from barking at the poor elf, Harry had dismissed him, with a promise to share some of his recipes but only *if he was left alone!*

He had quickly measured out a massive amount of white, whole wheat, buckwheat, and rye flours, before dividing them further up into loaf-sized portions. He had swept the spice shelf clean, pouring out and grinding down spices and herbs both sweet and savory, and after mixing his doughs and leaving them to prove he would then invade the pantry and cold chest for fruits, nuts, and cured meats to add to his creations before tossing them in the oven.

Tossing his first dough into a lightly oiled bowl to prove, he moved onto the next one. Slowly adding his yeast water to the ground white flour, he mixed them together by hand until he got a shaggy mess. Setting aside his cup, he dumped in a bit of milk and a pinch of salt before bringing both hands into play. After a few minutes of kneading inside of the bowl, he dashed a bit of flour on the polished granite worktop before tipping out his dough ball. Rolling it a bit before adding a bit more flour, he started working it over, folding and pressing and rolling. He might make this a black- and raspberry loaf with white chocolate drizzle, but he's still undecided. After all, he's still got about eight loaves to knead before he needs to come to a decision.

...Tom has the arms to help-

STOP.

NOPE.

NO.

*Bad Harry!...but Tom would treat you even **badder**.*

Growling in frustration, Harry gritted his teeth before picking up and slamming down his dough.

Just-

"Fuck me, Tom, why did you turn out so damn *gorgeous*!?"

Rubbing his palm over the copper bowl, Tom nodded to himself before putting aside his drill after removing the fine-grit filing bit. Picking up a soft bristle brush from the rack hanging over his workbench, he brushed off the fine copper dust still clinging to his project. Once finished, he examined the outside of the bowl to make sure he hasn't missed any spots; once he starts creating his patina, there's no going back. If he missed any rough spots, then that's it.

Satisfied everything was as it should be, he walked over to his largest anvil. Canting the bowl onto its side, he fetched his pigments and silver wire before putting together his lava-fired blowtorch.

Oh, if only the Purebloods could see me now, he snickered. Lava Fired and Lava Forged items were highly sought after, but the few Masters were limited in what they could do. Using the heat produced from the earth's core is extremely difficult, and creating tools to use it for fine work were few and far between. House Slytherin had pushed the art to its limits by becoming jewelers, but even they had had their limits. To be able to do any true fine, filigree work would be impossible.

Muggles, on the other hand, figured it out **ages** ago. It had taken him years and earning a Masters degree in Geology from the University of Iceland, but he figured out how to refine the use of lava and its heat via modified muggle heavy equipment, such as blowtorches and heat guns. The amount of ruinic arrays he drew up, discarded, or rewrote was stupidly large.

He should publish his research.

Making sure the metal hose at the butt of his torch was solidly connected, he pulled back the lever switch that closed off the torch from the feeder hose that floated in the lava pit he worked from and watched as the air at the end of the torch tip started to bloom and waver. Adjusting the intensity with a few knobs and switches, he soon had something hot enough to burn and melt his pigments, but not intense enough to compromise the copper.

Scattering the blue and green pigments in wide swaths over the outside of the bowl, he then torched them. He wrinkled his nose at the scent of burning rock, but from what he could

see, the pigments were binding to the copper. Tapping off excess color, he rotated the bowl before repeating the process. Once finished, he brushed away the excess powders before pulling out the silver wire. Each length was only a few inches long and very fine, designed less for actual crafting and more for accent work.

Scattering the filaments over the side of the bowl, letting them fall as they may, he quickly hit each section with the torch, just long enough to melt the metal to the bowl but not to liquefy it. Once he was finished, he set it aside so he could clean up his workstation before putting a few thin copper rings on each fluted side, glazing the outside, and then giving everything a final polish.

But first, he's going to take a break and go bother Harry.

Chopping up a handful of nuts and dried berries, Harry hummed in acknowledgment at Tom's call of inquiry. Scooping everything up, he dumped it on top of his punched-down sweet white bread dough before folding everything together. After a few folds, he dusted his loaf pan before rolling his dough into a cylinder roughly the same size before giving it a twist and plopping it in the tin. Grabbing his bench scraper, he started to tidy up for his next loaf when he felt hands rest heavy on his hips, making him jump. "Tom!"

Tom watched Harry from the kitchen door, arms crossed over his chest as he leaned on the jamb. He was still in his blacksmithing apron, and he really should take it off, but...

He had an unfettered view of Harry from behind. The other was wearing a simple, knee-length linen robe and sans socks and shoes. He had an apron tied around his waist and was standing on a stool in order to get the right leverage needed to knead his doughs. Even from this distance, Tom could see flour and bits of drying dough sticking to Harry's hair, and with a sudden **want**, he knew that this is what would make him happiest; having Harry at his side, just being himself. He doesn't care if the other wants to be his political equal and supporter, acting as his right to oversee the growth of Magical Britain. If Harry just wants to stay tucked away in the Demanse, only venturing forth on occasion, and with no further ambitions than to bake and garden while Tom sallies forth, then he's fine with that.

His hands twitched with the desire to hold his little Consort, and he was in no mood to deny himself. Creeping up, he grasped strong hips and a slim waist before burying his nose into a sweet, warm neck, inhaling the smells of warm bread and Harry while the other squealed in surprise, "Tom!" Licking the salty skin below his lips, he laved open-mouthed and needy kisses up the swan-like neck, growling when his Harry let out a surprised and breathy whimper. His hands clenched, needing to feel the sturdy bone and muscle below them, and his heart stuttered at the loud **moan** Harry released at the sharp nip he left just under the other's ear. Wanting to hear more of such a beautiful sound, he allowed his hands to wander, one sliding down to grasp a quivering inner thigh while the other twisted Harry's flushed face towards him, revealing eyes with blown pupils and lips wet from a pink tongue darting out to moisten them.

He could look at this forever.

Harry bit his lip, chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath. His blood felt like fire and lightning ran up his spine as he ground back into Tom, and he choked as he felt something large and hard grind back into his rear.

Being forced to look into Tom's eyes, a little voice in the back of his mind told him he should put a stop to this. That this isn't right. What would the *public* say, when it learns of the almost familial relationship the two had prior to Harry's romp through time. He can almost see the headlines now, crowing about the near-incestuous relationship between the two.

Fuck it. I deserve something nice, too.

Tom nearly crowed in victory when Harry whimpered in want before bringing their lips together, kissing Tom so sweetly he felt as though his heart would melt. And the soft touch of floured fingers on his chin was just...

Sweet.

He was going to keep this from getting too hot. Due to time and circumstances, **he** was now the one with experience and teaching a novice. Even with all of his sneaking out to dance halls, he doubts Harry has done more than kiss and touch, and he is going to make **sure** that he takes his time to teach and savor the other, and a kitchen is NOT the place for it.

And then he felt a soft, tentative, kitten-like lick against his bottom lip.

Growling like a predator scenting prey, he spun Harry in his arms before wrapping his hands around strong, firm thighs and hiking them around his waist as he lifted, deepening the kiss as Harry wound his arms around his neck and letting out a cry. He sat the other on the messy workbench before sloppily kissing and licking and nibbling his way down Harry's neck, biting and ripping the thin cord holding up the top of the apron so he could nibble the dainty collar bones hidden behind it. Snarling, he tore off the apron before shoving Harry back onto the counter and balling up the front of his Consorts linen robe in his hands before jerking, tearing the strong fabric from collar to hem. Leaning down, he kissed his boy again, like he was trying to crawl inside him as he rubbed his hands up and down Harry's waist and hips, marveling at how soft his skin felt over the firm muscle below it.

Kissing down his chest, Tom made a quick detour to suck on a hardened nipple, the pink nubbin growing rock hard in his mouth while his hand tweaked the other one. As Harry cried out and thrashed, he laughed, noting how sensitive the other was and putting a list together of toys they can acquire, putting nipple clamps at the very top. He only moved on when Harry's hips started jerking at each pinch and squeeze to the now-abused flesh, sucking bruises down Harry's sternum before dipping his tongue into a tantalizing navel. Nibbling further down, he only stopped when his chin bumped into Harry's pant-covered erection, and not wasting any

time, he slung Harry's legs over his shoulders before he buried his face into the bulge before moaning, "Merlin but you smell so good."

Harry bit into the meat of his hand, trying to muffle his sob. Hearing Tom echo his dream made his cock jump, and he was trying *so hard* but Tom wasn't making it easy and- "oh, Tom!" He jerked, digging his heels into Tom's back before keening when long fingers wove between the crotch of his pants and his balls before ripping the thin fabric away, the wet sound of silk tearing **doing** something visceral to his libido. He didn't even have enough time to try and scold the other before hands were pinning his hips down and a hot mouth was wrapped around him, and he shouted in shocked pleasure with a buck, burying his fingers into sweat-moist chocolate locks before involuntarily grinding up into the mouth above him. "Oh fucking *Christ*, **Tom!**"

Grinning around the cock buried in his throat, Tom hummed before bobbing his head. He groaned as thin, calloused fingers grabbed and yanked on his hair, and in retaliation he sucked hard on Harry's shaft, letting out a gravely chuckle at the high-pitched shriek he got for his effort. Bobbing his head more and sucking the tip of Harry's cock on each pass, he swirled his tongue and buried his nose into Harry's pubic thatch before humming.

"*Oh fuck, Tom,*" Harry wept before curling up, his legs snapping up around Tom's head like a vice before his back arched back, yowling as he came into Tom's greedy little mouth.

Tom lapped everything up, humming as he tasted Harry. Salty, to be expected, but just like his first sample, there was also something citrusy, as well. The perverse little gremlin that dwelled in its own little corner of his sexuality whispered that it may taste good as a drizzle for a lemon cake, and he quickly punted it to the side, and then apologized to it; maybe later he could talk Harry into some 'experimentation'.

Pulling off of Harry's softening shaft with one last suck, he sat back on a simple conjured chair as he watched Harry twitch and come down from his high, rubbing a dewy hip to help anchor the other. Every few moments Harry would twitch, and a not-so-small part of Tom was proud of the effect his not-often-used oral skills had on the other.

Scooping his still orgasm-high partner up into his arms, Tom nuzzled into sweat-soaked locks as he made his way up to their chambers, Zarba popping into the kitchen as they left in order to clean-up and finish Harry's baking. As he walked up the stairs, he felt Harry sigh and shift, wrapping an arm over Tom's shoulder and letting the tips of his fingers play with the fine hairs at the nape of his neck.

Once arriving in their chambers, he headed straight towards the bathroom. The tub had already been filled, and Tom felt like the vilest man alive when he slipped Harry into the hot water and he whined, trying to cling. Tom had never stripped himself so fast in his life, and soon he was sliding behind a sleepily blinking Harry and pulling him in for more moist-coital cuddles.

He doesn't know how long they laid there soaking, but he felt soft lips leave a little butterfly kiss just under his jaw. He hummed in contentment, and gently pushed away the hands traveling downwards towards his half-hard cock. "Don't worry about me, Darling," he murmured. "I can wait." Hearing a quietly muttered '*ah*', he sighed before relaxing further into the bath, absentmindedly licking his lips as Harry tucked up under his chest.

*Harry tastes fucking **delicious**.*

Memories III

"awwy," a little voice piped up while there was a tug on his trousers. "Can ya re'ch me th' cookieth?"

Looking down from his spot on a stool in front of the sink, Harry spied Tom at his side. The younger boy was frowning something fierce, and Harry knew it was because he was angry at himself for not being able to say his 'r's and spoke with a lisp.

"Can', Tommy-boy. Those'r for Ginge's birfday. You'll ge' one for puddin'." He watched as keen blue eyes darted towards the cooktop, where one tray of freshly baked cookies was cooling and one waited to go in after the third tray finished. "Tommy, if I see y'little fingers near 'em, you'll be on Tater Duty."

"Bu' I wan' one NOW!" Tom stomped his foot with a scowl.

"TOM."

"...thowwy," he muttered while looking away, then grunting. "Thorry," he tried again before gritting his teeth and folding his arms high across the chest. "*Thorry!*" Barking out a short shout, he kicked the kitchen cabinet closest to them, "why can' I thay m'wordth right!?"

Rinsing his hands, Harry then dried them off before hopping off of the stool. Squatting, he gently took Tom's chin in his hands. "Say 'ahhh!'," he asked.

After scowling at Harry, Tom did so, overexaggerating his 'ahhh!'. Looking inside the four-year-old's mouth, Harry hummed. "Well, your teef look fine, so tha's good. Stick your tongue out?" After Tom did so, Harry blinked in shock, "well, tha's no' normal, innit?"

Tugging gently on Tom's tongue, Harry now knows why the youngster is still having so many speech problems, despite Tommy's best efforts; not only did he have a pretty long tongue, but there was also a slit at the tip, a little less than half-an-inch in length. Poking one side, it twitched away from his finger while the other half just lay there limply. With a teasing grin, Harry tugged the ends and snickered at the glare Tom shot him before pulling his tongue back into his mouth. Standing back up, he ruffled the others chocolate curls with the same hand, ignoring the complaints about '*spitty 'ingerth in me 'air!*', "looks like you 'ave a snake 'ongue to 'alk t'your frien's, but you can' 'alk t'us people, ha! An' don' complain abou' your 'air! Tonigh' is Wash Nigh!'"

"Gerroff me, 'arry!" Angrily patting his hair down, like a switch flipped Tom smiled up at Harry like a cherub. "T'make it up t'me, can I 'ave m'cookie early?"

"No."

"*AWWWW, c'mon!?*"

Trouble in Paradise

Chapter Notes

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Oh, and >:D

Snuggling under the covers after curling up on his side, Harry blinked his eyes at Tom. The other was still sleeping, flat on his back, one arm under his pillow while the other was flung out into space. Harry wanted to snicker, but instead settled for wiggling his toes as he listened to Tom make a sound that wasn't *quite* a snore, but was pretty close.

Harry shifted a bit, breathing into the heavy top blanket as he settled. He was as snug as a bug in a rug, despite being fully nude. He must have fallen asleep on Tom in the bathtub, and the other didn't want to wake him up by putting him in bed clothes. While thoughtful in theory, it had led to Harry having to dash to the loo in the cold dark.

Needing the loo may be why he woke, but curiosity is what kept him awake. Curiosity-
-and arousal.

While yesterday wasn't the first time he had received oral, it was, by far, the best. And not being in the habit of leaving his partners unfulfilled, Harry was going to return the favor in the bathroom before getting waived off. Not taking care of Tom is starting to unsettle him.

That, and he wants to see what Tom's got going on. Seeing the large bulge in his robes after Harry worked in the garden, it left him wondering what the reality was.

Looking over his shoulder towards the windows with a squint, Harry estimates that there is still a few hours left before Tom has to be up. Usually he wakes at seven, starts dressing and grooming at eight, and leaves for the Ministry at eight-thirty. Currently, it looks like it's about five.

More than enough time for him to take a sneaky peak.

Looking shyly around to make sure Zarba or Dobby weren't lurking in the shadows, Harry gently peeled back the blanket and sheets from Tom's chest. Scooting up to his knees, he stuck out the tip of his tongue, leaning forward to see what would be seen after just a few more inches of skin was revealed. Seeing the start of Tom's pubic trail, he held his breath and-

-with a gasp Harry dropped the covers, scrambling back and away with a hand over his mouth as he cycled between blushing and paling.

What the fuck, he thought, frantically. Did one of Tom's ancestors fuck a horse!?

He panicked briefly as Tom let out a snort and shifted, only relaxing when it was revealed to simply be unconscious movements. Even after that, his heart stuttered still. Even only half-flaccid, Tom was large enough that Harry was left wondering about not only how large he would get when flying at full-staff, but also;

*Will he even **fit**!?*

Shoving his face further into his pillow, Tom buried his grin. He had come to semi-awareness when Harry slipped out of bed to use the toilet, and had almost sunk back into sleep when his Consort got curious and decided to peep the goods. Tom is quite proud of himself, knowing he has a lot to offer in the bedroom, so to speak. He has gotten quite a lot of different reactions from his bedmates, ranging from astonishment to greedy pleasure.

Harry's is just funny.

"Seriously, is he part horse!?"

"No, Darling, but I do have a minotaur in my line," he drawled.

Harry squeaked in mortification before yelping as Tom reached out and snatched him by the ankle, dragging him over before grabbing his waist and pulling astride Tom's lap. "Tom! Um, how long were you awake?" *Please say 'just now', please say 'just now', please say-*

"Since you slipped out of bed," Tom lazily said from his place below Harry, while rubbing his large hands up and down Harry's abdomen. "Mmmm, such a tiny waist," he muttered before flexing his hands and lacing them around the smallest part of Harry's middle, the fingers and thumbs overlapping. "I know many a maiden who would be jealous of your figure," he chuckled.

Harry blushed before lightly smacking Tom's chest. "Oi, no poking fun!"

Tom hummed, "mm, I'm not. And there are many a Lord who will be jealous of me." And they would. Harry's waist is the perfect shape to grab onto as he fucks into him from behind. Harry just huffed at him. "Why are you huffing at me? Aren't you the one who was peeping on an innocent man whilst he slept?"

Harry blushed. "Now, lis'en 'ere you li'l shite," he snapped while pointing into Tom's face, who just **laughed** at him. "Oi, you!"

Wiggling into a more comfortable position, Tom laid fully flat on his back with his hands near his head. "If you're curious, then go ahead. Touch away."

Biting his lower lip, Harry blinked at Tom a few times before tentatively reaching out. Cupping a hand around Tom's cheek, he got more comfortable when Tom leaned into his palm, kissing the soft skin while watching him with lidded eyes. He brought both hands into play, cupping them around Tom's face before bringing them down around his neck. He massaged either side of the Adam's apple with his thumbs, gently, moving on when he felt a slight shudder underneath him. He rubbed muscled pectorals and broad shoulders, memorizing their firmness and each dip and curve of skin and muscle that stretched over bone. Tom felt warm, almost hot, to the touch, and Harry had a hard time trying to decide if he wanted to lay down on top of him like a lizard soaking up heat from a rock, or to keep exploring.

His desire to explore won out, but only just. Leaning back, he ghosted his index finger down Tom's sternum, dipping between his abdominals. Scooting back, he tickled the others navel before gently tugging on a few strands of dark and wiry pubic hair.

"Careful, Darling," Tom muttered from beneath him, pillowing his head on a folded arm. "Don't wake up something you cannot tame."

Glaring at the challenge, Harry rose up on his knees, awkwardly pulling down and back the covers that were trapped between him and Tom. Once he was comfortably seated on slack but fit thighs, Harry goggled. "...there is *no way* that that will ever fit inside me," he deadpanned. Hearing the snort his statement garnered, he glared harder at Tom, who just snickered. "Tom, I'm serious. There's no way that that will fit."

"Oh, it gets bigger," Tom smirked. "Why don't you give it a tug, and see, hmm?" He didn't even try to hide the smarmy look on his face.

"Feck you."

"It's the other way around, love."

Harry just rolled his eyes, but he did indulge in his curiosity. He's held other men's cocks in his hand before, he's not a complete novice, but Tom's was so much *thicker*, more **girthy**. Sliding his hand between the other man's cock and stomach, Harry could feel it had some heft. Some meat, if you'll forgive the pun. Like Harry, he was uncircumcised, and was blessed with having an actually aesthetically-pleasing cock. The shaft, where it met Tom's body, was thicker than the head, but considering Harry couldn't even wrap his fingers around any part of the weightly length, that wasn't saying much.

Hearing Tom sigh, Harry gave a slight squeeze, smoothing his hand up towards the glans. Liking the smooth, almost silky feel, he did it again and again, watching as his lover grew even more under him as he slowly jerked him. Harry's eyes nearly bugged out of his head when Tom's final growth left him topping out at his belly button, and thick from root to tip.

Seeing Harry's shocked look, Tom just laughed. "I was able to get it into others, I'll be able to fit it into you."

Not liking his smug, cocky tone, Harry sneered before wrapping both of his hands around Tom's cock before pumping them a few times, sporting a smirk of his own when the other

groaned at the feel. "That's what I thought," he snorted when Tom just cursed at him before tossing over a phial of oil. Chuckling as he slathered oil on the dick in his hands, he let out a satisfied sigh at how much easier it now was to handle Tom.

Fluffing up the pillows behind him, Tom leaned back to enjoy the show, the index and middle fingers of each hand wedged into the crook of Harry's folded knees. He let out a choked groan when his eyes caught the flash of Harry's Consort ring.

He **liked** seeing that, seeing Harry sporting one of *his* Family rings. He also liked it when Harry wore his clothes and spent his money (and one day he wants to sit with Harry in his lap and grow *into* him as he watches his Consort spend his money through owl orders), but he REALLY likes Harry handling him while wearing his ring. The only thing that would make the sight better would be if it was a wedding ring...

He groaned loudly, digging his head back into his pillow at the mental picture of Harry pleasuring either himself or Tom while sporting the Gaunt ring on his left hand. Oh, but his grandfather and great-uncle would froth at the mouth if they knew some dainty 'mudblood' hand had gotten jizz all over their precious family heirloom.

He hummed while flexing his hips, his eyes slipping closed. Harry was gripping him just right, firmly but not so hard that it felt like he was trying to break him. Most grip either too hard, or too gently, and Tom would quickly move them on from there because it was frankly disappointing and if he let them go on, he'd lose interest. Which is a shame, because he enjoys a good handy.

Feeling lips against his, he kissed back, going up onto his elbows as he deepened their kiss. "Oh, you're such a darling, sweet boy," he muttered against Harry's panting mouth, and he felt him shudder at the praise. Shifting a bit more, he could feel Harry's own hardness butt-up against his, and after a bit of shifting he wrapped his hand around one of Harry's and both of their shafts, working furiously to bring them to completion. Sitting straight up, he sealed their mouths together, his free hand on the back of Harry's head, and he both felt and heard when Harry started to cum, his sweet boy's hips twitching and jumping as he spunked all over Tom's hand and cock with a muffled cry, and the feel of his Consort's warm cum covering him sent Tom hurtling over the edge as well.

His heart still galloping like a stallion on the run in his chest, Harry sat back. He took a few moments to just bask in the moment. He could feel a large hand rub up and down one of his folded thighs. Looking down, he could see a satiated Tom laying languidly underneath him, and-

"Jasus, bu' tha's a lo' of cum," he muttered. There was a large deposit puddled on Tom's stomach and tracks going up his chest. Looking down at his right hand, one of Harry's eyebrows lazily rose at the mess on his hand, and then the other joined it when he saw the mess caking his groin. "We're gon' needa 'owel," he slurred. He rolled his eyes as Tom laughed at him.

He didn't laugh for long when Harry started licking his hand clean, though.

Entering Princemoor Townhouse, Lucius walked to the Dining Room, grasping a thick file under his arm. It contained budgeting information and proposals related to Severus's department and had appeared in his study's 'Inbox' this morning promptly at six-thirty, and what little he has leafed through so far has left him disgruntled. Some other members of the budgeting board he's on are trying to push their own fiscal agenda's at the expense of the Brewing Dept., and he wanted to get with Severus to head them off before they are up for vote in June. Considering it's only just the beginning of April and these things are supposed to be sent out by the start of March at the *latest*, he doesn't need a good sense of smell to tell that there's bullshit afoot.

Entering the Dining Room, he was surprised to see that he wasn't alone. While Severus wasn't present, Regulus was. The younger man was still in his nightshirt and wrapped in a familiar-looking housecoat, his signature Black hair tied up in a loose braid hanging over his shoulder as he read the *Prophet* and ate a traditional English breakfast.

"Regulus," Lucius greeted before sitting in his usual spot. "Good morning. I take it Severus will be joining us shortly?" As he spoke a cup of tea and a small plate with buttered scones appeared in front of him.

"Good morning, Lucius. And no. Severus has already left for the day." Nodding towards the file at Lucius's side, he continued, "He's gone to raise hell over the budget. Apparently there's more than just budget cuts that have been snuck in."

OOO. Severus is a very talented brewer and the youngest titled 'Master' of Potions to have graced their lands, and there is a reason he is the foremost Lab Safety expert in Western Europe. For him to get up before six and go in for anything less than a mandatory meeting or brew oversight means that someone is trying to fuck with his safety requirements. Since taking over the department, he hasn't had a single death, and the man isn't going to let that streak break now. "Who should I expect to hear a Howler from," he asked lightly.

"Apprentice Taproot's father, actually."

"...I can't wait to see Severus rip him a new one." Lucius can't *stand* Maximilian Taproot, and seeing him on the receiving end of Severus's barbed tongue will be a genuine treat.

The two fell into companionable silence, eating and reading their respective materials for many long minutes before Lucius heard Regulus sigh. "I know the curiosity is killing you, so ask away, Lucius."

Mentally kicking himself, Lucius hesitated slightly. "While I admit to being... intrigued, about the relationship between yourself and the man I consider a close friend, I also respect him enough to let him tell me about his personal life when he's ready." The broken friendship between Severus and Lily Potter nee Evans had done a number on the man, the interpersonal relationships he keeps being few and far between as a result. Lucius will respect Severus's privacy in regards to that.

Regulus shot Lucius an assessing look before dipping his head in acknowledgment. "Respect. But no, we're not in a relationship. At least, not right now." At Lucius's hum, he refilled his teacup. "We tried quite a ways back, but we're both a little too dominant to make anything work. But, we still care for each other, and considering my... antagonistic...relationship with my brother, Severus is a bit protective."

Lucius is VERY familiar with Severus's protective tendencies. The one and only successful kidnapping attempt on Draco when he was a toddler resulted in four homes and businesses burnt to the ground, eight dead bodies, a broken-up Veela smuggling ring, and an overhaul to the Auror department. It had actually resulted in Lord-in-Waiting James Potter losing his job because he could no longer meet the new minimum physical requirements, and had widened the gap between Lily and Severus, who had, at that point, been slowly reconciling.

"Besides," Regulus tacked on with a smirk half hidden behind his teacup, "we like to meet up at *The Gilded Cage* and share a 'meal' every once in a while." Smugly sipping his cooling Earl Grey as he listened to Lucius get completely blindsided about this detail of his friends sex life, he made a mental note to forewarn his cantankerous semi-partner so he could have a laugh.

After properly waking for the day, Harry and Tom helped each other dress and get ready before Tom Apparated them to his Townhouse, Nagini in tow. Today one of the Twilfit's will swing by for a proper fitting for Harry, and Tom has meetings all morning before lunch, and after that he is to meet with an emissary from the Seelie Court.

Tom **really** didn't want to let go of Harry. At all. He was so soft and small, and wearing one of Tom's shrunken robes that he *hated* but Harry was still able to make look good, an orangy-peachy one that gradiented to yellow with a dark, warm brown trim.

"Lady Malfoy has a few things to do, today," he said, regretfully petting Harry's hair as they stood on the front stoop. "However, if you have need for her, summon Zarba and she will fetch her, understand?"

Harry batted Tom's hand away before standing on his tip-toes to adjust the neckline of Tom's collar. "I'll be fine. Don't forget, I'm still a good six-years older than you," he grinned cheekily, ignoring Tom's sigh. "Now, shoo! Nagini has been muttering about me making her a den, so I'll have plenty to keep me occupied until you come by for lunch!" Puckering up, he tilted his head back for his goodbye kiss.

Sliding his hands under Harry's arms, he plucked his diminutive Consort up and gave him a peck before swinging the other back down. Fixing (and failing) Harry's hair one last time, he spun away to the Ministry, resigned to a dull day until his lunch hour.

Fussing over Nagini as he curled up on a leather loveseat, Harry fiddled with his basket of yarn. He had already spent almost fifteen minutes exploring the Townhouse, and while it was

very nice, full of glossy dark woods and matte mint green walls and heavy silver fixtures, he likes the Demanse much more. The Townhouse just didn't feel right, like there was something missing. Maybe it's because it's not a 'home' like Cumbria is, it's not meant to be lived in.

"Maybe I'll make a few things, like a blanket or two. Ooh, and a tapestry!" That would certainly warm up the place.

~~*Den first!*~~ Nagini hissed from her spot curled around Harry's feet.

~~Yes, yes, Queen Nagini, I shall only make things after providing you a den.~~ Harry rolled his eyes as he pulled out a few balls of a bulky single-ply, roving-like yarn from his basket. ~~Does her Highness desire a full den, or a half den?~~

Slithering up his legs, Nagini inspected what Harry had pulled out, winding between the balls. ~~*A full one. With a soft bottom that stays warm!*~~

Remembering that he still has a full batt of Swiss Cloudwool at home, he thought for a moment. ~~I can make you a soft pillow to rest on, but only when we get back to our nest. It shall be the softest you ever slept on.~~

Accepting her hiss of satisfaction, he started to finger crochet a circle in single stitch, slowly expanding it until it was as wide as a rubbish bin lid, about twenty minutes of work. ~~Is this wide enough?~~

Setting it down on the ground, he watched as Nagini coiled up on it before shaking his head. Slipping it out from underneath her, he was going to work more on it when Zarba popped in. "Master Twilfitties grandson be's at the door, Hawwy!"

Setting his work aside, Harry trotted from the room and down the short hallway to the antechamber, Nagini following him. Smiling, he opened the door just to frown. "Oh, it's you."

Terrance Twilfit stood on the front stoop, his nose wrinkled like he had smelled something wafting out of an open sewer. And he was dressed in robes that left no doubt in Harry's mind that he had taken on most of the tailoring design and duties for dressing Tom; they were incredibly gaudy and just overwhelming.

"Yes, it's me," Terrance sneered. "I'm here to do your fitting." On the ground next to him was a flat-bottomed leather bag, similar to a muggle doctor's satchel.

Folding his arms across his chest, Harry clicked his tongue at the elder Twilfit sibling. "Nah thanks, I prefer Tarragon. If you can send him along, tha' woul' be won'erful." With each syllable of Harry's gutter-accent he uttered, Terrance's eye twitched. "If I nee' t'reschedule, tha's fine."

"You will either be fitted today, or not at all-"

"HARRY!"

Breaking away from their pissing contest, both turned to see Tarragon trotting up the sidewalk. He was dressed no less sharply than the last Harry saw him, but in a more vintage

fashion of a brocade waistcoat in cream with jade floral patterns, a crisp white high-collared shirt with gathered sleeves, and close-cut trousers in a chocolate brown tucked into black knee-high boots. Over his shoulders was a midweight spring cape in a matching brown, and he carried a bag similar to Terrance's with his left hand.

MUCH more sensible than whatever Terrance has going on. "Tarragon! Lovely to see you! C'mon in, mate, and let's bang on!" Tugging Tarragon behind him, Harry dashed back inside the Townhouse before slamming the door in Terrance's shocked face. "Bloody feckin' Berkeley hunt." Turning back to Tarragon, he grinned, "nice to see you, again! Loved the robes you sent, but, uh, well," he chuckled a bit bashfully while scratching the back of his head, "I outgrew them too quick."

"I see that," Tarragon muttered dazedly, forgetting to modulate his voice. Catching himself, he cleared his throat, "so, is it safe to assume we'll be going for a full wardrobe?"

"Yes," beckoning Tarragon to follow, Harry led them further into the Townhouse. "The whole shebang. Socks, pants, under robes, over robes, ooh, and trousers!" Entering the parlor he had been in shortly before Tarragon's arrival, he walked over to a desk and pulled a footstool out from underneath it. Plunking it down in the clear area of the room in front of his loveseat, he turned back to Tarragon just to see him standing in shock as Nagini hovered in front of his face, scenting the air.

~~Nagini, please don't scare my tailor. He's here to make me some new clothes, and I really like him.~~ Tarragon jumped at the sound of Parseltongue, his blue-purple eyes flicking between Harry and Nagini.

~~He doesn't smell like a 'he'. She is deceiving you.~~

~~He doesn't feel like a she, and wants to be called a he. It's only polite.~~ "Alright, so, how do you want to start? Get down to me under robe?" Getting a stuttered out 'yes', Harry started to undo the buttons starting at the back of his neck, "sorry about Nagini, she's like Tom, and a bit protective." As he spoke, Nagini slithered over to his knitting basket, heaving her great coils inside it as she burrowed in and ended up pushing some balls of yarn out. "Nagini," he chastised, just to roll his eyes at her hissed laugh. "I swear, they deserve each other," he muttered. "Ah, can you help me with the rest of the buttons?"

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Tom counted to ten before letting out a single, long breath. Upon arrival he had been dogpiled by both Lucius and Severus, the latter foaming at the mouth as a result of the latest tomfuckery some members of the Budgeting board were attempting to pull. His entire schedule for the morning had been upset as a result of the shitshow, and it was only because Severus was in the right for his anger that Tom didn't deck the man. He ended up going through the whole file with the two, and it was only now, hours later, that he sent off a missive to summon the idiots responsible to his office **now**, otherwise heads will roll.

Hearing a knock at his office door, he barked "enter!" Looking up as the door closed, he was surprised to see not Lord Maximilian Taproot or his son, nor Lady LeGrange, Heir

Tomfoot, *or* Mr. Jaimeson Lebowski, but Lord-in-Waiting Potter. "Mr. Potter, do pardon my tone, but I have an important meeting about to start. Do make it quick."

Looking at him with a face just this side of disrespectful, Potter nodded. "Myself and others have reason to believe that your Consort may be a Potter. I wish to have him tested and, if so, to welcome him into my Family."

Tom tilted his head in acknowledgment. "While I do not deny your request, Harry has yet to be cleared for use of magic, let alone the procedure required to test for bloodlines. Once Healer Parkinson gives his blessing, then we can reassess." Looking back down at his papers, he heard a muffled snort. Slowly looking back up, he shot a dark-look towards the younger man. "I sense that you wish to...disagree, with me?"

"In a sense," Potter responded blithely, shifting his weight to rest on his left foot. "It is no secret that my family and allies do not support you, not now nor during your *Revolution*. Neither of us can trust the other to hold to their word."

Tom just blinked at him impassively for a few moments before devolving into laughter. Potter was entirely unprepared for his reaction and his goggling only made Tom laugh more.

"Oh, Potter," Tom forced out as he lazed in his chair. "If your posturing wasn't so adorable I'd be *insulted*," he snapped the last part, his face going from mirthful to sanguine. "The only reason you aren't a smear on the rug is because rendering you so is more trouble than you're worth. And I quite like that rug." Getting up, he floated around his desk before gliding forward, not stopping until only a few inches separated their toes. Leaning down from his considerable height, he got close enough to Potter's face he could see three faint pale spots under his right eye, the size of pinpricks, perhaps the scars from adolescent acne. "I remind you that, while I allow you little Lord's and Lady's your, *illusion*, of a fair government, it is just that; an illusion. One that I can easily dispel, if I so choose." Standing back up, he bowed his head briefly. "Remember that."

Strutting back to his desk, he tossed over his shoulder, "I'll let Harry know he may have some family interested in meeting him." Circling back around, he sat with a toss of his hair. "Family is always a desire for an orphan, and far be it for me to deny something so simple for my Darling." A few knocks sounded at the door, and Tom flashed the other his patented 'Politician Smile'. "Looks like our time is up! We'll be seeing you, hm?"

"-so, I was wondering, if you have the time, can you take a look at me Tom's clothes and tell me what the feck is going on!?" Tarragon snickered around the pins in his mouth as Harry nearly shouted his question. Readjusting one of the folds for what will be an overcoat, he hummed as Harry continued his tirade. "Seriously! They're not bad quality, but have you seen the **style!**? My Tom is many things, but '*delicate*' or '*ethereal*' aren't it! Who the flying feck designed his wardrobe?"

"Me bro'her," Tarragon bit out, snickering as Harry shouted 'I KNEW it!' and forcing Tarragon to readjust Harry's posture. "He's technically gif'ed, bu' no 'ense." Pulling out the last two pins in his mouth, he fed them through the fabric he was working with, studying how

the fold started just under Harry's shoulder blade before following the curve of his spine. "Like a lot of other Purebloods, he thinks how rare or expensive a fabric is, is the most important part of the design." Which is a shame, because a lot of the materials used are frankly *beautiful*, but everything gets lost when you have eight fabrics in four different colors and textures competing against three different trims. "I help Grandfather with some of the simpler pieces. I quite like doing work for the Malfoy's and Patil's, they understand that sometimes less means more." He particularly liked doing work for the Patil's; they have access to fabrics that he can only *dream* of handling...

Harry scrunched his nose at Tarragon's statement. *That sounds about right*, he thought, remembering some of Tom's complaints from when he returned from his first year. "Yeah, Terrance just does too much. Also, I just don't like him." Smirking as Tarragon choked back a giggle, Harry asked, "so, you interested?"

"Hm?"

"In fixin' me Tom's wardrobe? He's fit as feck, an' I wan'a show 'im off." He felt smug at the sputtering his statement earned. "You up for it?" He hopes his unspoken offer to become their *personal* tailor is coming through. He likes Tarragon, both for his designs and stitchwork, and because he's just a nice bloke.

Things between them were quiet for a few minutes as Tarragon made a matching fold under Harry's other shoulder blade. All that could be heard was the rustling of fabric and the tinny tinkle of pins rustling in their tin.

"Sure."

Humming under his breath, Tom led the way towards his Townhouse while the LeStrange brothers followed. He had run into them in the Ministry's Atrium, with Rodolphus nearly vibrating in place while his younger, more excitable brother, Rabastan, just sighed over his brother's uncharacteristic demeanor. Inviting them along to his lunch hour with Harry, he stopped long enough to pick up lunch from *Martino's Bistro* down at the end of Vertic.

Judging from how Rodolphus seemed like he would fly apart at the seams, Tom suspects that he has had some sort of breakthrough in his research to Harry's wandless Transfiguration. Which could be a good or bad thing, one could never tell when it comes to Rodolphus; he's seen the man wax lyrical when a Transfiguration apprentice got too ambitious and attempted an advanced spell, and ended up killing themselves when they somehow partially turned their heart into a hagfish.

Entering his Townhouse, he was greeted to the sound of Harry's raised voice hurling apologies and Nagini's hissed laughter. Curious, he led the party towards the Main Parlor and was greeted to the sight of Harry in black suede leggings and a short red tunic squatting in front of the younger Twilfit...daughter? Son? Who was sitting on their rear in a daze whilst holding one of their bright red cheeks in their hand as Harry frantically apologized for *something* and Nagini just hissed hysterically from her spot in Harry's knitting basket.

"Is everything alright, here," Tom asked, his voice cutting through the cacophony. Harry, Twilfit, and Nagini froze before Nagini started hiss-laughing harder than before while Harry and- *Tiffany!* That's who it was! -Tiffany went redder than the surface of the sun. "Now I'm really interested to know what's going on..."

Harry and Tiffany exchanged looks before Tiffany groaned in mortification and flopped onto her back, bringing her arms up and hiding her face while Harry jumped to his feet, looking down as he played with his fingers. The new position showed that his tunic was quite short indeed, only just going past his pert bottom and was made from a silken, woven material.

Tom approves.

"Um, well, er," Harry stammered, his eyes darting from Tom, to Tiffany, to the LeStrange brothers and back again. "I, um, oh this is embarrassing!"

"Go oooooonn..." Tom leered, greatly enjoying watching Harry writhe in embarrassment.

"Oh, feck it. I accidentally hit Tarragon in the face wif me botty while reachin' for 'is measure," Harry groused out. The renamed Tarragon just wailed, making Harry flinch. "Um, an' I hit 'im 'ard enuff to knock 'im ova."

Everything was quiet before Rabastan bit back a boyish giggle, only to fail and start guffawing before Tom heard a loud smack and a muffled 'oi!' as Rodolphus did his brotherly duty and shut the other up.

Tom smirked at Harry even more, prompting his Darling to bark out, "I said sorry!" After which Tarragon whispered, 'it's alright Consort Slytherin,' which made both Tom and Harry freeze.

"What."

Oh, fuck.

The Devil Bows Down

Tom has never felt genuine fear of another person in his life. But right now, he can feel a drop of sweat trickle down the back of his neck.

This **should** be comical; Harry is lucky to come up to his sternum on a good day. Hell, Tom takes shits bigger than his diminutive Consort on the regular. One bump of his hip would not just send Harry flying, but would soundly knock him out as well. It's like trying to set up a fight between a chihuahua and a wolf.

*But chihuahua's are **mean**.* And looking down at Harry, who was standing arms akimbo and **glaring** up at him, he very much reminded Tom of one of those evil, yappy dogs.

"Tom." His face twitching slightly, he looked away from the other, careful to keep his face in a neutral mask. "Tommy." He sniffed, disregarding Harry's unspoken warning. He's not going to apologize for this! Narcissa was the one to put the Consort Ring on his finger, not he! And really, if anyone's to blame, it should be Harry; accepting a ring without asking what it means!? Honestly! Doesn't he know that you shouldn't trust something if you can't tell where its brain is kept?

And really, Tom is not just a Slytherin, but THE Slytherin. Once he realized what was on Harry's hand, he was going to make sure the only thing to replace it would be a wedding ring. Even if it meant keeping Harry in the dark. Lord knows the other would have gotten hung up on his morals-

"Tom, look at me when I'm talking to you!" Catching Harry's gaze, he made sure the other watched him look away and over his head deliberately. "Oi! Look at me, I said look at meee..." Harry's finger nearly poked him in the nose, and he had to bite his cheek to keep himself from laughing at how much like a disgruntled kitten Harry looked like as he kept swaying away from Harry's finger. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Rabastan turning away, shoulders shaking in his mirth while Rodolphus just blinked placidly. Tarragon, on the other hand, was still sprawled out on the floor, expression morphing between confusion, amusement, and slight horror.

"Oooh, that's it, ya lil' shite!" Hopping in anger, Harry looked around for something to stand on before darting over to a man who looked very similar to Rodolphus but a bit softer, yanking him by the arm. Ignoring the loud 'OI!' this earned him, he dragged the man over before throwing the man down onto his hands and knees, muttering a quick 'sorry!' before hopping onto his back. Standing on top of him, Harry could now look Tom in the eye.

Tom couldn't stop the barked laugh from emerging, but the boop to his nose he got did, and he scrunched it up on reflex. He HATES when Harry does that, and the other knows it.

~~Oi, arsehole! How long were you going to keep me in the dark!?~~ *God, but Harry speaking Parseltongue was **doing it** for him.* ~~We might be intimate NOW, but we weren't then!~~ Trying to glare at Tom harder, Harry's look now devolved into something more akin to a pout. ~~And frankly, it would have been NICE to have some warning-~~

~I was only going to say something when I actually proposed,~ Tom's answering hiss cut through Harry's rant. ~To be frank, while Narcissa may have presented the ring, you were only able to slip it on because my feelings for you were genuine, even then.~ He grinned smugly as Harry gapped like a fish before the meaning of the words hit him, and he didn't hold back the roguish grin from forming when Harry went so red he nearly turned purple, hissing wordlessly as he covered his face with his hands and sunk into a squat.

"Um, Consort Slytherin," a slightly muffled but strained voice queried from below him.

Squeaking in mortification, Harry remembered that he was still perched on some poor man's back that he had just *viciously* thrown onto the floor and used as a footstool. "Oh my goo'ness, I'm so sorry! 'ere, lemme 'elp you up!" Hopping off with a stumble, Harry helped him up. "I don' know wha' hi' me! I jus', oooh..." Getting the man up, Harry tried dusting off the man's robes, both of them red in the face from the encounter. "Zarba! Can you please show thi' gent to th' bafroom?"

Tom watched Rabastan like a hawk as the other stiffly followed Zarba to the nearest toilet. He knows what that particular gait means, most boys end up doing it at some point while going through the worst hormonal aspects of puberty. During his time at Hogwarts, it actually became a game among the girls to see how many boys they could get into such a state.

It also reminded him that Rabastan had a not-so-secret love for smaller, domineering partners. Tom doesn't know if he should growl in possessive warning or show Harry off. He'd be lying to himself if the thought of rubbing into Rabastan's face the fact that it's HIM, *Tom*, who has sole, exclusive rights to bury his face between those thick, muscular thighs that are being **wonderfully** shown off by leggings that are leaving nothing to the imagination, doesn't fill him with a smug, crowing satisfaction.

"Well, um, I'm sorry you both had to see that side of me, Mr. LeStrange, Tarragon," Harry muttered. "And I'll offer my apologies to the other gent, as well, when he's settled himself."

Tom put his arm around Harry's shoulders, gently tugging him towards one of the other loveseats in the parlor, leaving the one holding Nagini and Harry's yarn basket unmolested. "You always were feisty when you got hungry. Good thing I picked up a sizable lunch. And I doubt that Rabastan would hold it against you." Getting Harry seated, Tom squeezed himself in beside him before flicking his wand a few times, summoning the dishes he purchased from *Martino's* from their 'take-out' station. Most of what he had purchased was light fair, salads, and scampi's, but he also included heavier, meatier dishes for Harry. He had also purchased enough to share with the LeStrange brothers and Tarragon, as well. "Come, sit," he motioned at the others.

As three other chairs walked over, forming a semi-circle around Tom and Harry, Rodolphus and Tarragon chose their places. "Um, thank you, Lord Slytherin," Tarragon murmured. After receiving a gracious nod of Tom's head, Tarragon dug into his meal.

While Tarragon and Rabastan ate, Tom took the time to serve up a plate for Harry. After slicing in half the (LARGE) serving of chicken parmesan, he plated it next to a decent amount of garden salad before passing it over to Harry and taking the other half of each for himself. Normally, he can eat the full chicken parm serving on his own and have quite a bit of

room to spare, but he still has a meeting with the Seelie representative after lunch, and he doesn't need to be in a full-on 'carb coma' while dealing with one of the Good Folk.

They ate in companionable silence before Tom broke it. "Young Mr. Twilfit, I must say that the outfit you came up with for my Consort is quite unusual. What is your inspiration behind it?" He saw out of the corner of his eye the look Harry shot him at his utterance of the word 'Consort', telling him he is not *quite* off the hook, yet. Just to rile Harry up further, he winked at him.

"Oh, um," Tarragon stumbled. "Harry," he blushed at the raised eyebrow Tom gave him at the informal use of Harry's name, only stopping when Harry absentmindedly swatted at his middle with a muttered 'be nice', "Harry has graciously allowed me to use him in some fashion experiments. He quite liked my suit when he visited Grandfather's store and is interested in letting me push the boundaries of common fashion, as it currently stands."

"Tarragon is the one who made the cream and black robes, along with my underthings," Harry chirped. "I'm quite sad I didn't get more time to wear them..."

Tom smiled brightly at that. "Ah, so it was you who made those fetching frocks! I, too, am quite sad Harry couldn't spend more time with them." Those short robes did amazing work in showing off Harry's legs. They were also quite nice and modern and would stand out in a crowd. "It would be quite interesting to see what else you come up with."

As Tom spoke, Tarragon had slowly relaxed. "I have a few projects in mind for him. I took some classes at a muggle fashion design school, and I've been combining some of their ideas with wizarding fashion. We've not had much progress the last few centuries, and, um," he started to blush as three sets of eyes watched him. "Sorry for blabbering!"

Harry waved his fork at him. "Don't worry about it. I'm used to hearing others ramble on about their passions. Tom had a thing for history for quite some time when he was, ooh," his brow wrinkled as he thought. "You were six, right?"

"Seven, and up until I got my letter, Darling," Tom answered, cutting off a bit of his chicken and sliding it over onto Harry's now-empty plate. "And then I started to devour magical history." And it was a good thing he did, too. It helped him keep from repeating the same mistakes of previous Dark Lord's and Lady's.

For the most part.

Like when Ferrus the Ferocious tried an economic takeover back in 1869, but never thought to let the goblins in on it. They didn't take too kindly to such shenanigans and ended up creating a booming market, just to spite him. Ferrus ended up slinking off into obscurity, dying penniless and in a disreputable whorehouse.

"You seem to know much about our Lordship, Mr. Potter," Rodolphus intoned. "Approximately how old are you?"

Humming, Harry speared the bit of chicken before popping it into his mouth, his face furrowed as he thought. "Well, I was about a year old when I was dropped at Wool's, which

was in November of '21, so 1920. Tom was born at the end of 1926. But, my ACTUAL date of birth waffles between November and July, because, apparently, time travel messes with things," he grouched. "So, we're pegging it at July 31'st, 1920 for now."

While Rodolphus didn't even so much as bat an eyelash at the pronouncement that Consort Slytherin was soon going to be turning seventy-seven, Tarragon squeaked before choking slightly on his bite of fish. "Um, *how?*"

"Apparently I 'Folded' my way to the nineties," Harry grumped. "Which tells me **nothing**, because *someone*," he snarked, "never bothered to explain it to me!"

Tom sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose as he, once again, got pegged by Harry. ~**I suspect this is going to be a pattern**, ~ he hissed. "'Folding' is a technique of creating a 'pocket' in space. The Blacks, for whom Bellatrix is one by birth, have a unique grasp of Space and Time magic, and one of their ancestors *centuries* ago figured out how to bend the two to create extra space or manipulate how time flows."

"Oh, so I just broke physics," Harry softly uttered as Rodolphus nodded. "...I take it that it's not an easy thing to do?"

"No, indeed it is not," Rodolphus said. "Not even most Blacks can do so. It is a very difficult, magic-sapping working. I suspect that this may be why my wife is so taken with you." Hearing his brother enter the room, he gently nudged his chair to make room for him before sliding his plate over. "Along with your ability to wandlessly and **permanently** Transfigure things." He suspects that the reason Bella has had no issues with Consort Slytherin's presence is due to his being outrageously powerful and of Black descent himself. Very rarely will one Black truly turn upon another, their history of being hunted down by other families creating an almost instinctual response to guard one another. Sirius is the first Black in a long time to dance on that fine line, but luckily never crossed it, even during the worst of the Revolution.

That, and anyone who dotes upon Jasper is good in her book, and therefore good in Rodolphus's. Feeling the air around his brother shift, he looked out the side of his eye before doing a double-take at Rabastan's *very* pink face and a somewhat glassy-eyed stare. Getting an embarrassed look back, he just jerked his head at him before widening his eyes before sighing as Rabastan just sighed dreamily in response.

Harry just peered down at his plate sitting in his lap. "Then...why'd I never receive a letter?" It doesn't make *sense*.

"*That* is something we can only discuss after your appointment with Healer Parkinson tomorrow," Tom stated. "Once he clears you for magic, we'll run some tests to see what's going on, along to see who you may be related to." Harry looked up through his lashes, cocking his head in question. "As Rodolphus said, Folding is something quite difficult, even for a Black, so you may be related to Bellatrix, and thus Jasper, in some way. I have also been approached by a Potter because frankly, you have the same bird's nest hair that they typically have." Tom rolled his eyes as Harry muttered an insulted 'oi' about his mop. Hearing a gentle chime, he pulled an overly-complicated looking pocket watch out from his robes before grunting. "We'll have to discuss this more later. I'm due back in fifteen minutes, and have a

meeting scheduled for fifteen after *that*." Flicking his wand a few times, all of the plates neatly zoomed to stack themselves before popping away back to *Martino's*, with the leftovers being sent to Zarba to handle. Standing up, he bent over to give Harry a kiss, smirking at the pout the other had before straightening his robes out. "I'll be by around four to take us home. If not, I'll have Zarba take care of it."

The LeStrange brothers followed him out after giving their goodbyes, Rodolphus feeling a tad put-out over not getting to discuss Harry's ability to wandlessly permanently Transfigure, but he estimates he'll have a shot after Parkinson clears the shorter male to experiment.

After returning to the Ministry, the group parted ways, the two LeStranges going down several halls before Rodolphus yanked Rabastan into an alcove. "Robby," he hissed. "Did you do what I *think* you did!?" Getting a flat 'uhhhhh...' in answer, he facepalmed. "Just, what **possessed** you to do such a thing!?"

"Roddy, you don't *get it*," Rabastan simpered, causing Rodolphus to grit his teeth and scream internally. "I want Harry to slap me across the face and spit in my fucking **mouth**. He's *perfect*!" The '*and I want him to snap my neck with his thighs*,' went unsaid because Roddy did get a peek up Consort Slytherin's tunic and got to see firm, muscular, **thick** thighs wrapped in those leggings and now his mouth was starting to water...

"And **taken**. So the next time you meet him, I suggest NOT dashing off and having a wank in the nearest bathroom. Our Lord may have mellowed out somewhat, but I have a *gut Feeling*," he stressed, "that he would gladly devour your heart and shit out your soul if he catches you sniffing around his Consort." The Lovegood's aren't the only mad seer's in Britain; as much as Rodolphus wants to strangle his little brother on a good day, he'd miss the arse if Rabastan went a little too far. "Keep your fantasies that. *Fantasies*."

At one-fifteen on the dot, Undersecretary Percy Weasley knocked exactly three times on Tom's office door before opening it. "Minister Gaunt? Emissary Lorcan of the Light Court, to see you." Percy sounded...dazed. Like he was on some euphoric high.

Fairy Struck. Tom had studied what little literature still existed in their world about the Fae, and while he knows quite a bit of it is romantic bunk, one common thread was the 'glamorous, 'charming' effect that all Sidhe possess (to an extent). While the effect wasn't nearly as devastating on wizards as it was on muggles, it could still be felt, making the witch or wizard caught up in it feel drugged and more susceptible to the Sidhe in question.

As Percy walked further in, Tom stood to greet Lorcan. The Fae in question was not much taller than he, himself, but was also not as broad-shouldered. He had the near-inhuman, ultra-refined features of one of the Fair Folk, and was dressed in the sky at twilight, the Sidhe having such great and exacting control of their power and elements that they were not bound to wear clothing of mortal make, but instead, they dress themselves in light and shadows, the dew of the early morning and the joy of a lover.

As Tom walked around his desk, he also noticed that Lorcan had the distinct countenance of an Unseelie. His skin was just too pale, and his long, straight hair was just too dark, to put

him firmly in the Light Court. It was only looking closer at Lorcan's eyes that he could see the other was of both the Light and Dark Court. His eyes were like the night sky, the outer iris being the blue of an evening sky gradient towards the blackest black where the pupil would be and scattered across them were little flecks of silvery-grey.

"Greetings, Emissary Lorcan," Tom stated, being sure to lace his voice with just a touch of magic to clear the air. As he dipped his head, he saw Percy flinch before shaking himself from the stupor he was in. "It is wonderful to see a possible rebuilding of relationships between Wizards and the Fair Ones. I hope your trip has been uneventful." When he smiled, he made sure it was one that showed off his dimple.

"We thank you for your well wishes, and are excited to work towards a new dawn." As Lorcan spoke, Tom could feel a tendril of Charm whisper out, the tip of it dancing along with Lorcan's words before darting out to latch onto Tom's mind. He batted it away with a stretch of his *Occulmentic* shields and watched with interest as the corner of Lorcan's mouth twitched in amusement.

Tom could feel his own lips curl in amusement, something dark and deep inside of him unfurling with a stretch like a cat waking from a long nap.

"Likewise."

After seeing Tarragon off, Harry then resettled himself on the loveseat he decided was now his, going back to working on Nagini's nest. Once he got the base as wide as required, he then started working in a circle, adding a few rounds before transitioning to working back and forth in rows, leaving a section unworked so it can be an opening for Nagini. Once that 'hole' was big enough, he went back to working in a circle before drastically decreasing into a cone. Once finished, he snipped a length of the yarn, snagged a tapestry needle, and fed the yarn tail into his work to secure it.

Once finished, he took a few moments to admire his work. He had used oddballs of the same thick yarn, having separated out the colors where he only had one skein, for this project. He tried to organize them in rainbow order, but there were still areas where colors would jump drastically.

Oh, and he still needs to make the pillow.

Setting the den down, he called out for Nagini.

~~Mate Harry has finished Nagini's den?~~

~~Yes. I still need to make your pillow, but I want to see if you like it.~~ He watched with some apprehension as she slithered out of his yarn basket. Her tongue flicked out a few times as she inspected the outside of her new den before going in.

~~Nagini likes this den! It has many colors, as due her station as a Queen Serpent, and reminds her of her Speaker's shiny stone mine.~~

~~Good! I shall make your pillow tonight.~~ Getting a sleepy hiss in agreement, Harry plopped himself back down into his spot before pulling more goodies out of his basket. After pulling out a ridiculous amount of yarn, he finally grasped the wee sweater he was making for Jasper. He just needed to finish a few more rows before he could fold it into shape and do the two seams required. The modular pattern blew his *mind*, and he was so happy someone came up with the idea. He can easily bang out a few a week to donate to Saint Mungo's in between his other projects.

Fingering the **violently** purple yarn, he also made a note to see about acquiring a knitting sheath. Especially once he gets further along on Tom's sweater; once it gets heavy, the Irish Cottage method just won't cut it.

"I am quite pleased with how our talks went today, Minister Gaunt," Emissary Lorcan stated as he rose from his seat, one hand held out. "Queen Niamh was right to reach out to your Ministry."

Grasping the proffered hand as he himself stood, Tom absently noticed that Lorcan's fingers were longer and had an extra joint. Regardless, they shook the same. "And I am delighted she decided to do so. None too few of my people have traces of Fae within their family tree, myself included. Being able to connect to and learn of their ancestors is a boon." He started to walk with Lorcan towards his office door, his eyes darting to the large grandfather clock next to one of his bookcases and noticing the time being just after four.

Spying Tom's glance, Lorcan pulled a half-smile. "Ready to be rid of me, already," he chided, more Charm slipping into his voice.

Tom's face dipped into his usual 'Politician's Smile', but a few degrees more genuine even while he swatted the Charm away. "On the contrary! While I am over the moon to have met an esteemed member of the Good Queen's Court, I am afraid I have somebody waiting for me at home."

Entering the hallway, Lorcan waited for Tom to bespell his office before securing his door. "Ah, yes. I have heard you recently acquired a Consort." The two men walked down the hallway, making for the Ministry Apparation point. "I shall inform my Queen about our fruitful talks and make arrangements to bring the potential students over. Perhaps they can meet with your partner?"

"...while I doubt Harry would decline the invitation," Tom carefully said as they glided down a set of stairs, "as you no doubt know from the papers, he is recovering from illness. While I doubt any of the students would do anything with malicious intent, I must put his well being above anyone else." They stopped at the base of the staircase to let a wizard pushing a pram go past before Tom continued. "But, I don't think he'd take too kindly to that. He's always been stubborn."

"I think the word you're looking for is 'headstrong', Minister Gaunt," Lorcan chuckled.

Tom snorted. "If I tried to dance around *anything*, including describing Harry, I'd get a good swat." Going to stand in line for the Apparation point, he flicked an anti-eavesdropping charm around them. "Back to the previous discussion. Are there any other needs my Ministry should address, in regards to the possible students? Special diets? Allergies? Magical incompatibilities?" They slowly inched forward as Tom listed things.

"Most of that can be addressed when they arrive. Not all will be suited to spending time in the Overworld. But, obviously, a place to live outside of your school will be paramount." They were only a few people away from taking their own turn.

Tom hummed in thought. "There are a number of old, unused properties in the Ministry's keep. I'll have a list made up and each one inspected before we tour them." It was now their turn to utilize the Apparation room, and both Tom and Lorcan chose designated 'Away' circles next to each other. With a dip of the head, Tom wished the other well and watched with interest as the other simply flickered away in a bleed of purple, orange, and gold light, leaving only a faint outline of where he stood just moments beforehand until that, too, faded like a whisper.

With a spin of his heel, Tom snapped away.

Harry must have fallen asleep at some point, because the next thing he knew, he was being cradled in strong arms as there was a hissed conversation. Grunting in response to being woken, he blinked slowly as he tried to focus on the world around him sans glasses while Tom walked to the front door of the Townhouse. Behind them, he could hear Nagini slithering whilst scooting Harry's project basket along with her, the rasp of her scales on the polished wooden floor sounding like sand getting chased by a breeze.

"I'm awake," Harry mumbled, his hand clawing at his chest for his spec's. "I can walk," he blushed

Tom just huffed through his nose as he jimmied open the front door, letting Nagini slide out before exiting, himself. "Please. I hauled your scrawny backside around for nearly a week before you woke up. This is nothing." And it was true; even now at a healthy weight, Tom has no difficulty in carrying Harry around. And he'd be able to do so with one arm as well, easily.

"Ah," Harry uttered before his cheeks went pink when he realized they were outside. "Um, really, you don't have to," he squeaked when an elderly couple sitting on a nearby bench cooed at the sight.

Tom just made a noncommittal sound as he shut the door. He's spent decades building up a cult of personality around himself, and adding Harry to the mix is not just easy, but beneficial. He's a bit nervous about how the appointment with Parkinson will go tomorrow, and so he's going to do *everything* possible to endear Harry to the public he can. If Harry is truly un-magical enough that he cannot use a wand, Tom wants to make sure that his Consort will be protected everywhere he goes by the public, themselves.

And if that means carrying Harry bridal-style through Vertic and Diagon, then so BE it.

Apparating back to the Demanse, Tom still kept a hold of Harry, even when the other wiggled in his arms. Once they entered the sitting room, Tom took Harry's basket from Nagini and tossed it towards the chair Harry favors before entering the bedroom. Shifting the other, he flopped onto their bed, Harry squealing once they started tipping before letting out a choked 'OOF!' as he got squished by Tom's larger mass. Shuffling further into the middle of the bed, Tom squirmed until he could bury his nose into Harry's neck, looking forward to just basking in his Consort's presence until dinner.

At least, he was, until a sharp jab to his ribs ripped out a startled grunt and jerk, small but strong hands shoving him to roll over to the side so that he was now half-laying on Harry as the other attempted to slither out from underneath him with a glare. "'Arry, get back here."

"No." Scooching towards the end of the bed, Harry slid his legs over the side. Mentally cursing how fucking TALL Tom was, to need a bed so far off the ground that Harry is going to need a damn stepstool in order to get in or out of without looking like a child sneaking in to sleep with a parent, he ground his teeth as a long arm snaked around his waist, keeping him in his place. "Tommy, I swear, if you don' lemme go righ' **now**-"

"Unless you need the toilet, you're staying *right, here.*" Merlin, but if Harry is still pissed over Tom keeping the meaning of the ring from him, he's going to scream-

Harry's head whipped around, his teeth bared in a silent hiss, the abrupt change in mood startling Tom into releasing him. With a pointed glare, Harry shoved off of the bed, his feet thumping onto the thick rug the bedframe rested on before he not-quite-stomped away. "I'm still fuming from your dumbarsery, and if I have t'see your bleedin' mug for anuver five minutes, I'm going t'clock you." Snagging a nightshirt from the wardrobe, he entered the bathroom long enough to get changed before exiting and heading towards the foot of the bed.

Tom just shot the other an unimpressed look, rolling so he was on his back before pushing himself up to lounge on his elbows. "So? Does this mean you're banishing me to the couch?" As he spoke, Harry snagged two of the blankets folded over the foot of the bed. "You are! Darling, if you think I'm moving from my spot-"

"No, you daft bastard," Harry growled. "*I'M* sleeping on the couch." Feeling satisfaction burn in his gut at the shocked look he got for that statement, Harry smirked before tossing his head and strutting from the room, ignoring Tom's frantic '*DARLING!?*' that chased after him. Shutting the door firmly behind him (because he's not an **animal** who slams doors when angry), he bee-lined towards one of the couches and created a little blanket nest before curling up in it and dragging his basket over.

"*Fucking arsehole,*" he muttered as he riffled around, his fingers clenching around some needles before he yanked his hand out, his face screwing up as he saw he had pulled out the sweater he was making for Tom. "*MAJOR fucking arsehole.*" Setting it aside, he reached further inside, pulling out and tossing each skein he saw and rejected until he pulled out the large twist of black Shetland lace yarn. Taking a few moments to look at it, he then reached for his 2.75mm knitting needles before untwisting the lace yarn and slinging the large loop of

wool over his shoulder like a sash, pulling free and untying the yarn ends before unwinding a few loops of the fine yarn and starting to cast on for a Shetland lace shawl.

Midway through casting on for the shawl he was going to gift Bellatrix, he heard the doorknob on the bedroom door twist. Before Tom could even poke his stupid fucking head between the door and frame, Harry grabbed a random ball of yarn and hurled it with a grunt, the force of it causing the door to lightly smack Tom's forehead and clue him in that Harry is very *Not Happy* with him at the moment.

Seeing the other take the hint for what it was, Harry settled in for a good, long, anger-fueled knitting session.

It has been a good four hours since Harry had banished himself from their bedroom, and Tom was ready to strangle someone. He knew he had messed up about informing Harry about the Consort ring, but he didn't think the other could keep his hissy-fit going for so long. It was only now that Tom couldn't hear the angry *tic-tic-tic* of metal knitting needles, and it had been the best indicator of how **angry** Harry was; the other prided himself on how quickly AND quietly he could wield his needles. The fact that he could hear them a room away and through a thick wooden door showed that Harry was **pissed**.

After getting thwacked with the door via a yarn missile, he had decided to hunker down in the bedroom and summoned some of his backlogged paperwork to give him something to do as he waited for Harry to cool off. A few hours in he received supper, with both Dobby and Zarba popping in to deliver not just his meal, but disappointed looks, as well. And after they popped away, he tucked into his meal just to discover that his lamb was just a tad overcooked, his potatoes unseasoned, and his greens bitter from burnt garlic. He still finished his plate because he doubted he would get a redo if he asked, and it was still perfectly serviceable, just not up to the standards he was accustomed to.

After not hearing anything from the sitting room, he debated (attempting) going out there (again) until he heard the sounds of cutlery on stoneware. Deciding that bothering his diminutive Consort whilst eating was a recipe for disaster, he decided instead to have a bath before turning in early; their appointment with Parkinson was for the bedeviling hour of seven, and he wasn't going to subject the poor healer to two pissy men instead of one.

"I can't sleep like this."

Staring up at the canopy above him as he lay starfished on his bed, Tom blinked tired, gritty eyes. Lolling his head, he turned his attention towards the bedroom door; it had gone quiet in the sitting room hours ago, Harry dropping off to sleep sometime during Tom's bath.

It was now around midnight, and he needs to be up in about five to six hours, but he hasn't been able to catch a wink of shuteye. He's never had a lover stay in his bed a full night. Bringing his flavor of the day to his Townhouse, he'd enjoy them, have his fill, and then return to the Demanse. He always made sure they were satisfied and provided post-coital

services, but he would leave them to sleep it off and instead use his own actual bed to find his rest. He has LITERALLY never properly shared a bed since his teenage years, so he should have no issue sleeping on his own, in theory.

In theory.

But somehow, Harry has undone all of that over the course of less than a month. Not having that tiny, huddled mass curled up in his arms, breaths gently puffing against his skin, feels disgustingly **wrong**. The Universe has a new rule; Harry's place is at Tom's side, both awake and asleep. The fact that the other has exiled himself to the damn *couch* is just gross and undignified.

Grunting in loathing, he shoved the blankets to the side, swinging his feet over the edge of the bed before quietly padding towards the door. Casting a muffling charm, he gently twisted the knob and peered into the room, looking and listening for any signs of movement. Only picking up the deep, even breaths of someone fast asleep, he made his way around the furniture littering the room. He nearly panicked as he stubbed his pinky toe against a blocky table leg, biting his lip to muffle his curse as Harry twisted in his sleep before letting out a sigh and relaxing back into the couch cushions.

Tom was going to join him, but then he realized that Harry had chosen one of the *smallest* couches in the room. It only had two square cushions to sit on, and while Harry would be comfortable enough curling up on it, Tom would have to turn into a damn pretzel just to get his legs on it.

After debating with himself for a handful of moments, he muttered out a quiet 'fuck it' and gently scooped up a still-slumbering Harry before contorting himself to fit on the couch and snuggling his cargo to his side. He doesn't know how, but he made it work, even though he knows his back will be killing him the next morning.

"Worth it."

The Hand of God II

Healer Parkinson laughed as Lord Slytherin and his tiny Consort entered the exam room. While tired, the Minister looked amused while Consort Harry was well-rested but murderous. "I take it someone's not happy about having to be here on an empty stomach, hmmm," Faydenrich chuckled as Harry stomped to the lounge before throwing himself on it and crossing his arms with a snarl, his *Magic Free* robes whirling around him and reminding Faydenrich very much of his grandflower Pansy when she got into trouble as a tot. "I'll make this as quick as possible, then! Now, first, a blood sample." Summoning a phial, he went to Harry's side, indicating for the other to hold back his sleeve as Faydenrich cast the charm required to create a small incision at the elbow and draw out a thin stream of blood that then directed itself to fill the phial.

Once that was finished, he flicked a weak healing charm towards the cut, bustling towards the counter near his supply cabinet. He set the phial to balance on its curved bottom, the magic embedded in the medical-grade crystal keeping it vertical. "Now, from your looks and attitude, young man, you look to be doing much better than when I last saw you. I'll be repeating the spells cast on you on your previous visit while I wait for the last few minutes of my diagnostic potion to brew. Tell me, has anything changed? Gotten worse? Unusual side effects?" Getting a mulish shake of the head to each question, he gave the Minister a questioning glance, just to get a (tired) amused snort in return. "Alright, then. I'll get this show on the broom so you can get fed and more conversational."

Just like before, Faydenrich went through a series of swishes and flicks, bops and jabs, and just like Harry's first visit, a jet of multicolored light hit him square in the chest. Unlike last time, he didn't feel dizzy from the lights and the series of diagnostic spells finished in half the time. Both Harry and Tom watched in interest as the lights condensed into a ball that then shifted and stretched until a scroll about five inches wide.

"Can I eat *now*," Harry asked through gritted teeth. Getting a disapproving look from Tom, Harry bared his teeth at the other while Tom just sighed and rolled his eyes.

"Hm? Oh, yes, yes! Eat away," Faydenrich flicked his hand negligently towards his patient as he read the results of this latest batch of tests, trying to make sense of these results. "It'll, uh, take me a few...*well, that doesn't make a lick of sense...*"

Sending out a tendril of magic towards Zarba, within a minute a large plate with a richly marbled breakfast steak, fried potatoes, and four fried eggs popped into the room on a floating tray. Tom watched as Harry gave her a quick 'thank you' before digging into his meal. "So, from your muttering, I take it that Harry's results are unusual?" Harry, in the middle of his (neat) feeding frenzy, spared a moment to send Healer Parkinson a worried look. Which was somewhat lessened by the fact he had just shoved a large bite of medium-rare, juicy steak into his mouth.

Startled from his examination of this newest set of results, Faydenrich coughed as he realized he was now the center of attention. "Pardon? Oh, yes! Unusual, most unusual! But

nothing bad," he hurried to assure them. "Just, really unexpected?"

Popping a slice of egg into his mouth, Harry chewed and swallowed. "How so?" Tom nodded his head in agreement, incredibly intrigued.

Swishing his wand, Faydenrich conjured up a copy of Harry's last test results before making a copy of each and passing them over to the two. "As you can see, Harry's previous test results showed he was severely underweight, his bone-mass density was only half of what it should be, and he was severely anemic. There were a couple of other issues, of course, but those were our main concerns. Now, the potion regimen was meant to correct those issues, but over the course of a few *months*," he stressed, watching as Harry looked shocked while Tom cocked his head in curiosity. "Magic, while it can be a near-instant fix for many things, would only be able to speed up your recovery from such a state, and that was taken into account." Gesturing for Harry to continue eating, Faydenrich conjured an armchair for him to sit on. "Results like this should have taken a minimum of three months, not *two weeks*."

Inching his hand towards Harry's potatoes, Tom gave his Consort a crooked grin at the glare of pure fire he got. Harry had drilled into the orphans that snitching from another's plate was a big no-no (even though that didn't stop some of them from trying when Harry's back was turned, Tom included). "Lady Malfoy had sent a missive to Master Snape-Prince about her observations. It is my understanding that this sent him into a snit about possible contamination and ended up creating a back-order of Ministry potions as he had the whole production lab grind to a halt and go through a deep-clean."

"...so that's why my *Skele-Grow* order hasn't come," Faydenrich muttered while scratching his ear. "Well, back to these results! As you can now see, Consort Slytherin," he paused as he caught Harry tossing an indescribable look towards a smug Minister, "is now in the ninetieth percentile of all his stats. Minus his height, of course. But, he did gain a single centimeter to that!" He laughed as Harry drolly muttered 'joy'. "Sorry, my boy, but there's not much we can do about that. Maybe if we got a hold of you a few years ago we could have. Most men reach their adult height around the age of sixteen, which, if I remember, sir," he turned towards Tom, "my son, Marcellus, who was a year or so below you, lost his kippers when you came back for your sixth year towering over everybody! Ol' Slughorn had a crup of a time getting a bed big enough for you, and ended up having to do so again for your seventh year!"

"Indeed," Tom said as Harry hissed ~~tall-arsed wanker~~. He got a smarmy look on his face as he faux-nonchalantly fixed his hair, once again in its signature part. "I rather upset the usual Valentine's Rankings more than normal, both years," he ignored Harry's exaggerated gag. "Could have done without the spurts happening so soon after getting my new uniforms tailored, though," he grumped. "Had to ask Slughorn for special permission to head over to London to get everything fixed and let-out both times." And BOY did his personal finances take a hit from that. Especially when it came to his new shoes; he wears somewhere between a EU size 53 to 54, and despite English wizards having more mixed blood than they care to admit, getting shoes to fit him was both difficult **and** expensive.

Faydenrich snorted like a child. "Marcy was *pissed*. So long as you were around, he never had a chance to ask any of the girls out," he winked as Harry chortled while Tom just

wrinkled his nose, remembering how he couldn't go anywhere or do anything without a gaggle of witches following him while tittering. "Even after you graduated, he had trouble, ha!"

"*I still have trouble, even now,*" Tom snarked under his breath. "The amount of fuss everyone kicked up upon finding out about Harry was *ludicrous*." He frowned as Harry just snorted in amusement. "Look at you, mocking my pain. Where is the kind and compassionate boy I remember while growing up?"

"He got stuck in '38. You were always an attention whore, so undoubtedly you got bit in the arse from shagging everyone you could like some tom-cat."

"Back to the appointment," Faydenrich cut through the semi-serious snips Lord and Consort were slinging to each other. "We're now ready for the diagnostic potion! And then, we'll test for magic levels and sensitivity!" Sitting up straighter as the eyes of the two most important people of the Magical United Kingdom focused on him (because Parkinson knows that, even if Harry never becomes politically active he's still held in such high esteem by the Minister that he could literally change the course of *everything*), he turned and tapped a spot on his counter. With a shimmer a little cauldron appeared, steam still wafting from the surface of a clear blue liquid inside it. "Once I pour Mr. Potter's blood inside it, it will mist and a cloud will float up, turning into a diagram of the human body. From there, we will then be able to see if there are any more underlying issues that need to be seen to," he explained for Harry's credit.

Looking back on it, Faydenrich will smack himself upside the head because this was the largest clue about Harry's heritage. As it was, he tipped the phial in, and before he could cast a stirring charm, the potion turned bright pink before boiling, transitioning into a pearlescent white before it abruptly exploded.

"*IS EVERYONE ALRIGHT,*" Faydenrich bellowed between coughs as he activated the containment runes encasing the room with a flick of his wrist. Within seconds, the greasy smoke clouding the room started to get sucked into a small sphere near the ceiling. Once the room started to clear, he could see that the Minister had shielded his Consort with his own body, hiding them both behind his silk cloak before throwing up a powerful shielding charm. Faydenrich knew Lord Slytherin had godly reflexes; the man had taught dueling for a few years before his political career really got going, and when he started his Revolt, he had single-handedly held off over forty of the best the Auror corps had during the siege of Hogwarts. It still shocked him though that, in less than three seconds, he had scooped up Harry from his chair closest to the cauldron, plopped him in his lap, drew up his cloak, turned them away, shoved them into the nearest corner he could reach in their chair, and threw up his shield.

He could hear Harry cough as Tom twisted them back around, peering over his shoulder and scanning the room before flipping his cloak away from them. "We're unharmed, but what in Merlin's tits was that!?" Harry giggled at Tom's exclamation, a hysterical note hanging off of the sound.

"Couldn't tell you. And it can't be a bad potion! I order all of my supplies from Severus, directly! For there to be TWO issues with quality control in such a short time is just not

possible!" The man runs too tight a ship for that to be possible. Pre-Revolution, quality issues and recalls were par for the course. Post-Revolution, the rules and regulations are just too high.

By now the room was clear, not even a haze lingering. The counter, however, was not left unscathed; a large chunk of it had been seemingly atomized, and there was a large burn streak going up the wall and onto the ceiling. What was left of the cauldron had been reduced to molten slag that was embedded into the walls, floor, and ceiling.

"Soooo...", Harry drawled. "I take it that that ain't normal, huh?"

Pleased as punch, Narcissa checked off another part of her 'To Do' list that she had created while she had been recovering from her jaunt to find Harry. She only had a few more things to settle before Ostara and Draco returned for the break, and each task finished just reminded her that her darling son was closer and closer to coming home for almost two weeks!

Perhaps she can introduce him to Harry? May the Mother bless her son, but he could use a friend with both feet planted solidly onto the ground. Harry, while very unfamiliar with their society, has a good amount of common sense in regards to understanding how people work, and while her Dragon is certainly intelligent, still needs to come into himself before he could be labeled a 'man'.

Setting her list aside at her vanity, she looked at herself in the mirror, tilting her face to and fro before pursing her lips in displeasure when she noticed a mark along the side of her neck; Lucius had been a bit too 'enthusiastic' in his attentions last night when he **knew** she had a full itinerary for the next day.

"*Bratty boy*," she muttered as she picked up a jar of cream laced with *Essence of Murtlap*. "I knew he looked too satisfied with himself this morning. *Pha!*" Gently gliding her index and middle fingers over the silky cream, she proceeded to massage it into her skin, stretching her neck as she did so before noticing *another* mark. "Oh, the **nerve** of that man! He's just *asking* for it." Scooping up a bit more of her cream, she froze midway in applying it. "...which is probably what he is aiming for."

Finishing up her routine, she changed into spring robes done in a royal blue before Apparating into Princemoor Townhouse. She needs to ask Severus if he would be interested in possibly taking Draco on as an Apprentice for his mandatory Potions training required for his Conservation mastery, and she needs to know as soon as possible if the other man would have the time to do so, or if she would need to make other arrangements.

Normally Severus would still be abed at this time, but she also knows the labs got set back in their brewing, so he will be going in early to get them back on track. Climbing up the stairs she soon found the door to the master suite, knocking on it quietly before opening it when she heard a muffled assent. Entering, she saw that he was standing before his wardrobe, already mostly dressed in his Master Brewer's uniform; being in the Brewing Labs, his department was one of the few where trousers were a mandatory clothing item. They needed to be able to run (and *quickly*) if something was about to go wrong.

"'issa, wha' y'eed?" Between his lips was a long, dull metal needle, already threaded with a long length of black ribbon tape. Brought over his shoulder was the braid he was weaving his hair into, and she estimates that it would hit his lower back, now, considering that he hasn't cut it since he became a Junior Lord of the Dales upon reaching the age of twenty-one. She rarely sees him with his hair down, so each time she sees it it's a surprise.

Walking over, she gestured towards him and took over braiding duties so he could finish buttoning up the last few ivory buttons of the raw silk shirt he wore under his black uniform top. "As you know, your godson will be graduating this year. Do you believe you would have time enough to take him on as an Apprentice for a year?"

Severus hummed in thought while reaching for his uniform jacket hanging on the wardrobe door, the heavy black canvas and leather creaking as he pulled it off the hanger. "If it was for a shorter time, I would say yes. However, I've been tapped to lead a research expedition far to the north after the summer."

"Ah. Congratulations." Finished with the braid, she coiled it up at the back of his head before using the threaded needle to sew it in place. "Wouldn't it make more sense to go on the trip earlier in the year?"

"Politics."

Humming in understanding, she finished sewing the braid in place, giving it a few tugs to make sure it wouldn't fall out before tying the ends of the ribbon together and hiding them between the coils. He then swung his jacket on, zipping up the side seam before folding a flap over it and buttoning it closed. As he was doing that, she tugged at the heavy snaps at his shoulder and the unzipped side, undoing and redoing a few to make sure he could rip them open in case of an emergency while not just falling apart at a casual brush. He was already in his high-waisted black trousers, lines of snaps going up the side of each leg for the same reason as the jacket, and they were tucked into heavy-soled, knee-high boots.

While she's not one for anything mimicking muggle styles, she can admit that the designer did an excellent job creating such a slick outfit. Even *Witch Weekly* had run an article about the uniforms upon their debut, and she's seen quite a few blushing faces in the alleys when a Brewer had to do out-of-lab chores. And if she didn't know any better, she'd think the uniforms were designed with her acerbic friend in mind; he cut quite the figure when fully done up.

Spying the large, kerchief-like cap he's required to wear to keep his hair from contaminating whatever he's brewing, she pulled it from the rack within the wardrobe before expertly folding it in half, making sure the points were off-center and that the gold embroidered 'MMB' would be visible on the sides of his head when tied on, she passed it over to him and watched as he laid the long edge over his forehead before smoothing over his temples and wrapping the rest of the long edges around the base of his skull and up and over his coil before tying it in place.

Once he grabbed the large, leather messenger bag sitting on his bed, they both exited his room before making their way down to the ground floor. One of the doors they passed belonged to Draco's guestroom, which he's had since he was a baby. It has morphed and

changed from a nursery (Severus had taken his Godfather role *seriously*, and even single-handedly cared for baby Draco for almost two months when Lucius had come down with *Bellwether's Sweating Sickness* when he was only five months old), into a toddlers room, and now rested as a young man's den.

Securing his home, Severus led the way down the boulevard towards the side streets near Saint Mungo's that contained the direct Apparition point for his brewing labs. "If you can give me more information about Draco's mastery, I may be able to get him a place in the expedition. Most of it will take place in Scandinavia and the Nordic countries, ending specifically on Svalbard. It's a joint project, cataloging flora and fauna, and recording their uses in many different disciplines, including potions."

"I'll have to speak to him more, then," Narcissa murmured as a harried witch with two energetic young children nearly ran into them with an apology. "My understanding is that it has to do with art and portrait preservation and restoration. I believe that his Potions Apprenticeship will need a focus on the different preservation potions, lacquers, and other related materials for such work."

Coming to the Apparition point, they stood to the side so they wouldn't block others who needed it while they finished their conversation. "I don't think there's much I'll be able to offer, in instruction. We'll be gone for about three, four months maximum before the winter season will make our work impossible. I'll ask the other Master Brewer's if they would be interested, or if they can recommend anyone. Aside from Slughorn," Severus only just kept himself from sneering while mentioning the other man. While he's an excellent brewer and a decent teacher, Slughorn always let his politics take the forefront of his interactions with his students. If he took on Draco, he doubts his godson would actually learn anything beyond what he already knew from Hogwarts.

Thank Merlin he never went into teaching; it would have been an unmitigated *disaster*.

"Thank you. After the morning budgetary meeting, Lucius will be free for the day. Do you anticipate being free for lunch?"

Pulling a hardcover planner from his bag, Severus flipped to a page. "If everything goes according to plan, I'll be breaking for lunch at one."

Lunch agreement made, they bade each other goodbye before Severus entered the Apparition point and disappeared with a sharp crack. Returning to the boulevard, Narcissa decided she had enough time for a short stroll before having to pick up her tea order down on Vertic Alley.

Severus had been incredibly lucky to snag a townhouse here when he did; *Aurora Boulevard* was one of the first magical neighborhoods built in a **long** time and was set in northern London. The townhouse hadn't even had its foundations marked out when he bought the place (with help of the Malfoy's and some senior members of his clan). The area was geared towards the more academic and wealthy, with only a few families with young children mixed in. The nearby *Greenbriar Gardens* attracted those looking to build a family, and Narcissa is thanking her stars for that; even with sound-canceling wards, Severus wouldn't be able to put up with large quantities of rowdy children tromping through his carefully curated

front garden. He already gnashes his teeth when putting up with his younger cousins, Merlin forbid some random toddler pulls up his *Red Velvet Dahlia's* or his *Black Quartz Rose's*.

"Oh, I still need to send him some *Nightglobe Snapdragon* seeds. They'd look wonderful in his back garden." Adding another item to her list for the day, Narcissa Apparated away to Vertic Alley.

The bell hanging over *Ollivander's Wand Shop* tinkled merrily in stark contrast to the dark, nearly gloomy interior. Harry stood awkwardly to the side of the door to make room for Tom to enter, his gaze locked onto the faded purple pillow in the display window holding a single wand.

Harry didn't know what to expect of a 'wand shop'. Obviously, it was a shop that sells wands, but aside from that, he has no idea what that entails; his only encounters with a wand (before coming to the '90s) had been Tom's, and even then he had never touched it.

Ollivander's was cramped. *Incredibly* cramped. Aside from the front window, all other surfaces were plastered in long, shallow wand boxes. Some were on shelves, others piled higgly-piggly on tables, or apparently **glued** to bare walls. Even the narrow staircase leading up to the open second-story looked like it was made out of wand boxes!

Spinning on the ball of his foot, Harry came eye-to-eye with an old man, almost exactly his height. He had large, luminescent silver eyes set in a pale face and wispy white hair. "Hello, Mr. Potter. I've been expecting you for some time."

"Ollivander," Tom said archly. "I require your expertise in testing my Consort's magic and fitting a wand."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief when the wandmaker shifted his gaze off and away from him, feeling like a weight had been lifted from his chest. Whatever Ollivander is, it's not human, or at least not entirely.

"Ah, Minister. Nice to see you again. Yew, thirteen and a half inches. Phoenix feather core. I never forget a wand. Rigid, but it *will* bend before it breaks. It seems to still be serving you well. Good." Returning his gaze to Harry, Ollivander tilted his head, reminiscent of an eagle flying high in the air tracking some poor field mouse before diving in for the kill. "I would ask why you would want **me** to do the testing, but it is good that you are." Snapping a long-fingered hand, a typical tailor's tape measure flew out of a pocket of his robes, tangling around Harry and measuring such things like the widest angle between his right thumb and forefinger, the distance between his cheekbones, and the circumference of the ball of his ankle. "Good enough." The measure fell, flopping onto the ground with a sound like overcooked pasta smacking porcelain tile.

Harry leaned into Tom's side, shivering a bit in the cool shop. He warily watched as Ollivander went behind his counter and pulled out an incredibly knobbly and crooked stick, about half a meter long. "This will not just tell us, Mr. Potter, if you can perform wanded

magic, but also give us a clue as to how powerful you may be." From the look on Ollivander's face, Harry thinks the man already knows. "Just give it a swish and flick."

"No need," Tom stated while unsheathing his own wand. "I have no doubts behind my Consort's... *potential*," he purred as he passed it over to Harry, who just rolled his eyes at the unnecessary innuendo.

Looking down at the yew wand, Harry studied it, intently. It had changed, slightly, from when he last saw it. The grip had been refashioned from something similar to a wrapped sword pommel into something more like the end of a bone, but that was about it. It still had the same dull, satiny finish, but some areas of the wood had colored ivory from age, giving the wand a distinguished look. It felt warm, but that may have more to do with the fact that Tom had just handled it.

After looking at both men, Harry did as instructed. After mimicking a gesture he's seen Tom do many times before, everyone watched as nothing happened. Harry had been expecting **something**, *anything* to happen. Sparks, or maybe the half-full glass sitting on Ollivander's counter to shatter. Hell, even the wand just letting out a sound like a wet fart would have been a relief, but this just confirms (even if only to himself) that Harry's not magic enough to have EVER received a letter.

As much as Tom doesn't want to admit it, something has to be wrong with his wand. Even if they were incredibly incompatible (which, really, his wand should adore Harry as much as he does), it would have done *something*. This just should not be-

"*Merlin's lice-ridden merkin!*" Stumbling to the side, Tom caught himself on a nearby shelf as the tiled floor beneath his feet roiled like the North Sea during a heavy storm. All around him things heaved and sagged, twisting and turning before growth and greenery exploded into existence, the very bookshelves holding hundreds upon hundreds of wands growing branches and leaves and flowers while the floor below them fractured as grasses and clover pushed through. He heard a crack as the slim wand cases were broken by the very wands **themselves** spontaneously acquiring thin whippets of new, tender shoots and large, fragrant blooms.

With a final, loud crack of the front display window shattering, everything came to a standstill. All around him, Tom saw green, *green*, **green**. Grasses and flowers ate the floor, and Ollivander's counter was now more akin to a felled tree trunk, patches of bark and knolls covering it as moss slowly but noticeably crawled across the surface. The window frame that originally held the display window was warped beyond recognition, buckling and waving as the tree that the wood first started as regrew and put down roots, and every set of shelves now pulsed and sang with **life** whilst holding wands that now looked more like the branches of trees felled in a storm.

The destruction was awe-inspiring, but was nothing compared to now what took up residence in the shop proper; a massive tree, tall and mature, had shot up through tile and brick, its branches punching holes into the walls before its crown burst through the roof, letting in shafts of bright sunlight. He could see the golden, iridescent shimmers of pollen

dripping from small but fragrant blooms, punching him in the nose with the knowledge that **this** was a fertile, full-blooming apple tree, but like one he has never seen before. This was the tree he envisioned as producing the coveted Golden Apples of Greek mythology, its color was oversaturated, almost hyper, and as he looked at it for longer and longer, he could feel as though something was sweetly beckoning him-

"Tom," Harry coughed, his voice coming *from* the tree, causing Tom to panic before a dark head poked out of a large globe of leaves almost fifteen feet up. Harry looked around dazedly before his eyes fixed on Tom. "Um, is this normal?" His voice had an almost hysterical edge to it.

"...no, Darling, it's very much not."

"Oh. Okay. Um. How, how do I ge' down? 'cause I ain' magic mysef down an' I can' jump an' oh *Lordy* 'ow do I-"

"Darling. Just, take a deep breath." Gingerly picking his steps between broken tile and brick, Tom was soon standing between the gnarled roots of the **massive** tree. Already, he could hear a crowd gathering outside the shop, gasping in shock and awe at the sight. "Do you still have my wand?" Getting a quavering 'yes', Tom smiled up at his Harry even as his brain started to burn out from creating, assessing, and discarding theories related to what the ever-loving *fuck* just happened. "Toss it to me, and I'll use it to levitate you down." As Harry did as instructed, Tom held his hand out, ready to catch his wand and-

"**BLOODY BLAZING BOOMSLANGS WHAT ON EARTH!?**" As his wand landed in his hand, a sensation like a lightning strike zipped down his arm and along his spine, making his hair stand up on end. He jerked, dropping it and his jaw dropped as he saw that little branches, at most an inch long, had sprouted from it and were now sporting bright red arils and slim, tender green leaves.

What in the WORLD is Harry!? "Right. New plan. Can you jump?" Seeing the incredulous look his question garnered him, Tom just shrugged. "It's either that or a ladder."

Harry spent a few moments looking from Tom to the shop, to the tree, and back again before giving a jerky nod. His head disappeared for a few moments before the branch he was perched on started shaking. After a few agonizing minutes, he spied his tiny Consort scooting along towards the end of the thick branch, winching when a slight tear of ripping silk was heard. "Ah, ready when you are?"

Picking along the roots, Tom stood under Harry. Making sure he had good footing, he held out his arms. "Ready."

"Um, are you sure? What if I knock you over?"

"If that happens, just make sure you land on my face."

"TOM!"

Tom just sighed while rolling his eyes. "Harry, Darling, Light of My Life? Just fucking jump already."

"Bastard." Wiggling a bit more, Harry scooted forward before taking a deep breath, and shoved.

Bracing himself, Tom bent his knees slightly before Harry landed, the skirts of his robes swirling like some exotic flower. "See? I'm absolutely *fine*," Tom smirked at the other.

Before Harry could snark back, a loud cough interrupted them. Turning, they saw an ecstatic Ollivander, holding in his hands a single, undamaged wand box. "Mr. Potter? I do believe I have your wand."

Skirting around tree roots and his own discarded wand, Tom then set his precious cargo down, albeit reluctantly. He watched as the box was opened. "Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches. Nice and supple," Ollivander said lowly while proffering to Harry, who shot it the hairy eyeball. It appears to be the only one unscathed from Harry's, for the lack of a better term, 'blooming'. As Harry picked it up like it was a live mouse trap, Ollivander continued, "although, I don't believe it will be a perfect fit, even if its twin also favors you so. I imagine that there is only one wand that will, but, well..."

Tom watched hungrily as Harry adjusted his hold on the holly wand before giving a pathetically weak swish and flick. Before he could open his mouth to taunt the other, he closed it with a snap as the apple tree shivered, the flowers blossoming more before the petals melted away and large fruits started growing in their place, ripe and red and *juicy*, and his mouth started watering the longer he looked at them-

"-om? Oi, shithead." Shaking himself out of his stupor, Tom glared at an innocently smiling Harry. "Are you going to pick up your wand? I've gotten hungry all of a sudden, and all these people staring at me is giving me a rash."

Looking for his wand, Tom found it nestled between two tree roots. He was nervous about handling it again, not wanting another shock.

"Go ahead, Minister Gaunt," Ollivander murmured, causing Tom to shoot him an annoyed look at his tone. "I believe you'll find that it will work better than ever before." If Tom was any less dignified, he'd smack the old man; he sounded way too entertained with this whole debacle.

Shaking his head, Tom scooped up his wand, the little twigs and berries falling away as a pulse shot along the wood. A feeling similar to the 'pins and needles' one gets when they've sat on their legs for too long breezed through his body, from tip to toe before he flicked his wand. Lights shaped like glowing blue butterflies drifted out of the tip, lazily flapping about before dissolving into mist.

Well. That's new.

Hearing the crunch of booted feet on glass, all three turned in time to see a Junior Auror entering the bedraggled store. "*Minister! Is everything alright?*" Her voice sounded distorted

through her half-mask, and she nearly fell onto her back as her foot slid on glass, sending her blue robes swirling.

Harry shrugged while Tom said, "let me get back to you on that. Ollivander?" Bowing to the ancient wandmaker, Tom then stood tall before gathering Harry to him. "Please send me an invoice for the total damages. To my Demanse. I will ensure everything is cared for, personally." Once he got a nod of agreement, he scooped up Harry before flicking his wand and brushing a path through the rubble. Ignoring the hisses his manhandling caused, Tom graciously smiled and nodded to the crowd of onlookers, making sure to put on his best 'For the Camera!' grin when he noticed Rita and her photographer in the hubbub. Making excuses, he then power walked to the Apparition point before spinning away.

Once they appeared within the walls of the Demanse, Harry started wiggling like a cat wanting down. Instead of finding his feet on solid ground, he found himself pinned to the wall, his feet dangling as wet lips and tongue pried his mouth open before doing their best to coax his soul from his body. It was only when he whimpered with oxygen starvation that Tom released him, only to bury his face in the crux of Harry's neck as they both panted.

"So, Darling," Tom nipped into the silky skin below him, grinding his erection into Harry's thigh as the other let out a confused but wanton moan. "Do you believe you're magic, now?"

Forbidden Fruit

Chapter Notes

>:D

Harry struggled to breathe, the sudden assault of Tom's hands and lips making his hormones *scream* into his bloodstream with a vengeance. It honestly took him an embarrassingly long time to register Tom's question. Once he did he could only nod his head, words escaping him.

"Good," Tom growled into Harry's neck before biting and sucking the warm, sweet skin under his lips while he hiked up the thick, *Magic Free* robes to Harry's hips, and he **moaned** into Harry's neck before sinking down to his knees, setting Harry back onto his feet. Harry choked on a squeak when Tom bent at his waist and tossed the skirts of Harry's robes over his head, and Harry gasped when tricky lips started sucking kisses over and along his pant-covered erection and large hands gripped his stocking-clad thighs firm enough to make him *burn*.

"Oh! Ooh. *Oooh, Tom,*" he whimpered, resting his hands on top of Tom's covered head as teeth made themselves known by burying themselves into the sensitive flesh of his inner thighs, his cock jumping at each nip and suck and he wanted to **scream** at the other to just get on with it already!

"Tom, feck, please, I need-," he shrieked in surprise as Tom pulled down his pants and throat him, humming hard and long and startling Harry into his orgasm.

Sliding out from under the robes, Tom smirked while licking his lips, savoring the essence still clinging to his mouth as he watched his sweet little Consort sag against the wall and try to relearn how to breathe. Knowing the other will want to return the favor, he scooped him up before quickly heading towards their bedroom. By the time they entered, Harry was nibbling along his jaw and ear and Tom's cock was so hard he feared it would *burst*.

Tossing his boy onto the bed, he wasted no time in stripping off his robes and freeing his erection. By the time his cock was unrobed, Harry was leaning back on his hands, his green, **green** eyes locked onto Tom's cock that was too big to jut proudly into the air, but he still licked his lips as he looked up at Tom from behind his cute little glasses, looking so much like an altar boy about to be willingly ravished by his Proctor and *boy if that didn't make Tom's cock throb!*

Tugging Harry down the bed by his slipper clad feet, Tom pushed his muscular legs up and apart, wrapping his hands around delicate ankles as bunches and bunches of fabric piled up and over Harry's middle, putting on display the new stockings with ribbon garters

Tarragon had made just the day before, along with thighs covered in love bites. Seeing the little pair of panties still trying to cling to Harry's hips, Tom snaked them off before tossing them to the side and pushing Harry's legs as far apart as possible, chuckling with a sadistic edge when his Darling cried out in mortification and tried to push his robes down to cover his already reawakening erection.

"Oh, no. You'll keep your hands up here," Tom whispered as he pushed Harry's hands away from his groin, purring as the other blushed all over his face and down his neck. Harry gasped as Tom manhandled his legs again, soon pushing his knees to his shoulders so Tom could look his fill at Harry's bare groin and rear. "So cute," he muttered as he rubbed a thumb over Harry's cute little pink hole. And it was. And so was Harry's cock, and his balls, and his arse cheeks. His cock, while not small, was flushed an adorable pink as the foreskin was pulled back and leaking, and his balls were high and tight, the skin of the sack that held them smooth and taught. But Tom *really* liked Harry's arse; each cheek was firm and thick and had the right amount of fat to make them soft and have a slight jiggle. *And his entrance looked kissable...*

Harry squeaked in shock when he felt *something* run through his core, confusing him before he squawked when a wide, wet tongue **licked** him.

Down there!

"Tom! Tom, you-, fuck!" Slapping both of his hands over his mouth, Harry dug his head back into the bedding and moaned like a whore as Tom licked and dragged his tongue up and down his cleft. Harry gasped on each pass as that *bedeviling*, slick muscle pressed into his hole, digging in but not fully breaching him before it continued up just to stop and Tom's sinful lips sucked on that patch of skin between his balls and arse. "How-, how can you?" Tom hummed at his question. "That's so *dirty...*," he whimpered between his fingers.

"And I have magic, Darling," Tom grunted before shoving his tongue **inside**, and oh sweet, baby JESUS if that didn't feel good! Harry could feel his eyes roll as his hands dropped to either side of his head and gripped the bedding and he moaned unabashedly as Tom tongue-fucked his entrance long and deep. He could both hear and feel Tom laugh but he didn't care, the other could do whatever he wanted as long as he *kept doing that!*

Pulling back with a little kiss to a spit-slicked entrance, Tom massaged the firm thighs under his hands as he watched Harry pant. Even without a second orgasm, he could tell Harry was mentally checked out; he could feel the strong muscles under his hand's flex and jump, and Harry's cut little tummy moved in fits and starts while his red, bitten lips went from gasping open to closing with whines.

*Now would be the perfect time to stretch him open and make him **scream**.* But he won't. He wants not just consent, but to Have Harry **begging** for it, climbing over Tom to get at his dick.

Flicking his wrist, a phial of one of Tom's favorite lubricating oils appeared. It was thick and golden, and this blend had a small amount of cinnamon in it, just enough to make everything tingle and warm.

Harry must have heard the pop of the cork getting pulled, because he looked up through hazy green eyes (and if he didn't know any better, Tom would say the gold flecks in the one were *glowing*), his fingers curling around the hem of his mussed-up robes as he bit his lips. "Tom? I, um. I-,"

"Don't worry. I've something else in mind." Pouring nearly half the phial of oil over Harry's groin, Tom then started to rub and massage it all over Harry's cock, balls, and arse before deciding he needed more and used the rest to slick up those *amazing, gorgeous* thighs, not caring when the oil started to stain the silky stockings. Tossing the phial aside, he then tugged Harry closer to the edge of the bed, after a few moments sliding a pillow under his lower back when Tom saw that his sweet **little** Consort would need the extra support. Once happy with what he had, Tom took himself in hand and laid his length along Harry's, who had pushed himself up onto his elbows to watch. After a bit more shifting, Tom's groin was butted up snugly against Harry's arse while the other was spread, and after a few test slides, he pulled Harry's legs closed, sandwiching his cock between the smooth, slippery thighs while throwing the rest of Harry's legs over his one shoulder.

Harry felt hot, his cheeks burning. Peeping down at the junction where his legs came together he could see Tom's thick cock lying over his own, both red and slick. Before he could ask what the other was going to do, Tom squeezed his legs together and pulled back before thrusting forward, shocking a groan out of Harry as the cock now thrusting between his legs dragged back and forth over his own sensitive parts.

After a few moments, Tom found a rolling rhythm, not too slow but not too fast. He wanted to savor this, the feeling of fucking up between slick thighs and over a velvety set of cock and balls, the drag of slippery skin on skin giving each of them the perfect amount of friction. He loved watching Harry's face, how it went from pink to red, and the blush moved from his cheeks down his neck, soon disappearing under the neckline of his robes. And he loved the startled little cry he wrung out from the other when he started bouncing his darling boy in earnest, pressing Harry's legs up between their chests (and oh how he *loves* how flexible the other is!) before rolling his hips.

Each wet smack of Tom's groin against his arse pulled a sound out of Harry, some as grunts, others as cries, but most as bitten-off moans. As close as the other was (literally fucking between his **thighs**, and oh god did it sound *filthy!*), Harry wanted him closer. Reaching out, he grabbed sweat-slick shoulders and wiggled, pulling Tom's face towards him for sloppy kisses while his knees were pinned up next to his shoulder. He shouted as Tom pushed him up the bed, using his long arms to pin Harry in place so he could get his knees below him for more leverage. The change in angle caused Tom's cock to thrust firmly against the underside of Harry's sac, and soon Harry's legs started to shake from his impending orgasm.

"Tom! Tom, Tom, *Toooooom*," he keened, his toes curling.

"Fuck," Tom cursed, the sweet mewls making him growl. "You're perfect, so fucking-" he thrust hard, making Harry cry out beneath him- "perfect!"

"Tom, I-, I-, *oh fuck*," grinding his teeth, Harry's eyes snapped closed, a tear escaping from the corner of one eye as he tried to hold out for Tom.

"C'mon. C'mon, Darling, just let it go. I want to watch you cum!" Snaking one arm between their chests, Tom pinched and tugged on one of Harry's pebbled nipples.

"*Fuck,*" Harry whimpered before jerking, trying to curl up on himself as his hips spasmed outside of his control and he came with a high cry. He could feel more tears fall as Tom thrust between his clamped thighs, his cock **aching** from the stimulation as it shot its load.

Watching his boy cum while bouncing from his cock with tears in his eyes was what did Tom in. As Harry spasmed and jerked, his head twisting side to side with a cry sounding like a broken bird while literally crying in pleasure, Tom thrust between those suddenly rock-hard, quivering thighs a few more times before cumming with a shout. Grinding against the slick arse below him, he milked his orgasm to the last drop, only regretting that it wasn't getting buried deeply in his little Consort's bubble-like arse.

Both collapsed onto each other, Tom sliding them until he could lazily kiss the panting mouth below him as they both slowly came down from their high. Slipping Harry's legs down, he settled between the now-open thighs, sighing in debauched satisfaction at the feel of their filth sticking them together. If it was up to him, Harry would wear nothing but his cum as his clothing, if he wore anything at all.

He would make an exception for the stockings, though. Already, he could feel himself stirring in interest.

Harry gasped. "Tom, no!"

"Tom, yes!"

"*Holy shit, James! Guess what the fuck just happened!*" James nearly fell off of the bookshelf ladder he was standing on as Sirius kicked the study door open, the heavy wood, once again, bouncing off of the plaster wall from the force. Unlike last time, Sirius was ready for the rebound, but just like last time, he still got knocked over, only onto his front instead of his back when he bent over and tried to use his boney, non-existent arse to stop the door due to having his arms full of...something.

"Oh for fucks sake, Paddy! Stop banging on my door! It's older than your favorite GrandPappy, and I want to keep it for a while longer, yes!?" Rolling his eyes at the belligerent grumping his remark earned from Sirius, James pulled out the book he needed before going down the three rungs he was up before sliding the ladder to the side. Setting the book down on his desk, he reluctantly helped Sirius back up onto his feet, noticing the other was hiding something in his short outer robe while James patted him down. Finished, he twirled a finger and Sirius minced in a circle, both long familiar with the routine of checking their mate out to make sure he wouldn't look like some tosser before going out to pull some birds. "Now, what's put a niffler in your knickers?"

Nearly skipping towards James' desk, Sirius put on a show of looking around for any possible witnesses before bending over, fiddling with the front of his robes.

James just **looked** at his friend. "Um, Paddycake? I know you've been in a dry spell, but I'm married!"

"Jimbo my man, now is NOT the time!" Barking in triumph, Sirius shook out the chest of his robe just for a few...apples? To roll out and lightly bounce on James' desk. "A miracle has happened, on this day of days, my brother! BEHOLD!" Holding up one of the red fruits in question, Sirius spun on the ball of his foot, grinning like the dickens at (one of) his best friend.

James just quirked an unimpressed eyebrow at the other, crossing his arms while putting all of his weight on his right foot. "That is an apple," he said flatly.

Sirius visually deflated before dropping his head to the side with a sigh, tossing the apple from one hand to the other. "Yes, Jumbo Jet," he smirked at the gross sound James made at the new nickname. "But this is not just *any* apple. **NAY**," he presented the apple like the hostess on that one muggle game show that Lily and Remus liked to watch, *Something of Fortune*. "THIS apple is the fruit of the COLOSSAL apple tree that now resides where good ol' Ollivander's once stood!"

Glancing suspiciously at Sirius as he came closer, James examined the apple with a critical eye, noticing it was nearly neon red with a dusting of pure white on the bottom and a cap of gold on top near the stem that almost glowed. "What does that mean," he asked.

Tossing the apple up and down, Sirius leaned back against James' desk. "The Great Goth and his Jailbait bed warmer," Sirius side-eyed James when the other growled at the nickname of a possible cousin, "visited Ollie's. They were only in there for, ooh, maybe fifteen minutes when the hippogriff dung hit the fan." His free hand snaking out to the other apples scattered across the desk behind him, Sirius was soon juggling four of the juicy-looking fruits. "Don't know what happened inside there, but a Wild Apple tree just decided that now would be the best time to say '*HELLO!*', so now Ollie's shop and a few others are the new home to the newest bit of greenery Diagon has to offer. Ouch! **Fuck**," Sirius rubbed his cheek while dropping the other apples after smacking himself in the face with one.

Picking up an apple that rolled across the floor and hit his boot, James gave it a slight squeeze. "It's certainly a Wild Apple, but I've never seen them get this big. Or colorful." Most wild apples are on the small side, but they make up for their lack of size with an intense flavor, one just needs to know their tree species. The estate of one of his great-uncles had several, with one super bitter tree mixed in. James found out the hard way which one it was when he bit into a felled apple when he was six. "What type of tree was it, did you say?" If Pad's can describe it, James might be able to figure out the hybrid species-

"A *Faerie* Wild Apple Tree," Sirius said smugly.

James dropped the apple in astonishment. "You're joking." A **Faerie** tree? Here!? In the *Overworld*!? One of those hasn't been seen since the time of Merlin! In fact, the last one died out only a century after Merlin died, or left Britain, or went to Avalon, or whatever happened to the man. Hell, the Faerie Mounds themselves no longer host apple orchards on their outsides, now only being home to sacred rowan and oak.

*Where the **fuck** did this tree come from?*

"Um, Siridipity," James asked his Sworn Brother slowly, watching as the other man jauntily polished an apple on his breast while lounging like a cinema siren on James' desk. "How did you get these apples?"

"After Snake Shagger left, carrying his cutie-patootie bit of naughty by the way, a whole bunch of us shoved inside the shop. Caused a bit of a riot, now that I think on it," Sirius squinted at his ill-gotten fruit. "I figured, 'oi, me and the mates have tried a lot of *things*. Let's try some Wild Apples!'. What's the worst that could happen!"

"The 'worst that could happen' is a repeat of that time you made me lick a toad," James grouched.

"That was a bad trip all around," Sirius argued.

"I thought Lily-flower was a giant, killer crab from outer space! I ended up coming down while up on a muggle telephone pole and in my pants!" Merlin, but James' parents had a bitch of a time getting that out of the papers. And it doesn't help that the photo and article SOMEHOW ended up framed and hung in a place of honor right next to his Hogwarts diploma.

"It could be like that time we tried 'shrooms!" Sirius sounded *way* too excited at the prospect.

"Which was during the night of the full moon. Remus forgot how to werewolf and instead acted like a lost, stray dog, and ended up getting taken home by that old muggle, remember?"

"...oh, yeah," Sirius muttered. "He ended up streaking down the lane because she woke up and screamed when she saw a naked man sleeping at the foot of her bed." He sniggered. "That was funny."

"REGARDLESS," James cut through Sirius' snorting. "We have empirical. Evidence-," "-oh, big words!-", "-shut it, Spot. *As I was saying*," James snarked, "every time we try something, everything goes tits up! So no. We are not eating Faerie Apples!"

"*Harry, no*," Tom groaned out from his position face down in the middle of the bed.

"Harry, yes," Harry chirped from his position stretched out along Tom's back, kissing and nibbling the tips of his lover's ears. Both were nude and still slightly damp from their bath. After Tom had rutted out a second orgasm for himself (and overstimulating a dry one from poor Harry), both were in serious need of a clean-up. After getting the both of them scrubbed up, Tom had bonelessly sunk against the rim of the tub, prepared to doze for a bit in the warm water while cuddling his Darling, but apparently Harry's libido decided payback was in order. After a nice handy in the tub, Tom was ready to go to bed, regardless of the hour or his lack of dinner. But Harry...

Harry has other things in mind.

Moving with the motions of the bed as Harry literally climbed all over him, Tom groaned as he lazily tried to bat his bedeviling Consort away. Getting a snort for his effort, he felt the other squirm a bit before sitting on the small of his back, dropping a kiss between his shoulder blades before dismounting with a bounce.

After listening to the slap of Harry's feet on the stone floor get distant, Tom relaxed into the bed. He had just fallen into a light doze when he heard Harry come back, stopping near the foot of the bed. Hearing the pop of a cork getting pulled, he moaned, "Darling, no. I'm very firmly a giver-," he groaned when slick hands wrapped around one of his feet, thumbs digging into the arch and heel while also smoothing an oil with notes of lavender and cedar in it over his skin.

Harry snickered as he heard Tom let out a sound akin to a fat, lazy cat getting comfortable in a sunbeam. "Consider this my forgiving you for being an arse, yesterday." Waking up this morning to find Tom curled around him on the tiny couch had him right in the heart. It had to have been majorly uncomfortable; if he didn't have to share space with Harry, Tom could have gotten away with little pain. As it was, Harry saw the other wince multiple times while they had dressed for their healer's visit.

So, Harry's going to fix that. First with a foot massage, then he's going to attack Tom's back.

Moving on to the other foot, Harry spilled out a bit more oil into his palm before rubbing his hands together to warm the thin oil up. He made sure to pay special attention to Tom's heels and the balls of his feet; those areas take on most of a person's weight, and Harry doesn't care how well a pair of shoes is made or bespelled, Tom's dogs have got to be barking.

Giving one last tug to his big toe, Harry then crawled up the bed and perched on the back of Tom's thighs. Re-oiling his hands, he started at the small of Tom's back, pressing in on either side of the spine before working out from there. As his fingers dipped along Tom's side, he felt a slight, involuntary twitch. Making a note for future exploits, Harry worked his way up until he got to Tom's back and shoulders. Making himself comfortable by perching on the small of Tom's back, Harry prepared himself for some deep tissue massage. Cracking his knuckles, he wiggled his fingers before diving in.

Tom let out an embarrassingly loud groan as Harry dug his thumbs into the defined muscle of Tom's shoulders. He grunted when Harry put the heel of his hand along the spine just below the two scapulae, pressing down until everything realigned with a loud crack. After a few more cracks and snaps along the upper spine, Harry dug his hands back into the muscles, finding and attacking hard knots until they smoothed out into soft jello.

Harry doesn't know how long he worked for, but eventually, he had rubbed out every knot he could find, leaving Tom as nothing more than a puddle of good feeling on the bed. Hopping off of the other just long enough to pull the fresh covers down, Harry made sure the other wasn't in an awkward position before retaking his spot on Tom's back, pulling the

blankets up and over them both while sucking up as much of the warmth the other was putting out as he could.

As his eyes started to droop, Harry reminded himself to give Tom some shit the next morning; apparently, the other starts to snore when he's feeling loopy-goopy, and he remembers a certain youngster stating he would **never** develop such an 'uncouth' habit.

Putting her key in the door, Lily didn't even get a chance to turn the lock before it was ripped open. On the other side was Remus, and the poor man looked like he was suffering from a horrible case of shell shock. From deeper within the house, she heard a few thuds before they fell into some sort of pattern, and Sirius cheering somebody on.

"Remus-"

"Lily, I am so sorry, but it's all Paddy's fault," the other shot out, his voice sounding utterly exhausted. "Daisy is staying with the Longbottom's. I-," he collapsed against the door frame, eyes wild as he buried a hand into his already disheveled hair. "I'm, I'm about to snap!" A loud 'oh, fuck!' was quickly followed by a thunderous crash, seconds later loud guffaws echoing down the hallway.

"Remy? What on EARTH is going on," Lily asked, keeping her voice down as she entered the apparent warzone her home has become.

Remus sighed. "Long story short, there's now a Faerie Tree in Diagon, and Sirius stole some of the apples." At Lily's gasp, he jerkily nodded his head. "And then the idiot decided to talk Prongs into eating some with him."

"Oh, you have got to be *kidding* me," Lily hissed. Those berks! Accepting a Faerie Apple from one of the Fair Folk is chancy as it is, but straight-up **stealing** some from one of their trees!? It's just MADNESS! "So, what is it this time? Insanity? Fixation? What!?"

"They're high off their tits, is what," Remus murmured. "Remember that time Siri snuck in a few joints, during Sixth Year? It's like that, but hyper."

"Dear Mary, Mother of God," Lily was shocked. Sirius had gone all-in on his teenage rebellion phase and had brought into Hogwarts some muggle weed. The sixth-year Gryffindor boys had hot-boxed in their dorm, but the entire tower ended up getting blazed.

McGonagall had been *furios*.

"Ey. Eyyy! EYYYYYY! *Who'sa, uh, whose'er!?* Lily, issat you," Sirius's drunken voice bounced down the hall. Along with a loud 'oh, shi' from James who probably thought he was being quiet, Lily and Remus heard footsteps thundering towards them. They braced themselves when they saw James and Sirius stagger into the living room, nearly tripping over each other and *giggling* before using one another as supports as they stumbled their way over. Both men were sloppily half-clothed, Sirius down to his leggings and open underrobe while James was only in his skivvies and socks.

"LILY! LOVE OF, love of m'life an' muther of my chil'ren," James slurred. "You loo' as, as radiant as, uh..." he trailed off with a squint.

"The SUN," Sirius loudly whispered into James' ear, ruining his serious tone with a schoolboy-like giggle.

"NO! She's moar beau'iful than tha'!" Smacking the top of Sirius' head in admonishment, James listed to the side as his brain got sidetracked by trying to think of a compliment for his beautiful wife instead of greeting her with a kiss like he normally would.

Sirius snorted while rubbing his chin, soothing the wrong area that was abused. "A GODDESS she is! We're not fit to, to uh, shit, what'er we not fit for," he asked a mentally checked-out James, who was currently distracted by an off-colored patch of wall that was head-height.

"Wha'," he grunted before shaking his head. "Oh! Uh. FEET! We're no' fit to even lick'er feet!" James looked very proud of himself for that one.

"Oi, speak for yerself! Don't take this wrong, Lily," Sirius flapped his hand while letting go of James, who slid to the ground with a thump like a sack of potatoes. "But I would **GLADLY** suck on your toes-"

"Oi, tha's me wife! If anyone's suckin'er toes, is me!"

"OKAY," Remus barked out as Lily hid her face in her hands with a groan. "Time to go home! Lily," Remus turned to his quasi-sister-in-law and gripped her upper arms before coming close and kissing her forehead. "I'll pick up Daisy tomorrow and keep her at my place. Swing by whenever! And **you**," he turned towards Sirius, who was now looking down at James like he was some specimen of sea slug that's never been seen before, "you're coming with me!" Summoning the rest of Sirius' clothes, Remus then wrapped his arm around his absolutely *slaughtered* friend's waist, dragging him out onto the front stoop before disappearing with a discordant crack.

Shutting the door properly, Lily made sure it was locked and charmed shut properly. Before she could turn around, she felt two arms wrap around her waist before James' warm lips buried themselves along the side of her neck. The smell of apples was overwhelming, sweet with a sharp undertone of something she couldn't describe. Just breathing it in was enough for her to feel heady, and she wonders if these particular Faerie Apples didn't so much as get you high as make you feel ecstasy.

"Come on, James. Let's get to bed," she muttered as she turned in his arms. Trying to shove him backward was like pushing against a rock. "C'mon, now. Shoo!"

Her husband just had the audacity to smirk down at her, his hazel eyes blown wide and glossy. "Hey, Lils? Did you do something different?"

She gave him an incredulous look. "Um, *nooo...*"

"Are you sure? Because," he returned to her neck, "you look *ravishing*."

She snorted before shoving him away. "Alright, Romeo, that's enough. Off to bed! It's near eleven!" Walking around James, she only managed a few steps before he goosed her, making her shriek. "JAMES," she shouted with a giggle.

Getting up close to her, he once again wrapped her up in his arms, mock growling as he rubbed up against her, letting her know just how much he missed her. "By the rap tap tapping of my chamber door, something wicked this way comes," he lowed into her neck as they sloppily made their way into the living room proper.

She just rolled her eyes. "That's two different quotes." She screeched as she was flipped topsy turvy, blowing her hair out of her face when James lifted her up in a bridal carry before continuing on to their bedroom. "JAMES!"

"LILY," he crowed back, very pleased with himself.

"James, no," she slapped his shoulder. "I have to be in early tomorrow-"

"Awww, don't worry, Lily-flower! I won't knock you up! Unless you want me to? We make some good-looking kids," his grin was sleazy and wolfish.

"James, no."

"James, yes!"

Memories IV

Elbow deep in sudsy water as he scrubbed at a roasting pan, Harry cast furtive glances out of the kitchen window, careful not to linger on the figure of the man who was up on a high ladder, cleaning the gutters.

Father McGillicutty, the priest who ran the church that Wool's was affiliated with, was away for two weeks, recalled by the Archbishop of Canterbury to handle an issue related to another priest gone rogue against the doctrine. In his place was sent another priest to oversee the church, one young and fresh-faced enough that this is possibly his first solo flock.

Harry doesn't like him. Several of the girls think Father Dillard is quite handsome; even Ms. Cole blushes when she sees him. And Harry can see why, Father Dillard is tall and broad-shouldered, with blond hair and dark brown eyes. He looks like he should be on a movie poster, a swooning dame in his arms while backdropped by a sunset.

But *something* about him made Harry's skin crawl when he introduced himself. He doesn't know what, but Harry was just waiting for the other shoe to drop, or for McGillicutty to return before something happens. The Irish priest may be an old bastard, but Harry knows what to expect from him; maybe a swat around the ears for being a nuisance, and the smell of strong drink on his breath (courtesy of Ms. Cole when they hole-up in her office while doing *other* 'things'), but other than those things and a mouth that would make a sailor take pause, McGillicutty tries to do them right.

Dillard sidled into the slot left open by McGillicutty and then some. Along with teaching the orphans their letters and numbers, he also was quick to lend his help in child-rearing. He let the youngsters use him as a jungle gym while some of the slightly older kids went to him for adolescent advice. He even tried to help Harry with the babies and toddlers, offering to wash and change them, and do diaper checks.

The first time Harry saw the man looming over little Freddie, his hair stood on end. Dillard had just laughed him off, saying he was just checking for 'self-pollution'. *Little ones at this age still need to be checked on*, he had said laughingly.

Harry didn't buy it. That man is **wrong**, and he wants him *gone*. When he went to Amelia and Ms. Cole about it, his concerns were just brushed aside. Told that he was just imagining things.

So Harry waited, and he watched. He may only be twelve, too young to have the title of 'Man of the House', but by God is he going to make sure his kids are alright. Keeping Dillard in his sight as much as possible, following him from room to room, doing everything he could to not leave the man alone.

But, Harry still has cooking and cleaning to do and the weekly shop. Today he had to go out and get food for the week, and he's the best at haggling and weedling for better prices or extra food. If Amelia had gone out, he knows that she wouldn't have come back with three extra chickens (old birds, but good enough for soup and stock), or that if she went to the

Jewish deli two streets over, one of the grannies would trade apples for extra mending. It falls to Harry to stretch what money doesn't get drunk away, so he had to go out.

He made sure to be quick, but not quick enough. When he came back, little Ollie, a new boy who came into their care just last month, had been fidgety and upset. Harry tapped the young boy (not much younger than Tom) to help him put the food away, and he quietly prodded Ollie about what happened.

Harry wanted to spit fire.

Giving the boy a kiss on the forehead while quietly thanking whoever was listening that it didn't go farther than touches, Harry sent the boy to help one of the older girls gather the washing before starting to prepare dinner. It was as he was breaking down the chickens that he had an idea.

As everything stewed away, Harry made sure to take his time going out to the shed. Grabbing the rickety old ladder inside, he put on a show of wrestling with the contraption, knowing that Dillard would be coming towards the kitchen to badger Harry and pretend he was a nice man, a routine he had already established.

As he predicted, Dillard accosted Harry, admonishing him for trying to do too big a job such as carrying such a 'big, heavy ladder' while also praising him for his 'hard work'. Piping up that the gutters needed cleaning, Harry had *reluctantly* said he would need help clearing them out because he was too short, and would Father Dillard help him out? Maybe after dinner?

Taking the bait, Dillard promised to do so, but only **after** dinner.

Once the food was served and then cleared away, Harry enlisted the help of the other little boys (Tom included) to wash the plates so he could tackle the roasting pan. By the time everything was done, it was just Harry at the sink while Dillard went outside to handle the gutters.

Watching the man go up the creaky wooden rungs while whistling a jaunty tune, Harry listened carefully. By now, all the younger kids should be out front, running off the last of their energy, while the older ones would be either down in the cellar or up in the belltower.

After a few minutes of listening, Harry quietly set the halfway clean pan down in the water. Drying his hands on a nearby towel, he quickly looked around himself before leaning towards the window. He could just *barely* see that Dillard was on the very top rung of the tall ladder, reaching as far as he could to scoop the gutters clean. Every few moments he wobbled, Harry having snagged the ladder that had slightly uneven feet.

Knowing this was his chance, he darted away from the sink and out the open back door, propped open to cool the place down. Once he got close enough, he swung back his right foot, twisting his hips as he kicked forward with all his not-inconsiderate might and slammed it into the base of the ladder.

Dillard landed with a sickening crack, his neck at an odd angle. His body jerked a few times, his eyes rolling wildly while red pooled behind his head. Seconds after impact, his face went slack and he let out a sigh.

Gently kicking one of Dillard's feet and getting no response, Harry spat into a patch of nearby grass. "Arsehole. Don't touch my feckin' kids." Nodding in satisfaction, he went back inside.

Resuming his place at the sink, he picked up his pan and scrubbed at it for a few moments before letting out a horrified shriek.

"MS. COLE! DILLAR' FELL!"

Heavy is the Head who bears the Crown

Running his hands down his front, Harry hummed in pleasure as his fingers glided over the deep, intensely red silk casual robe. Scattered over the bed were other articles of clothing as well, the first delivery of clothing he had commissioned from Tarragon, and out of everything he has received so far, he thinks that this will be his favorite piece.

Tom had already dressed for the day and was about to leave when a barn owl had winged towards the balcony, carrying a bundle of shrunken packages. After relieving the bird of its burden, he separated out and unshrunk the sturdy cardboard boxes holding everything as Harry cooed and fussed over the owl, the bird in question quietly barking and nibbling nimble fingers. Once finished, Tom had decided he could spare a few minutes before heading out and watched as his Consort excitedly tore through the packages, and was very impressed with the vast array of colors and styles Tarragon had gone with. He is quite excited to see Harry try on a set of formal robes done in Slytherin colors, the implied ownership of the outfit making something deep inside purr.

Watching Harry slip on a red robe, his mouth had quickly dried up. The silhouette was in an a-line and reminded Tom vaguely a bit of a kurta. It had a square keyhole neckline with a wide, flat black collar, embroidered with gold thread. It closely hugged the torso before gently flaring out at the hips, ending a few scant millimeters above the tops of Harry's feet, and the sleeves belled out before stopping at the mid-forearm, the hems also lined with a wide black band. The red color was deep and intense, bringing out the warm, woodsy undertones lying deep in Harry's peachy complexion while also magnifying the red and gold lowlights present in his hair, making Tom believe that one of his parents had to have red hair in order to get such a warm yet still true black.

But what had really gotten his attention was the silk material. It must have been made from immature acromantula silk; the first spinning of baby acromantula was renowned for how fine the silk was. And the material was fine, indeed, for Tom was easily able to see Harry's body shine through the fabric as he stood in front of the balcony door, the morning sunlight not stopping in the face of the fabric.

It was hard kissing Harry goodbye before leaving for the Ministry, but needs must. He has meetings about the economic block, has to respond to the *Prophet* about an interview, pull lists of properties in the Ministry's care that could be used to house the future fae students, and don't get him STARTED on trying to figure out whatever Harry is-

He sighed as he appeared in the Atrium. It looks like he'll be working through his lunch.

Wiggling his toes on top of the warmed balcony stones, Harry shifted in his spot on a plush chair as he sketched out garden ideas on pieces of scrap parchment as he took in the warm April sun. He was doubling down on replanting the large courtyard into a pleasure

garden and setting up the greenhouse to produce food, but he was torn between several different ideas.

He also wanted to speak to Tom about hiring a live-in gardener. Preferably a squib. Heir Golden-Mane's talk about their high unemployment rate and magical society's reluctance to do anything to give them a reason to stay still rang in the back of his head. He'll need to do a bit more research, but he doesn't see why he can't employ a few squibs to care for the courtyard and contract with a witch or wizard to provide magical support. And it's not like the Demanse doesn't have the room; the building had once housed nearly a thousand people, at one point!

Hiring a squib chef also wouldn't be out of the picture. If they decide to hire even just two gardeners, that will be four mouths to feed. While Harry doesn't doubt Dobby's skills, he's reluctant to keep the elf from his family for too long, and even if he does change ownership, having two elves be responsible for the cooking for four people AND the cleaning of the Demanse seems a bit hard, even with the use of magic to aid them. Onboarding a chef just makes sense.

He should also get on and send a hawk to Gringotts and request copies of their assets and ledgers. From the look of Tom's-, *their* vault, they should have a vast amount of holdings, and Harry wants to know exactly what they have down to the last knut. If they have land, he wants to know what type and where. If they own properties, are they occupied or rented out? What's their condition? Do they have stocks? Tom may be content to let things roll as they have, but Harry **isn't**.

He should also inquire with Lord Malfoy about those financial lessons, as well. From his memories of Tom's snarking, the denominations of wizarding money are confusing, and he needs to know the tax structure. Are there taxes on assets? If so, is it yearly, bi-yearly, annum, or only at the time of purchase? Sales taxes? Estate taxes? Tax write-offs?

He sighed. Just thinking about it all is making his brain hurt.

Lucius watched in amusement as his wife buzzed about the Manor's entrance hall, snapping out orders to the elves to clean this, polish that, air out this room, and oh, by Merlin are Draco's quarters cleaned!?

He can't blame her, he is also looking forward to having his son home. The *Hogwarts Express* will be pulling into platform 9 ³/₄ at four sharp tomorrow, and contrary to common sense, long train rides are utterly exhausting. Making sure everything is ready for their son is important, especially considering how the morning after his first full day at home is the day the Malfoy family traditionally does its start of spring rituals (a date that changes year to year, due to changes in the moon and star cycles), and they all must be well rested to greet the new dawn in order for everything to go off right. The following week they will hold their annual Garden Party, kicking off the Spring Social Season, and where Draco will officially be introduced as Heir Malfoy.

Which reminds him..."My, dove? How are talks with the Greengrass's going?"

Narcissa hummed as she read a long parchment presented to her by a somber-looking elf. "Quite well, but the question of which daughter has sprung up." She tapped her foot as she tasked whatever she was reading.

"How so?" Coming up to his wife's left, he gently placed his hand on her waist before reading over her shoulder, kissing her forehead as he did so. "Oh dear, that's quite the...well, *that*."

"Indeed. Lobby! Dispose of this **tripe**." Passing the parchment back to the elf, she rolled her eyes as it bowed and popped away. Really, the nerve of some people. "Back to the Greengrass's. While Daphne will be graduating with Draco, her younger sister, Astoria, is a fifth year. And Astoria has a mind better suited to the title of Lady Malfoy." Being Lady Malfoy has certain responsibilities and Daphne having a career as a dueling instructor, while a good and respectable one, will interfere with the baggage being Lady Malfoy entails. Astoria, meanwhile, has her eyes set on Arithmancy and Ruinic Sequences, a much safer and more flexible field.

"Ah," and now Lucius sees her conundrum; if the second Greengrass daughter marries before the first, that would make it harder for Daphne to secure a good match. And from what Lucius remembers, many of those calling for Daphne's hand are on the lower end of the Noble Houses, bordering on Lesser status. "I'll ask around and see if any families on the Continent would be warm to a Greengrass match." He'll need to steer clear of Spain, though; his Lord had informed him about the absolute *fit* the other country had over Britain joining the trade block. It wouldn't do for a young woman of Fine and Ancient breeding to be handed over to one of them.

"Perhaps Finland or Sweden?" Narcissa had had tea with both of the Queen's when she and her husband followed their Lord over to Denmark for a summit last year. Not only do both of the Lady's have sons of marriageable age, but nephews and cousins who are available as well. And that's before touching on the noble families of either nation.

"Hmmm. Perhaps." The idea has merit, but Lucius doesn't have enough knowledge of the political and social scene of the two kingdoms to full-on agree. Lord Aster Greengrass only has two daughters and no sons, and his brother only a single daughter. While matrilineal, the Greengrass's are ruled by patriarchal doctrine. The likelihood of a noble son taking on a woman's family name is low. If Lord Greengrass wants to keep the title within his line, he may have to pony-up the large dowry needed to keep his future son-in-law's family complacent while Daphne rules as Lady Regent until they can produce a viable son, otherwise the title would be forfeited to Lord Aster's third cousin Reginald Bagman-Greengrass.

*And that would be an utter **disaster**.*

"It can wait until the Garden Party," Narcissa waved her hand flippantly. "Lord Greengrass is yet to agree, and even if he does, he is adamant that neither of his daughters are to marry until they have finished their secondary schooling, so we have some time yet." And she agrees with the sentiment; some Pureblood families of either persuasion are fine with marrying their daughters off as early as sixteen, but many more (especially of the Dark faction) just think it prudent that a Daughter of Noble Blood receive continuing education

just as if she were a Son. Too many things could happen that would leave her without a husband, and Households don't run themselves for free.

Nodding in agreement, Lucius changed the subject. "Speaking of the Garden Party, has everyone RSVP'd?"

Hissing in agitation, Tom chucked the latest list of bollocks into his bin. The nerve of the Western Trade Block committee members! Have they forgotten who he is!? He has half a mind to go down to their offices and remind them just who is in charge of this nation! Sniveling rats-

Grunting as he heaved himself out of his chair, he stormed out of his office, slamming the wards to secure it into place with a loud clap of displaced air. People tripped over themselves to get out of his way upon seeing the rage-filled look on his face, their efforts to do so doubling when they caught sight of his yew wand clutched in his left hand.

Coming to the office space set aside for the committee, he slammed the doors open. "Who's the *fucking moron* who proposed making the Stonehaven cure free for all," he hissed while sparks shot out of the tip of his wand.

Upon his entrance, the nearly thirty people within the area had staggered back, trying to get away from their utterly furious Minister. Most were simple parchment-pushers and aids, the underlings needed to make any department truly work; they themselves had no power or authority. That belonged to the four men and three women who were selected to head the committee.

Nobody moved for quite some time, until a woman (who looked like a Moon, but he doesn't recognize her; possibly a half-blood) shoved a man who Tom placed as Sylvester Dagwood, a Light-aligned Pureblood, to the head of the group. The man gulped, wringing his hands as he broke out in a nervous sweat. "Th-th-that would be me. Sir," he tacked on with a squeak at the sneer Tom gave. "It's, um. It's a sound idea, and-"

"And it takes NO consideration of the extreme cost to brew," Tom hissed, stalking forward. "Or the rarity of the ingredients," he purred as he came closer to the man, mantling his shoulders as he leaned down. "Or the plain fact that we only have **three** Potioneer's with the skill to brew the cure," Tom breathed into Dagwood's face, his nose just inches from the trembling man's forehead. "Just to break even on a single dose, it costs almost five-hundred galleons," he stated as he started to circle the idiot, his arms clasped behind his back. "Four-hundred and ninety-seven galleons, eight sickles, and three knuts, to be exact," he bumped his shoulder into the profusely-sweating Dagwood's, nearly sending the man into a sprawl.

Coming back to Dagwood's front, Tom stood up straight and tall, head held high while he looked down his nose at the other. With a sudden jerk, he got right into Dagwood's face, teeth bared. *"If I hear another suggestion such as this from you again, don't worry about telling your family you were sacked. You'll be delivered to them in one."* Standing back up and taking a moment to fix the neckline of his outer robe, he froze when he heard drips of water and smelt something acrid. Rolling his eyes before staring incredulously at Dagwood while a

puddle slowly expanded out from his feet, he just jerked his head with a loud sigh. "Moon," he snapped.

The woman he pegged as a half-blood earlier took a step forward from the rest of the cowering group. "Sir?" He has to give her credit where it is due; she's clearly scared out of her mind, but doing admirably to hide it. He can only see a faint tremor in her shoulders and hear the slightest quaver to her voice. Possibly a Gryffindor.

"From now on, your job is 'Idiot Wrangler'."

She blinked in shock but quickly recovered herself. "...any duties specifically, or just keep any rampant stupidity from your office, Sir?"

In answer to her question, he just arched an eyebrow at her. "I'll let you figure it out. You seem *marginally* more intelligent than most other people in this room." Turning about-face on his heel, he started striding out of the office, just to stop at the door. "You have until noon Friday to have an actual integration outline on my desk."

Slamming the door behind him, Tom stalked back to his office with a growl. Already he can feel the muscles in his shoulders and upper back heat, the latest tomfuckery that just happened already working to undo the hard work Harry put in the night before massaging out his back. Waking up this morning, his back and feet feeling like jello while his Consort used him as a mattress had been like waking from one dream before falling straight into another, better one.

And Dagwood fucked it all up!

Stomping through his wards, he took extra care to ensure he wouldn't be disturbed for the next ten minutes before picking up the ugly, empty vase by his door and hurling it at one of his walls with a shout.

Fucking Dagwood.

Rubbing the chest feathers of Hedwig as she perched on his shoulder, Harry looked back and forth between the two halls he now stood at the T-junction of. He *was* going to go down into the courtyard to sketch out more ideas, but another rainstorm had rolled in. With his feet tapping with restless energy, he decided to explore his home.

Knowing Zarba and Dobby were just a shout away, he had first visited the mews. After greeting the more friendly raptors housed within (even getting a few bobs from Gregorian), Hedwig decided to join him on his field trip. He had returned to his and Tom's quarters long enough to slip on a pair of simple socks, wiggling his toes as they happily squished the wool around them with each step.

He casually glanced out the closed glass balcony door and noticed that across the courtyard was a smaller balcony, on level with his, and he could just make out a heavy, iron-

banded wooden door. There was no bridge or walkway linking the two balconies, so there must be another entrance. Maybe he'll find a way in!

With that goal in mind, Harry had initially started going to each door he found, starting with the floor beneath theirs. Most of the rooms he's found were empty or filled with drop cloth-covered furniture. There were a few exceptions, like what looked to be an old but still used potions lab, and another that looked like a sitting room converted into an office, but so far everything has been empty, empty, empty.

Oh, and dusty.

Eventually, his searching devolved into 'open door, look inside, shut door, move on.' It was getting hard to imagine this place at one time being home to hundreds of people. The Demanse of now felt-

-lonely.

And thus, he was now here (wherever here was). He actually hadn't paid much attention to where he was going, so he has no idea where to orient himself in regards to his room.

Looking back and forth between the two stone hallways, Harry debated on turning back when he felt a warm but very faint breeze on the right side of his face. His curiosity getting the better of him, he decided to follow the breeze to the source.

Following the hallway and going down a few different flights of stairs, the breeze got slightly warmer. It was only as he turned down another staircase that he gasped, feeling like he had just walked into a wall of heat. The air was both moist and dry, a combination he never thought was possible. Hedwig let out a concerned chirp, and he pet her a few times before going on. After another turn of stairs, he stopped, his sock-clad feet having left smooth, time-worn stone and now hitting roughly-hewn, raw rock. He debated taking his socks off, but that was before his ears picked up odd, thick, bubbling, and popping sounds. Pushing on, he walked down the now-straight hallway he was now in before abruptly finding himself on an open walkway jutting out of the side of a magma chamber.

"Cor, this must be what Zarba meant by 'lava tubes'." Harry was in awe. Below him, lava roiled in lazy swell's, the surface of the liquid rock glowing red, orange, and bright yellow while a scattered fishnet of ash covered the surface. Slowly looking around the chamber, he could see off on the far side something that looked like a forge and several workbenches, but the heat coming off of the lava slowly flowing through the chamber only twenty or so feet below him was thick enough to distort his view.

He was a bit scared to go further, but the stone floor below his feet did widen out significantly. After a few tentative steps away from the enclosed hallway that had spat him out into this (for the lack of a better term) room, his confidence returned to him. He wanted to see what the forge looked like. Were some of Tom's ancestors smiths? Did they make armor? Weapons? With something like this, a distant Warlord ancestor could truthfully say he wielded a blade forged in the fires of Hell!

Hopping a few times in excitement, he nearly startled himself into a fall when he came upon a gaping maw of a shaft. Peering inside while his heart raced, Harry soon realized that this was once used for mining, but for what he doesn't know. Biting his lip, he looked back and forth between the mineshaft and the forge before plunging into the mine, justifying his decision by reasoning he could visit the forge afterward.

After only a dozen steps, torches embedded into the walls lit up with a pale and ghostly light. Looking closely at the walls, Harry could see gouges where instruments like pickaxes were used to dig into the walls. His curiosity ramped up even more; what was the mine for? Minerals? Gems? Metals?

As he went further and further into the mineshaft, the red-orange glow from the lava chamber faded, leaving only the pale, thin light of the torches to light his way. As he stopped and squinted deeper into the shaft, trying to decide if it would be worth his while to continue on, a spec of light caught his eye.

Just to his left, about shoulder height, something dully shined through the packed dirt and rock of the shaft wall. Rubbing his finger on it and dislodging some loose soil, Harry was shocked to see part of a raw and jagged gemstone. Looking around in excitement, he spied something that looked like a hand trowel sitting on top of a large boulder. Nicking it, he started to gently chip away at the rock and dirt packed tightly around the gem.

It only took him a few minutes, but soon Harry was holding a long, rough spike of some unidentifiable gemstone. It was vaguely shaped like a stretched-out teardrop, with the thinner end coming to an abrupt and flat end. It was hard to tell in the light, but one side looked blue-green while the other was purple. It also felt quite heavy. Setting the dirty stone down off to the side, he looked around in excitement, trying to see if there were any other glimmers he could find. Soon, he spotted three more and buzzed over to the next-closest bit of shine he saw.

"Oi, Hedwig, I can't wait to show Tom these! He'll flip 'is lid!" Getting a trill of agreement, he dug into his newest find.

Ticking another property off his list, Tom flipped over one of the many parchments before him and examined the next one. This one looks like it may be promising; it was a property that once belonged to the now-dead Dragonsfire line. After Bors Dragonsfire passed six years ago with no heirs or close family to pass the old country manor onto (along with an Irish villa and a half-decayed fort in the Northern Hebrides), it had fallen into Ministry custody. It's been on the market for a few years (after Ministry curse breakers had stripped the magic from it), but there have been no takers.

It needs a little bit of work, but there are enough rooms to house up to twenty exchange students on their own in singles, and up to forty if they double up. It's also located out in the country, giving the Seelie youngsters a safe place to live without the overwhelming pressure that human magic and communities can create.

Setting the property aside in a pile with three others he approved of, Tom was just about to move onto the next possibility when three firm but not overwhelming knocks sounded at his door. Waving his hand, the door opened to let Rodolphus in, the man holding a file while his eyes fairly glowed in excitement.

"My Lord, I have an exciting mystery on my hands, involving your Consort." Lord LeStrange nearly vibrated, giving Tom an ample hint that, whatever this mystery is, is something either exceedingly rare or unheard of.

"Of course! Please, sit," he gestured to the chairs in front of his desk as he tidied up his work, wanting to dedicate his full attention to what Rodolphus has to say. "I judge that you have had a breakthrough, yes?"

Seating himself, Rodolphus set his file down on the freshly cleared space on Tom's desk. "I initially thought I had finished my examination of Consort Slytherin's...unique Transfiguration abilities a few days ago. I was unable to inform you of my findings, though, when we had lunch with your Consort and his Tailor," opening the file, he fanned out a few sheets of parchment, the thick material covered in charts, numbers, and equations. Looking at them, Tom could only understand about half of what he was seeing. While he ensured he got nothing less than straight O's in all of his subjects, there is a steep increase in difficulty and skill required to master Transfiguration outside of the Hogwarts (much improved) curriculum.

"And?"

Leaning back into the chair while still sitting up straight, Rodolphus drummed the fingers of his right hand on his knee. "Out of curiosity, I let the knitted sample provided by your Consort to 'marinate' so to speak for another day before examining again. As you know, Transfigurations can last for a long time, but only if a lot of magic has been pumped into the spell before charms are added to lengthen the lifetime of the Transfiguration."

"Yes, that is taught to every First Year. What does that have to do with this?" Tom wanted to sigh; Rodolphus has few faults, but dragging things out is one of them.

Leaning forward again, Rodolphus pulled out a parchment from the bottom of the stack. "Somehow, your Consort is capable of Permanent Transfiguration," he gloated.

Tom just stared at the other. "You're shitting me."

"I shit you not, my Lord." Tom wanted to giggle hysterically; hearing Rodolphus say such a thing was like something out of a muggle *'Twilight Zone'* episode. "Consort Slytherin is capable of permanently Transfiguring items, down to the *sub-molecular* level, with his bare hands."

With renewed interest Tom gathered up the parchments, flipping back to the front of the pile. He was going to brute-force the knowledge into his brain if he had to, because, seriously?

What the fuck are you, Harry?

Humming under his breath, Harry was nearly skipping in glee as he made his way back up into the Demanse proper. Dangling from his left hand was a large metal bucket chock full of rough, raw gemstones. He's never seen an actual diamond in the flesh, but he suspects there's at least one raw one mixed in with the rest of his findings. He can't wait to get back to their rooms and give them a nice scrub down!

And scrub himself down, too. He's feeling quite silty.

Turning around a corner, he recognized where he was; just over *there* is the portrait of Xenia Slytherin, the woman who likes to tease him.

"Young man." Harry jumped, looking around himself wildly, trying to find the source of this new, unidentified man's voice. It was soft and velvety but rang clear, not quite a tenor but not quite a baritone, and the accent was one unfamiliar to Harry, sounding a little like Irish Gaelic but still undisputedly *not*.

"Here." Looking towards Xenia's portrait, he found she was sharing it with another, the man who called out to him. Coming closer out of curiosity, Harry peered at the newcomer. He stood while Xenia sat, her head leaning against the man's hip while he casually pets her hair. Where Xenia wore a sumptuous, square-necked gown that looked like a combination of Tudorian fashion and Rococo fancy, he was in something far more medieval; a long, belted dark green tunic with gold and silver trim, a cream undershirt, a wide cloth a leather belt and cream hose tucked into tall, dark boots. Covering it all was a dark cloak, and he had copious amounts of jewelry on his fingers and around his neck. It was difficult to tell his age because while his face was somewhat youthful, his long, dark hair had streaks of silver running through it before it got caught up in a club hanging over his shoulder.

"Hello," Harry greeted, feeling a bit self-conscious about his dirty appearance.

"Yes, hello," the man said. "I believe you are the newest Slytherin Consort, correct?" On his right hand, he absentmindedly turned a heavy gold ring that held a large, dark stone around his index finger.

"I am. My name is Harry. Harry Potter." His eyes darted towards Xenia as she cooed at him before returning to the unnamed man.

"See? Didn't I tell you? And he's so sweet, too," Xenia fawned. "Our current Lord Slytherin seems to have been revitalized."

Humming at the tidbit of information, the man stared down at Harry for a few moments before coming to a decision. "Follow the lights. I shall meet you where they end."

And with that, he swept away in a swirl of fabric.

"Wha-, wait!" Dancing in place for a few moments, he set down his bucket before dashing off, following the swirling, glowing colors the moonstone-studded floors gave off. After a few steps, he stopped to strip off his socks, the small bits of chipped stone clinging to them

digging into his feet as he ran. Throwing them in the direction of the bucket, he broke out into a sprint, the slaps of his feet on smooth stone a counterpoint to his harsh breathing.

After going up and down stairs, and left and right around corners, he soon came to a stop outside a set of thick and sturdy doors. Gingerly reaching out, he grasped the lever door handle, pushing it down before pushing it open. It glided open on well-oiled hinges, whisper-light. Peering around the door, he saw that he was in a set of rooms, similar in set-up to his and Tom's; this was the sitting room, full of furniture covered by dust cloths, and to the right and next to a (currently) cold fireplace was a door that would no doubt lead to a bedroom. The only difference was that on the left was another door, more discreet than the one he was currently standing in or the one leading to the currently-unseen bedroom.

Across from the room's entrance was the balcony he saw earlier, but he was utterly confused; looked at from Tom's balcony, all he saw was hewn stone and a door, the balcony itself being quite small, only a few feet wide and out. From this side, the whole wall was made of glass, and there was a large stone overhang.

Must be something to do with magic.

"This is the Consort's Chambers." Harry jumped at the sound of his guide's voice. Turning he saw the man had taken up residence in the tall portrait frame hanging over the fireplace. "For generations, since my family cut the first stone to build this place, we have set aside rooms exclusively for the use of the Slytherin Consort. No one, not even the Lord or Lady of our great House, can enter." Gesturing around the room, he sighed. "This is, quite literally, the safest place in all of Britain," he ended on a wistful note.

Harry quietly contemplated this information for a few minutes. "Why?" He fought the urge to fidget under the heavy, blue gaze he now found himself under.

"...the Lord's and Lady's of Slytherin hold their beloved sacrosanct," the man muttered. "Just like the Consort holds their heart, they hold their Consort's life. If the Head of Slytherin falls, the Consort will be the one to take the House forward, inheriting the title of Lord or Lady. Any children they may have after this transition will be considered of Slytherin blood, even if neither parent is a Slytherin or a member of the other lines." Leaning over, his gaze bore into Harry's. "In the grand scheme of things, your Tom is disposable, while you are more precious than even the tears of a phoenix." Standing back up, he gave a decisive nod, "please, remember that."

Harry could just barely hear the portrait leave the room over the buzzing in his ears.

Trouble in Paradise II

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay! Not only did this chapter not want to get written, but contracts are getting redone at my job site, so my writing time is going to be a bit spotty for a while.

Anyway, enjoy a chapter where Harry gets to be a little Angst Muffin :)

Harry wrinkled his nose while he nibbled on a cookie, trying his best to ignore the coo's from the occupants crowding the portrait frame hanging over the fireplace in the Slytherin Consort (his) sitting area. He let his eyes drift over the walls and room, noticing things here or there, like that the rooms were a mirror to the Lord's (Tom's) chambers. Where Tom's bedroom would be through a door on the left wall, Harry's was through one on the right.

Currently, he was sitting at a small tea table, nibbling on dainty tea cookies brought in by Zarba (who had been shocked, to say the least, when she was summoned to these rooms). The furniture and decorations left by the last Slytherin Consort still filled the room, if albeit somewhat dusty. Unlike the heavy, sturdy woods and overstuffed cushions in Tom's sitting room, it looked as though the previous occupant heavily favored Rococo, the overly ornamental and theatrical art style had its stamp all over the room.

It's nice, Harry will admit, but he misses the Art Deco lines, curving forms, and smooth, polished surfaces that had started taking London and America by storm. As a boy, he had been utterly captivated by the newspaper article about the Chrysler Building and other American skyscrapers being erected in New York and Chicago, the bold, futuristic yet artful lines and details of their Deco style just stealing his heart. He had even hidden away a poster for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair underneath a floorboard under his bed, the sheer energy and bright-look-forward held within its boldly colored stock able to hold his attention indefinitely.

...maybe he could ask Tom about redecorating his rooms? His lover(?) may have made all those proclamations to him underneath Gringotts about being equals, but Harry has already commissioned a large wardrobe from Tarragon while also securing the tailor's expertise on revamping Tom's. That's a LOT of money, and he fears overstepping some unmarked boundary.

And that's not even delving into the little yarn studio Harry wants to set up. Granted, his new digs have changed a few things, but still-

He looked up and to the side as the portrait occupants cooed at him again. They might have been previous Slytherin Consort's because he spied several of the men and women within the portrait sporting a painted copy of his ring.

Licking his lips clean of powdered sugar as he dusted his hands off with a napkin, he caught sight of his bucket, which Zarba had brought in when delivering his snacks. He really should clean those raw gems off and try to figure out what he dug up; Lady Malfoy had mentioned that past Lord's and Lady's of Slytherin had crafted jewelry. Maybe Tom could have something done with what Harry had dug up?

Picking up his bucket, he debated washing up here or in Tom's rooms. Both are viable options, but the bucket was **heavy**, and he doesn't want to bother Zarba...

"Oh, what do we have here?" Peering over a woman's shoulder was a young man, clean-shaven with a tangle of bright red hair tumbling over his shoulder in a messy braid. Glimpses of metal and pearls peeked out from his messy locks, and he had woad swirls painted on his face and around his blue, nearly ice clear eyes. Harry could understand why the other would capture the attention of a Slytherin; he was *beautiful*. "Oi, shiny rocks!" His accent was thick and unplaceable, showing he was from a land and time Harry has never encountered. "Go oan, gib 'im a warsh!"

Before he could even say anything, a bucket full of water appeared at his feet, suds and steam wafting up from it. Putting down his prize, Harry kneeled, preparing to scrub up his goods before realizing that his current robe was quite dusty and the sleeves just a tad too long and loose to keep out of the water.

Seeing his dilemma, another portrait pipped up. "Go ahead, laddie, and just shuck it off! We won't tell!" In contrast to the redhead, this was a curvy woman who looked Iberian, with darker skin and honey eyes, and her hair tapped up in a crown around her head.

"Um," Harry blushed. These people may be long dead, but he is NOT going starkers in front of them!

The redhead cackled. "Ay, we'll strip in solidarity! *Let's get naked, everyone*," he crowed before tossing off a blue tunic, the nearly dozen others crowding the portrait with him cheering before dresses, petticoats, leggings, trousers, and other clothing items flew like confetti.

Harry squeaked, slapping his hands over his face while his ears burned. He could hear the other Consort's peals of laughter, various men and women cajoling him. He hasn't felt this amount of pressure since the first time he went out for drinks!

Throwing his thoughts to the wind, he flung off his robe to loud cheers. Face still blazing, he crossed his arms over his chest and glared at his audience and oh stars *but they were all so handsome and pretty and he's **not-***

He's starting to regret this. The others were tall and beautiful, full figured or having a muscular frame. Even the one who he pegs as being short is still a few inches taller than him, and it's making him feel inadequate. He's always been a short, scrappy little thing, with dry and tangle-prone hair that he's always had to keep close cut, and hands covered in calluses with a crooked index and middle finger on his right hand and he has two snaggle teeth on his lower jaw-

"Oh, no. Oh no no no. No, laddie, why the tears!?" The Iberian Consort sounded beside herself, setting off the others into making concerned sounds when they noticed his wet eyes as Harry tried to hide himself behind his bucket.

He sniffled. "I jus', I don' ge' wha' Tom sees in me? I'm pre'y much nuffing! 'e's go' 'is long bludline an' power an' so many differen' lovers and dey were so clean an' refined an' I'm jus', jus' not!" Meeting Lysandus was a bit of a kick in the face; he was everything Harry was not. He may have been an arsehole (and he *hates* arseholes), but he belongs far more in magical society than Harry ever will. He loves Tom to bits, but really, where is the match to be made? Tom has always been ambitious and dreamed big, not content to just 'get by' on what meager scraps life tossed him.

Meanwhile, Harry just struggled to keep his head above the waves.

"Oh, sweetie, no. No, don't cry," another Consort cooed, a French accent tickling her words. She was tall, blonde and svelte, bedecked in gold and jewels, several necklaces dipping between the valley of her high and tight breasts. She was sandwiched on a chair between two others, one woman and the redheaded man. "If the current Lord has seen fit to call you Consort, then that's all you need!"

That doesn't tell Harry **anything**. "Bu', why *me!*? I ain' pretty, and I bring nuffin' t'the table-

"Oi, what do you mean '*you ain't pretty*'," the redhead boomed out, startling Harry out of his funk. The others voice was LOUD, especially considering he was thin of build, even if he was still fit. "You're adorable! Why the Jarl's of my homeland would have competed for just one night in your bed!"

"...I still don't know what he sees in me," Harry muttered, tapping his fingers on his bucket. "I never finished my primary schooling." Once he reached fourth year, he stopped going, except for his maths classes. Numbers have always just clicked for him (unlike letters), and he justified his continuous mathematical education by telling himself it would help with the budgeting and accounting for Wool's.

"You make him happy, so that's all the justification needed," another man, Moorish, if Harry judges by the dark, almost midnight color of his skin, stated in a voice that was almost subharmonic. He was built with a more fatty frame, the type that acts more like muscle. Harry knew a man like that, a machinist that could easily swing around car engines with his bare hands and kick through walls. "A Spouse is for business, and a Consort is for sheer pleasure."

Harry gapped for a few moments, his mouth opening and closing like a guppy before he went red in anger. "Oi, you! If'n your sayin' Tom is only keepin' me 'round for a quick feck-

"*NO! Great Mother, no!*" Iberian waved her hands about, flapping like a bird (and if Harry had been in a better mood he would have laughed at how her chest bounced at the quick, fervent actions). "A Consort is to **love!** Marriages were usually business arrangements! Either Spouse could take one on, because everyone wants to hold somebody at night," her

strident tone melted into something more wistful as her gaze grew distant as she got lost in memories.

"Enough of this," the French Consort barked out. "Your Lord keeps you because he wants you, and that is more than enough. Now," she clapped her hands, making Harry blush from the interesting things physics was doing with her chest at the movement, "call your elf for an actual plate of food and let us see the sparklies!"

Ms. Skeeter,

I would be quite glad to give an interview to your publication. After all, no doubt quite a few members of the public must be beyond curious about my Consort and indulging in such a thing is quite harmless! If it would please you, perhaps we can get together tomorrow, in the early afternoon? Given that most of the Ministry will be either off or working a half-day in preparation of the Hogwarts Express delivering students home for Ostara, this may be the best time to conduct talks.

T.M.R Gaunt

Lord Slytherin

Minister of Magic

Defender of Britain, Wales, Scotland, United Ireland, and the Faroe Islands

Setting his letter aside to let the ink dry naturally, Tom then pulled close a book that Rodolphus had lent him about the more esoteric and advanced aspects of Transfiguration. The revelation that Harry can, without a wand or even an uttered word, permanently Transfigure an item is literally mind-blowing. He, himself, is also capable of such a feat (minus the wandless and non-verbal aspect) but is limited greatly in how it can be applied. He's constrained by mass and material; if he has a five-kilo block of wood, he can only permanently transfigure it into another wooden item that is also five kilos. If he wants it to weigh less, he has to cut off a piece before performing the spell. Professor Minerva McGonagall of his old alma mater has slightly more range in the feat, and, as much as he may hate to admit it, Tom will begrudgingly concede that Albus Dumbledore is the unquestionable Master of the Transfiguring Arts, being able to add or subtract a full 25% of mass to his spelled items, and mold the material three full degrees along Kemper's *Transfiguration Materials Index*.

He perked up, though, upon realizing that Harry, sans wand, has left Dumbledore completely in the dust. And he's sorely tempted to recall Dumbledore from exile just to watch his sweet little Consort utterly curbstomp the old goat. Again.

Humming a jaunty little tune, he dove back into his reading.

Scrubbing the lump of blue mineral in his hand, Harry dunked it into his wash bucket before holding it up to his adoring audience. "How's about this one," he asked quietly, still embarrassed over his hunger-induced breakdown.

Who knew cookies weren't an appropriate substitute for an actual meal?

Estrella Slytherin, the Iberian Consort, cocked her head as it rested on the back of her hand as she sat curled up on a spongy chair. "Sapphire, I think," she stated while squinting.

"Nah, that's blue Emerald," Danfig Red-Crown countered. He was currently trying to repaint the woad on his face from his spot on the portrait floor, the excitement from earlier causing a bit to smudge under his left eye.

"Sapphire's and Emeralds are the same thing," the Moor, Ibrahim al-bin Assalhaim, said. He was basking on a heavily padded lounging chair, lazily eating a bunch of grapes. "And it's more purple than blue, so I say it is Tanzanite."

"Wrong stones, Ibrahim. It's sapphire and ruby that are the same," Giselle Valois-Saint-Remy, the French Consort and a former princess corrected Ibrahim, who just grunted at her while waving his grapes.

"...I'll just put these into the 'Have Tom Look At Them' pile," Harry said while doing just that. The lump of blue joined a small pile that included a stone the size of his fist that confused the other Consorts because it looked to be diamond, but was a brown, chocolatey color, something that *may* be Ametrine, a brittle but cheerfully green stone that broke as Harry washed it, and a lump of *something* that might have been ruby, but the red tone was just too wrong.

That was in contrast to the large pile of things that **were** identified. One was an undisputed diamond almost the size of his head (and BOY had that set everyone off into a tizzy), chunks of ruby, sapphire, and emerald, different feldspars, and an honest to goodness moonstone.

And he still has almost a third of his bucket to go.

Grabbing another dirty, unidentified rock, he dunked it into his wash bucket. As he scrubbed it, he darted a look towards the door behind him and near the entrance to his chambers.

"What's behind that door?" After a few confused sounds from the previous Consorts, he motioned towards it with his shoulder. "That door? Where does it lead to?"

"Ah," Giselle breathed, a rosy blush creeping along her cheeks. "That is the Nursery! While married, the Lord or Lady of Slytherin isn't supposed to beget any children outside of their Spouse, but accidents do happen..."

Harry hummed. He might see about turning it into a little work studio, then. Outside of adoption, there's no way for him and Tom to have babies, and regardless of that fact, he doubts Tom would want any, anyway. As a child, he hardly tolerated the presence of the other orphans, and he doubts much has changed.

That, and Harry is in no hurry to acquire any. He's spent most of his life caring for others. It would be nice to worry about himself for a change.

"And what's this shape, Jassy," Bella cooed while tapping a page in a child's workbook, her dark lacquered fingernail scratching over an illustration of a red shape. While her voice was soft it still echoed around the high, stone vaulted ceilings and bounced off of the leaded stained glass windows of the 14th-century cathedral that House LeStrange calls home.

Poking his tongue out between his lips as his face screwed up, Jasper frowned down at the shape from his perch in his Mummy's lap. "A square," he eventually shouted out. With a gentle prompt, he gripped with his hand a large, rounded piece of chalk and slowly wrote out the word 'square' on his piece of slate, not noticing as his mother ruffled his wispy hair and dropped a kiss on his crown.

Rabastan sighed, watching his sister-in-law as she instructed her son in his simple exercises. If she wasn't so batshit crazy, he'd recommend she go into teaching. Alas, not only did her mental state work against her, but her sheer ferocity on the battlefield makes her too valuable to leave to her own devices. Once Jasper joins a local creche starting towards the end of this summer, Bella will be returning to her post full time, and Rabastan suspects their Lord will be using her in order to further his agenda.

Watching her turn to another page in Jassy's workbook, he leaned back into the couch he was sitting on. He was debating on getting another glass of ice wine, but given the early hour of the day, and his brother and sister-in-law's opinions on copious alcohol consumption in front of their little boy, he held back on it. He doesn't want to have to explain to Roddy just why half of LeStrange Cathedral needs to be rebuilt; he's heard often enough how priceless the stained glass windows were and how they predated the discovery of the New World and yadda yadda yadda-

"Oi, Bella," he queried. He felt a shiver go up his spine as her head slowly turned towards him, the motion reminding him entirely too much of his Great Uncle Ignatius's owl, Belerpheron.

Creepy fucking bird. "Bella, I've been wondering something? Why do you like Harry so much?" He had asked Rodolphus and didn't accept for one minute the muttered 'Black ancestry' and 'respect of power'. The Minister had bedded Black's before and, while Bella may not have attacked them, she also didn't fawn over them like she does Harry. There's something else going on in that squirrely brain of hers, and he's just sloshed enough to ask.

"Harry? Is Harry here!? Mummy, can I go say hi," if Rabastan was a lesser man, his cold, dead heart would have melted at his nephew's excited tone. Instead, it just thawed slightly.

"No, Jassy, Uncle Rabby is just asking Mummy a question," Bella cooed, staring at Rabastan the whole time with her unblinking blue-grey eyes and a smile on her painted lips just to the left of unhinged. "Maybe he can come and visit. We should write him a letter later." Jasper gave a little cheer upon hearing that. "Why don't you go and find cousin Lobelia? I think it's snack time."

As little feet in little dress shoes trotted out of the room and down the hallway, Rabastan could feel a frisson of *something* go up his spine. He's not nearly as gifted as his brother when it comes to peering into Madness in order to see the future, let alone as talented as their Great Grandmother Ekaterina (which he is grateful for. He can do without existing in a fugue state just to erupt into explosive shouts whilst using her blood to scrawl predictions upon the walls, thank you very much!), but he occasionally has his moments, and right now he feels like one of those is about to bite him on the arse.

Bella turned in her seat, her head somehow staying fixed on him as her neck and torso followed, the whole motion reminding him of a snake coiling into position. "Why does Widdle Wabby wanna know?" *O-kay*. He was not expecting that tone. "Bella knows her widdle brother likes her Lord's Consort. Widdle Wabby should be careful," she giggled.

"...I was just curious. You, uh," Rabastan stumbled over his words. The last time he heard Bella talk like this, a few of the Smith's ended up meeting an unpleasant end. "You have carried a torch for our Lord for quite some time. I'm just wondering why, out of the many partners he's had throughout the years, Harry is deemed acceptable." There, now here's hoping she doesn't bite his face off.

Instead, she devolved into high-pitched, child-like giggles, making his hair stand up on end. "Because, Widdle Wabby," she clapped her hands before hovering her fingers over her mouth, "our Lord is like a *god*. So powerful, so beautiful," her voice drifted off into a wondrous whisper. "Only someone like He is worthy to stand beside him."

Incredulous, Rabastan watched as her eyes unfocused. "...and Harry is?" He jumped, almost sloshing the last of his wine out of his glass, quickly gulping it down to prevent the loss when he almost lost his hold on the goblin crystal.

"Where He is the Father of Our Nation, Harry will be like the Mother..."

Rabastan blinked. "Right. I, uh, understand now." Standing up slowly, he set his glass down on a little side table, his eyes locked on her form like a deer who spotted a wolf and was hoping it has yet to be seen. "I, have to go. I promised to help Auntie Esmee with, er, something. Bye!" Quickly walking out of the room, he twitched as she called out '*cawful awound Hawwy, Wabby!*' behind him before her voice rose several octaves as she laughed like a hyena.

"I am *so happy* Mother changed Father's mind. Roddy can fucking HAVE her."

It was as Tom was securing his office that he received an ecstatic reply from Ms. Skeeter, confirming a time for an extended lunch interview for tomorrow. She had promised that it would only be her and her photographer, and had even conceded that all pictures would have to be approved by him, but that she wanted a full-color headshot of his Consort to run with the article.

Pleased that she had already capitulated to demands he had yet to make, he exited his office, weaving around Ministry employees excited to get home and finish last-minute

preparations in anticipation of their children returning for the short Spring break along with the start of the Spring Social Season.

Speaking of which, he'll have to ask Harry if he feels up to joining him with the Malfoy's on Monday for their Garden Party. Not only would it be good for Harry to get out, but it would also be an opportunity for Tom to remind his followers just how important the other is to him, and how **disappointed** he would be if they saw something going on and *didn't step in*.

As he approached the Apparition point, he realized that most of the Potter's (Named, at least) would also be present. It would be interesting to see how the two groups interact. If he remembers correctly, Lord-in-Waiting Potter and his wife have one child in Sixth year, a set of twins in Third, another in First, and then a 'surprise' who's still a toddler, and thus won't be present. Then there is Lord Regent Charlus and his wife and a few cousins of little import. From Lucius's grumblings the oldest Potter child, a boy named Gideon, is a bit of an arrogant little shit who has subscribed to the whole 'Slytherin, bad! Gryffindor good!' mentality that still lingers prior to Dumbledore's ouster.

Arriving home, he was about to start towards his chambers when the clearing of a throat caught his attention. Unnoticed by most, there is a long, rectangular portrait hung over the inside of the Floo and Apparition room door. In the past it would be monitored by a Slytherin ancestor, but has since been left vacant.

Looking up, his eyes widened in surprise. "Salazar. What can I do for you?" He has only met his Progenitor twice; once upon taking possession of the Demanse as Heir Apparent, and then once upon becoming the Pater (which was his thirtieth birthday). Early on during his residency, he had tried to track the man down, but he had remained elusive.

The stare Salazar gave Tom made the younger man want to fidget, but he fought the urge. "Your Consort. Harry."

Tom *hates* this tendency of Salazar's; starting a line of thought or inquiry just to abruptly drop it. The only reason he even knows **anything** about his home is because he had spent literal hours conversing with the man each time he appeared. "Yes? What of him? Is he injured?"

"...no," Salazar rolled the simple syllable around in his mouth. "I have shown him to the Consort's Chambers."

Yes, congrats, thank you, I'll throw a parade in your honor. "I was not aware we had such a set, but I thank you."

Salazar sneered down at him, and Tom gritted his teeth at the look. "Of *course* you wouldn't know of them. They are for the **Consort**. You may be the Head of the Family, but the Consort is the Neck. Without them, we are *nothing*." Sniffing in a manner that reminded Tom far more of Abraxas than a Slytherin, Salazar then tossed his black and silver hair over his shoulder, a ring-encrusted hand helping it along. "Chambers aside, the other Consort's have done what they could to help Harry settle in, but seem to have...accidentally, upset the

boy." Leaning as far into Tom's space as he could as a painting, Salazar breathed out, "I do believe you should pay a bit more attention to him."

Not needing to be told twice, his brain abruptly switching gears upon hearing the words 'Harry' and 'upset' used in the same sentence, Tom didn't even bother to thank Salazar before the heavy wooden door was slamming shut behind him.

Salazar just rolled his eyes upon the abrupt departure of his descendant. "Oh, to be young and stupid, again."

Harry hummed, flipping another page in the gemology tome he had located on one of Tom's bookcases. It was muggle and current, each page in glossy full color, showing an example of a rock, gem, or stone in its raw form and then cut. He quite appreciated the typeface, as well; the font was larger than what he's seen back in the twenties and thirties, and he thinks it may even be a different typeset because the letters didn't squiggle as much as the ones in his scrounged physics's books.

He rolled onto his side, rubbing his legs into the fur covering Tom's bed as he adjusted the book. He had dressed long enough to return to their bedroom and had taken a quick shower and decided it was warm enough to air dry. Not being in the mood to knit, he had decided to try and identify some of the mystery stones. So far, and based on what the other Consort's said, the questionable diamond *is* a diamond, but a chocolate-colored one. Which is absurd because he's **never** heard of diamonds being anything but white or cloudy yellow-

"Darling!?"

Harry squeaked, almost throwing the book when Tom burst in. "Feckin' 'ell, Tommy! Warn a man next time-" he squawked when long fingers and large hands rolled him over, having to squint through now-crooked glasses at Tom's worried face as it hovered over his as the other visually and manually inspected his still-naked body. "Tom! Keep yer paws-"

"I was told you were upset." Finding nothing physically wrong, Tom tossed aside his outer robe before jumping into bed, pulling Harry up to lay on his front. "Forgive me for fearing the worst."

"Oh, um. No, that's, uh, fine." Harry's cheeks warmed, both in a combination of self-chastisement and at the pleasant feel of the hand gently rubbing up and down his back. "I met some past Consort's and, um, I got emotional whilst hungry."

Tom just lifted an eyebrow at him while letting out an *'umhmm'*, the combination of the sound and gesture making Harry take pause long enough to wonder why they were so familiar. "What? It's true!"

"Oh, of course. Nothing to worry about, even if a concerned portrait decides the best course of action was to corner me upon my return. Please, do go on about how you weren't upset," Tom drawled.

Harry blinked at him in confusion before he pushed up onto his hands, glaring through his glasses before fixing them. "Now, lis'en 'ere, you li'le shite-"

"Oh, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to," Tom said airily. "But, just note, then, that you shan't be leaving this bed otherwise." And as if to emphasize his point, he sat up, pulling his underrobe off before leaning around Harry to scrunch his socks off. Tossing the articles to the side, he then rolled over and squished a protesting Harry underneath him. "There. Try to get out now."

Harry choked. "T-tom! Ge' off you lardarse!"

"I will have you know that I am one-hundred percent Prime British beef," Tom proclaimed, inserting as much arrogance and mock-offense into his declaration as he could. "'lardarse', he says! Why I have **never** been so offended...", he trailed off, smirking in satisfaction at the piggish snort Harry failed to stop. Rolling over Harry and onto his back, dragging the smaller man on top, he then vigorously ran his hands up and down Harry's back, like he was trying to warm the other up. "Now that you're in a better mood, do you feel like sharing?"

Harry was quiet for a few minutes, nibbling on a petal-pink lip before haltingly telling Tom about his day. Tom made all the right interested sounds as his Consort recounted exploring the Demanse, the raw gems and stones he dug up, and meeting Salazar (who, once learning who the man was, sent Harry into a blustering tizzy). Once he came to his meeting of the Consort's, he stopped, causing Tom to have to prompt him to continue by teasingly poking along Harry's ribs.

"What in Merlin's name do you mean you're 'not attractive' and 'bring nothing to the table'," Tom barked, abruptly sitting up and nearly knocking Harry's forehead with his chin. Lucky for them both, Harry rolled just in time. "If I wanted additional resources, I would marry one of the **many**," he hissed in emphasis, "prince and princesses being thrown at me. And '*unattractive*'! Who have you been speaking to, I just want to have words with them." Contrary to his words, his tone said otherwise.

Huffing, Harry scrambled and sat on his heels. "You're the *Minister*; as you have, AGAIN, forgotten!" He ignored Tom's hiss at the jab. "Just, taking up with some uneducated, chubby-"

"*Chubby? Chubby!?* Just-, what in the nine hell's do you mean to call yourself 'chubby'? For once in your life, you look healthy! *You could put on a little more weight, though*," Tom muttered under his breath that last part.

"-average-looking bloke can't be doing much for your political image," Harry finished, ignoring Tom's remark because, quite frankly, the man had a habit of overlooking the finer details in favor of the bigger picture. "I mean, have you even *seen* the previous Consort's!? Estrella could suffocate a man with her tits! And Giselle looks like something out of a fairy tale!"

"And Ibrahim had to have furniture specially made to accommodate his bulk," Tom said drily. Oh, the man was big in many aspects, both in height and stature. Tom knows from the family journals that the man had literally choked a rampaging bull to death with his two

arms, so there is more than just fat underneath his skin. "And your Estrella was also on the 'heavier than polite' side of the spectrum. And one of my ancestors *was a fucking minotaur.*" Really, Harry needs to remember that there is more to his ancestry than just people in different shapes and sizes. Tom has quite a few, as the kids say, 'monster fuckers' in his family tree.

A pretty boy with a big butt and killer thighs is **nothing** on that.

Not to mention the rampant incest, but they don't have the time to unpack that just now.

Harry hissed through his teeth because Tom just wasn't *getting it*. "My hands are messed up-"

"From literally being worked to the bone to care for young orphans, which nobody **sane** could argue against." Tom is determined to counter each and every argument Harry has against being his Consort.

"-I have snaggle teeth-"

"There are potions for that, but Darling, really, us Brit's are known the world over for having 'exciting teeth'." Tom was blessed with a perfect set. Surprising, considering his ancestry.

"-my hair's a mess-"

"Again, potions. And you may be a Potter, so there is really no helping it." He is going to look into conditioning treatments, though. Potter's are known for messy hair, not coarse hair.

Looking down at his lap, Harry fidgeted. "Um, and I, well." Sighing, he pushed a hand through his hair, "I never completed my lessons after Fourth year." While schooling had been compulsory for both boys and girls up until the age of fourteen, the state didn't really care about the truly poor and destitute, even giving programs run by churches and other private institutions leave to let children stop early, so long as that child was working. Considering how little money Wool's received, and then eventually taking in the orphans from an orphanage that got closed down (yet not receiving much more in funds), he had to stop going to school just to help keep the place running.

Gently tugging Harry closer, Tom pulled off his glasses before setting them somewhere safe and curling around the other. "And yet, you're able to easily understand concepts that, even now, *decades* after their discovery, still baffles many adults." Trying to fix Harry's hair, Tom gave up after a few passes and settled in to give a gentle scalp massage. "That, if anything, shows just how **amazing** you are. And," he injected as much arrogance and conceit into his voice as he could, "if anyone dares to complain, I'll just have them tossed in prison."

Harry choked on a snort, covering his face. "Tom, no."

"Also, I shall name a day of the week in your honor." Hearing Harry moan in mortification, Tom ducked his face, pushing into the space between Harry's neck and shoulder and peppering it with loud kisses, making the other laugh and wrap his arms around

Tom's shoulders. "Your birthday will be treated as a holiday, and your favorite color will become our new national flag."

"Tom, no, stop," Harry whined, not trying very hard to push the other away from him. "Don't upset your constituents with your whims!"

Playfully biting on a delicate earlobe, Tom growled out, "I'm their Benevolent Dictator, I can do whatever I want." Smirking when Harry just guffawed, he gently kissed where he had just bitten before rolling and pulling Harry up to rest between Tom's legs as he lounged against a mound of pillows. "Now, I seem to remember you saying you had dug up some raw stones? Let's see if we can figure out what they are."

As Harry scrambled towards the side of the bed, Tom fetched the gemology book from earlier, keeping an appreciative eye on a delightful derriere. Once Harry pulled up his bucket of goodies, they snuggled back up. Tom didn't *quite* know what to expect, but seeing a huge, raw *Fancy Cognac champagne diamond* was not it!

Seeing Harry then pull out a shard of jeremejevite, Tom just decided to take his disbelief and throw it out the window, smile and nod at a chattering Harry, and flip through the book. "Now, this is jeremejevite, which I don't have in my collection, yet, so this is quite the treat. While rare, enough samples exist that, through testing, we found that they make for excellent anchors for *Nature of Intent* wards..."

Divine Punishment

Lucius scowled at his wife, who daintily sipped her morning tea while he held a cool flannel soaked in a minor healing potion up to his cheek.

The reason?

He had woken her at 3 a.m. when he jolted up from a dead sleep whilst shouting that *'the Minister's new Consort is a fairy!'* and Narcissa, true to form, had lashed out in her sleep while slurring out that referring to Harry as a 'fairy' was quite rude and improper. Something about cheese may have been involved, but that was the gist of it.

And the smack, like past history has shown, sent him right back to sleep. He only woke when he heard his wife give a loud gasp because apparently one of her nails caught him near his ear and he ended up smearing a bit of blood all over his pillowcase. He had tried to wheedle some extra fussing out of her, but she was still quite firm that, scratch aside, he deserved the smack he got.

Now they were at an impasse. Past practice has shown him that he won't be able to make any inroads or justifications of his unwanted 'early morning wake-up' call until Narcissa is good and ready, and THAT is only after she's had three cups of tea, two buttered scones, and a bowl of diced fruit. She was still on her third cup of tea, the one that's more cream than tea, and he needs her to *hurry up*.

After what seemed like an eternity later, she set her cup down upon its saucer with a soft clink, dabbed her mouth with a linen napkin, and leaned back in her chair. "Now, Lucius. What did you mean by calling Harry a 'fairy'?"

Finally! "Since the first time I met our Lord's Consort, something had been bothering me." Pulling back his flannel, he looked at it before frowning and replacing it whilst slumping. "He's not *just* a Potter. Oh, undoubtedly he has the Potter Look, and I had even mistaken the lad for a young James Potter. Had even been tempted to speak with Mrs. Potter about her husband fathering a bastard," he twitched at the look of disapproval Narcissa shot him. He held up a placating hand. "Believe me, my dove, I have no love for that family, but would you truly expect me to stand by while a man disrespects his wife in such a manner?"

"...no, I cannot." Abraxas was a tough son of a bitch to get along with while alive, but Narcissa **is** thankful the man instilled a strong belief in honoring one's Spouse in Lucius. If Lucius had truly believed James had an affair while married, he would be honor-bound to inform the injured party. "We are in agreement that Harry is a Potter, our Lord included, but what makes you say 'fairy'?"

"Something about his facial structure. I don't know enough about the Courts to decry his being Seelie or Unseelie, but...his cheeks," Lucius gently traced his uncovered cheek with his own fingers. "His brows," his fingers traced up to echo along his own slightly arched eyebrows, "there's something a bit fox-like, almost mischievous, about them. And he's incredibly charming, bordering on Charming."

Reaching out to peel his hand and flannel away from his face, Narcissa inspected the cut trailing from just before his ear down to the hollow of his cheek. She pursed her lips before nodding. "We still have no idea who his mother is. The Black Family Tree only records those with Black Blood for two generations past their Black ancestor. The rest is done through paper records. He could simply have foreign features." She had asked Regulus if there was any variation of 'Harry Potter' on the Family Tree, but aside from the listing of 'Harry James Potter (godson)' under Sirius' name, there isn't one. Paper records prior to the '30s are a bit unreliable, due to a Great-Great Aunt destroying quite a few in an effort to destroy evidence of non-Pureblood or non-human bloodlines.

Instead, she ended up burning down nearly half of the Black Archive.

Lucius snorted as he summoned a damp kerchief, rubbing away the **disgusting** tacky feeling of dead, regenerated skin clinging to his face. "It doesn't matter who his dam is, the Lord Consort has fairy blood in him. Granted it could be through whoever his mother is, but mark my words-,"

"Lucius."

"Yes, my dove?"

"Shush and eat your breakfast."

While he scratched his quill against fine-grain parchment, penning out his veto on a bill about Unicorn culling, Tom occasionally peered over at Harry. His Consort was curled up on the same couch he used during his first visit to Tom's office, Nagini once again snoozing in the yarn basket as Harry worked away at a black lace Shetland shawl. The quiet *tic-tic-tic's* of the metal needles was soothing, and Tom feels like he could keep track of time with how regular and consistent Harry's stitching was. The black, laced booties Harry had worn were neatly tucked to the side of the couch, and the charcoal, emerald-trimmed mandarin-collared robes gathered around him like the petals of a flower. If he looks hard enough, Tom could see a peak of emerald leggings and undershift peeking out from folds of dark fabric.

It was an outfit whose colors Tom mirrored with his own, albeit his robes were in the more traditional British style, rather than the Asiatic-based ones Tarragon had sent along.

Things weren't so quiet that morning. After inspecting and classifying the raw stones Harry had dug up, they slept before Tom roused them both. As Harry helped him to dress, Tom had asked if the other would be interested in being present for Skeeter's interview. Harry had turned into a nervous, stuttering wreck before going quiet for thirty seconds, getting a determined look on his face, and then firmly announcing 'yes'.

Sliding his veto into his 'out' box, he pulled over a thin file, green, from the Integration committee. They already have an outline, including suggestions on how to deal with foreign currency or modifications to the current visa system. Already he can see three major issues, and he traded his quill for a fountain pen, this one with red ink, and slashed out the recommendation that foreign currency exchange fees be removed.

Really, does the idiot who suggested that actually understand how Gringotts and the International Magical Currency and Banking Organization works? Most of those fees go to pay for the labor and costs incurred to convert from one currency to another. "*Privileged arsehole*," he muttered under his breath.

After a few more slashes and scathing responses, he looked up again. Harry had set his needles down and was stretching his hands and arms, sighing when his knuckles cracked. Nagini was peering over the rim of the basket, her coils having shifted up a different project, a mass of violently purple and black yarn hanging from a larger set of needles.

Peeping at the clock, Tom saw it was mid-morning. The perfect time to stop for a light snack and cuddle.

"MUM! MUM! MUMMY! MUMMYMUMMYMUMMY! MUUUUUUUUM-MY!" A cacophony of pots and pans banging echoed out of the kitchen as an overexcited toddler found something to entertain herself while repeating variations of her favorite word.

Only just resisting the urge to *Silencio* her youngest daughter, Lily sighed as Daisy did what all toddlers do best and destroyed all sense of order in her path. She had debated putting Daisy into her pen, but then the little terror would demand entertainment, and Lily just doesn't have the time for that. She has to finish these Arithmantic equations before plugging them into the *Decrypt-O-Gram, Charms Edition*, and **then** she has to plug the results of *that* into Broggilton's *Equation* before she can finish her charts and have the next week off, and-

Lily sighed, exhausted. She'd pass Daisy off to James, their youngest being an utter *Daddy's Girl*, but he was off finalizing a security ward matrix that he finished laying last week, and he needs to make sure it's functional before the clients go to pick up their children from Platform 9¾.

"MUMMMMMMY aba-ba-BAAAAAAH!"

Lily winced; James better hurry the fuck **up**.

Harry focused with single-minded intensity on the little knitted jacket in his hands, lips pursed as he seamed up the left front piece to the back. His hands were steady and even while tugging each stitch closed, and the simple motions were almost meditative in their repetition.

He was nervous. *Extremely* so. Arguing with shopkeepers over prices is easy. Comforting children is easy. Hell, dealing with handsy arseholes is easy.

Dealing with a reporter? Someone who is going to focus on you with the intensity of light refracting through a magnifying glass? Who's going to find something *salacious* and pick, and pick, and pick at it until you become a blubbing mess?

He's scared shitless.

He startled as a large hand covered one of his. Looking up, he watched as Tom smiled down at him before sliding onto the couch next to him, gently pushing Harry's yarn basket more firmly towards the side and making Nagini hiss in annoyance. "Don't worry, Darling," he said quietly before kissing Harry's temple. "There are certain rules for interviews with the Minister." Softly taking hold of the mass of purple and black yarn out of Harry's hands before plopping it on top of Nagini, he smirked as she glared at him between layers of wooly goodness. "All articles need to be edited and approved before publishing. And no doubt Ms. Skeeter will want to get straight to the point if she wants to make the evening edition of her paper."

Harry wanted to admonish Tom about freedom of the press, but knowing Tom, he'd just brush it off. Besides, it could be a national security issue, like with King George- "wait, who's ruling England?"

"King George's daughter, Elizabeth II, assumed the post of Queen back in 1952. She has reigned since then."

"...what year is it," Harry whispered.

Tom's ears went red. "It's Wednesday, April 9th, 1998."

"... *oh*," Harry whimpered, lightheaded. "So, um, I went pretty far, huh?" He had teased Lysandus about Tom being in his seventies, but he hadn't realized how RIGHT he was. "Wait a tic!" Whirling towards Tom, he squinted at the older-, younger-, whatever the fuck he was, man. "'ow come y'still look like a young mingy ponce!?"

Tom smirked smugly while fixing his fringe. "It's a gift, Darling," he drawled. His dimple became more pronounced when he heard Harry snort at him before gently removing the... *thing* ...he was working on previously from Nagini.

"Oh, shite! I'm almost 78!"

"Daisy, put that down."

"NO!"

Lily sighed, blowing air as she buried her face into her hands and leaned forward, almost somersaulting from her cross-legged position on the family room rug. In her lap were a pair of toddler shoes, which she had been TRYING to put on her daughter before said daughter decided to pick up the little tchotchke basket in the center of one of the coffee tables, dump out the potpourri inside it, and wear it as a hat.

"*James this is all your fault*," Lily whimpered into her palms. The moment that **man** gets back, Hogwarts Express or no, she is dumping the little gremlin into his hands and locking herself into her office. All she wants to do is go for a walk, maybe do a bit of pleasure shopping in Diagon!

Instead, James' Little Hellion has to be an utter little shite!

Head whipping up as she heard Daisy start bashing the basket over the *monstrous* leather recliner that Sirius bought for them for himself while visiting, she winced as Daisy let out an ear-splitting screech of '*MITTENS!*' Their poor cat must have hidden under it and Daisy saw him.

"Daisy-"

"No!"

"Daisy, put that down-"

"I said **no**, Mummy!" Her declaration was emphasized with the stomp of a chubby foot.

*"Daisy Mae Potter you will put that down **right NOW.**"* Sighing in satisfaction as her daughter stared at her in astonishment, the feeling quickly left as Daisy threw her head back and wailed before falling back onto her rear, her face quickly going as red as her hair.

Lily sighed, heavier this time. "I only wanted a backrub..."

Tom growled as Harry whimpered below him, licking deeper into that sweet mouth as his darling little Consort rocked in his lap and fisted his chocolate locks. Tom's hands were just as busy as his mouth; after pulling the shorter man into his lap, the large appendages had quickly started rubbing and squeezing along a linen- and silk-clad body, taking great delight in the little jump Harry did when sneaky fingers pinched his rear.

Tom had noticed that they had about half an hour before Skeeter was due, and decided that Harry needed a distraction. He's never been one to fornicate in his office, but with Harry, he was willing to make an exception.

After leaning in to nibble cute little ears and a warm neck, all while making his darling boy blush and giggle, Tom had decided to up the ante and hauled a squeaking Harry up and into his lap. After a bit of flailing, he soon had his Consort on his knees, straddling Tom's thighs while he balanced himself with his palms on Tom's broad shoulders. A few moments of looking into each other's eyes before Harry (surprisingly) fell upon him with lush, soft lips and a wanting little moan.

Tom wasn't going to complain; he wants Harry to *want* him, and to be able to come to him for physical fulfillment. Unless there is a meeting going on, Tom will be ready whenever and wherever Harry is. If that's in this office or a dingy little corner alley just off of Knocturn, then so *be it*.

*...even if Harry barges in on a meeting, Tom doubts anyone would complain; not only is Harry **stunning**, but he vaguely remembers stories of past Slytherin's and Gaunt's conducting business whilst 'taking care of' a needy lover. It would just be par for the course for him.*

"Tom," Harry whimpered needily against his lips, shuddering before grinding into Tom's stomach.

Tom hummed before kissing the other again, his slick tongue slipping between sweetly panting lips and wringing a whine from the other's throat. Underneath the lingering tastes of Harry's breakfast tea and fruit-and-cream crepes was something citrusy, a flavor that he was quickly associating with the other. He likes the taste of it and would have no issue kissing Harry at all times just so he can keep the taste lingering on his own lips.

Just as he was debating sliding them down onto the couch (yarn basket be damned), three sharp, brisk knocks rang out.

Before Harry even realized what happened, he and Tom were sitting next to each other, thigh-to-thigh. With a flick of his fingers, Tom had both of their appearances neat, even down to his hair returning to its signature part and neat fringe. "Enter," he called out, voice crisp and clear, without a hint of the shenanigans that had been going on moments before.

Blinking in bewilderment, Harry watched as a tall, red-headed young man entered, followed by an older blond woman. The man was thin, with a splash of freckles splattered over his slightly long nose, and he was dressed in robes that mimicked slightly the overtly lacy, ostentatious ones Harry usually sees Tom in.

Leading the woman, who Harry can only presume is Ms. Skeeter, over to their seat, the redhead stopped three feet before them before dipping into a half bow. "Minister Gaunt, Ms. Rita Skeeter of *The Daily Prophet*, here for your lunch interview."

Flashing Percey and Rita his 'Politician's Smile', Tom stood. "Thank you, Percey," his smile took on a bit more of an amused edge as Percey puffed up slightly at the casual use of his first name in front of a notable reporter. "Ms. Skeeter, welcome! As you have no doubt met, this is one of my Undersecretary's, Mr. Percey Weasley. He's quite the organized, dependable sort, the type any business or government needs to keep the wheels turning." It was no secret that the Weasley's, and via Mrs. Molly Weasley her maiden family, the Prewitt clan, was on the opposite side of his during the war. Tom *promoting* one of their elder sons to a position as coveted as 'Undersecretary' was a surefire way to broadcast that not only does he not see the family as a threat, but that he doesn't hold the actions of a parent against a child. Simply not working against the young Ministry employee (but neither helping) did wonders for his polls.

That, and the young man was good at his work. *Incredibly* so. He would have been a shoo-in for Slytherin, if not for the fact he will hold his ground against anyone that tries to go around *The Way Things Are Done*. He finds Lucius's spite for the youngster amusing; his money does nothing for the lad.

Gesturing towards Harry, he continued his introductions. "Ms. Skeeter, this is my Consort, Harry James Potter. Harry," he rested his hand at the small of Harry's back when he joined him. "This is Ms. Rita Skeeter, the most controversial and provocative reporter to have ever graced the offices of *The Prophet*," he finished with a roguish grin as Skeeter giggled.

"Hello," Harry's voice was soft. "It's nice to meet you both." He has no idea what exactly being an 'Undersecretary' entails, but it sounds important. He turned towards Percey. "For Tom to speak of you so glowingly, you must be a very hard-working employee. As a child, it would have to be something mountain-moving in order to get him to say something even **remotely** nice about *anyone*."

Percy blushed at the praise. "Well," he stumbled slightly over the word, suddenly going from pompous to bashful. "I just do what I'm told and what procedure states. Nothing too hard about that!"

Harry hummed. "You'd be surprised at how hard that is for some people to do. And Ms. Skeeter! You, *provocative*!? I would have never guessed!"

His eyes watched as the woman, hair bottle-blond and done up in artificial curls that framed an expertly (if heavily) made-up face, giggled behind a hand that was oddly large and calloused, despite having long, blood-red nails. Her eyes fluttered behind narrow yet sophisticated cat-eye glasses, and her outfit was an odd, if fashionable combination of magical and muggle, but in a metallic green satin. It reminded him a bit of a shiny beetle. "Oh, *please*, Consort Slytherin," she batted his remark aside with her hand. "You are far too sweet!"

Percy made his excuses and left the office while Tom summoned an extra chair for their guest. Once everyone was seated, a floating silver tray foamed into existence, little clear globes stacked on it holding miniature dishes for their perusal.

"It's always a treat for my readers when you have time for an interview, Minister," Rita's voice was just short of simpering while she picked up a globe that held some sort of sponge cake. "They're *quite* enamored with you. And your Consort as well!" Cradling the globe with her left hand, she tapped the top with her right index finger. With a quiet pop, the plate enlarged before settling into her hand, a fork materializing and hovering in the air next to it before she grabbed it and took a bite.

Tom just smiled while selecting a glob holding a strawberry and custard parfait for Harry, his dimple becoming slightly more pronounced as he saw Ms. Skeeter's eyes light up at the action. "I'm quite flattered, Miss., that my constituents admire me so. Sadly, being Minister doesn't leave me as much time as I would like to connect with my public." Once he got Harry settled, he selected a slice of *Death by Chocolate* cake for himself.

Seeing the utterly decadent confection, Harry snorted. "Still a chocolate fiend, eh, Tommy?"

Rita's face lit up. "Oh-ho! So, you two must have known each other for quite some time, Mr. Potter, *any chance you're related to those Potters, by the way*, if you can make such a remark!" Flying out of a blouse pocket was a miniature quill and sheets of parchment, enlarging with a snap of her fingers before hovering off to the side, quill quivering in anticipation for an answer.

Harry's face took on a foxy grin, and before Tom could say anything, he said, "well, yes. I mean, I once changed his nappies!" Tom sighed before loudly facepalming.

"...what."

Lily cursed herself, nearly growling as Daisy pulled on two fistfuls of her hair from her perch atop Lily's shoulders. After finally getting her gremlin properly dressed, they had Floo'd to Diagon Alley so that Lily could pick up some books from *Flourish and Blotts* and *Tasmin's Tomes* so she could finish her research before meeting James to pick up their kids from the Hogwarts Express.

...but she had forgotten just how chaotic the main alley can be on the first day of the school holiday. Normally she doesn't visit on such days, having finished whatever shopping is needed **far** before the hols start, but this blasted equation was baking her biscuits and she just needs it DONE.

She also wants to stock up on her chocolate supply. Her eldest, Gideon, is a carbon copy of James (only a redhead), and that goes so far as to be an utter troublemaker. He and Daisy are like two peas in a pod, and she needs all the help she could get.

Thank Merlin Rosalind, Arthur, and Violet are much more mellow. Although, from some of Gideon's letters, Rosa and Arty may have decided to emulate the Weasley Twins and she doesn't know what to make of that-

"MUMMY! WOOK! A TWEE!"

Wincing at both the volume of her daughter's shout and the harsh tug on her hair to go along with it, Lily growled slightly under her breath. "Daisy! What have I told you about pulling on Mummy's hair?" Getting another hard yank, only this time solely on the left side of her scalp, Lily closed her eyes, breathed in for a count of five, held for a count of five, and breathed out for a count of five before opening her eyes, meeting the understanding look of another witch, all while Daisy shrieked 'wook! Wook!' while doing her best to rip out Lily's hair. "Daisy. What. Is. It."

"A twee!"

Sweeping her gaze along the street, Lily had no idea what her daughter was going on about. Spinning on her heel in an about face, she was about to instruct her daughter on proper ways to get Mummy's attention (*again!*) when she looked up and froze. She now remembers Remus's mention about a Faerie Tree cropping up in Ollivander's shop, but she wasn't expecting *that!*

Ollivander's was in the midst of getting deconstructed. Construction wizards were casting spells to take apart what was left of the shop while the proprietor and a woman who could possibly be related to him were floating out crate after crate of thorny, bushy boxes of wands. A Gringotts goblin was seated on a small chair nearby, a traveling desk before them as they

barked out demands in Gobbledegook to younger (seeming) goblins, who barked their answers back.

*But, the **Tree**...* breathing in, the sweet scent of ripe apples was mixed with an almost honey-like smell. As a breeze blew past, golden dust wafted away from the tree, floating along the currents as though Aphrodite had trailed her fingers through a sacred grove. It was slightly cloudy, but when the sun peaked through them, the tree's leaves lit up like a muggle neon sign, but the color was deeper, layered like she was gazing through silk gauze three layers deep.

"MUMMY!"

Lily jolted, coming back to herself. She vigorously shook her head, for some reason feeling like music was echoing through her ears, even though she was surrounded by the surrus of voices talking and shouting, wood splintering and shifting, and a bored child on her shoulders squawking about snacks.

"Yes, yes," she reassured Daisy. "First books, then snacks." Getting a cheer for such a proclamation, Lily shoved her way into the crowd, going opposite from Ollivander's, but feeling as though she's forgotten something, but she can't put her finger on it.

"-so, you woodwork? What's that like? I can do basic carpentry, but anything more than that I just never learned."

Rita beamed at Harry. "Journalism will always be my calling, but I have many fond memories of playing in my Da's workshop!" Setting her plate of tiramisu down (her third plate of sweets since this meeting started), she proudly held out her hands. "Don't get me wrong, I can knock-up a sturdy bookcase, but my real love is wood carving!" Oh, but to embellish a simple piece of furniture! She can get lost for hours whittling out little leaves and furls as adornments.

Gently taking her proffered hands, Harry looked closely at them. They were covered in small scars, knicks from a planer going off track here, a marl from a gouger there, and calluses along her knuckles, palms, and the pad of her thumbs. He whistled, "cor, bu' y'mustuv been doin' thi' for years..."

"Da didn't know what to do with a daughter, so he just treated me like he would have my brothers. Mum despaired of me until puberty hit," Rita scooped up a bit of her cake. "Once the hormones hit, she finally got someone she could teach *feminine* things to."

Tom just sat back and watched as Harry charmed the pants off of a reporter who was well known for keeping her private life under lock and key. After a few embarrassing stories and a bit of talk about Harry's origin and how he arrived in 1997, Rita had asked about Harry's yarn basket and it lead to Tom learning that Rita was one of five children, the only girl born to her father's family in three generations, her hobby as a woodcarver, a reveal of who her hairdresser was (offered when Harry had made an offhand remark about his messy hair), and that she moonlight's under the pen-name of an author who's romance novels are so racy

(borderline pornographic, really,...not that Tom would *know*) , parents lobbied to get them age-restricted and to have a 'Literature Rating Board' created to rate all future fiction books.

As Harry and Rita started clucking about woodgrains, a gentle chime rang through the office. As Harry looked towards Tom who responded with an elegant shrug, Rita scarfed the last two bites of her cake before standing up. "Times up, unfortunately! We'll have enough time to get a portrait before I need to return to the newsroom. I should have the article ready for review in a few hours, Minister, and it'll be in the evening edition tonight!"

As Rita went to the office door whilst briskly calling out '*Balthazar!*', Harry and Tom rearranged themselves on the snug little couch, Tom banishing their platter of nibbles. Once Rita returned and helped the most non-descriptive man Harry has ever seen start setting up his tripod, Tom scooted them closer together, wrapping an arm around Harry whilst holding a fidgety hand.

Feeling Tom's larger hand wrap around his own was supremely comforting. Tension Harry didn't know he was carrying fell away from his neck and shoulders, and his jaw unclenched. He hummed when he got a soft kiss to the top of his head, turning towards Tom for another and never noticing the flash of the camera.

"So, Harry!" Harry jumped at the perky voice. He blushed while turning back towards Rita, pointedly ignoring the smug air surrounding Tom. "We've done our flash test, so we'll take a few photos of the two of you and a few on your own." Putting a bit of flourish into the sweep of her hand, she presented the camera. "Now, for the group composite!"

Sucking on a berry-flavored boiled sweet as she left the *Honeydukes* Diagon location, Lily looked towards *Tasmin's Tomes*, estimating that enough time has passed for her special order to have been retrieved from their vault. She jogged Daisy in her arms, the toddler nibbling on a vanilla-banana soft cookie, and Lily was feeling quite impressed with the new toddler-friendly confections the sweets chain was offering; she may need to make this a staple.

Turning up the alley, she made her way towards *Tasmin's*. It would be hard to miss, the shop looked like the lovechild of a steampunk ship and a Victorian mansion; pipes weaved in and out, over and under the facade, steam billowing up from the tall chimney at odd intervals, which must coincide with the vault buried underneath the large building opening and closing.

Just before the building entrance was a knot of people, keeping her from entering. Recognizing the robes as belong to Charms Apprentices, she was about to bellow at them to get out the way when she heard a loud 'OUCH!', quickly followed by Daisy giggling over her shoulder before bubbling out, "Daddy!"

Surprised but no less pleased she could fob the little gremlin in her arms off on her husband, Lily turned carefully while wearing a relieved smile. "Oh, James! Thank Merlin you're here, Daisy has-, oh!" Seeing someone who was **not** James trapped in her daughters clutches, Lily went as red as one of the glowing steam pipes attached to *Tasmin's*.

"Ah, is alright. No 'arm done," Harry winced as the hand who belonged to this woman's daughter got tighter in his hair. Gently bringing both of his hands up, he slowly started untangling chubby fingers from his dandelion-like fluffy hair. "Still in the grabbin' stage?"

Lily could do nothing more than numbly nod her head. This was Harry, **her** Harry. Her sweet, baby boy that she and James never got to bury. He had the same messy, fluffy hair, the small scar on his chin from the afternoon he decided to skip learning how to walk and went right to running and tripped, and he looks *just like James!* Potter men look like clones, like instead of being birthed from the union of a man and woman, they just bud off of each other like sea sponges!

"Harry..." She whispered, shaking herself to reality before noticing Daisy's steel-trap like grip had moved from Harry's hair to the shoulder of his, undoubtedly *expensive* robes (making Lily wince because while her family is well off, those robes must be worth more than her and James' monthly paychecks **combined**), grunting as she tried to pull herself out of Lily's arms and into Harry's. "Daisy, no!"

Too late. With a loud grunt, Daisy pulled herself towards Harry, and both struggled to contain the heavy little girl. After some fumbling, she ended up sitting on Harry's hip, hands on his chest as she looked up at him with a squint. "Hey," she cooed. "You're not Daddy!"

"Sorry, Sweetie, wrong person," Harry poked her upturned nose and laughed as she made a disgusted sound. "He's probably more handsome than me!"

Lily studied Harry-, *Consort* Slytherin, as Daisy babbled nonsense at him and he acted interested, the natural way he did so making it seem like this wasn't his first thestral round-up. Her heart felt heavy as she focused more on his features; his face was softer, his cheekbones slightly more pronounced, giving the upper part of his face a more heart-shaped look while he had a slim but angled jaw. His eyebrows were more foxy than arched, and his hair had a definite curl to the short tips, which neither she nor James has (hers being pin straight while he just has a mop that does what it wishes).

But what was the final nail in the coffin was the eyes. When her baby boy was born and his eyes had changed from newborn blue, she had been so excited to see that they were green like hers. She had been the only one in her family with green eyes, and Tuney had teased her horribly as a child that her father was actually the milkman. At times the taunts had driven her to tears, and Mum would send Tuney to bed without supper.

But...Harry didn't have speckles of gold drifting over his left iris like spilled molten gold ink. She could write off the scar slashing down from his hairline and stopping short of his eye as an old injury after being taken from them, but that?

That can't be explained away.

"Yes, that sounds quite yummy-, no! Nope, you can keep your biscuit!" Gently pushing the soggy, half-eaten treat away from his face, Harry turned towards the little girl's mother. "Ma'am, she seems ready to-, ma'am are you okay!?" The girl's mother seemed to be going through a mental breakdown. Stepping closer, he gently put a hand on her shoulder, startling her. "Ma'am?"

She sniffed, pulling a kerchief from her pocket before dabbing her face. "S-,sorry. Sorry! You, ah, you look like somebody I used to know." Her voice was thick with over a dozen emotions.

Oh. "It's okay, take your time. Was it...recent?"

She sniffed. "No, it was a long time ago. Lost during the Revolution."

Before either of them could continue, a loud shout rang out, and the knot of Apprentices was shoved aside by a heavily robed and hooded individual. "*POTTER,*" they shouted as they sprinted towards Harry and his companions, voice waving oddly, sounding like several people were talking at once. "*POTTER! YOU TRAITOR!*"

Barreling into them, after a struggle with arms pushing and tugging from all sides, the person wrenched Daisy from Harry's arms. The little girl screamed, the sound piercing through the noise of the alley as her kidnapper made to escape.

Before the snatcher could get more than a meter away, Harry had darted forward, hooking his arm into the person's elbow and pivoting them. At the same time, he twisted his back and waist, his free hand bunching up into a fist before landing with a loud '*THWACK!*' into the middle of the large hood. Snatching Daisy from suddenly slack arms, he shoved the crying child towards her Mum before landing a haymaker, a choked warble and loud click of teeth signaling a hit to the jaw. "Oi! ARSEHOLE!"

Shoving Harry back when he went to land a third hit, the would-be kidnapper growled, pulling out their wand, the tip glowing a menacing green. "*Avada Ke-*"

Wrenching a pipe from the building they were next to, Harry lunged forward, both hands curled around the bottom and he swung **hard**. With a sickening crack, the pipe met the assailant's head and they dropped like a sack of potatoes, their wand sputtering out.

Out for blood, Harry pulled up and kicked the kidnapper in the ribs. "Feckin' sicko! 'ow DARE you-," he grunted when a long arm wrapped around his middle before he was lifted up and away, resting against a familiar chest. "Tom! You pu' me down righ' now, or I swear on Mary, Mother of God-"

Tom grunted, pinning Harry against him with his other arm as the other thrashed with a surprising amount of strength. "Stop," he gasped. "The Auror's are...here. Let them do...their...*job*," he spat through clenched teeth as Harry renewed his struggling when the kidnapper moaned and twitched, bringing a gloved hand up to their head. Leaning down to Harry's ear, Tom hissed. "*We can't interrogate him if he's dead.*"

"E WON' BE TH'FIRST KIDDIE 'OUCHER I'VE PUT IN T'GROUND," Harry spat. A swarm of blue-robed individuals like what he saw in the Ministry swarmed the area while Tom dragged him back, three Auror's alone surrounding the suspect. A man with glasses and messy hair was comforting Daisy and her mum while the same man who had seen Harry and spooked before visiting Twilfit's was standing guard, teeth bared in a dog-like snarl.

Spying sudden movement from the kidnapper, Harry hauled himself over Tom's shoulder, reaching down and pulling off a boot before chucking it with all the strength he could leverage from the odd position at the kidnapper, who had wrestled free from the Auror's. As the first boot winged through the air, Harry pulled off the second one and threw it, the first landing between the shoulder blades of the fleeing perp while the second struck true and clocked him on the back of the head, sending him back to the cobbles. "HA! FECK YOU," Harry crowed while chucking a two-fingered salute at the moaning perp.

Pulling a, in turns, cackling and snarling Harry close to his side (and making sure the other wouldn't try to turn another object into some sort of missile), Tom yanked the closest blue-robed Auror towards him by their collar. "I'll be in my office," he snarled before shoving them away and disappearing with a loud, glass-shattering like crack.

The Children of the Garden

Chapter Notes

>:D

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

Simultaneously as they appeared into Tom's office, he slammed Harry down face-first onto his desk. His teeth ground as Harry snarled up at him while Tom tried to get the other's arms behind him, but with a hard buck Harry threw him off. Sliding to the side of the desk before sprawling in an inelegant heap, it took him only a moment to grab a legging-covered ankle and yank, and Harry slid backward before losing his balance.

With a surprised yelp, Harry fell. Hitting the rug with a loud thump, he twisted quickly to the side, cursing the skirts of his robes as his legs got tangled. Hearing scrambling, it took only a moment before Tom had wrapped his arms around Harry's middle, trapping his arms against his sides. Biting his lip, Harry twisted his arm and shimmied, the silk in his outer robe enabling him to slide his arm just enough to allow him to jab an elbow into Tom's ribs.

Tom's breath left him in a loud whoosh and creak of abused ribs, and he fell to the side and on his back, coughing and wheezing from the sudden assault. His chest seized right before he tried to roll away from the pounce Harry was attempting, throwing up a weak shield as he saw stars. Pushing himself back with his heels, he rolled onto his hands and knees, gagging slightly as his diaphragm stuttered once, twice, three times before it snapped back into rhythm.

Getting to his feet, Harry skidded past the faint, glittery edges of the shield before jumping onto Tom's back, bearing him back down to the floor. Both grunted as their combined weight and the force of Harry's tackle slammed them onto the floor, the whole room shaking and anything glass or crystal tinkled from the impact.

With a sound like a hissing snake, Tom threw his hips, tossing Harry over his shoulders to land onto his own back with a swirl of fabric. Quickly crawling over, he almost missed the wild right hook Harry threw, the punch only missing due to the fact that Harry had lost his glasses at some point and was still somewhat stunned from his toss.

Deciding to do this the Greek way, Tom flopped across Harry's middle as Harry tried to roll, attempting to get his Consort into a submission hold. Feeling robes shift and Harry bunch up, Tom rolled them over and over each other as Harry tried to kick out at one of Tom's knees and Tom threw them both to the side, using the momentum of the kick to roll them over each other in the opposite direction in an attempt to disorient Harry long enough for Tom to get a pin.

Coming to a stop with Harry face down, his arms flung out while Tom was on top of him, Tom took the opportunity presented to get Harry into a full nelson, snaking his arms under and around Harry's shoulders before lacing his fingers together behind Harry's neck and locking them together, his arms *squeezing* and forcing Harry's head down while arching his back. Tom shuffled onto his knees, legs spread on either side of Harry's to give him support before he rose up slightly, jerking Harry up onto his own knees before he slid back towards Tom's middle and-

"Ahh!" "Oh..."

Face flushed with exertion, Tom froze at the cry that warbled out from Harry's lips and his own answering sigh. Canting his head down and looking between them, he saw that Harry's rear was now pressed firmly against his groin, and both were flushed with adrenaline. Tom was familiar with battle lust (or, as a young Abraxas called it, a battle boner) from the height of his Revolution, and he was in the *perfect position* to take advantage of a not-unwilling-sounding Harry.

Grinding his hip forward, he let out a deep, almost growled purr while Harry tried to push back. Releasing Harry from his hold, Tom reached down and pushed up and aside the skirts of both their robes before reaching around and untying the front closure of Harry's leggings and pulling the band down. He smirked when he saw that his Consort had foregone wearing pants, the peachy bubbles of his butt popping over the tight material and giving Tom an idea.

Gently grabbing and squeezing each cheek in his palms, he gave a light smack to one when Harry tried to slither out from underneath him. Taking a few moments to concentrate, his left hand started to glisten, the oil Tom conjured appearing. Slipping his hand between thighs still trapped by leggings, Tom slicked up Harry's thighs before turning to his own throbbing cock. Pumping himself a few times, he pushed the head between firm thighs before grabbing Harry's hips, pulling him up onto his hands and knees before sliding between soft skin and silky cloth.

Harry pushed himself back against Tom with a sigh. Once his rear was pressed firmly against a sturdy set of thighs and groin, he wiggled, arching his back and letting out a low moan at the moist, wet sounds of Tom's cock fucking between his thighs and under his own cock and balls made. He let out a quiet little gasp when a pair of long fingers tweaked a clothed nipple in admonishment, and he could feel cum drip from the tip of his cock.

Watching Harry try to bounce against him, Tom leaned back before surging forward. After a few stuttered attempts he found a nice rhythm, not too hard and not too fast, perfect for drawing out the pleasure but not enough to get off on. He heard Harry sigh and lean down, pillowing his head on folded arms as he kept his arse high, almost like he was supplanting himself before a god and oh, but did Tom like that.

Shifting on his knees, it was only as Tom gripped Harry's hips that he remembered the oil on his hand. He rubbed his slick thumb between jiggling cheeks, paying special attention to the tight hole hidden between them. Gathering a little magic to the pad of his thumb, he knew when it caressed Harry inside and out by the loud, choked squeak his darling boy gave as he jerked up onto his elbows. Tom can just imagine the look on the other's face, green and gold

eyes wide as a red flush covered his cheeks, pink lips bitten between pearly teeth before gasping open.

Shoving a bit more magic inside of Harry, Tom then breached the other man, pushing his thumb against and then past the tight ring of muscle. He groaned, savoring the tight heat of his Consort for a moment before pumping the digit in and out.

"Ah, shite, Tom," Harry huffed. He wiggled his hips, "mhm, more..."

Conjuring more oil, Tom exchanged his thumb for his forefinger, burying it to the knuckle in one slick push. His hips twitched and stopped thrusting as Harry bucked, crying out at the sensation and the unfettered, surprised sound reminded Tom that not only was Harry a virgin but had most likely never been touched in such a way and *oh fucking hell his blood **burned** at the realization-*

"T-, Tom, please."

Taking a deep breath, Tom slowly rocked against Harry, thrusting his finger in counterpoint to his cock. After a few minutes, he added another finger to the mix, stretching them deep inside that tight heat as he looked for-

"AH!"

-there it is. Pushing a little magic into his fingertips, Tom rubbed firmly against the little bundle of nerves. He watched in amazement as Harry just completely *melted*, his head, chest, and shoulders sinking to the floor as his whole body started to tremble. Crooked, calloused fingers dug deep into the rug, and Harry's face went from pink, to red, to brick as Tom mercilessly assaulted his prostate and took advantage of his magic sensitivity. Within minutes, Harry was a gasping, sobbing, and twitching mess and Tom can't wait to see how he would react with a thick cock rooted deep within him-

"Oh, TooooOOOOM!"

With a buck of the hips that almost snapped his fingers, Tom watched as Harry was caught in the throws of the most **glorious** orgasm he has ever seen. He watched as his Consort cried out, tears in the corner of the eye he could see as Harry twitched and jerked, back bowing and arching as he let out a broken, gasping cry.

Tom's own orgasm was ripped from him as the slick thighs he was trapped between utterly strangled his cock, the firm muscles bunching and squeezing him to completion. As he wetted Harry's thighs with his cum, he pulled back just enough to slip a hand between them, pumping his shaft so he could milk himself as thoroughly as possible whilst keeping the head of his cock trapped in silky warmth.

After what felt like an eternity later (but was most likely only five minutes), Tom let himself flop over Harry's still raised hips. He lazily kissed what parts of Harry's face and neck he could reach, still too wrung out to try more than that. After a few more moments, he gently tipped them onto their side, desiring post-coital cuddles and not seeing a reason to deny himself. He hummed as his deflating cock slowly retracted from the nest of skin and

jizz it had made itself home in, savoring the feel of Harry's pulse thumping along his bloodstream and fluttering over his length.

A quiet hoot was the only warning they had before an owl appeared, fluttering to the floor before them. After bobbing its head a few times it walked closer, holding out a clawed foot to Harry that had a letter tied to it. Once relieved of its burden, it ducked close and playfully nipped Harry's nose before taking wing.

Scrunching his nose while Tom huffed a quiet laugh, Harry opened the letter, quickly scanning the contents before tossing it behind him, smirking when Tom grunted as the heavy parchment smacked him in the face. "The Auror's want to interview us," he murmured. Tom hummed his understanding, not caring to push the letter off of his face. "They wanted to meet us about twenty minutes ago," Harry added. "We're late."

Tom just *pfh'ed* him. "Darling, please. I'm the Minister. I am **never** late. I arrive *precisely* when I intend to."

Rolling his eyes, Harry half-heartedly swatted at his lover before pushing himself up onto his elbow. "Well then, *Minister*, if you would **kindly** magic us clean, then we can go to the appointment that we are CERTAINLY *not late* for."

Sirius sighed as he walked through the barrier separating Platform 9¾ from the rest of Kings Cross station. It was crowded more so than usual, the typical hubbub seen during Express days added to via an additional Auror presence; there are normally a handful of the blue-robed individuals when students are coming or going on break, but the attempted snatching of little Daisy had kicked over the hornet's nest and now the station was crawling with them.

Looking down at his token, he saw that his pseudo-nibblings would be dismounting from car 13. While he HATES that dismounting the Hogwarts Express has become an organized event, he has to admit that it does cut down on the chaos. He may thrive in it, but Sirius admits that he needs a bit more stability today. While he wants to be in the interrogation room as that slime ball gets broken down, Lils and James need him more. Picking up the kids is the least he could do.

Crossing over to the 'Odds' section of the platform, he didn't notice until almost ten minutes had passed that he was standing next to Snivellus. Instead of opening his mouth to taunt the slimy git, he instead chose to study the taller man; Snape was a bit disheveled, with bloodshot eyes and with his hair tossed up into a messy bun on top of his head while the slightly wrinkled muggle-style dress shirt had the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, showing off not just his Dark Mark, but other tattoos as well, all in black and white grey-scale. The top few buttons of his shirt were undone, and it was tucked into a pair of black muggle jeans. The man looked like he would rather be anywhere but here, and he had a lit cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth to prove it.

"Either say something or stop staring, Black."

Jerking, Sirius glared at him. "Oi, it's a free country!" Magnanimously ignoring the rolled eyes his statement earned him, Sirius bulldozed on. "Didn't think some half-blood supremacist greasy git knew how to wear muggle clothes."

Taking a deep drag of his cig, Snape blew out a large cloud of clove-scented smoke through his nose. "Unlike *some* mutts," he drawled around his cancer stick, "I actually know what constitutes muggle fashion. Contrary to popular belief, throwing a leather jacket over whatever you're wearing doesn't count."

Sirius gaped. "Hey, now! That was ONE time!" Pointing a finger at Snape while the other lit a new cigarette from the butt of his old one, he growled, "besides, why the hell are you dressed like that!?"

Snape curled his lip at the Black Lord, showing off a canine that was a smidge on the sharp side. "Not that it's any of your business, but I've been up for the last 36 hours and got interrupted to pick up the little chits from the Express. Now, stop bothering me before I decide homicide is on order for the day."

Before Sirius could continue, the loud shriek of the Express's whistle cut through the air. Chugging into the station, the bright scarlet steam engine came to a stop, releasing a cloud of steam from the boilers before the odd-numbered cars opened their doors. In an instant, children started spewing forth from the train, and the already loud station got exponentially louder. Hearing Snivellus groan before covering his eyes with his free hand, Sirius grinned; sounds like the poor bastard has a sleep deprivation headache.

How sad.

Keeping an eye out for the kids, Sirius was surprised to see nearly a dozen teens and pre-teens shove through the crowd, loudly talking and gesturing to each other as they made their way over to him-

"-okay, so, we saw this weird fuckin' cat, and-, Oi, Sev!? Where's Nonna!?"

-not him. Snape.

"Marcus," Snape said silkily. "Do you remember the conversation we had? About names?"

The teenager in question, a short and burly boy with short, black hair with frosted tips who looked to be a Sixth Year Slytherin, blinked his dark eyes before shrugging. "Yeah, yous said not'sta call ya dat, but 'Severus' is a mouthful an-"

"Marcus, just, shut up," Snape looked like he was in pain, and Sirius couldn't really blame him; Marcus had the thickest American Jersey accent he has ever heard.

"-so anyway, as I was sayin's, we saw this weird fuckin' cat, right? And I says to Stella, 'hey, look at this weird fuckin' cat! It looks like Nonna!' and- *OW! STELLA!* The fuck was dat for!?"

Stalking past Marcus must have been Stella. Dressed in Hufflepuff robes, she was small and dainty, with hooded dark eyes and long black hair braided into pigtails on either side of her face. She looked like a china doll, and if it wasn't for the thunderous, stony look on her face or the vicious way she had elbowed Marcus, Sirius would think she was cute as a button. She came to a dead stop in front of Snape, her fists balled at her sides. "Cousin Severus," she ground out in a monotone.

"What."

"Thank you for picking us up. What is the best way to hide a body?"

Snape just quirked an eyebrow at her while Marcus barked out '*Stella, no!*' and some of the other teens snickered. "I assume this is all hypothetical?" Receiving a nod as an answer, he tilted his head as he thought. "First, don't commit murder in a public space. Only stupid people do that."

"Noted." Snapping her fingers, Stella kept eye contact with Snape while a set of Mediterranean identical boy-girl twins (Sirius' brain was doing cartwheels because identical twins have to be the same sex in order to be, you know, **identical!** But yeah, the only way to tell them apart was that one had a, ahem, chest) stepped forward, setting down a trunk before opening it and shoving Marcus in there, who started screeching like a boiled cat as it shut. "What's the next step?" Her expression remained stonily placid even while Marcus screamed bloody murder while banging on the lid of the trunk.

Snape just sighed like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders, and for the first time in his life, Sirius felt sorry for the bastard. "Next, don't plot murder in a public space."

"Then we shall follow you to the car." Turning back to her cousins with a commanding look on her face, Stella then strutted away towards the barrier, the noise of the group's previous conversation picking back up, now joined with the muffled begging of Marcus within his trunk.

Facepalming, Snape sighed before taking one last drag of his smoke before snuffing it out on Sirius' shoulder before flicking it away. "I don't get paid enough to deal with this shit," he groaned as he trailed behind the group.

Sirius gapped, looking rapidly between his still-smoking shoulder and Snape's retreating form. "O-oi!" His face twisted between astonishment, disbelief, and anger as all he got was a one-finger salute. "OI! ARSEHOLE!"

"UNCLE PADDY!"

Turning around, Sirius saw the gaggle of children he was waiting for. Watching as several brunettes and redheads emerged from the morass, he did a quick headcount before frowning. "Hey, I'm supposed to have two brunettes and redheads each! Where did all these other kids come from!?"

A redheaded, brown-eyed boy, James and Lily's eldest son Gideon (a Sixth Year Gryffindor), rolled his eyes. "C'mon Paddy! You know Ron, Gin-Gin, and Mione. Stop it!"

As he said 'Gin-Gin', an offended girl's voice warned Gideon to watch his back.

Putting on a show of inspecting each child, Sirius slowly counted off on each of his nieces and nephews before ticking off on two additional redheads and a bushy-haired brunette. "Hm, yes. Yes, I do remember them." Crossing his arms, he stuck his nose up in the air. "Well, I *suppose* you can come with-"

"Your shoulder's on fire, Uncle Siri," little Violet, a First Year Hufflepuff and the only one of the Potter Pack to have green eyes and black hair (even now, Sirius' heart twinges when seeing the combination), whispered while pointing.

Looking at his shoulder, Sirius started. "Oh, shit!" Batting at the small flame ineffectively, he gave a girlish yelp when he just made it worse before Rosalind (Third Year Gryffindor, along with her twin Arthur) shot a bit of water at him. "Nice shot, Rosie!" Hitting himself with a drying charm, Sirius took his time fixing his appearance, savoring the groans and sighs of his captive audience. "Whelp, now that I am," he pushed his hair back from his forehead while striking a pose, "beautiful, again, we need to get going!" Checking his nieces and nephews over and seeing that they all had their trunks, he nodded to himself. "Good! Now, my children, if Ron, Ginny, and Hermione don't need us, we must be off! Today has been exciting enough as is, and I need a drink."

Narcissa's eyes tracked first Severus, then Sirius, as the men left with their charges whilst she and Lucius waited over on the 'Even' side of the platform. She'll need to remind Severus to get to bed early, as both she and him have an event to attend to tomorrow evening and it was one that CANNOT be ignored.

It took several long minutes for the platform to clear enough to trigger the charms that opened the rest of the carriage doors. She fairly vibrated in her spot and sniffed as Lucius chuckled at her antics. Hypocrite; he's just as excited to see their son as she is!

Second verse, same as the first: the platform became louder than a cathedral hosting a choir as the remaining students disembarked from the train. It didn't take long for her to spot her baby boy.

Nearly a full head taller than most of the other students, Draco Malfoy stood to the side on the metal stairs hanging down from the train car exit door. Narcissa watched as he scanned the crowd, his blond hair glinting as he looked for them, and her heart nearly burst as his face lit up upon finding them. Not bothering to hide her enthusiasm, she waved at him excitedly, almost hopping on her toes as he turned back into his carriage before leaving it, pushing through the crowd towards them.

"Mother, Father!"

Crushing her son into a hug, Narcissa leaned up to give a kiss to each cheek, cupping his face in her hands. "Oh, my little Dragon, how was your trip?" She ignored his embarrassed mutter of '*Mother!*', and only just resisting the urge to pinch his pink cheeks. "I swear, you've gotten taller!"

"Now, now, my dove, let him breathe." Ignoring his own advice, Lucius brought his son in for a one-armed hug, the hand holding his customary walking stick coming up to thump Draco a few times on the back. Holding his son back at arm's length, Lucius inspected his one and only child before smiling in pride when he saw that they were nearly on eye level. "Soon, you'll be as tall as me, if not more so!" Lucius was about 184 centimeters, but he's certain his son will reach the lofty heights that Abraxas once had at 195cm.

"Please, it's only been a few months," Draco said. "I visited not long ago for *Career Day*." Really, Draco loves his parents, but their excitement is *embarrassing*! He can already imagine the letters from Pansy, Greg, and Vincent teasing him about this!

Watching her son beam in a mixture of smugness and bashfulness, Narcissa clapped her hands together. "Here, let's get home before you combust from blushing," she chirped, not acknowledging the offended sound Draco released at the accusation. "You're most likely tired from the trip and, honestly, while Hogwarts feeds its students well, the same **cannot** be said of the Express!" Pulling out her wand, she swished it a few times, summoning her son's trunk and any other valuables his Housemates may have nicked (as per tradition). Once ensuring she had everything in her pocket, she and Lucius bracketed Draco between them before heading towards the barrier. "I'll have Bobby make for you your favorite! And you *absolutely must* tell me how Mr. Moon's niece took my criticism of his writing!"

Tapping together the thick stack of parchments in his hands, Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour frowned in thought, eyes squinting in the harsh lighting of the rough but barren Interrogation Room he was sitting in. The unpadded metal chair he sat on was doing no favors for his leg, and the rickety table squeaked constantly anytime he moved.

He had just finished interviewing his former Auror, James Potter, and his wife, and the answers he was given had left him with more questions than could be explained.

The attempted kidnapper was a non-descript man that neither Potter knew. Rufus suspects the man in question has gone under extensive cosmetic sculpting because he was just that unmemorable. He's met many men and women who you wouldn't think twice about looking at, but this guy is on another level. There may even be *Forgetfulness* charms woven into his appearance, but that can't be confirmed until Rufus can get a Surgical Healer in.

A loud rapping interrupted his thoughts, and he barked out, "Enter!" Behind the door was an unmasked Junior Auror, something Tonks, and she had Consort Slytherin with her. Undoubtedly the Minister is not too far behind.

"Hello, sorry we're late! I got dickstracted," Consort Slytherin chirped as he stepped around his escort.

"...you were distracted?" Rufus doesn't know if he's hearing things or what, so he's going to **assume** the Consort meant 'distracted'.

Harry nodded, all smiles and cheer. "Yes. Dickstracted. Horribly so."

Scrimgeour narrowed his eyes. "And just what sort of *distraction* were you subject to?"

Both quieted as the Minister entered the interrogation room, his signature 'Politician's Smile' plastered onto his face. "My apologies, Director Scrimgeour. I'm afraid I distracted my Consort from answering your interview request."

"As I said, sir, I was dickstracted!"

Now Rufus **knows** Consort Slytherin is deliberately pronouncing the word the way he is, but he's not going to touch that with a ten-meter broomstick, so instead, he gestured to the chairs across the table from him. "Please, seat yourselves. I'll try to make this quick, but depending on your answers, this may take a while. Tea?" Receiving negative replies, he went straight into his questioning. "So, give me a timeline of events, starting from this morning."

Noting every action both the Minister and his Consort mentioned, Rufus soon had a clear picture of their day; wake up, eat breakfast, dress, go to the Ministry, do paperwork or knit, interview with the Prophet, head to Diagon. Soon, the parchment was covered in scribblings and arrows, notes off to the sides adding details, and so forth.

"And what was the meaning of your visit to Diagon, Minister, and Consort?" Rufus dipped his quill inside his ink bottle, preparing to write more.

"It was to visit and place an order at *Tamsin's Tomes*," Tom stated. "My Consort requires additional books for further education, and I trust *Tamsin's* over most other booksellers."

Scribbling down the Minister's answer, Rufus eyed Harry suspiciously. "And if I may ask, just why was your Consort not with you, but *outside* the shop?"

Tom growled at whatever Scrimgeour was insinuating, cutting himself off with a huff when Harry swatted his middle. "Cool it, Tom. It's his **job** to be suspicious," Harry muttered. "The sounds of the steamwork that open and close the vault underneath *Tamsin's* gave me a headache, so I told Tom I'd wait for him outside."

Accepting Harry's explanation with a nod, Rufus jotted it down. "And this is how you met Mrs. Potter?"

"Yes. Apparently, I look similar enough to her daughter's father that the little one got a grip on me." Harry blushed while Tom just smirked at him. "Tom, don't you even start."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Darling."

The look Rufus saw Harry toss at the Minister could fry an egg. "I'm sure you don't, *Sweetheart*." Turning away from Tom with a victorious smile when the other blushed at the endearment (which Rufus mentally filed away while also doing his best to *ignore* the implications that that brought up), Harry soldiered on. "Mrs. Potter and I had our hands full of a tenacious toddler, and a few minutes after that is when that asshole showed up trying to pull a fast one."

Leaning back in his chair, Rufus scratched his chin. So far, everything the Consort is saying is lining up with Lily's recounting. "Do you know who the would-be kidnapper is?"

Harry shook his head no. "He was completely cloaked. Couldn't see even a hint of schnoz. He sounded angry though, but which 'Potter' he called traitor is confusing."

Before Rufus could elaborate, Tom cut in. "It most likely was directed towards Mrs. Potter. Her family is politically and magically against my position, but they have, hm," he hummed, tapping a finger on the table. "At the climax of my Revolution, they backed down and have, somewhat, accepted my rule, while still opposing me, just solely in the political arena and not on the battlefield."

Rufus wouldn't frame it quite so delicately, but it works. "Indeed. It's possible, sir, that the man is a disgruntled rebel who took umbrage with the Potter's scaling back their involvement. However," he folded his arms across his chest before sighing, "it may be that, given your Consort's last name and strong familial resemblance, the would-be kidnapper targeted him and, unable to make off with his quarry, went for the next best thing."

Tom honestly hadn't thought of that, given that *nobody* knew Harry existed until a month ago, but it is plausible; considering Harry, who looks too much like a Potter to dismiss the possibility, a 'traitor' to the Light cause by getting involved with the Dark-Lord-cum-Minister via a bloody revolution, **would** be something the rebels would do. And being unable to steal him away, going for the next-best and almost as valuable second choice. "There are too many possibilities and too few answers, Scrimgeour."

Rufus held up a hand, attempting to placate an irritated Minister. "We have a few specialists working on the kidnapper. I'll have a full report on your desk tomorrow morning."

Nodding his head in acknowledgment, Tom stood up. "If that is all, then we shall be going. We've had enough excitement for the day."

After shaking hands with Consort Slytherin and trading nods with the Minister, Rufus sighed in relief as the two left the room. "That went better than expected," he muttered to himself. He had been expecting to encounter a frothing at the mouth Dark Lord, possibly a few thrown *Crucio*'s and a dead body or two. His new Consort must be *amazing* in the sack if the most threatening sound that came out of the Minister's mouth was a growl (which passed quickly).

"TONKS!"

A loud squeak and thump resounded outside the door before the young woman appeared. "Yes, Auror Scrimgeour?"

"Remind me to send a fruit basket to Consort Slytherin." Gathering his parchments together, he ignored the dropped jaw his request garnered before shaking his free hand, his signature walking stick appearing in his grasp with a *thwack*! "I suspect that we have him to thank for bearding the dragon in its den." What the Minister gets up to in his personal time isn't his business, but at the very least Consort Harry Potter should get thanked for laying back and thinking of England.

Hobbling out of the room, he almost missed Tonks' squeaked '*S-sir?*' "Use the funds from our bribery account to get it done! And make sure it's a nice one from *Fanciful Frank's Fruit's!* "

Chapter End Notes

Hey y'all, I'll be doing some minor editing for the previous chapters. Edited chapters will have a * in the chapter tittle to denote this. All I'm doing is fixing some minor formatting issues and tweaking a few sentences, so nothing major.

Memories V

Shaking his still-smarting fist, Harry stormed away from Father McGillicutty's sprawled form. Distantly, he could hear the offended screeches of Ms. Cole ringing in his ears, but he frankly couldn't give a flying fuck about what she has to say.

Cutting through the crowd of children, he left the great room and stomped up the stairs, going to the one place he knew Tom would feel safe.

Approaching their shared room, Harry smartly rapped the ill-fitting wooden door.
"Tommy-boy! Open up!"

Rusty locks tumbling was shortly followed by the creak of dry hinges. Looking down, Harry watched as a single, suspicious blue eye peeked out of the crack between door and frame before withdrawing. As the door opened fully, Harry grunted as his charge darted out and nearly tackled him. Thin arms wrapped around his waist as chocolate locks bussed into his chest, and Harry gripped Tom back just as hard, if not harder.

Walking them back into their room, Harry kicked the door shut behind them. Soon after, they were lying curled around each other on Harry's larger bed, Tom's little cot not being fit to hold more than its owner. Harry kept quiet as he gently rubbed Tom's head and back, knowing the other will talk when he's ready.

"... I'm a freak."

Harry's eyes went as wide as saucers before he jerked. Looking down, green eyes met blue. "Wha'? No. No!" Gently grabbing Tom's shoulders, Harry pushed him back just enough for him to look at the youngster fully. "Why would y'fink tha'!?"

Tom looked down and away, the fingers of one hand tracing little circles on top of the thin blanket they laid on. "Ms. Cole always call' me a demon child. And then, there's wha' Father did-"

"A damn exorcism is far from appropria' for 'im t'do!" Cuddling Tom closer to him, Harry buried his nose into errant, wispy curls, absentmindedly noting that Wash Day will be in a few days. "You're differen', tha' I'll gran' you, bu'a bleedin' **demon** ? *Pshaw*," he huffed out. "Defini'ly a brat."

Tom's head darted up sharply, eyes wide as he glared in offense. "You take tha' back!"

Harry just raised an eyebrow. "Why? Yer a brat. If it walks like a duck-"

" -I am many fings, bu'NOT a brat!"

"... *quack, quack.*"

Letting out a closed-mouth scream of frustration, Tom slammed his face back into Harry's chest, making the older boy (teenager, really) chuckle.

"...if i'makes you feel bet'er, I knocked McGillicutty's square off." Harry chuckled louder at the shocked look he received.

"You're lyin'!"

Holding up his sore hand, Harry watched as Tom sat up on his knees, using both of his smaller hands to hold Harry's as he examined the red and purpling knuckles. An inquisitive finger prodded his middle one, making Harry hiss, now realizing he had a split; he must have grazed one of McGillicutty's teeth when he socked the arsehole.

Scooting off of the bed, Tom only took two steps away before spinning around on the ball of his foot, pointing imperiously at Harry. "Stay," he commanded, with all of the arrogance a seven-year-old boy could muster.

Amused, Harry only nodded and watched as Tom marched away, his gait remarkably akin to a waddling duck's. He only had enough control to wait for the boy to close the door behind him before he collapsed into giggles.

Wiping a tear from his eye, Harry sprawled across his bed, the springs squeaking in protest. It's going to take Tom a while to bring up the little medical case Harry threw together a while back, along with a bowl of warm water and a clean rag, he may as well get comfortable.

And think about how he was going to handle Ms. Cole and Father McGillicutty.

The Devil's Silver Tongue

Chapter Notes

Lot's of stuff going on, so this chapter is being split into three smaller ones.

Oh, and >:D

Lot's of >:D

Tom hummed, the feathered tail of his quill tickling his smirking bottom lip as Harry squirmed at his side in their bed, bare skin on skin, the other man's body still liquid from his sleep whilst Tom leaned back against his mountain of pillows. Tom pretended not to notice how uncoordinated his Consort was as he struggled to lean up and give Tom a 'Good Morning!' kiss while Tom did paperwork, repeatedly missing the mark and instead kissing his neck or shoulder. He also pretended not to see the scrunched-up face of disgruntlement Harry made when his soft lips met the rough, almost sandpaper-like texture of Tom's newly appeared facial stubble.

Tom shouldn't find it funny, but he does. Harry after he just wakes up is just so *cute*.

"*Tooooooooooom...*" His lips twitched at the whiny warble Harry let out before huffing. He kept his eyes fixed on the stack of parchments in front of him, but he could **feel** the annoyance just leaking from the other. "Tom." Trying and failing to hide his grin, Tom gleefully slashed through a section of the bill he was examining.

"Tom!"

"Yes, Darling?" Oh, but that little growl rumbling from his boy's chest was just *adorable*. Like a kitten trying to scare away a big dog.

"Lean ova, I wanna gib ya a kiss." A sharp chin dug itself into Tom's bicep, and he could feel the puppy eyes Harry was giving him.

Tom just smiled smarmily before twisting towards Harry. "All you had to do was ask, Darling," he muttered, his smile becoming more warm and genuine as Harry just huffed out a bitten '*arsehole*' before their lips met. Tom hummed as fingers curled into the nape of his neck, and it gained a more satisfied tone as a wet tongue licked at him.

It didn't take long for him to understand what Harry wanted, and Tom easily deepened the kiss. Tongues and lips lazily slid and swirled around each other, their kiss heated but more of a banked heat, one that could be easily stoked or left to smolder until later.

Harry sighed into the kiss, using his grip on the back of Tom's neck to pull himself up and closer. A bit of wiggling later and he was halfway in Tom's lap, both of his hands keeping the

other's head in place as Harry's kisses became more heated and hungry.

Tom growled as teeth nipped at his bottom lip, and he reverse-Summoned his parchments back to his desk as his hands wrapped around a slim waist to pull his delightful little Consort more fully into his lap. He chuckled when he felt the others' hardness grind into his stomach, "ah, so I see. You had an ulterior motive."

"Oh, shut your noise, you," Harry snarked before sliding up Tom's chest. As he was going to straddle his lover's lap, Harry's hands slipped, dropping from their place around the base of Tom's skull to his neck, just under his jaw. "Ah, sorry, I-" he started saying when Tom shuddered at the feel of hands around his neck, just to stop, his eyes going wide when two large hands covered his while Tom groaned into his mouth.

"No. Keep them there," Tom choked out, his voice thick like honey as he fell back more firmly into the nest of pillows propping him up.

Harry blinked at the request before shrugging it off. Pushing up onto his knees, he returned to kissing Tom, panting against the soft lips under his as he ground forward. He shuddered as large hands caressed his body, cascading from his shoulders and down his back before mischievous fingers gripped and massaged his arse and thighs.

The two men rocked against each other, moaning into each other's mouths at the feel of the other upon their bodies. Soon, enough pre-ejaculate had leaked from their combined cocks to make sliding their lengths together possible, and with strong, sturdy, *commanding* hands on his hips, Harry started to roll and undulate against Tom, giving them both desperately desired friction.

They started slowly sliding down the bed, the heavy wooden bed frame creaking in protest as Harry found a rhythm. He shifted, getting one foot under himself to push up and leaned forward, putting (inadvertent) pressure on his hands still gripped around Tom's neck and accidentally pushing his thumbs up and into the cairn where Tom's neck and jaw met, the pulse points under the skin beating like a captive butterfly. Tom gasped, his hips jerking while his hands spasmed on their place around Harry's waist.

"Oh, feck! Sorry, Tom, I-" Harry flustered, eyes big and round as he tried to apologize. "I didn't mean-"

"Do it again."

It took a few moments for Harry to catch on, but once he did he went red. "I, uh, are you sure?" Getting a trembling 'yes' in response, he shifted, trying to get comfortable. Getting back onto both knees, he looked down and saw that Tom's cock was incredibly red, the head nearly purple, and watched as a thick bead of cum welled up. Giving an experimental squeeze of his hands, he felt Tom shiver and saw a thick, lazy ribbon of cum drool out, gathering in a puddle around Tom's navel.

Oh.

Leaning forward, Harry kissed Tom hard and deep, his hands gently but firmly squeezing, with something dark deep inside him growling at the trembling moan his actions pulled out from Tom. His hips ground down, swiveling and swerving, pushing their cocks together and against each other while he continued kissing Tom like Tom was air and Harry a man drowning at sea.

Harry gasped, his body twitching as a hand snaked between their bellies and gripped them both firmly before pumping furiously. Leaning back just far enough that they could share breath but not kiss, Harry saw Tom, his face red and sweaty, working hard to bring them off. Harry's own cock was pink and slick, but Tom's was practically weeping, copious amounts of cum dribbling out of it at each pass. The sight of it made Harry's groin twist, and a little voice in the back of his head said that **this** must be the feeling Tom gets when he's playing Harry like a fiddle.

And Harry gets it.

Pressing his thumbs down just a bit more, Harry watched as Tom's eyes rolled up behind their lids, his body shuddered, and his head jerked. Harry's hands went slack, and Tom gasped, his eyes flying open before squeezing closed as his back bowed and he shouted, his hand squeezed and pumping them. Harry moaned as he felt spurts of hot cum splash against his groin and abdomen; looking down, he saw thick, pearly ropes of cum explode out of Tom's cock, and just the knowledge that Tom came so hard was because of *Harry* was enough to send him over the edge.

They fell in an entangled heap, Tom's cum soaked hand trapped between their bellies. Tom couldn't do much more than just lay there and quiver, relearning how to breathe while Harry sloppily kissed him all over his face, neck, and mouth.

Harry inspected his lover closely. Tom's bottom lip had a nick in it from being bitten, and his cheeks, nose, and temples were red. Looking down at his neck, Harry was happy to see that, aside from a bit of redness, there wouldn't be any bruising. He had been worried that he could have hurt the other.

Still, he needs to ask...

"Tom," Harry gently whispered into Tom's ear. "Are you okay?"

Tom just laid there, chest heaving. Harry started to get worried before the biggest, brightest grin overtook Tom's face, his eyes fluttering but remaining closed. "Oh, yeah."

Scrimgeour sighed, rubbing the heel of his palm into one of his eyes. He was NOT looking forward to informing the Minister that his department has run into a brick wall in regards to their interrogation, and he was seriously contemplating faking his death and fucking off to the Bahamas and letting some other poor sod take the fall.

They have nothing on the kidnapper. Literally nothing. Their healer on retainer confirmed that the now-ascribed John Doe has had extensive cosmetic work done on him, but nothing in

Britain's registries matches the muddled magical signature left behind. It's *possible* there's an unregistered Cosmetic Healer doing back alley stuff somewhere, but it's also equally likely that the man went abroad for his work before coming back and kicking the henhouse arse over tits.

On top of **that** , none of Scrimgeour's Auror's who have been trained in *Legilimency* are able to get a read on the perp. He's put out a *General Request* memo for any Ministry personnel with a security rank of 6 or higher and a minimum of Adept in the Mind Arts to lend a hand, but most of the Ministry is flying by the seat of its pants due to the student holiday, and he might not get anyone until Monday, and it's currently Thursday.

...he may need to approach Consort Slytherin about the issue, first. Rufus doesn't want to chance losing an Auror to one of the Minister's fits, he doesn't have many he can spare; the new recruitment standards have really improved the quality of the department, but it also means that any loss is a heavier blow. Rufus needs to hold on to all the personnel he can, **especially** if his suspicions about the rebel faction getting bolder are accurate.

Grabbing one of the sheets of premium parchment he keeps on hand for communicating with those of 'refined' taste (or as his predecessor calls them, 'snobs'), Rufus inked his quill before he started penning his request. Hopefully, the Minister's Consort will be receptive and assist him in banking the man's ire.

Sprawled out over the bed, Harry flipped through a few parchments he had sneaked from Tom's side as the other man dozed after their little tussle. The other man had Summoned back the pile a bit after the afterglow started to fade, and then had promptly said '*fuck it*' before wrapping himself up in a multitude of blankets like a mummy before dozing. Harry must have grabbed from the center of the pile, because so far only about half of what he's read is making a lick of sense. He *thinks* it has to do with international trade and budgets, but he doesn't have enough information to make an actual guess.

Rolling onto his stomach, he flipped through the pile, being careful to keep everything in the same order he found it in. Coming to a new section, he pulled a pillow under his chest to prop himself up and he settled in to read, gently kicking his feet in the air.

SECTION 231.6; STONEHAVEN CURE

As part of INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, the territory that falls under the Governance of Minister of Magic T.M.R.J GAUNT, also known as the Dark Lord Voldemort, also known as Lord Slytherin, will be provided as needed the STONEHAVEN CURE at either;

DISCOUNT

AT COST

FREE

To any nation that his territory is under neutral or amicable terms, and who has citizens suffering from MEDUSA SYNDROME, also known in layman's terms as RAPID MINERALIZATION, to prevent the spread of stated disease. At the discretion of the Minister and his Government, additional provisions to nations adverse or not in a trade agreement with his own may be enacted on a humanitarian basis.

Harry hummed. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw that Tom was still blissed out, and he felt a bit of primal satisfaction at that; for the most part, it's been Tom taking care of him, and Harry is more than happy to return the favor.

As though he could feel the weight of Harry's stare, Tom cracked open a blue, blue eye. Harry watched as it tracked over the bed before Tom lazily reached out, fidgeting his arms out from their cloth prison and his long fingers wrapped around one of Harry's ankles before giving a gentle tug. "Ge' ov'r 'ere," he slurred.

Snickering, Harry put his pillow on top of the parchments to anchor them before getting onto his hands and knees, crawling over the bed towards Tom. He flopped into the arms of the other, kissing under Tom's jaw as Tom wrapped him in his embrace with a sound almost like a purr.

Kissing his Darling, Tom settled more firmly into the bed as a dextrous hand carded through his hair. "Wh', tro'ble di'ya ge' in'o, now?"

Harry snickered again at the almost drunk-sounding inquiry. "Nothing. Jus' readin' some of your paperwork. Curious about this Stonehaven thing, though."

"Ah." Pushing his head further into Harry's palm, he sighed as blunt fingernails gently scratched at his scalp. "It's the only known cure or treatment for Medusa Syndrome." Picking up Harry's free hand, Tom kissed first his wrist and then the back of the hand, humming. "If you're familiar with the myth of Medusa and Perseus, you can probably guess what it does, but it's slow."

It took Harry a few moments to think, but when he realized he shuddered. "They actually turn to *stone*!?"

"Mhmm." Rearranging Harry a bit, he soon had the shorter brunet laying across his front, chest to chest before resting his hands along the dip of Harry's back. "From onset to full mineralization, an infected child-"

*"-it infects **children**!?"*

"-a maximum of six months to get turned to stone. And it affects mostly children."

Harry shuddered. "And I take it that once you turn to stone, there's nothing to be done?"

Tom shook his head, more awake now that he needs to talk. "No. And not only that, but children are the primary vector. Every adult infection, regardless of their age bracket, is because they had close, extended contact with an infected child."

Harry frowned in thought. "When you say 'every adult infection', is that literal?" When he got an affirmed hum, his frown deepened, "well, it makes sense for a parent or grandparent to get infected caring for their child, but to have no independent adult infections doesn't make a lick of sense."

"Nor the fact that there are no native infection cases north of the English Channel."

Harry gaped at Tom. "Wha-, how!? That doesn't seem physically possible!"

Tom shrugged, rubbing his hands over Harry's lower back. "We don't know the how or why. Only that, ever since the Ministry started keeping infection statistics back in the early eighteen-sixties, all infections on our shores were from citizens going abroad and bringing it back. And even then, it's a crapshoot." Which had always puzzled Tom, because the probability of infection is about the same everywhere else. None of his researchers know why, but for some reason, citizens of his nation and parts of the Nordic countries have the lowest probable infection statistics. "Of course, some of those stats could be wrong; we're relying on those countries reporting to give accurate numbers."

Harry shivered, but he felt slightly better knowing that he had an almost nil chance of catching the disease. Still,... "those poor, poor children," he muttered.

"Hm. We haven't had a fatality since a cure was synthesized at our Stonehaven facility. And we have an exchange program, so that helps keep international fatalities low." Tom will need to make sure that Harry **never** learns that the program isn't as altruistic as it seems; Tom's first duty is to his lands, everybody else needs to pony up *some* sort of payment. His investment into the Stonehaven cure is paying for itself hand over fist, allowing him to broker amazing international deals to his benefit. He adores Harry, but unless a child is one of his citizens, they can mineralize for all he cares.

It means one less future adversary.

Opening one of the French doors leading to his parents' rooms, Draco peered around the frame, his icy eyes flitting over the small sitting room that would lead to a bedroom. Seeing it empty, he quickly glanced behind himself before darting inside, taking extra care to ensure the door closed quietly.

He was on a mission, and the most important one in his life thus far; as is House Tradition, all Seventh Year Slytherin's, over the course of the last Ostara before they complete their Hogwarts education, must 'steal' an item from their parent or guardian's rooms and attempt to keep it for as long as possible, including bringing it back to school.

Nobody knows when this tradition started, but it is one performed every year by Slytherin students. It is a test of their wit and cunning, on subterfuge and secrecy. It is a way to prove that they are the most Slytherin of Slytherin's and if they can do so while **also** having Slytherin parents?

Why, that makes them just *extra* Slytherin.

It needn't be something big or expensive. A ring or necklace, even a decorative kerchief will do. The only requirement is that it is something that is used semi-frequently. Pansy is going after one of her mother's hairbrushes, while Blaise has his eye on an antique cologne bottle that was gifted to his late father.

Draco is going after The Chest.

The Chest is a heavy wooden, squat but long carved box that sits at the end of his parent's bed. Ever since he was a child, Mother and Father always admonished him to stay out of it, even going so far as to put advanced locking charms on it. Not only is his curiosity burning, but if he could snag whatever is locked away inside of it AND can hold onto it until the end of the school year, then that would prove he is the most Slytherin of not just his Housemates, but in his family!

Thrumming in excitement, he tip-toed across the room, almost hopping with glee when an ear to the bedroom door revealed it was barren of inhabitants. Opening the doors a crack, he almost cheered as his suspicions were proven true, and he wasted no time in darting inside, bypassing his Mother's vanity, Father's Thinking Chair, and a multitude of other things (and easier targets) before coming to his knees before the chest at the foot of their bed.

Rubbing his palms together in glee, Draco unholstered his wand, weaving a few charms to reveal the locking spells used. He snickered upon finding that they were spells he knew the countercharms to, already having read the books containing the information during the previous summer. A few swishes here, a jab there, and he heard the locks and charms tumble away with a final flourish. Flinging open the lid, his triumphant grin froze before it took on a slightly horrified edge.

"*Oh, no,*" he whispered.

Draco is an intelligent young man, and thus he knows just how he came into being. He also knows that people like to add a bit of variety to their sex lives. A few years ago, his parents sat down and had The Talk with him, reassuring him that such desires were healthy and normal but to PLEASE not go too far because they were too young to be chasing after grandchildren, so Draco knows what sex is and how it works.

But he doesn't need to know just how freaky his parents are!

Looking down at the mass of silk ropes, leather harnesses, gags, phallic instruments, and oh *Merlin* is that a riding crop!?, Draco was filled with two equally strong but opposite emotions; investigate more, or shut the lid and pretend he never saw anything.

His sick need to poke around won, but only just, and he gingerly started prodding through the box of utter filth in front of him. He's not completely innocent, being away at boarding school makes that pretty much impossible, so he quickly connects the dots and concludes that his parents are into quite a few aspects of bondage (and oh, but he is shoving that into a corner of his mind labeled *Forbidden Knowledge*). Furtively glancing at the door, he dug around more, and his eyes bulged out as he found a stupidly large, bright Fuschia dildo standing up in one corner.

Feeling incredibly dirty but with his decade-long curiosity satiated, Draco was getting ready to shut the chest when his eyes spied an unusual harness. Fishing the lilac-colored metal and leather contraption out, it took him a few moments to make heads or tails of what he was looking at. Leather straps, metals rings, and buckles, it almost looked like some weird garter belt, but there was a rubber cock hanging from it and-

-falling from his hands back into the chest with a clatter, Draco started to hyperventilate. Oh, but, he needs to tell Father this! After all, why would there be a strap-on inside the chest, if not for the fact that Mother is seeing another woman!

Jumping to his feet, Draco ran for the door, stopping halfway there and returning to the chest long enough to close it before darting back.

"FATHER! WHERE ARE YOU!? I NEED TO TELL YOU SOMETHING!"

Harry moaned, biting his bottom lip while Tom licked over his entrance. He let out a gasp as the tip of the other's tongue dipped into his pucker before dragging over it, and the long-fingered hand wrapped around his cock and balls gently squeezed and pumped.

After Tom's little nap and their talk, he had declared he was hungry, but before Harry could summon Zarba or Dobby, Tom had twisted and flipped him. When Harry finally got his bearings, he found himself on his upper back, his feet tossed over his shoulders while Tom wrapped an arm around his waist to keep him bottom's up. With a flick of magic, Tom had extra pillows bunching and wiggling behind him, supporting him into an upright position. Harry only had enough time to look up between his thighs at a mischievous grin before a wide, flat tongue was dragging over his hole.

That was ten minutes ago. Since then, Tom has found a steady, lazy rhythm, consisting of lapping at his entrance with a dip inside here or there while also languidly pumping his steadily drooling cock. Being in such an awkward position should be painful, but the flexing arm wrapped around his middle showed Harry that Tom was holding up most of his weight, and oh but- "ah, Tom!" Covering his mouth with one hand, Harry reached up and buried the other into the gently swaying nest of chocolate curls currently making themselves at home between his arse cheeks.

"Mhmm," Tom hummed, pushing his tongue deeper into the slowly relaxing, tight little hole he has been licking and slobbering over for the last quarter-hour. Rightfully he should have been at work quite some time ago, but if the rest of the Ministry can take a holiday, then so can he. And he intends to spend as much time as possible carnally corrupting his little Consort.

Speaking of, he shoved his tongue deeper inside before worrying his head like a dog with a bone, the wet, popping squelches of the slick muscle fucking his boy open making his cock jump. Oh, but he can't wait for his cock to do what his tongue is and fill Harry fit to bursting with his seed. He's going to do everything possible over the course of the next week to get the other loose and wet and begging to get bred like a hound in heat.

"Shit! Tom!" Growling in pleasure as thick thighs jerked and tried to snap shut around his head, Tom sighed as the hand on his head tightened into a claw, yanking hard on his hair. Pulling back just slightly, being sure to keep the tip of his tongue inside the twitching ring of muscle it had been slithering in and out of, he peered over the top of Harry's scrotum and looked at the beet-red face below him. Liking what he saw (sweaty face, gasping mouth, plump lips) he pushed his tongue back in, elongating it and slipping more and more inside.

Harry squeaked, his eyes going wide and almost cross-eyed as Tom's tongue went deeper than it had any right to. Reaching up, he wrenched back Tom's face from its current home attached to his hole. His chest burned when he caught the smug but dazed glare-cum-smirk his action garnered, the spit-shiny mouth, cheeks, and chin working hard to make such a complicated expression around the tongue that *was over four inches long but still twisting inside him and oh fuck but Harry had forgotten and-*

Seeing the look of realization cross Harry's face (and HA, Tom isn't the only one to forget things!), Tom shook off the hand in his hair before shoving his face back where it belongs, pushing more of his tongue inside Harry and growling at the broken cry he received for this gift.

Harry's breath whistled as he gritted his teeth, his arms scrambling to reach something before they flopped up and behind him, his fists clenching the sheets as he tried to anchor himself in reality. He sobbed and his right foot shook as the widest, fattest part of Tom's tongue sunk past his pucker with a loud and wet pop, his hole snapping shut around the noticeably thinner root anchoring the muscle to Tom's jaw and throat. He felt *so full, so stretched*, which is ridiculous because this is Tom's TONGUE, which is nowhere as thick as that tree trunk he calls a dick and it shouldn't be this- "oh, Tom, fucking Jaysus!"

Bobbing his head, Tom snickered before wrapping both arms around Harry's middle. Once he found a rhythm, he tongue-fucked the tight little hole surrounding his tongue in earnest, moaning in delight at the wet, slick sounds of the fat base of the muscle popping in and out while his sweet little Consort moaned and cried in pleasure like the best-paid courtesan in the West. Holding tight to Harry's middle, he shoved his face as close into the others arse as he could before he flicked the tip of his deeply buried tongue, his brow scrunching as he looked for-

"TOM!"

-there it is. Rapidly flicking the tip of his tongue against Harry's prostate, Tom hummed and his own cock jerked when Harry's startled cry of pleasure turned into a squealed shriek before the smaller man spasmed, hips twitching as he came all over his own face.

As Harry's hole relaxed from his undoubtedly **superb** orgasm, Tom pulled his tongue back and out, as satisfied as a cat about to receive the finest cream. Shifting to sit taller, he kissed the slack pucker before glancing down at his darling little whore, liking what he saw.

Speaking of the cat with cream-, shifting Harry just slightly, Tom laid the other on the bed before getting to his knees, hovering over the still panting man. With long, languid licks, Tom lapped up the spunk splattered all over Harry's front, paying special attention to still peaked nipples. Reaching Harry's face, Tom delighted in scooping up the large wad of cum sticking

to Harry's flushed cheek before bringing their mouths together, shuddering at the quiet moan he heard Harry release upon sampling his own essence upon Tom's tongue and lips.

Eventually, they laid entangled with each other, hands lazily exploring each other's bodies. It was as Tom was rubbing his palm up and down Harry's hip and side that he noticed the slightly pained, definitely embarrassed scrunched-up face his lover was wearing. "Darling, what's wrong," Tom asked in concern.

"Um, it's, well...oh, but," covering his face with his palms, Harry tried to twist away from Tom, the few bits of his face peeking through his hands going redder than the sun.

"Darling!?"

Grabbing a pillow, Harry brought it up to his face, suffocating himself in the plushness before letting out a smothered screech. After a few moments, he pulled it down, just enough for his eyes, nose, and mouth to be free. "...I'm sore."

"...?"

"...down there."

".....?"

Growling at the uncomprehending look he received from Tom, Harry growled before bashing the other over the head with the surprisingly dense pillow. "Oi, you feckin' arse, you rubbed me cheeks raw wif yer face!"

Tom just blinked a few times before he connected the dots with an almost audible click. Snorting, he tried to muffle his chortling but failed. In moments he was sprawled on his back, belting out loud, belly-rolling laughs that were nearly donkey-like. He couldn't stop himself, and neither could Harry's best efforts to smother him with the pillow. "I-, I-, *HAAAAAAW! I GAVE YOU BEARD BURN!*"

"Shu' t'feck up, **jackarse**," Harry hissed between gritted teeth, his jaw grinding as Tom just continued to bray like a common donkey. "That's. It." Hopping off their bed, Harry whapped Tom a few more times with the pillow for good measure before gingerly making his way to the bathroom. "ZARBA! I need a potion!" His shout setting Tom off again, Harry quietly plotted murder as he slammed the door shut.

"Fecking. *Arse...*"

The Devil's Silver Tongue II

Chapter Notes

Chapter 26, part 2!

Alas, there is no >:D in this chapter. Maybe the next one :3

Tapping the tip of his cane against the side of his boot, Lucius took his time in taking off and hanging up his cloak on the cloak rack next to the front door of Princemoor Townhouse. While Severus does employ the services of a house elf, he does not put up with others (family, friends, guests or otherwise) unnecessarily mucking-up his home and making more work for Miffy. And he WILL make his displeasure known, no matter the socio-political station of the mess maker. Even the Dark Lord respects this, and has done no more than smirk while Severus stared down the French Undersecretary of Internal Affairs when the dolt just threw his cloak on the floor or put his dirty loafers up on a coffee table during a 'Friendship Visit' a few years back.

Knowing his friend is still putting himself together for tonight's event, Lucius let himself into the small, intimate Drawing Room Severus uses for those he likes, and took a seat on a chair that Lucius claimed as his *years* ago. Knocking twice gently on the small drinks table in front of him, he leaned his cane against the side of his seat while a large mug of tea and milk with a cloud of whipped cream appeared. Humming in satisfaction, he sipped his dessert-like drink while settling into his chair.

Hearing a slight rustle, he looked back over his shoulder whilst drinking, nearly inhaling his drink when a set of flaming, orange eyes hovering a few scant centimeters above the floor blazed at him, sheltered in the dark alcove created from a couch.

"Sm-, Small Cat," he coughed, wiping his mouth with the napkin that hovered in the air before his face. "Merlin's tits but you scared me."

"Mew."

Leaning over and wiggling his fingers and making kissy noises, Lucius watched as the smallest, fluffiest little black cat trotted out from his hiding place. Small Cat was as dark as the void between stars, and his fur was so dense you couldn't really see any features aside from his orange eyes. He was a bit of a nervous thing, not really liking many people aside from Severus.

He was also the **cuddliest** little fluff ball once he decided he liked you.

Lucius let his hand still while Small Cat gently scented him with a moist, black nose before big orange eyes lazily blinked and he head-booped Lucius's hand. Feeling victorious,

Lucious scooped the critter up easily, setting the now purring cat up on his shoulder where it easily perched. Given that Small Cat wasn't too much larger than a ten-week-old kitten, he made for an excellent shoulder buddy.

Sipping his tea some more, Lucius frowned as he felt a raspy tongue lick at his temple. "Small Cat, please stop."

"*Miaw...*" Ignoring Lucius's entirely reasonable request, Small Cat continued licking, quickly moving from Lucius's temple and onto his hair.

Not wanting cat spit in his freshly washed and styled hair, Lucius gently plucked up Small Cat and plopped him into his lap, smirking at the disgruntled, high-pitched meow he received in complaint. Watching as Small Cat rolled over and presented his ultra-furry belly, he resisted for only a few moments before giving into the temptation and petting it, hissing when sharp little claws and teeth sunk into his fingers.

It wasn't long after that Small Cat froze, mouth clamped around the tip of Lucius's index finger while his back paws kicked at Lucius's palm. Not even a full blink of his orange eyes later and Small Cat had sprung, throwing himself off of Lucius's lap and sprinting towards the door. Only then did Lucius notice footsteps, and from the tread he guessed it was Severus approaching. Seconds later, the taller brunet turned to enter the room, and Small Cat wasted no time in scaling his owner, winding up Severus's tall frame, stopping with his claws hooked into Severus's shirt over his chest, tail whipping back and forth before loudly meowing and hopping up onto the man's left shoulder. With another loud mew, he bussed his furry head against Severus's cheek and started purring.

While Severus scratched under Small Cat's chin, Lucius looked at his friend and nodded in approval. Severus and Narcissa participate in ballroom dancing competitions, and tonight was the final round before the Western European Grand Prix. He doesn't remember the exact itinerary, but Lucious thinks tonight is the night where they perform the five Latin dances, with the Standards having already taken place the night before. For their competition, Severus was dressed in the high-waisted, flared-legged trousers and white shirt of a male flamenco dancer, with a heavily bejeweled and sequined gold bolero hanging over his arm. Lucius knows it will perfectly match to that of his Narcissa's dress, a bright and vibrant red and gold flamenco dress, designed so that the ruffled front that flows out from the sheath bodice stops short and parts, turning back into a full, ruffled train. Lucius was quite proud of the dress's design, having created it himself; he may not be able to dance the paso doble or rumba with his wife as a result of a stiff ankle, but by Merlin he can make sure she'll be the star of the show!

"Sma'ca', stop. No, don't lick my hair, I just," Severus sighed. Coming back to himself, Lucius let out an inelegant snort; Small Cat was standing on his hind legs, front paws perched in Severus's freshly washed hair, and doing his tiny best to lick the fine, voluminous dark mane into submission.

Getting up, Lucius unhooked the little furball from his friend, quietly chuckling at the high-pitched growl the action earned him. "He tried getting me, too."

Rolling his eyes, Severus set his bolero over the back of an unoccupied chair, shaking his loose hair to resettle it before summoning a rat tail comb and passing it over to Lucius. "I don't smell like him anymore, and Smacky doesn't like that. Help with the hair?"

Setting Small Cat into Severus's lap once the man sat, Lucius then turned to his friends' hair. "Braid?" Getting a grunt of agreement, he got to work on making a tiered French braid. While Severus has a LOT of hair, it's also very fine, and for competition's Lucius and Narcissa came up with a two-tiered French braid to help keep it all corralled.

Creating two main sections (top and bottom) and two wedge sections (slices from the ears that met in the middle of the skull), Lucius set the wedge lengths in his friend's hands before combing the top section and starting his braiding. "So, a little birdie in the DMLE let slip that the department is at an impasse with the Potter's would-be kidnapper," Lucius quietly stated. Getting an inquiring grunt, he continued, "nobody in the department can get through his mental shields."

Severus went stiff, only relaxing minutely when Small Cat mewed plaintively for more scratches. "That's not good."

"Mhmm. Scrimgeour put out a call for a Mind Arts Adept with a security level of 6."

"... that's *really* not good." While most members of the DMLE are required to have a minimum of Apprentice in the Mind Arts (surpassing the Neophyte rank that was once considered just a bonus and NOT a requirement), not many in the Ministry as a whole are Adepts, let alone having the clearance Scrimgeour is requiring for this issue. The whole situation is making Severus's teeth itch.

Finished with the crown, Lucius started working the wedges into the main braid after splitting them and twisting. "I agree. For now, it looks like Scrimgeour is trying to handle it himself, but I predict he'll need to get Bones' involvement sooner rather than later." Scrimgeour is as Slytherin as they come while also holding a Gryffindor-esque streak of honor a mile wide. The few run-in's Lucius has had in the past with the lionessque man left him frothing at the mouth each time; Scrimgeour doesn't just toe the line, he dances on it, and has outmanoeuvred Lucius on several occasions by just pulling out some obscure law nobody has used for three-hundred years.

If it wasn't so galling, Lucius would gladly buy the old bag a drink.

Severus tilted his head forward, giving Lucius more room to work on the braid tail. "I wonder who's going to try and involve the Minister via his Consort, first."

Lucius froze, a dawning horror settling into his bones. Ever since the existence of Harry had been made public, their Lordship has mellowed out, some days just mentally miles away. And he has kept more reasonable work hours. It is **clear** he adores his little Consort, if the glow of satisfaction (and other *things*) surrounding him is any indication. If anyone tried to endanger Harry...

Shivering, Lucius finished the last few inches of braid rapidly. Accepting the red ribbon Severus passed over, he quickly tied off the end, tugging to make sure it wouldn't come

undone mid-twirl like it had three years ago at the English qualifiers. Satisfied, he snatched back Small Cat from his friend, ignoring the other man's snarl before he sat back down and cuddled the little cat close. "I'm not going to think about it."

James, along with the rest of his household, were unusually subdued the day after his school-aged children returned from Hogwarts. Lily was still very much shook-up from Daisy's near-kidnapping, and the rest of their children had picked up on that energy. Their eldest, Gideon, had even gone so far as to make dinner last night so Lily could unwind.

Lily was still keyed-up, and had even brought Daisy into their bed. Gideon had chosen to bed-down in front of James and Lily's bedroom, face stormy while Rosalind and Arthur kipped out in the living room. The only one to sleep in her own bed was Violet.

James had been the first to wake, and decided to whip up a simple breakfast of eggs, bacon and toast. After putting everything under charms after eating his fill, he had retreated to his study. Lying on his desk were two copies of the Prophet, the current morning edition and last night's evening edition. Seeing that the newest one was centered around an interview with the Minister and his Consort, James tossed it aside for now and picked up yesterday's copy.

ATTEMPTED POTTER KIDNAPPING! REBELS REVIVE!? SLYTHERIN CONSORT SAVES THE DAY!

Unfolding the paper, James leaned against his desk, brow furrowed as he studied the looping photograph below the headline; it consisted of Harry Potter utterly decking the kidnapper after wrenching a steampipe from the walls of *Tamsin's Tomes*, his face twisted in a snarl as the end of the pipe made contact with the perp's head before looping back. Reading on, all that the article consisted of was a recap of the incident and speculation about who was behind it. A few sources who were interviewed were of the opinion that it may be the rebel group that split off from the *Order of the Phoenix*, the organization James and Lily belonged to before their Harry's murder, but the current regime has a lot of enemies; too much speculation at this point will cause more harm than good.

Still, the article *has* reminded him that THIS Harry may be a distant relative. He should send an invitation for Consort Slytherin to visit Godric's Hollow. James would prefer to not have *that man* here, but he can put up with him long enough for his family to thank Harry properly.

After taking care of that *embarrassing* burn and having a quick wash-up, Harry had retreated to the kitchens, Tom on his heels and in a *scandalously* short silk house robe. Harry was in the mood to bake, and he may be able to get Tom to agree to his idea to hire a few gardeners and possibly a cook if he's plied with his favorite bread and maybe a hot meal.

Wearing a smock-like tunic in undyed linen, Harry had quickly put on an apron before pulling out his tools and ingredients. Tom settled himself at the opposing end of the large

stone workbench, Zarba or Dobby quietly magicing a cup of tea for him as he read through more of his paperwork.

Starting on his signature bread, Harry decided to make a very large batch, intent on sending some to Mrs. Potter after the shit day yesterday was. Getting his yeast started in warm sugar water, Harry started to measure out the rest of his dry ingredients as the yeast woke up. He started with almost an entire sixteen-ounce sack of flour, double-weighing it to make sure his other ingredients can be accurately measured.

"Darling?"

"Hmmm?" Pulling a large jar of wildflower honey from the pantry, Harry heaved the gallon-sized monstrosity towards the workbench.

"Would it trouble you to make those sausage and oats patties you used to do?"

Harry paused in scooping out his honey, the tip of his tongue sticking out of his mouth. "Do we have whole nutmeg?" Hearing a quiet pop, Harry looked down his side and saw Dobby anxiously wringing his hands. "Do you know if we have nutmeg, cinnamon, sage, and allspice, Dobby?" Getting a vigorous nod, Harry smiled down at the strange little elf, "thank you. And do we have any pork sausage?"

"N, no, Mr. Slytherin Consort Harry Potter Sir! So sorry! Dobby is a bad elf!"

Tom watched Harry watch Dobby with a look of horror on his face as the elf ran towards an oven and pulled open the door, slipping a hand in before viciously slamming the heavy door shut. Harry's wordless shout of shock startled Dobby just enough to let Harry wrench the elf's hand away, and Tom watched as Harry frantically called for Zarba to take Dobby away and care for him.

Settling Harry down at the bench, Tom put the kettle on for tea. His Consort's face was pale and drawn, the elf's reaction deeply disturbing him. Scooping out a spoonful of chamomile tea into a teapot, he then poured over the almost-but-not-quite boiling water before putting the teapot top on. Once he floated it towards the table, he summoned over a few of the petit fours Zarba keeps on hand at all times for snacking and made up a plate for Harry, immediately preparing a cuppa, as well.

"...tha' was, er, somethin'," Harry muttered after sipping his tea. "Are all elves like that?"

"For the most part, no. Just like people, elves can have their own, hm, *issues*." Tom isn't going to touch on the issue of elf rights with a ten-foot pole. He still gets headaches remembering those letters sent by that one Gryffindor student about her organization, S.P.U.D, or something similar.

"Ah."

They drank their tea and nibbled on their cakes for a few minutes.

"Well, I should ge' on wif makin' me patties," Harry announced before getting up. "Do ya fink you can grind up the pork wif magic, Tom?"

While Harry gathered the ingredients, Tom did Harry one better and summoned the meat grinder he bought for Zarba almost twenty years ago. All one had to do was chunk up whatever meat you wanted minced and toss it and any spices into the hopper. It would take care of everything else on its own. Harry was quite happy to see that, and after quickly chopping the meat and measuring his spices, gleefully dumped it all into the hopper. He nearly danced as the grinding handle started turning on its own, and before long he was mixing his bread dough while the grinder finely minced everything together before dumping it out on a collection tray.

Leaving his dough in a bowl to prove, Harry squinted over at Tom. "Oi, Tom, I've been finkin' -"

"-rather dangerous, that," Tom quipped from behind a stack of parchment.

"...kiss me arse. Anyway," pointedly ignoring Tom's leer, Harry dusted off his hands before inspecting the loadout tray with his grindings, happy with the consistency, and slid the tray into the cold chest to firm up. "I was finkin' of 'irin' a few gardeners, maybe a cook, as well." Wandering over to where the kitchen counter wedged into a corner, he reached for the large kitchen scale sitting there, bringing it back over to his work station.

Tom hummed as he wrote something. "I remember you alluding to that in yesterday's interview. Any particular reason?"

Pulling over the tin of rolled oats, Harry struggled to open it, cursing it and its mother before the top popped. With a triumphant smirk, he then started scooping out spoonfuls of oats out onto the scale. "Even wif magic, it's still goin' t'take a long time to fix up th'courtyard to 'ow I wan' it. An' I don' know everyfing abou' plan's, le' alone magic ones." Eyeing the scale, he scooped off a tiny amount of oats before grunting. "An' we'll need a cook, because Dobby'll need t'go 'ome a' some poin', and having Zarba be 'th'only one t'cook an' clean is jus' mean."

Tom hummed in though, watching closely as Harry then put the pound of oats into a large pot, followed with enough water to cover it to half an inch over, and then a few spoonfuls of the spice mix he had made before setting it on to gently boil. "I have no objections. I take it you're looking to get one over on Heir Golden-Mane?" He smirked at Harry's growl. "Write up your proposed compensation and we'll look it over. I'm still trying to make arrangements for tutoring for you, but, at least for right now, it will be haphazard at best."

Stirring the oats, Harry looked over. "How so?"

"Well, you're too old for a traditional Hogwarts education. I doubt you want to share classes with a bunch of eleven-year-olds." Tom smirked at the face Harry made; it was no secret that Harry had little patience for the early teenagers back at Wool's. Children were much easier to reason with. Teenagers, on the other hand, were *hell*. "But, there are not many tutors available during the summer because of private bookings, and most Hogwarts

professors are either on holiday or conducting research. And my work as Minister will cut into most of our time together. I **can** teach you, but it will be extremely slow going."

It is quite the conundrum. Tom is contemplating asking for favors from many of his most loyal, such as Runes and Arithmancy training from Lady Malfoy, and Transfiguration from Lord LeStrange. He would prefer Headmistress McGonagall for the latter, but she's going to be away at conferences for most of the summer.

Regardless, he needs to draw up a list and collect recommendations. Harry needs to be taught, and taught well.

Tossing his cloak aside before flopping back onto the couch, Lucius sighed before focusing on his **beautiful** wife. Narcissa was sitting at the vanity kept in what he calls 'The Dance Room', wrapped in a pale blue silk robe, carefully making up her face in anticipation for tonight's competition. She looks to be close to finishing, which means she'll be able to move onto dressing her hair. He quite looks forward to that part, loving the feel of her hair in his hands. He also never fails to sneak in a few naughty caresses; how can he resist? She is like Galatea given flesh.

He doesn't know how much time passed as she went through her ritual, but at some point he could hear an, almost buzzing, sound ring in his ears. A few moments passed and he deciphered that it was his Draco's voice. Probably received a letter from his friends and got a little excited.

"-Father? Father, where are you!? I-,"

Seeing Narcissa's reflection smirking, Lucius sighed before heaving himself back to his feet. Many would comment that Narcissa spoiled her soon, but truth be told, Lucius has a hard time keeping anything back from Draco. Both of them have pampered Draco endlessly, but Lucius is the one with the soft touch. While he doesn't regret any of it, it's times like now that he wishes Draco could show a tad bit more restraint or decorum.

Before he could cross the scuffed wooden floor (worn from years of dance practice and breaking in new performance shoes), the heavy door swung wide, bouncing off the wall. With his face flushed and an anguished look on his face, Draco looked like he had been told something horrible. Lucius's heart was up in his throat, and he feared the worst.

"FATHER!"

"Draco, what is wrong-," "-my dragon-!" Both parents rushed to reassure their child, fearing something horrid had happened. Are his friends okay? Did his Apprenticeship get revoked? A peacock pass?

Lucius had their son in a bone crushing hug, and Narcissa was about to join them when Draco jerked away from her with a hiss.

"Draco," she gasped.

"You stay away from Father, you, you *hussy!*"

Narcissa gapped in shock, a hand coming up to her chest.

Lucius stared aghast at his son. "Draco Lucius-!"

"Father! You won't believe what I have found!"

"I don't care what it is you've found," Lucius growled, grabbing Draco by the biceps before shaking him. "You are to NEVER speak to your mother that way!" As Lucius spoke, Narcissa covered her mouth, tears gathering in the corners of her partially lined eyes as her lids fluttered.

"But, Father! She-!"

"-you will apologize right this instant-"

"-but-"

"-and properly explain yourself-"

"MOTHER IS SEEING ANOTHER WOMAN!"

At Draco's outburst, all three froze. Draco, with a red, tearstained face; Narcissa, her eyes wide and hand frozen halfway between her mouth and chest; and Lucius, with a look on his face that was a cross between astonished, confused, and hurt.

"...what?"

Nodding, Draco sniffed. "I was, I was in your bedroom, looking for something to nick."

"The Slytherin Tradition," Narcissa murmured.

Nodding, Draco scrubbed one of his eyes with the heel of his hand. "And I had, er. I wanted to be *extra* Slytherin. To beat the others. So I, er, went rummaging in the Chest."

Lucius swallowed thickly. "Oh," he breathed out in a manner similar to someone getting punched in the gut. Narcissa looked as though she wanted to sink to the core of the Earth.

"Er, yeah. And, um, I found some things-"

Narcissa squeaked. "N-now, Draco, darling! Remember that Talk we had? A few years back? It's, it's perfectly normal-," she choked on the rest of her words as Draco spun to face her, a finger viciously stabbed towards her.

"You be **quiet**, you, you *slattern!* You Whore of Babylon," Draco spat, face twisted into a foul sneer as he advanced on her. "I saw your tools of perverted infidelity, and I won't let you make a mockery of Father!"

At Draco's proclamation, Narcissa just blinked in confused astonishment. "Draco, my dragon, what in blue *blazes* are you talking about!?"

Draco barked a scoff. "Oh, please, Mother. Don't try to hide your foul misdeeds behind an empty-headed facade! I saw that **thing** you use on the women you sneak in behind Father's back-

"Wait, my dove? Are you seeing someone?"

"-no, Lu, you know I wouldn't! I-

"Don't try to lie, Mother *Dearest*. After all, there IS another woman! Why else would you have a strap-on hidden in the Chest!"

The room echoed briefly at Draco's last words, before it became loudly quiet. After a few moments, Lucius and Narcissa traded similar horrified looks, both coming to the same conclusion.

"Draco," Lucius weakly croaked. "How about we go into the Blue Drawing Room and have a, a bit of a chat?" Walking up beside his son, he wrapped an arm around Draco's shoulders and started steering him towards the Dancing Room's door. "There are a few, things, that we need to clear up." Peering over their son's head, Lucius tilted his head towards the vanity before blinking once slowly.

A few minutes later, the father-son duo were sitting on a couch in the Blue Room. Warm, afternoon sunlight streamed in through the open windows, a light breeze fluttering the gauzy, dark blue curtains. Draco had both of his hands wrapped around a mug of milky tea, tilted slightly to look at his Father while Lucius sat slightly hunched over, one hand pinching the bridge of his nose while the other sat akimbo on his thigh.

Draco was worried. Did Father already suspect Mother of being unfaithful? Was he unable to satisfy her and, loving her enough to let her see another, was dying on the inside? If so, how did they hide it from him for years? Was everything he saw just a lie!?

Lucius sighed, moving to sit upright. "Draco, do you remember, when we had the Talk, about how different people like different things? Or, try new things?"

Draco sipped his tea, feeling like a young child again. "...yes," he muttered around the rim of his cup.

"...so, you know, then, that some people may like some... unorthodox things."

Draco nodded. "Yes?" He's not seeing where this conversation is going, and doesn't like it.

Deciding to cut to the chase, Lucius turned to look his son in the eye. "That strap-on is for me."

Draco just blinked a few times, utterly flatfooted. "You...use it on Mother?" Why? Was Father not big enough? Wait. Was there an accident, and magic couldn't fix it, so his parents

had to resort to **that** in order to maintain their closeness? Oh, but if so, that is *tragic* and he needs to apologize to Mother right NOW!

"No, your Mother wears it."

Lucius watched as the wheels turning in his son's head came to a screeching halt. "Wait. Then that means..."

Lucius nodded, blushing. "Yes." He was expecting a lot of different reactions, but the one he got was not one he was expecting.

With a look of *something* on his face, Draco sat his tea down and **looked** at his Father. "Wha, why!?" He crossed his arms before throwing himself back into the couch. "If you want to get buggered, why not find another man!? To have Mother go through all that effort, just to satisfy **you** -"

"Oh, she enjoys the work." Deep inside, past the mortification he was feeling at having to have this conversation with his **son** of all people (Severus gets a free pass because he's the root cause of this whole affair; if it weren't for him being an utter **bastard** a decade back Lucius wouldn't be enjoying the fruits of Narcissa's labor), he's silently laughing his arse off.

Draco opened and closed his mouth a few times. "I. What." Breathing deeply a few times, he huffed. "I don't get it."

Nodding faux-sagely, Lucius patted his son on the shoulder. "Sometimes, you just want to let someone else take charge."

"...and what does Mother get out of all of this?"

"Why don't you ask her."

"So, I was thinking, we could turn the greenhouse into a food garden. And, maybe have a large, flowering tree as the centerpiece, and over *there*..." Harry tugged Tom along the overgrown, wild courtyard by the hand, pointing out different spots and his ideas for them.

Tom let Harry's excited babbel wash over him like a spring shower. To be honest he wasn't paying much attention to what was being said; Harry could turn the courtyard into a swamp for all he cares. He's too busy watching the utter excitement burn in green, **green** and gold eyes.

"-and I was thinking of having it organized by smells, if that makes sense? Like, earthy ones here, more delicate ones there, and have a path wind through it all."

That is... intriguing. "We would definitely need to hire some gardners, perhaps even a garden planner." Tom surveyed the large, open area. The courtyard was originally built to accommodate things like a stable, an armory, a blacksmith, and so on, but over the centuries those freestanding buildings came down, and by the mid-1700's the yard was used mostly as some sort of garden. Harry would have a lot of space to work with. "Perhaps, those patches of

earth in the corners and down the sides? Can we turn them into some sort of themed sitting areas?"

Harry peered at one of the indicated corners, thinking. Given the current walking path layout, the corners have enough free space to have a bench or two installed, maybe a small gazebo. "Is there something you have in mind?"

Tom blinked. He's not used to being asked what he wants, personally. Oh, when it comes to laws and commands, to getting things **done**, that's one thing. But this? This is different. He appreciates the loyalty of his followers, and their gifts for Yule or the anniversary of his rise has always been thoughtful, but no one has ever *asked* if he wanted something in particular.

"...I would like an area designed for relaxing. Unwinding," he murmured. "Lavender and sage have always been calming, for me." Looking down, he met his Consort's smiling face.

"Simple enough!" Letting go of Tom's hand, Harry walked towards the nearest, overgrown corner. Wanting to get a feel for the spot, he carefully walked into the tall grass, mindful of the thorny vines he saw peeking out here and there (for he was barefoot). Reaching out, he started pushing the grasses aside, wanting to see the state of the soil when a loud, indignant squeak startled him.

"EEK!"

Jumping back, Harry watched as the grasses rustled on their own.

"EEK! EEKEEK!"

Coming over, Tom stood over him as the cause of the noise rolled out of the grass and onto the flagstones. Two small, stoat-like creatures rolled over and around each other, before one who can only be their mother appeared. She was about the size of a small housecat and light-brown in color, with a tan bib, and she hissed at Tom and Harry before attempting to drive her wayward litter back into their home.

"Well," Tom said as the grass swayed behind the furry family. "We'll need to leave this area alone. We don't need a pissed off pine martin on our hands." Pulling out his wand, he conjured a staked sign that read 'WARNING: DENNING MARTIN' on it and directed it to a spot on the boundary of the grass. "And I'll need to tell Nagini to leave them alone. Shouldn't be too hard, given that they go for prey smaller than what she tolerates."

After that bit of excitement, Harry excitedly buzzed over to one of the other corners. This one was mostly bare earth, and Tom smirked as he watched Harry squat down and feel the soil, look up to see the angle of the sun, and even check the direction of the breeze by holding up a finger that he licked.

Harry doesn't do anything by halves.

Conjuring up a chair, Tom sat and watched as his lover picked up a stick and started sketching out shapes in the dirt, no doubt plotting out this little contemplation corner. He

leaned against one of the armrests, chin propped up in his hand as he watched the creative process.

"Tom! C'mere! What do you think?"

Getting up, he walked towards Harry, taking in the rosy look of pride on his face. Looking over his fluffy head, Tom squinted at the dirt scribbles outlining where sage, lavender, and vetiver would be planted. Unbidden, he could already smell the combination. "Maybe some geranium wouldn't be remiss?"

Hopping, Harry scrubbed out a few circles with his foot before drawing something new, tossing half-formed thoughts Tom's way. Soon, he was distractedly wandering away from the corner, walking towards one of the little earthen 'islands' jutting out of the side of the courtyard.

Tom watched the wandering with an amused snort before turning back to what is going to be HIS corner.

...maybe I should retire...

The Devil's Silver Tongue III

Chapter Notes

I'm not dead! YAY! Life has settled down for me and I got through a major writer's block. Updates should be more regular from now on!

This is the final part of The Devil's Silver Tongue. Looks like Tom and Harry like to fuck lol.

Also, >:D

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

Harry glared at Tom from his spot on the small sitting room couch. The other man was lounging on one of the many overstuffed chairs littering the space, his legs stretched out and his feet propped up on an ottoman while he did paperwork. Tom was nearly naked, the short silk housecoat pooling at his waist and showing off his long legs and fit chest.

*I want to **lick** him.* Tom had nice, broad shoulders, and pectorals that were nice and firm, decorated with pink nipples that Harry wanted to **bite** while he wrapped his legs around Tom's waist that wasn't thin, but also not thick. Harry liked the taper from Tom's shoulders to his middle; it was a cross between triangular and rectangular. Harry remembers seeing soldiers at his dance hall that had the whole triangle shape going on and he always thought they looked a little funny. Like they would tip over if they stooped too far. And he noticed most of those guys had no butt's, so then they looked like Vienna sausages stuck on the end of a toothpick, which had always made Harry snicker.

But, Tom has that slightly thicker middle, where there was enough of a dip to keep things interesting but he wasn't so thin that Harry felt like he could break him if he squeezed too hard.

And that pubic trail...Harry jerked, feeling something wet at the corner of his mouth, and was mortified to find out his mouth was literally **watering**. What on God's green earth is wrong with him!? Where had all these fucking urges come from!?

Tom. He's a fucking four-course meal compared to the stringy porridge that you were previously offered. Harry wanted to smack himself for thinking that, but dammit it's true! Tom is fucking *delicious*.

*...and **mine**.* Harry can go and sample that bit of prime rib whenever he wants.

But he shouldn't. They've both had quite a bit of 'fun' today. Going in for THIRDS would just be ridiculous!

"I can smell your brain roasting from here," Tom called out while flipping a piece of paper.

"Oi, you!"

Tom just gave him a smug look. "You also look mildly constipated. Does Zarba need to fetch you a potion?"

Harry blushed, half angry at the insinuation, half sexually frustrated. "No! I just-! Listen 'ere, you 'andsome git!" He jabbed a sharp finger at the utter bastard gloating gloatingly in his chair, "I'm just-"

"If you want some," Tom interrupted, smirking roguishly while throwing his parchments up and over his head with nary a care and spreading his arms wide in an invitation, "come and get it."

Accepting the challenge, Harry bounced to his feet before trotting over to the smugly smirking other. Plopping himself into Tom's lap, Harry locked lips and used every trick and ounce of skill he had picked up during his trips to his dance hall to leave the other breathless. He grinned into Tom's mouth when the other shuddered and moaned, grabbing Harry's waist with his large hands and gripping tightly.

Tom growled low in his throat, pulling Harry against his front. He felt the other shift so he was standing on his knees as they kissed, Harry's hardness rubbing against his stomach as their tongues slid against each other and teeth nibbled spit-slick lips.

After what felt like an eternity they separated, Harry gasping for air with rosy cheeks and his glasses askew and Tom watching the other like a wolf stalking a fawn.

Harry's mouth abruptly watered as he sat back in Tom's lap, sighing as a thick cock slotted between his arse cheeks. He swallowed saliva as he remembered the last time he sucked someone off; a man in his late twenties, married, but who liked to nip out and dog younger men. He always liked the way Harry would take him into his mouth and never took up any of the other guys for oral.

Leaning forward and pecking Tom on the lips, Harry slithered down between long legs and onto the floor. He gently pushed Tom's knees apart, glancing up at the other through hooded eyes, his gaze hinting what he was about to do.

Tom leaned back in his chair, licking his lips in anticipation as Harry opened his robe and took hold of his erection. He's going to enjoy teaching his boy the finer aspects of sexual debauchery, savor as Harry becomes less and less innocent and more depraved, and revel in the disgusting, sleazy, **dirty** things that they would get up to behind closed doors.

Resting one long-fingered hand on top of dark, unruly locks, he sighed. "Oh, feel free to indulge, darling," he cooed. "It will be so fun to teach you- *HNGK!*"

Smirking around the cock between his lips, Harry sucked down the shaft in his mouth, inching towards the root. Once his nose was firmly pressed into Tom's pubic thatch he

hummed, startling a shout from the other. He pulled back with a loud, wet suck, gasping for air as he replaced his mouth with his hand and pumped Tom's cock leisurely. "What, did you think I was some virginal lamb," he laughed as Tom's hips jerked.

"You little minx," Tom growled, glaring at Harry.

Harry just laughed before deepthroating Tom again. Pulling his glasses off, he tossed them to the side before bobbing his head, swallowing when he was halfway up the shaft before going back down. He was literally slobbering all over Tom's cock, thick gobs of saliva and cum mixing together into one delightfully disgusting mess before dribbling down a thick shaft and Harry's chin. As Harry came back up he felt two hands in his hair, and only just now realized that Tom was moaning in the most beautiful tone.

Deciding to be cheeky, Harry decided to throat-fuck himself, moving quickly up and down, a hand following behind his lips and squeezing Tom's cock. He was thirsty for the other's cum and he wanted it **now**.

"**Fuck, Harry,**" Tom barked, his toes curling and his back arching. He fought not to just pull Harry's head down and grind into his warm, wet throat, not knowing the extent (or lack thereof) of Harry's gag reflex. "Oh, but you're an utter *angel*..."

Harry snickered around Tom's shaft, bobbing up and down a few more times before he felt the other tense. Pulling off completely, he jerked the other vigorously before leaning back forward, mouth open and his tongue sticking out as his fist flew, looking up at Tom with glassy eyes.

Tom cursed as Harry looked up at him, green eyes bright and his tongue dangling over plush and swollen lips. The first shot landed partially in Harry's mouth and skidded across his cheek. Cupping his red tongue slightly, he continued jerking Tom through his orgasm, letting the other's cum hit his tongue and inside his mouth and dribble out, down his chin, and onto his neck and chest.

Collapsing against his chair, Tom's eyes closed as he gasped for breath, his brain temporarily shut down. He could feel hands rubbing in soothing circles over his thighs and he grabbed one, holding it tightly to ground himself. After several long minutes, he cracked open his eyes just to squeeze them shut with a groan.

Harry's mouth and chin were caked with cum and spit. Thick ropes of it hung from the edges of his lips, dangling down just to land on his flushed chest. It is the **nastiest**, dirtiest thing he's ever seen, and he wants to do it again and again until Harry is covered mouth to arse in his spunk.

"So," Harry croaked. "Do you still think I'm an angel?"

Tom just rasped out a laugh.

Fearing his mother's wrath, Draco had snuck through the Manor to the nearest Floo that connected to his godfather's home. After the latest revelation about his parent's sex life and how he had dealt with his assumptions and emotions (*horribly*), he needs to go somewhere to fix his head before he apologizes to his mother.

Finding himself in the Floo Room of Princemoor Townhouse, it was only a matter of minutes before he was standing in the doorway of the Drawing Room his godfather likes to use when finishing getting ready for a competition.

Draco watched for a few minutes as Severus smoothed down the edges of his hair in front of a mirror hanging over a buffet cabinet. Long fingers glided inside a tin of smoothing gel before swiping the thick, matte material over the baby hairs that framed his face. Presentation and appearance heavily weighted the scores in qualifiers and finals, and Uncle Severus and Mother have scored all ten's in that category for the last ten out of twelve years.

A black blur darted out of the corner of Draco's eye before going airborne. "You have a kitten on your butt, Uncle."

Looking back over his shoulder, Severus frowned. "Smacky! Draco, can you get him?"

Snickering under his breath, Draco came into the room. Once behind Severus, he set to work unhooking Small Cat's claws from his quasi-uncle's behind, taking care not to hurt little paws or tug the threads of the dancing trousers. Once he freed the little gremlin, Draco cradled the ball of fluff in his arms, petting the beastie with long strokes. "You know, you never told me why you named him 'Small Cat'."

"You did, actually." Snapping the tin shut, Severus twisted to inspect his backside and make sure his little monster hadn't ruined his clothes; it wouldn't be the first time it's happened. He's still counting his lucky stars that his trousers had split backstage prior to the *paso doble* he and Narcissa were to perform at the Finals a few years back. He would never have heard the end of it from Lucius if it happened mid-lunge, his arse hanging out for all to see.

Not that he's concerned about his appearance. Regulus thinks it's quite nice. All those years of squat-lifting full cast iron cauldrons have paid off.

Draco blinked confusedly down at Small Cat, who was busy licking his fingers. "Wait, I did? When?"

"When you were three. I found him hiding behind a muggle dumpster, looking like a drowned rat. I brought him home and a few days later you asked to name him. You decided that 'Small Cat' was perfectly fine, being that he was a small cat, and it stuck."

"Ah."

Both became quiet, Draco petting Small Cat and Severus tackling the last few stubborn baby hairs with a cosmetic charm before sitting on a nearby chair with his back to Draco. "So," Severus asked. "What are you doing here?"

Draco pinked. "What, am I not allowed to visit my favorite Uncle?" He could feel his godfather roll his eyes, despite not seeing his face.

"Draco..."

"...fine," Draco sighed. "I, erm, may have gone digging around in my parent's room and found out something shocking, and accused Mother of cheating on Father." Severus slowly turned in his seat, squinting at Draco. "Don't look at me like that," Draco shouted. Severus just raised an eyebrow at him. "Or like that!" The other eyebrow joined the first, creating an indolent expression. "Yes, like that! Like I'm an idiot or something!"

"Knowing you, you probably dealt with the situation in the worst, most dramatic way possible."

"...I may have called her a 'whore of Babylon'," Draco admitted sheepishly.

Draco stared at his godfather for about thirty seconds as the other man turned away with a shake of his head and slipped on his dancing boots before heaving a gusty sigh. "You're right, I'm an idiot." Flopping face-first onto a nearby supple leather couch, his head turned to the side as he lay on his front while Small Cat leaped up and walked in circles along his back before sitting down and making biscuits. "Knowing her, she'll play the long game and get me when I least expect it."

Finished tying his boots, Severus stood up, walking a few paces to and fro to check that they weren't laced too tightly. "Personally, if you were mine, I'd already be burying you in the back forty."

Draco shot up to his elbows, jaw hanging. Small Cat tumbled from his back and over his butt with an angry meow. "Wh-, what!? Uncle Severus, no! And besides, Father would *never!*"

Severus snorted, picking up and swinging over his shoulders the gold bolero that hung from the back of his chair. "*Pft*, it's not like you're irreplaceable. Your parents are young, yet. They can just go and make another one, and tell them how stupid the first one was."

Draco was utterly gobsmacked. "...is this some new holiday I don't know about!? Did his Lordship pass *National Roast Draco Day* when I wasn't looking!?" He shrunk back into the cushions when Severus rounded on him, jabbing a long finger into Draco's face.

"You deserve far worse than what you're getting. If it wasn't the fact that it was VERY out-of-character of you and it was in defense of your Father, you would have been banished to some far-flung estate."

Draco's mouth opened and closed a few times before he collapsed back onto the couch with a death rattle-like whimper. "You're right. Great, merciful Merlin but you're right."

"Of course I'm right," Severus stated matter of factly. "I'm always right. I'm always right with your father, always right with you, and, may the night be merciful, I'll always be right

with any...children...you may produce." His tone on the word 'children' showed such great distaste for them that Draco almost agreed with his sentiments just on sheer principle.

But, "I take it Mother is ALWAYS right?"

Severus *pfh'd* at that. "Please, show me at least a **little** respect. It's fifty-fifty. And on *that* note-"

"**OW!**" Draco glared up at his godfather, rubbing the back of his head to soothe the sting of the hard flick he had received as Severus walked past and out to the Floo room.

"Think of ways to make it up to your mother, or I'm going to use you to squish slugs. With your bare feet," Severus called over his shoulder before he was obstructed by the wall.

"*Fine,*" Draco hissed between gritted teeth as he glared at the now-empty doorway. He shrieked when Severus leaned back into view, braid dangling as his eyes spat fire at his shithhead of a godson.

Narrowing his gaze for good measure, Severus snorted before striding off towards his Floo. "I'm getting too old for this shite," he muttered under his breath before grabbing a pinch of Floo powder out of the mortar on the mantelpiece. "SWARTHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER," he bellowed before stepping in.

Oh well. Narcissa will no doubt tell him about her payback at the upcoming garden party.

Tom buried his face in the hollow of his Consort's neck, his lips lazily pressing dry kisses to freshly washed skin as he curled around the other. He could feel Harry let out little hums of pleasure, once or twice huffing and squirming in Tom's arms as his hands explored slightly damp skin.

After their latest sexual play, a bath had been sorely needed. The quick wash they had earlier was no fix for the amount of bed play and garden planning they had indulged in. Tom had attempted to return the favor just to get waived away by Harry; the other had been overtaken by kittenish yawns and droopy expressions the whole bath, and it had been up to Tom to get the other properly cleaned up.

Not that he's complaining. A lap full of Harry can make anyone's day, and they'll have decades (centuries, if Tom has his way) to be together in the bedroom.

Poor Harry had fallen asleep in the bath, and Tom couldn't bring himself to wake the other long enough to dry off. He also couldn't keep his hands to himself and decided some exploration was warranted, once they were cocooned back in their bed.

Tom quite liked the weight Harry has somehow miraculously put on. It looks good on him, gives Tom something to hold on to. He never realized how *thin* Harry had been as a child, his memories rose-tinted and slightly distorted by time. He had felt like he was made

out of sticks and parchment by the time Tom got his hands on him, and he much rather have this firm, sturdy version of Harry in his bed.

Narcissa's comment about how quickly Harry had put on weight was still buried within his mind. Severus is an excellent brewer, but he is no god. Either something had contaminated Harry's potions, or Harry has mixed ancestry. Tom is leaning towards the latter; there's no doubt Harry is a Potter, with Tristan most likely his sire. The main branch of the Potter family is nearly as human as one could get, but who knows what Harry's mother was or was mixed with. Most Purebloods (even now, with a Minister who's arguably one-quarter Unseelie Sidhe due to rampant incest) don't like to acknowledge any non-human ancestry, and quite a few have a policy to politely ignore any mixed blood a family member could have. Very few families are open about their ancestries, such as the Malfoy's, Gaunt's, and the Prince's.

Tom always found it funny that those on the 'Light' side of the political spectrum were the biggest hypocrites. Always quick to point the finger at any Dark 'bigot', yet they go out of their way to ensure none of their own *sully* themselves with a Brownie or Banshee. At least with the Dark faction, they limit their blood supremacy to which generation of magical you were.

Harry sighed and wiggled, twisting in Tom's arms. Tom watched as the other settled, his eyes darting rapidly behind thin lids as Harry's brow furrowed. He could see dark green shadows roll behind closed eyelids, the sight reminding him to get in touch with Severus to see about lineage testing; Harry's lineage could have a great effect on his practical lessons.

That and Tom is curious. Insanely so. Harry is like a puzzle box or ring; unassuming at first, but as you get past the first few pieces he gets more and more complex. Tom probably has most of the pieces in front of him, but he's missing that one linchpin-

"Tom?"

Looking down, Tom watched as the most beautiful set of eyes fluttered open, squinting slightly. Endless fields of green and emerald, one scattered with drops of molten gold, blinked up at him.

"Tom? Y'okay?"

Tom squeezed Harry closer to him. "Perfectly fine, Darling. Just thinking."

Harry huffed. "Well, stop it. It's loud."

Tom hummed as Harry sighed before falling back to sleep. "I can't help it. I've always been drawn to riddles..."

Slipping his short, stacked spring cloak off of his shoulders, Lucius draped it over the back of his chair that sat ringside to the dancefloor. Taking his seat, he leaned his cane against his thigh before summoning the dance program for the evening.

As he flicked through the thick vellum pages, his eyes would occasionally dart over the edges, looking for his wife and Severus. The last he saw, they were waiting in the pool to get their numbers pinned onto them by one of the event coordinators, but that was a while ago, and-

Ah. There they are. And judging by Narcissa's scrunched-up nose and the tilt of Severus's head, they were no doubt getting bothered by that one Italian duo that was waiting next to them.

Lucius snorted. Maria Bellucci and Donatello Moscato were younger, relative newcomers to the circuit and had stepped all OVER everyone else's toes with their arrogant ways, certain that they were better than the locals. Narcissa and Severus had soundly disabused them of that notion by going on to set the highest records for technical proficiency on four different dances seen in nearly fifty years, then getting the platinum trophy for the Wizarding EuroDance Finals.

Needless to say, for the past three years, Maria and Donatello have done everything they could to be a thorn in their side.

Dancers and coordinators milled around for the next half hour before the energy of the room changed. Observers and dancer supporters cleared the floor and took their seats as a generic saucy, brassy tune pumped into the space. The first five rounds are set aside for the Youth (under 21) dancers, and Lucius spied his wife's blond 'do in the shadowy viewing gallery set aside for the Adult classes.

Lucius found himself quietly rooting for a few Youth couples. One was a sweet couple that reminded himself of he and Narcissa in their youth; they looked at each other with starry eyes and flushed cheeks, completely absorbed in each other. A second couple was quite cheeky, adding extra flair to spins and pivots, with the male reminding him quite a bit of Severus's extended family.

He'll need to check in to see if they're cousins. It would be good for his cantankerous old friend to mentor a fellow dancer.

As each match ended, Lucius gave polite applause. The local circuit, while fiercely competitive, was also pretty friendly. He doesn't want to be known as Narcissa's Rude Husband to the youngsters when they graduate to the Adult class, his mother taught him better than that.

There was a brief intermission after the last dance, long enough for sweepers to come out and clean the floor of any lost buttons, sequins, or beads that may have fallen off of dancer costumes. The brooms (pushed by Junior dancers and organizers) were charmed to smooth out scuffs left in the wax while also ensuring there would be enough texture to prevent any unnecessary slips. He was a bit miffed over that; the main reason it was Severus and not he dancing with Narcissa was due to a horrid twist and fall while Waltzing. After another two permanent injuries to other well-known dancers, the Western European Magical Dance Society decreed a change to the floors. Many had been complaining for years (himself included), but it was only after several life-altering falls that anything was done.

As the last sweeper left the floor, the music sounded. Lucius sat up as the Adult class glided out to the floor, strutting, striding, spinning, and twirling to their starting positions. Seconds after the last couple hit their mark, the first strains of one of Lucius's favorite Samba tunes came on. He watched as Narcissa and Severus separated, his eyes glued to his wife as she moved her hips and thighs in the opening steps of a basic samba.

Lucius smiled as Narcissa looked over her shoulder at him, her lids darkened with eyeshadow, giving them a heavy, siren look. She gave a sultry little pout at him as horns joined the light drumming, her movements speeding up slightly as her hands joined in.

'SAM-BA!'

A heavy hit of drums joined the female singer's shout, and they were off. Like a shot, Severus and Narcissa had closed the gap between them, starting to travel the floor in a clockwise circuit. Lucius sat back, ready to enjoy watching his wife's speedy footwork as Severus led her towards their first corner. As they leaned into their counter lunges, an outside foot tried to sneak its way between them and trip up Narcissa. Sitting up, Lucius watched as Narcissa neatly danced over the offending limb and twirled into Severus's arms, the man in question spinning with her and using his back to block an elbow that, if allowed to finish its trajectory, would have hit his wife in the eye. Briefly, he saw Severus glare at Couple 27 before leading Narcissa away, quickly making space between them and Maria and Donatello. Once they came up towards the judge's panel they spent a little extra time going through their steps before swanning off.

Knowing that Severus won't let anything happen to his wife, Lucius allowed himself to sit back and enjoy. He can plot once the dances are finished.

Chapter End Notes

Here's a link to the samba inspo for Severus's and Narcissa's performance:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPfAPwhFcmo>

The Hand of God III

Sipping his morning cup of tea, James frowned down at the piece of parchment laying in front of him in the breakfast nook. It's been nearly a full half-hour, and he still doesn't know how to word his request. Scrubbing his free hand over his face and through his hair, he then took a note out of his Lily's book and just jotted down what first came to mind.

Greetings, Consort Slytherin, Harry Potter,

You have my most sincere gratitude for your efforts protecting my youngest daughter, Daisy, from the attempted kidnapping performed not even a week back. I wish to extend an invitation to my home, so that I may properly thank you, ahead of the Spring Social season.

If it would not trouble you so, my family would be pleased to share brunch with you this upcoming Sunday.

Lord-in-Waiting James Fleamont Potter

Well, it's a start. It definitely needs some polish (he winced at some of the clunky tone changes), but at least he has **something** to work with.

"James?"

Looking up, he smiled at his beautiful wife. Lily must have just rolled out of bed, her light cotton nightgown was still heavily creased and her long red hair was in her usual sleeping braid. "Hey, there, beautiful, you from around here?"

Snorting, Lily grabbed a teacup and filled it from the teapot sitting on the stove. "It's been nearly twenty years, you can stop trying." In contrast to her words, her tone was playful.

"Twenty years? TWENTY years!? You are lying to me, Lily Flower, for you look as radiant as the day I first saw you on the Express!"

"Mm-hmm." Looking over, she spied his letter. "Writing to Harry?"

"Yes. Or, well, *trying* to. I don't want to sound too stuffy, but he **is** the consort of our current Minister..."

Lily just ah'd before frowning. "Just, make sure that **He** doesn't come here."

James winced. "Um, that may not be, er, possible-"

"I'll not have that *monster* in my home-"

"He's the Minister-"

"-and if Harry can't respect that-"

"LILY," James shouted, startling his wife out of her rant. "I understand, I truly do," he set his quill down and reached for her hands with his, "but, the last article that came out? He seems utterly **smitten** with his Consort. I don't think he'll let Harry out of his sight, let alone leave him unsupervised with the opposition."

Lily went quiet, looking down at their intertwined hands with an intense look. Suddenly, she jerked her hands free before twisting away from her husband. "Not that I'm not grateful to him, but why would such a sweet boy be with **him** ? Everyone knows what he did!" If she ever gets a chance to take that bastard out for what **he** did to her baby boy, even if she dies, he's going down with her.

James scratched the back of his head. "Honestly, I don't think Harry knows." Wincing, he held up his hands in a placating manner in response to the look of venom he received. "I mean it! And Paddy already told us about Harry getting pulled out of a Fold!"

"He also ranted about his Grandpappy being hot to trot with Harry. Vega, the lech, passed, what? Ten or so years ago? While improbable, it's not out the realm of possibility for Harry to have been in a Fold for that long." And Lily should know; she was the lead researcher on the charms sequence for Wizard Space for four years. She's one of a very small, select group who got to read about the foundations of Folding. As a British-born wizard, Harry would have **known** about the events of Samhain 1981. Even if she's generous and gives him a few extra years, he would have gotten trapped at the **earliest** some time in '83.

Looking towards the kitchen counter, James looked for the stack of newspapers they keep hold of for a variety of reasons. With a sweep of his wand, the pile shivered before an edition from a few days back slithered out and floated over. "Not to burst your bubble, my dear, but you might want to revise *back* his Folding date."

Reaching for the paper, she cocked her head. "How far back are we talking? 1980? '75?" With a loud snap, she unfolded the thicker-than-usual *Prophet* edition while leaning back against the stove.

"Try the 1930's."

Goggling at James, Lily blinked in shock before opening the paper and rifling to the center. She could just make out the sound of a quill scratching on parchment before her attention was absorbed by the exclusive interview that that harpy Skeeter snagged.

PROPHET EXCLUSIVE: INTERVIEW WITH MINISTER GAUNT AND CONSORT SLYTHERIN!

Special Correspondent Rita Skeeter

*You read that right, Prophet readers! Chief Minister reporter Rita Skeeter has once again gotten the scoop and scored an exclusive interview with our powerful and handsome Minister of Magic, T.M.R. Gaunt, and his sweet Consort, Harry J. Potter! Read on for never-before-seen anecdotes about our private, nay, **secretive**, Minister and how his Consort came to be!*

Rita Skeeter : Thank you so much, Minister, for granting me the opportunity for this interview! Quite a few of your constituents are intrigued by your Consort!

T.M.R. Gaunt : Always a pleasure, Rita. Sad that we can't sit down for these interviews more often.

R.S. : Quite so. Now, please! Introduce the person to have ensnared your heart! The people need to KNOW! *laughs*

T.M.R.G. : This is my Darling, Consort Harry James Potter.

Harry James Potter : Hello! *blushes*

R.S. : Oh, but he's so sweet! Tell us, Harry, how long have you and the Minister known each other?

H.J.P. : *laughs* All his life! Literally!

R.S. :... really?

H.J.P. : Oh, yes! In fact, I once changed his nappies!

R.S. :...what.

T.M.R.G. : *sighs*

"What." James looked up from underneath his fringe, his lips twitching at the absolutely bamboozled look on his wife's face.

H.J.P. : He was born in the same orphanage that I was living in. Ms. Cole, the matron, did an absolute bollocks job at placing his crib. So, I took charge of him.

R.S. : You were **born** in an orphanage, sir!?

T.M.R.G. : Indeed. And if it hadn't been for a young Harry, I would have turned out worse for the wear. We ALL would have.

R.S. : Which orphanage was it, sir? Bartholomew's? Milly Maggie's?

T.M.R.G. : A muggle one. One that housed anywhere between thirty and seventy-five children. More the latter during the partnership of Grindelwald and the muggle known as Hitler.

"James is this some sort of joke!?"

"No, Lily Flower. This is an actual article. I'm not pulling a fast one on you, Marauders Honor!"

R.S. : Goodness!

T.M.R.G. : Goodness indeed. And Harry, from the young age of six, took on some of the roles and duties as caretaker for our building. Money was very scarce, and it wasn't uncommon for

babies and young children to pass during the winter months. If it wasn't for Harry and his kind heart, I wouldn't be sitting here before you, today.

Skippping along the article (which took up the entire front page and half of the second), Lily's eyes stuttered to a halt.

R.S.: So, after Harry disappeared, how did you deal with it? A poor young boy of only thirteen losing his primary support in such a harsh world, oh, but it hits the heart!

T.M.R.G.: I had always been a tad difficult. Hard not to, when you're the only certified wizard surrounded by grubby muggle children. I admit I went a bit off the rails.

H.J.P.: Difficult? Tom, you were a certified brat.

T.M.R.G.: You hush! At first, I went through the stages of grief, spending a lot of time in denial and then wallowing in anger. I had felt betrayed. I had been adopted many times, just to get returned. I had thought, for the longest time, that Harry had finally given up on me. It wasn't until I was older, oh, about sixteen or so, that my mind changed.

R.S.: What happened?

*T.M.R.G.: Well, puberty, of course! *laughs* But really, I had made all of these grand designs, and seeing my year mates mooning at each other reminded me that, as the last viable Heir of Slytherin, that I needed to start looking for a partner. I made a list of what I felt was important and tried to match appropriate witches to it. Each one, though, had what I saw as a flaw; not warm-hearted enough, or hard-working, content to rest on their laurels.*

It wasn't until I neared the hols of Sixth Year that I woke up in a cold sweat, my mind finally putting two and two together and getting ten. I was comparing every eligible witch to Harry.

It was incredibly sobering. While some may view it as, well, weird, I never viewed Harry as family. He never treated me like a child, a little brother. And I never associated him with familial feelings. He was always just Harry in my mind.

R.S.: Sir, it almost sounds as though the reason you never took someone as a partner was because you had already given your heart to another!

Setting the paper aside, Lily felt both disgusted and impressed. Impressed because she never thought such a hate-filled man could feel such depths of love and devotion (borderline obsession) for another person.

Disgusted because, "isn't that a **tad** bit incestuous," she asked James while peering over the top of the paper. "I mean, Harry literally changed, fed, and burped the man as a baby. That's more **brotherly** than anything."

"Weeeeellllll, he **is** a Gaunt," James drawled, squinting down at his second draft of his letter.

"Jimmy, please explain this to me like the muggle-born I am, and don't assume I know the genealogy of every Pureblood family in the Isles." Really, James is incredibly intelligent, but

he can be rather daft at times.

James blushed slightly. "Oh, er. Remember how in the past you would complain about how, er, *consanguineous* the local Pureblood population is?"

"Yes. Especially Sirius's parents." When she found out Orion and Walburga were first cousins, she had felt a little sick.

"Er, uh," James stumbled over his words. "The Gaunt's? Take Sirius's parents and multiply that by a hundred. They're literally FAMOUS for it." Gaunt's family tree has so few forks in it in the more recent generations, James remembers his Auror mentor, Tiberius Ogden, once commenting that the man in question, through his mother, was uncle and brother to himself **and** his mother.

Thank Merlin Gaunt's mother laid with an unrelated wizard.

Both were quiet as they stared at each other until Lily's face scrunched up and she stuck out her tongue and gagged, making a sound similar to what the family cat, Susan, makes when she's coughing up a hairball. "Oh, but that's *disgusting!* Why!? HOW!?"

"Beats me," James scratched the back of his head again. "I can only guess that it has to do with the lack of other Parseltongue's. Got to keep the talent alive **somehow**, and, well," he put on a country bumpkin accent, "my daughter's lookin' mighty grown."

Lily bleached with a full-body shake before haphazardly folding the paper up and binging it towards the garbage bin. "Still, it doesn't explain why Harry went along with it. He should have been more apt to put up a fuss over the implications."

"Eh, he was stuck in a Fold for decades. And, uh well," James said awkwardly, "I don't fancy blokes, but even I can admit that Gaunt looks handsome. I mean, have you seen his cheekbones!?"

Lily looked hard at her flustered husband, who looked a mess of emotions and was blushing. "James, is there something you want to tell me?"

"What? Oh, no! Merlin, no!"

"Now, husband, you know I wouldn't judge," she smirked. "Well, I would, but more so on the matter of who you're with than your hunger for man-flesh."

"LILY!"

"...wait. Is that why you're so close to Sirius!?" Lily affected a stricken expression, but on the inside, she was cackling like a magpie.

"LILY, NO!"

"LILY, YES!"

Harry had just finished making breakfast, leaving a batch of the sausage and oat patties and fried potatoes under a lid to keep warm, before exploring one of the bookcases in their sitting room.

He had woken early, throat slightly sore, and decided to get an early start to the day. It was gently raining as he tucked Tom into the bed, and he threw on a simple underrobe before heading to the kitchen. The sausage mix had firmed up and bloomed wonderfully, and using the kitchen scale he divided up and flattened out the batch before frying them up. Dicing up potatoes and onion, Harry questioned why Tom would crave such a simple, poor meal when he had the money to eat larks tongues and drink pigeon's milk, but trying to figure out why Tom chooses some of the things he does has always been a lesson in futility.

After eating a plate and seeing that the remainder would be kept warm for Tom, Harry had decided to explore the bookshelves, quickly locating Tom's First Year textbooks. Opening to the first page in the Charms text after taking his usual spot on the smaller couch, Harry nearly went cross-eyed when he looked at the typeface. It was all curvy and flowery, like calligraphy, and the letters danced and squiggled in ways that made it nearly impossible to read. And the somewhat splotchy ink distribution certainly didn't help.

Huffing, he resorted to his old tried and true trick to reading difficult type. Using his fingers and thumbs, he blocked off the rest of the words with his hands, intently focusing on the first word of the first paragraph. It didn't stop the squiggling, not completely, but it allowed him to figure out enough of the shape of the word to decide what it was.

"The. Levitation. Charm," he said under his breath haltingly, moving his fingers to frame the next word as he read on, "is. a. basic. First. Year. spell. You. sworsh-, no, swish. and. flick. your. wand. while. saying. Wig-, wind, wingard-i-um. Levi-o-sa. Right, now where's me wand?" Looking up, he searched the room with his eyes before finding the box with his wand on a side table, exactly where it was left after leaving Ollivander's.

Retrieving it, he grasped it by the handle, melting back into his seat as warmth raced through his body. Focusing on the little cardboard box now sitting on the coffee table in front of him, he swished his wand, "*Wingardium Leviosa*," he quietly said before flicking.

For a few moments, nothing happened. He felt a little disheartened before his brow furrowed in determination. Nobody gets everything right on the first try every time. He just needs to practice! It's even possible that he's not saying the words right! It might be *Levi-o-SA* and not *Levi-O-sa*, and-

The coffee table shook before rocketing straight up. Harry squeaked as it slammed into the high ceiling, covering his head with his arms as the old, heavy wood splintered before showering down. He shouted as one leg nearly clobbered him as it fell and he curled up into a ball.

"*DARLING!?*" The doors leading from the sitting room to their bedroom flew open, the ancient wood bouncing off of the even more ancient stone. Tom frantically ran in, naked as the day he was born whilst brandishing his wand. His eyes were wide and wild.

"Um, hi," Harry squeaked from under his pile of wood splinters. "Er, sorry?" He jumped as a piece of wood fell from the ceiling and clattered to the floor. "I can explain!"

Slowly lowering his wand arm as he realized that his home was **not** being invaded, Tom looked from the pile of deconstructed wood on the floor, to Harry, up to the ceiling and back again before refocusing his blue eyes on his flustered Consort. "An explanation would be nice."

"We greet the Sun."

Rising from the bench in the easternmost garden on the Malfoy estate, Lucius, Draco, and Narcissa stood as one and faced the horizon. As the first rays of the sun broke, they closed their eyes and basked in the slowly increasing warmth.

Many Pureblood families have their days of rituals. Some are big, wondrous events. Others are small makings. A few involve no magic whatsoever. The Nott's hold a bonfire during the Equinox, casting items into the flames that represent what they want for the coming year. The Prince's still follow traditions from before the Roman invasion, sacrificing blood and flesh to gods forgotten even amongst wizardkind. And the Longbottom's, out on their half-wild country estate, give recognition to the sun that gives light and life to them all, even though their ritual has changed drastically over the centuries.

Most muggleborns and muggle-raised half-bloods believe that one can tell if a family is light or dark based on how they recognized the turning of the seasons, but that is an ignorant thought. The Potters, a family that has been light-aligned more often than not, once held rituals just as bloody as the Prince's. Draco only knows the bare bones of his godfather's seasonal rituals, but if even half of that is true, then the Potter's should be just as dark as them.

Once Draco could feel sunlight on his face and down to his collar, still with his eyes closed, he reached for his parent's hands. He's always thought his family's spring ritual superior to most others; there's no magic, no grand gestures. They simply acknowledge the return of the sun from its wintery prison.

Once the sun was fully above the horizon, they broke their handfasting and returned to the Manor, Narcissa leading the way. Later in the year when they say farewell to the sun, it would be Lucius leading the group, representing the change from fertile life to dormant sleep (for it is only fitting that a woman represents life and fertility, being it is from women that mankind is born).

Entering their home, Draco broke off from his parents. They will have roughly an hour of contemplation before rejoining for breakfast, time to use to plan out the year, or just spend time on themselves. When he is older and married, Draco and his wife may even use that time to fulfill their marital duties; a child conceived on such a day is said to be blessed with good luck and powerful magic.

Soon after he was relaxing in the bath. Once breakfast is finished, he'll need to figure out how to apologize to his mother and he'll be walking on eggshells around her for some time yet.

Who knows what unholy retribution she'll be visiting on him in the future.

"Again."

Sighing, Harry waited for Tom to conjure a simple (if ugly) vase. Once it settled on the ground in the center of the debris-filled spare room Tom had led them to after that morning's bit of excitement, Harry swished and flicked his wand. "*Wingardium Leviosa*," he said, his tone flat and bored.

Just like the coffee table in their sitting room, and the moldering bookcase after that, and the crockery set after that, and the wooden table after *that* (which was unintentional; not Harry's fault that the chipped bowl he was attempting to levitate also brought the table it was sitting on with it!), it did nothing for a few moments before launching like a mortar straight up into the air and colliding with the stone ceiling.

Tom watched the pulverized fragments rain down from the ceiling, scowling the whole time. Harry's pronunciation and form were technically perfect. Textbook, even. And Tom couldn't measure any great surge of magic, either. There were no tells of Harry yanking on his connection to magic and throwing it into the spell, like a person using a bucketful of water to put out a candle.

...maybe it has to do with Harry's ancestry? This, combined with the Apple Tree tomfoolery, is really making Tom think that Harry's nonhuman relative is pretty recent. He really should see about getting Harry tested; if the initial testing attempt with Healer Parkinson is anything to go by, he's going to have to have Severus create a potion from scratch.

While Tom was busy making his 'I have a new puzzle' face and staring off into the middle distance, Harry just sighed and looked out the nearby window. If the way Tom's eyebrows are furrowed is any indication, this could be a while.

Spying a fleck in the distance, he squinted at it from behind his glasses before realizing it was an **owl** of all creatures. He opened the double-paned window, knowing that the bird must be delivering something; owls are mostly nocturnal and won't go about in daylight unless they absolutely had to. Only a wizard would be fool enough to make them a messenger bird.

Standing to the side, he watched as the bird (a barn owl that had lovely caramel coloring) glided inside, turning in a circle before landing on the stand Tom conjured for it. Fluffing its feathers, it looked between the two of them before hooting at Harry, holding out its leg in a silent plea to be relieved of its (light) burden.

"Ah-ahh," Tom chided with a flick of his wand as Harry reached for the letter. "My wards are tight, but I shan't endanger you." As the letter soared over to him, he lazily tossed a few

spells at both the crisply folded parchment and the owl. "Zarba! Some nibbly for the owl, please."

A hook holding a plate of small, scone-like treats and a watering bowl appeared on the bird stand, and Harry took the opportunity to fuss over the bird. "Cor, but yer a looker. Such nice plumage...", he trailed off as he gently stroked the owl's caramel bib. It hooted quietly before nibbling on one of his fingers. "Oi, who's the letter from?"

"Patience, patience," Tom demurred with a roll of his eyes. After a few moments, he hummed. "It's from James Potter. The father of the little girl you saved. He would like to invite you to his home for brunch on Sunday."

"Oh, that's nice. A bit awkward for you, though, innit?" The owl clacked its beak before stretching a leg towards Harry's wrist, gingerly wrapping a talon around it before walking its other leg over and settling. Shaking its head, it gave a yawn before looking up at him plaintively. Knowing a voiceless plea for scratches when he sees one (Tom was notorious for wanting his scalp scratched as a child), Harry indulged the little thing.

"Hm. If they expected you to come alone, then they're stupider than I thought." Folding the letter back up, Tom flung it with a twist of his wrist. The parchment curved through the air away from him before twisting towards the open window, dissolving into ash as it passed the window frame. "Despite our past of crossing wands, neither Mr. Potter nor his wife is a threat to me. If anyone would feel awkward, it would be them."

"...why **would** you have crossed wands, though," Harry asked whilst inspecting the owls' talons. "You're the *Minister*. Are duels over governmental policy really that common?" After not receiving an answer for a few moments, he looked up to see Tom with a fixed expression. "Tom. What did you do? And why are you still naked!?"

Tom snorted, crossing his arms over his chest. "Why are you assuming *I* did anything," he demanded, ignoring Harry's other question; this is **his** home and he'll do as he damn well pleased!

"Need I remind you of the rabbit."

Wincing at the sharp reminder, Tom engaged Harry in a brief staredown before capitulating. "I...may have started a revolution."

"Go on," Harry drawled.

"...which involved assassinating the then-Minister."

"...and?"

"...and storming Hogwarts," Tom sighed.

"...AND?"

Tom threw his hands up, exasperated. "And holding the entire Wizengamot hostage at wandpoint! Are you done giving me the third degree!?"

Harry just stared at him for a few moments. "You know, I figured you'd get up to something like that." He had always pegged Tom as becoming either a renowned politician or a war criminal. Possibly a mob boss. Harry should kick himself for not seeing Tom doing all three (he **knows** Tom has to have organized crime connections. Committing murder but balking at racketeering? Perish the thought!).

"Oh, my Darling, but your lack of faith in me hurts. Really cuts me at the heart," Tom mimed getting shanked with a dagger to the chest.

"*Pft*. It just means I know you. And go put... *that*," Harry flopped his unburdened hand towards Tom's middle, "away. You'll poke someone's eye out!"

Chuckling, Tom did as he was told, putting a little extra strut into his step. If Harry watched him a little more attentively than he normally would have, well, Tom won't call him out on it.

Entering Princemoor Townhouse, Regulus thankfully handed over his cloak to Severus's one house-elf, Miffy, before heading further into the home. It was still early enough that the other man would most likely still be abed; he normally was the day after a competition.

Which is fine for Regulus. He had gotten caught up between his brother and Lord Potter having a fit over **something**. He honestly hadn't paid too much attention, given that he was busy with research into an Astronomy project, but he had quickly developed a headache and needed out.

Approaching Severus's bedroom, he gently touched the doorknob. Not receiving the mild shock that his quasi-partner uses as a 'Do Not Disturb' notice, he slipped off his ankle boots before pushing the door open. Only hearing the deep, even breaths of someone held tight in the clutches of sleep, he fully entered the room, sighing as his headache lessened immediately in the dark room.

Treading over polished hardwood and then over thick, plush carpeting, Regulus came to the more open side of the bed. Taking a few moments to slide off his outer robes and set them on top of a nearby chest of drawers, he found the edge of the covers and slid under them. Finding the lump that was Severus, he curled an arm around a warm waist, burying his face between silk-covered shoulder blades. Hearing a sleepy grunt, he shushed the other before taking a few deep breaths as a larger, warmer hand covered his. Soon after, he was dozing.

Tom returned to the kitchen while Harry took a much-needed shower, eager to dig into a meal he hasn't had in literal *decades*. Seeing the large, covered plate and smelling the rich, savory sausage and oat patties, his mouth started watering.

Adjusting the belt of his housecoat before sitting down, he spread a conveniently-placed linen napkin on his lap before lifting the cover on his plate. Setting it aside, he drank in the sight of thick, crisped patties and fried potatoes.

Grabbing his fork, he cut into the largest patty and popped a piece into his mouth. He moaned, flavors bursting on his tongue just like the nostalgia in his brain, memories as a child of standing on a stool next to Harry and making sausage and oat balls before squishing them flat on the countertop, or of waking up on a cold winter morning and feeling warmth throughout Wool's as Harry had breakfast going on the hob, flickering through his brain.

Tom quickly demolished his plate (large as it was) and looked to the cold chest for seconds. Opening the box (designed similar to a muggle refrigerator) he found a large covered casserole dish. Lifting the lid showed a frankly ridiculous amount of patties, which made Tom frown.

Did Harry make extra? After cooking up breakfast? Last night? Tom had watched as the other measured out and mixed the ingredients; one pound each of sausage and oats, spiced to taste, and enough water to cover to an inch over. Even after the oats bloom and everything gets mixed together, you can only yield so much.

This was easily **double** what Harry should have gotten out of his batch. And that's including what Harry could have eaten, and what Tom did.

Harry must have made extra when Tom wasn't looking. He'll ask the other when he's finished getting wood dust out of his hair.

Narcissa smirked behind her teacup as her son squirmed in his chair at her table in her solarium. She knows it's because he's... *concerned*, about how she'll deal with his less-than-stellar handling of yesterday's revelation. They both know that a simple apology won't be satisfactory enough, that she'll want her pound of flesh, and she is delighting in watching him squirm like a fish on a hook.

Draco awkwardly cleared his throat, his cheeks red in mortification. "Mother. Er, about yesterday..." he trailed off.

She let him simmer for a few moments. "Ah, yes. Yesterday," she purred.

"...my conduct was very poor and much out of line. I don't think the words are strong enough, but I am genuinely sorry for how I handled myself."

Oh, but he's adorable when shamefaced, she thought. Setting down her teacup, Narcissa leaned back into her chair. "You are correct. While such a possible situation is distressing, the way you went about confronting us was incredibly irrational and immature. But," she sighed, "you are young and coddled. You are incredibly lucky to be living in a time where the most distressing thing that could happen to you is possible parental infidelity." Reaching towards the teapot, her lips twitched as Draco lept to take it and refill her cup. "Still, the point stands that you reacted more like a child than a young man nearing adulthood. We will need to work with you more on comportment during stressful situations. I would hate to think about what could happen if you reacted in such a way during, say, a *Wizengamot session*."

Draco flinched at her steely enunciation. "Yes. The damage to the family name would be extensive." He nodded woodenly to emphasize his point.

Narcissa smiled brightly, Draco trying to hide his shiver at the sight. "Good to see you understand, my dragon. Now, run along. I have a few minor details for Monday's Garden Party to finalize."

As Draco scarpered from the room, he passed Lucius. As his son left, he took the newly vacated chair across from his wife. "Did your talk go well, my dove," he asked while fixing himself a bit of tea.

"Quite well," she replied. Seeing her husband sporting a catlike grin, she raised her eyebrows. "And you seem to be in a good mood. Thoughts?"

Lucius chuckled. "You won't have to worry about Maria and Donatello."

"...what did you do, and where are the bodies?" While she is far more bloodthirsty than her husband, he does have a vicious streak a mile wide, it's just buried deep.

She wouldn't put it past him to have made 'arrangements' for an 'accident'.

He just looked at her innocently. Or, well, as innocently as possible for a man of forty.

"Lucius..."

Laughing, he held up a hand. "Now, would I do something over an elbow to the back?"

"In a hot second," Narcissa shot out. "If you jeopardize my chances for a Golden Cup-"

"I won't keep you from getting another shiny piece of metal-"

"Lu, you dote on those 'shiny pieces of metal' just as I do," Narcissa snorted. "After all, *who* was it who special ordered a *Sun Cotton* flannel to polish my trophies with?" She huffed in amusement at the mock-glare her observation got her. "Now. What did you do?"

Lucius tried to stare her down, buckling after a few moments with a roll of his eyes. "*Fiiiiine*. I MAY have made a few comments to the French judge. And MAY have offered a few memories for the League pensive."

"...go on..."

He sighed. "And I may have mentioned the unsportsmanlike conduct to the other visiting league scouts. After all, I don't think any of the *Eastern* leagues would want someone like that representing their nations on the international level."

With a hand to her chest, Narcissa sighed. "Lucius, have I said how much I **adored** you, lately?"

"I believe about twenty minutes ago, while I had your robes thrown over my head as I-". He laughed as Narcissa swatted at his arm with a hiss.

"Lucius!"

Memories VI

Chapter Notes

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

Closing their bedroom door, Harry sighed, resting his forehead on the doorframe. On the other side of the thick, dry-rotting slab of wood, he could still hear Billy's horrified screaming, Ms. Cole's caterwauling, and the backing chorus of over a dozen children causing a ruckus.

Behind him, he could hear slight shifting and the sound of old, rusty bedsprings creaking.

Gathering his mental strength, he took a deep breath. "Tom." The shifting stopped.

Looking over his shoulder, he saw that Tom had shrunk in on himself. His boney shoulders were hunched and his head drooping, while he nervously played footsie with himself. Even from this distance, Harry could see Tom's knuckles were white as he clenched the edge of his mattress.

"Tom, why? What happened, to make you *fink* that was an appropriate action to take!?"

Tom squirmed, looking up mulishly at Harry from under his lashes.

"Tom, answer me," Harry snapped, turning around fully to look at the youngster while folding his arms.

Tom went squidgy before kicking his legs out. "Billy called me a freak, an' said tha' no one wanted me 'cause I was th'son of Lucifer!"

"So you went an' 'anged 'is rabbit from th' rafters? After snappin' its neck an' butcherin' it!? You though' tha' was appropriate t'do!?" For God's sake, may the Angel Gabriel give him the patience to deal with his boy.

Tom didn't answer, only looking away and swinging his feet aggressively from his perch.

The silence lingered for many long moments; Harry glared at Tom while Tom refused to meet his gaze. It broke when Harry heaved out another sigh and covered his face with one hand, leaning back against the door. "Tom," he said with a thick edge to his voice, the unfamiliar tone causing the young boy to look up sharply. "I get it, Billy's a lil' shit who needs to have a come t'Jesus meetin', but this ain' it."

"*Hmph*. Jesus innit here. Somebody's got to take Billy down a notch, an' I guess it was up t'me-", Tom jumped as Harry's head snapped up and he glared at him.

"No' if it means you ge' shut up! Is that what you want!? To get put into one o'them loony bins!? 'cause if you don't get ahold of yerself, that's where you'll end up!"

"So wha' am I su'pposed t'do!? Nuffin'!?"

"No, you lil' shit, yer to get yours with no one bu' the arsehole in question knowin'," Harry snapped with a glare.

Tom glared back at him for a few moments before looking away with a huff. "You say that like it's easy t'do."

"It's plenty easy, so long as you actually FINK!" Tom yelped as Harry thumped the youngster on the head with a bony knuckle. "Why you fink we haven't seen that cockwomble Davis? You though' 'e just left Cassie alone, outta th'goodness of 'is heart?"

Tom rubbed his head while squinting in thought. "But, I still see 'im. When I go to th'market wif you!"

"Gettin' back at any asterbar who bothers you means more than creasin'em when nobody's lookin'! We had a bi' of a cackle, an' I gave 'im a warnin'."

Tom opened his mouth, no doubt to smart off at Harry *again*, before he closed it abruptly with a snap. Harry could only guess what was going through his boy's squirrely head as blue eyes lit up, he sat up properly, and a cherubic smile took over his face. "'arry. You didn't **say** I can't do nuffin'. Jus' don' get *caught*. "

Knowing he was going to regret this, Harry nodded. "...yeah."

With a smile like the sun peeking out from the clouds, Tom nodded decisively before hopping from the bed. "I'll keep that in mind! Thank you, 'arry!"

As Tom practically skipped out of their room, Harry had the sinking feeling that Tom is deliberately misunderstanding his point, but, by now, it's far too late for Harry to fix it.

"I need an oily," he sighed.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone wants to do a translation of this fic, feel free to do so! Just let me know so that I can make a collection for others to peruse! I've had a few people approach asking to translate into other languages (French, Chinese, etc) so I am giving blanket permission!

Mana

Chapter Notes

...um, hi? SORRY FOR BEING GONE SO LONG HERE HAVE SOME PORN! >:D

"I just don't get it, Pads," James said while dramatically flopping back into the thick leather chair placed before Sirius's desk. "Why would she *insinuate* such a thing!? And with that vile bastard of all people!?"

Sirius shook his head in disgust before leaning towards the small liquor stand he keeps close to his desk. "That, Jimmy my boy," he said sagely while uncorking a bottle of *Irish Red* whiskey, "I cannot explain. Women are creatures of mystery! Who **knows** what goes on in their mysterious minds! You want a shot?" He shook the bottle at his best mate.

James looked at the bottle with a winsome expression. "I *really* shouldn't-"

"More for me," Remus's voice sounded before his hand shot between the two men, grabbing hold of the bottle's neck. The two others shouted at him as he took a large swing of the drink, with Sirius going so far as to call Remus a 'foul scoundrel' for stealing his alcohol.

"Oh, shut it," the more mild-mannered of the three admonished. "It's been nearly two hours since Prongs galloped in, caterwauling about his 'manly manliness' being besmirched and how Lily betrayed him. I'm surprised Regulus lasted as long as he did before scarping."

"Reggie couldn't have left, he-, wait, where's Reggie," Sirius questioned suspiciously.

Remus sighed. "I already told you; he buggered off. I think it was sometime during James' soliloquy about that one bloke who works in the deli down Fantastic Alley's cheekbones, and that he can acknowledge another man's appearance and still be absolutely, one-hundred-percent, heterosexual."

"Well, I'm right, ain't I," James snapped in the sudden silence.

"Listen, Jimbo, if you're curious and Lily's fine with it, I know a guy," Sirius suggested before talking over James' response of a good imitation of a dog throwing up. "But now I need to know where Reggie pissed off to. I HATE making party plans-,"

"-but Paddy, you love to party? Remember that one with the burd who could do that ping-pong ball trick-?"

"*AHEM*," Sirius coughed loudly to shut a smirking Remus up (and James' guffaws). "That was a decade ago, and a different type of party! The good kind! No, I had Reggie taking care of our Summer Solstice event." His face screwed up and he made a 'yuck!' sound, with the

other two yucking in agreement. "I need to know if he finished so I know what colors to get my robes done in."

James shrugged and looked at Remus, and Remus shrugged at Sirius. "He didn't say anything. Looked like he was in pain, though, which I can sympathize with; dealing with you two has always been a pain in my arse."

Feeling squeaky clean, Harry tossed on a pair of lounge trousers and a matching shirt. They were a bit long on him and he had to roll up the cuffs of the sleeves and legs, but they were cozy and warm and in a soft lilac color. Grabbing his wand, he was disappointed to see the owl had gone but was more than happy to have Hedwig's company.

The little falcon had just finished making herself comfortable in his hair when Tom shouted from the sitting room. Immediately after entering, Harry was accosted by the other, getting jostled and upsetting Hedwig into a chirpy rant. "Oi!"

"I have an idea," Tom proclaimed, tugging Harry back to the room that they had been experimenting in earlier. "I want you to try casting with a few other wands." Stopping just inside the door, Tom released Harry's hand and snapped his fingers. "I have been thinking-"

"-dangerous, that-"

"Hush! As I was **saying**, I had been thinking; as we suspect, you may not be fully human. There is the distinct possibility that your magic may be more potent." Zarba appeared, holding in her hands a flower basket full of wands in different woods, shapes, and lengths. "Because your wand, well, *chose* you, it is the most conducive to your magic. I wish to test this."

As Tom spun his own wand with a flourish and started conjuring and summoning objects for "testing", Harry winced.

He has a distinct feeling that this is not going to be as simple as Tom is making it out to be.

Being the only responsible adult out of the three, Remus was the one who corked the alcohol before shuffling his two whinging brothers-in-all-but-blood towards the Small Dining Room for a late lunch.

It's closer to being an early dinner, but *details*.

Sitting at the head of a table that could easily seat twelve, Sirius took his time getting comfortable, savoring the irritated sighs and grunts of his guests as they waited for him to Summon his (only) house-elf, Kreacher.

"KREACHER!"

"*Fucking finally*," James muttered under his breath as the elf in question, an ugly and surly little fellow with a constant glare on his face, appeared with an unpleasant pop.

"Ungrateful, unfavored Master bellowed for Kreacher," the elf groused.

"Indeed I have, foul cretin," Sirius snarked back whilst ignoring Remus's put-upon sigh and Kreacher's grumbling. "Fetch us a spot of din-din! And my brother, as well."

"Good Master Regulus is not in residence."

Sirius looked at the elf. "Why? Where is he!? I need to know if he finished planning the party!"

"Padfoot, calm down," James shushed while Remus shot Kreacher an apologetic look before wincing at the milk-curdling sneer he received in turn. "For all we know, he had to step out to place an order, or, er, approve decorations? Merlin, he could be out sampling food for the event, for all we know! I know **I'M** hungry," James trailed off with meaningful emphasis.

"Oh." Like a switch had been flipped, Sirius went from shouty to calm. "Well, yes, going out for a tasting at this time would make sense; dinner and work all at once!" Turning towards Kreacher, he turned his nose up at the elf. "Where has my brother gone? *The Golden Goose*? Mayhap *The Strumming Harp*? Ooh," he lit up like a child on Christmas morning, "maybe even *Avalon*!" His mouth started watering; they have a **wonderful** roasted capon!

"Good Master Regulus is out with his lover," Kreacher intoned, a sly (and slightly sadistic) look on his wrinkled face. "They will be doing dinner and a show."

Sirius's face transformed, turning smarmy and gleeful at this little tidbit whilst James and Remus leaned forward, also interested in this bit of gossip. "Oh-ho! And who *is* the fair lady?"

Grinning a grin that showed off every one of his sharp, yellowed teeth, Kreacher said in the most respectful tone he could muster, " *Honored* Junior Lord of the Dales, Master Severus Snape-Prince, of course!" Dropping his voice a tad, the elf gleefully tacked on, "a gentleman of *good breeding*."

"WHAT."

Sighing, Harry set aside the wand he had been holding (a stubby little thing, only six inches from shank to chipped tip) as the dust settled. He didn't have to try hard to hear Tom grinding his teeth, despite the taller man being nearly two yards away.

Not that Harry could blame the other. For the teeth grinding, he means. After all, it's not every day that the other man is wrong about something, and today seems to be a day of wrongness, for Tom. Every theory and hypothesis he's had in regards to Harry's relationship to not just his wand, but others, have been blown to smithereens.

In some cases quite literally.

With a rumbled growl starting in his chest, Tom spun before releasing the noise as a shout. Flicking his wand in a series of jabs, he conjured and destroyed crockery pieces in quick succession, going from one piece to another before the shards of the previous one could even hit the floor.

And frankly, who could blame him? Not only is Tom rarely wrong, but in this case, he's so wrong, that he's not even in the right Quidditch pitch; every wand Harry has touched, no matter its temperament, has fairly leaped to his bidding. It was like watching a dribbling garden hose suddenly turn into a geyser, and Tom doesn't know *why!?*

"Oi! Tommy-boy!"

Snapping towards the voice, blue eyes hyper-focused on the diminutive form in front of him. Green eyes glared back as calloused hands sat on unimpressed hips and a bare foot tapped against the cold, naked stone. Bristling along with her master was a ball of feathers, glaring at Tom from a wild thatch of black curls.

Huffing, Harry shoo'd Tom away. "Go on an' get! Go blow up somefing els'where! I don' need ye mussin' me up!"

Snarling, Tom spun on his heel before stalking from the room.

Snorting at the dramatic display, Harry rolled his eyes before reaching up and plucking Hedwig from his hair, curling his palm around her fluff before bringing her close and giving her head a little kiss. "Dramatic little wanker, ain' he?"

He smirked at her trilled agreement.

"REGULUS! WHERE ARE YOU!?" Pounding on Snivellus's front door whilst bellowing, Sirius snarled. That no-good, stupid two-bit greasy bastard! How DARE he lay a finger on his baby brother! When Sirius was done with him, that fucker would wish-!

"Siri, cool it," James barked while he and Remus tried to pull the other away. Don't get James wrong, he doesn't like Snape *or* Regulus, but Regulus was his best friend's little brother; if Sirius asked, he'd do anything he could to protect the younger man.

But right now? Sirius was *incensed*. Who knows what he'd do if he saw Snape in this state?

"James is right," Remus said with a slight growl. He barred his teeth as Sirius bucked in their hold, and his sharp eyes caught a few onlookers watching. "And besides, they're BOTH consenting adults! Regulus can shag who he wants-!"

"THAT GREASBALL'S DOSING MY BROTHER I JUST KNOW IT! REGGIE!"

With a shudder and a click, the door opened. Sirius was ready to barge in (and had already taken about three steps past the threshold, James and Remus following hot on his heels) but stopped short.

In his way was a tiny, nay, diminutive she-elf. She was of poor appearance, missing one curly ear and she had a milky eye, but her pinched face was screwed up in a mou of determination. "Youses are RUDE," she squalled in a high, reedy voice. "Guestes are to be's POLITE when invited IN!"

Snarling like a dog, Sirius was poised to do **something** unsavory, but Remus stepped in. "Pardon my friend's rudeness, but we were hoping to see his brother, Regulus Black. Is he here?"

The elf opened her mouth, but a quiet (though tight) voice interrupted. "I'm here, now, Miffy. If you want, you can go back to your quarters."

James, Sirius, and Remus watched as Regulus, dressed quite nicely in a black muggle-style suit vest, cravat, dress slacks, and shoes, came down the stairs from an upper floor. His hair was freshly washed and dried and pulled back into a silk charcoal ribbon. His cufflinks and cravat pin glinted in the sunlight that streamed in from the tall window that was set above the front door and ran up to the roof, and even James could tell that his dress shirt was starched. The man was clearly dressed for a night out on the town.

"Reggie," Sirius barked. "What's this about you and Snivellus *dating*!? Since when!?"

Regulus rolled his eyes, taking his time descending the last few steps before addressing his brother. "If you had bothered to *pay attention*, you would know we've been in a relationship for over a decade."

"**WHAT!?**" Both James and Remus winced at Sirius's outburst. "YOU MEAN TO SAY YOU'VE BEEN FUCKING-"

"Shut it, mutt!" A jet of pearly light darted around a corner and came down the ground floor corridor before splashing across Sirius's face. It glued itself over his mouth before coalescing into the shape of a zipper. With a loud 'zip', it closed, the tongue of the zipper disappearing before Sirius could wrench it open.

Looking back down the corridor, the three men not occupied with a sudden transformation saw Severus. He had his shirtsleeves rolled up and was wearing a cooking apron, and Remus could smell garlic, olive oil, and herbs wafting out from what must be the kitchen.

"Sev," Regulus admonished, the nickname and how easily it rolled off his tongue upsetting his brother even more. "I have it under control."

"He upset Miffy," Severus growled, crossing his arms over his chest. Between his spread feet a tiny black ball of fur with bright orange eyes hissed.

"And I'll handle it. Now, head on back to the hob; I dare say Miffy is upset and will only calm down after a meatball or two." Regulus's voice was low and calm.

Severus continued to stand there, glaring at his unwanted guests while the angry black kitten at his feet spat.

"Severus."

Rolling his eyes with a snort, Severus grunted before lifting one of his feet into a point, the toes still on the ground. The black cat spat once more before turning primly, rebuffing the situation with cat butt before it clung to the bottom of Severus's trouser leg as the man turned and walked back to what must be the kitchen.

Sighing, Regulus turned back to his brother and his two friends. "Now that that's been diffused," he directed towards Sirius, "can you act like an adult for long enough we can talk, or am I going to have to ask you to leave?"

Letting out a series of grunts and exaggerated gestures, Sirius then gasped as his mouth unzipped, even though his lips were still transformed into metal. "Reggie! What the fuck? *Snivellus!*? Don't you have more **taste** than that!?"

"If all you're going to do is denigrate my choice in partners, then this conversation is over."

Before Sirius could really put his foot in it, James rezippped his mouth shut. While those two argued through a series of glares, Remus stepped up to be peacemaker. "While I agree that you are, er, free to enjoy-," Remus sighed as Sirius let out a loud, angry grunt, "-who you wish, you have to admit that such a revelation would, uh,-"

"Sirius can mind his own business," Regulus sniped. "He's done so since Hogwarts, and he can continue in that vein."

Throwing off James's hand, Sirius once again unzipped his mouth before interrogating his younger brother. "What's he blackmailing you with? What dirt does he have? Is he slipping you something? Potions? Roofies?"

"ROOFIES," James yelled in shock before a loud, meaty crack rang out.

Sirius swore as his vision swum and his jaw blazed in pain. He wheeled before a hand grabbed his arm and kept him from getting laid out on the floor. His free hand cradled his jaw and he spat to the side, blood mixing with saliva as he tongued the side of his mouth. His eyes widened in shock and he stuck out his tongue, a bloody molar tumbling from the tip before landing on the floor.

Everyone stared in shock before turning to the assailant. Regulus's chest heaved, and he looked mad enough to breathe fire. His right fist had a stream of blood running down the knuckles, drops falling to the floor with a plink.

*"Don't you EVER say such a thing about Sev **again**,"* he hissed. "Now. Get out."

With a blast of wind, all three men were swept from their feet. As they blew through the air the door banged open. With a shout and tumble, all three were deposited in the middle of

the boulevard in an ungainly heap. Right before the door slammed closed, Regulus threw Sirius's tooth, nailing his brother square between the eyebrows before the younger man bellowed something down the hall towards Snape.

"Er, Pads," Remus said from the bottom of the pile. "Don't know if you know, but I think you fucked up."

Grunting, Tom slammed his fist into the punching bag. The chain holding the bag up from the floor creaked loudly as the heavy object swung. His other fist quickly followed, and soon he had built up a rapid, steady rhythm, punching his frustration away.

Harry is fucking impossible. He's breaking every rule of wandlore that exists, and while that would normally excite Tom, right now he's so mad he could bark.

EVERY wand that Harry touched was exuberant in its desire to be used. ALL of them. Even those that were the polar opposite of his wand literally trembled in his hand, nearly singing as Harry's magic surged through the wood before it blasted itself to pieces, with only a mournful cry ringing out and echoing whatever beast was harvested for the wand core.

Wandlore has Rules; rules for woods and cores, how certain materials just don't mix because they have different harmonies, or that certain wands or materials will *never* work for some people for the same reason.

But... *god fucking damn it, Harry!*

With a growled shout, Tom swung at his punching bag with a haymaker, his wrapped knuckles digging into the thick canvas fabric. With a dry ripping sound, a tear formed, quickly dancing around the cylindrical bag before it split in half. The bottom half, along with all the sand and wood chips inside, fell to the floor, leaving Tom no choice but to stand there, panting as the dust settled.

Figuring he let Tom have enough time to unwind, Harry set down the wee child's sweater he had cast on. It was being knitted out of a white, silky wool-like yarn, and was a cardigan-style with a bit of flair at the waist. He had even been lucky enough to find five small, metal and enamel buttons in the shape of little daisies to go along with it.

He was nervous. The day after tomorrow he was going to have brunch with what could be his only living family, and here he was boffing their main political adversary.

Will they like me? Would they like me enough to stay in touch, despite being with Tom? Would they decide I'm not worth it?

Anxiety he's not felt since he was a young child reared its ugly head; he never told Tom this, but he's been adopted out and returned nearly as often as Tom himself. His possible

parents always had the same excuses; he's too small, or he looks too freaky (what with his one eye), or that he's got to be a changeling.

Bad things never **happened**, per se, like what did with Tom, but after a week or two, he was being sent back to Wool's and await another family to take a chance on him. Eventually, he stopped trying to get adopted out, knowing it was a futile exercise.

*But Daisy is a **cousin**, and so are her siblings and Mr. Potter...*

Shaking the wistfulness from his shoulders, Harry padded out from his and Tom's shared quarters. Once he stepped out into the hallway, the blue lighting that gently glowed from the gemstones embedded in the walls and floor changed hue on his right. Following the changing colors, he was led to a room in what he thinks is just below ground level. Loud thuds could be heard behind the wooden door, and out of curiosity Harry gently pushed it open.

Light spilled around the frame, and after a moment his eyes adjusted and took in the sight of a brightly-lit indoor gym. Some of the machinery and equipment he easily recognized, knowing of them from the boxing club that was a twenty-minute walk from Wool's, but there were also contraptions alien to him.

Once he looked his fill, he found the source of the sounds; Tom was near the back of the room, shirtless and pouring sweat as he swung at a punching bag. His back was to Harry, treating the other to the sight of a defined trapezius or deltoid, and of dewed skin moving and flowing like water-

*Oh, God, he smells **so good**.* Harry could feel his mouth water. He could smell Tom's scent from here; salty and musky and something he couldn't describe.

Harry always had a sensitive nose. It's one of the reasons Ms.Cole sent him to do the shopping; he could smell rot and wrongness, no matter what a shopkeeper did to cover it up. He was also the first to tell when it was time to plant in the little back garden, something about the earth and air changing in scent always gave him a heads up.

But right now, his nose was treated to a smorgasbord of delightful, *delicious* smells. The sweat trickling down Tom's body covered his bare torso in a glistening sheen, and Harry's eyes zeroed in on the damp patches in the skintight creases and folds of Tom's fitness leggings, his gaze resting on the v-junction of his hips and thighs and he just wanted to **stuff** his face in there and sniff-

"Darling?"

Tom's eyebrows furrowed, confused. He had turned around upon hearing the door open, curious as to who was bothering him. Zarba would have simply popped in, but if she was leading Harry...

He was happy to see Harry in the doorway (and he's always utterly delighted to see his little Consort), but that soon changed when he looked at the other. Harry looked...strange.

Dazed and poleaxed would be the best way to describe him; like he had just been smacked in the face with a mackerel. His beautiful green and gold eyes were open wide, and as Tom watched, the pupils started to expand-

-oh.

Tom wanted to preen; he knows full well how arresting his appearance is and has used it to his advantage for both personal and political gain.

Still, seeing Harry get worked up over him is quite the ego boost.

His nose scrunching, Tom subtly leaned towards an armpit and sniffed. Ugh, but he *reeks*-

"Harry," he squawked, startled when thin(er) arms wrapped around his middle, and Harry shoved his face into Tom's sternum. "Darling, are you okay?"

Tom paused in his fussing at the loud, near pig-like inhale that erupted from Harry. *What the absolute fuck-*

"Tom," Harry moaned into his skin, the sound shooting straight to his dick. "*You smell so good...*" Harry's voice was thick, like syrup, and he sounded drunk.

"I beg to differ-, oh!"

Tom was being stupid again, Harry decided. He smells fucking AMAZING, like spices and woods and smoke and *sin* and something that he can't put his finger on but whatever it is, it feels like his blood was lit on fire.

Deciding he was the smarter of the two, Harry ignored Tom's faffing and dropped to his knees, yanking the tight waistband of those *utterly amazing and illegal* skintight leggings down Tom's thighs. He wasn't wearing any sort of underdrawers, so Harry had full access to the thick cock and the neatly (but currently mussed and sweat-soaked) groomed pubic thatch at its base.

This is where that utterly delightful, thick, heavy, **heady** smell was coming from.

"Harry, what the fuck!?"

Did Harry eat or drink something off? That was the only explanation Tom could think of to explain the very uncharacteristic (but deliciously debauched) manner that Harry was acting. It reminded Tom of a cat in heat, rubbing up against any old tom who was nearby, raising her rump in invitation whilst caterwauling.

"Harry." Gripping fluffy curls, Tom pulled back on Harry's head. Large, liquid eyes looked up at him, pupils blown wide, the colorful iris nearly non-existent. "What is going on?"

At any other time, Tom would be more than happy to have a partner literally crawling all over him, but this wanton attitude came out of *nowhere*.

Oh, sweet baby Jesus!

Growling, Harry buried his nose into Tom's pubic hair, ignoring the pinpricks of pain in his scalp while huffing like an addict. Opening his mouth he slurped down the thick cock resting among the curls, his toes twitching as his mouth and throat were filled with musky, silky skin.

Harry moaned as long fingers gripped his head. He could feel Tom let out an explosive sigh before leaning back against something, spreading his thighs to allow Harry better access.

Happy that the daft git was FINALLY getting with the program, Harry wasted no time in bobbing up and down. He made sure to swallow each time his nose met Tom's pubic bone, the sound wet and loud between their heavy breathing and Tom's unfettered groans.

Pulling off completely, Harry gasped for breath before pressing his nose into the space between the base of Tom's cock and balls. Whatever scent was being produced was heaviest here, and he literally gulped mouthfuls of saliva, the tantalizing scent causing his mouth to water like a broken fire hydrant.

Swallowing Tom back down, Harry pressed as close to the base as he could, shaking his head back and forth slightly while his nose was tickled with coarse, curly hair. He slipped a hand down between his legs, palming himself through his silky lounge pants. He pumped himself a few times as he bobbed, his hips twitching as smooth silk caressed his heated cock.

Twisting his head again, he moaned loudly around the prick in his mouth as he got a big whiff of Tom's musk, and his hips shuddered as he spilled.

Tom looked down at the top of Harry's head, the black, mussed strands quivering as the smaller man shuddered. When he felt the other's throat constrict and gag, Tom wasted no time in pulling the other off of him. He doesn't know what his Consort is up to, but there are few things that can kill his erection in an instant, and Harry's about to demonstrate one of them.

He almost breathed in relief when he saw it was just a climax.

Wait, what?

No! No, erection, come back! Tom growled, frustrated with himself; here he has an utterly gorgeous, deliciously filthy boy coming in his trousers from sucking on his knob, and Tom just had to **ruin** it!

"Um, Tom?" Looking down at confused, hazy eyes, Tom just sighed.

Merlin, damn it.

Hope

Chapter Notes

Short little transition chapter. Next, THE POTTAH'S!

Saturday passed in a whirl of anxiety attacks, yarn missiles, and a disappearing Harry.

Which left Tom feeling a bit miffed; after the disastrous end to what had been an excellent blowjob, he had gotten laughed into bed by his tiny Consort, just to get laughed out of said bed the following morning while Harry had been all sunshine and rainbows because, unlike a certain some **one**, HE got a happy ending while Tom was left nursing a bruised ego and the nightmarish memories of his first forays into oral sex, which had ended with the unfortunate witch choking on his cock until she got sick.

*Thank **Merlin** for memory charms!*

And then Harry remembered the Potter brunch.

"No."

"Tom, I said no."

"Oi, feck off, mate!" *"OW!"*

Rubbing his stinging side where Harry's skinny, dagger-like fingers pinched him, Tom scowled as Harry scootched off of the bed (a not-so-small part of him snickering at the little jump the other had to do to dismount the mattress). He then proceeded to pluck up the little knitting basket he's taken to carrying his current projects around in before stalking towards to sitting room door and exiting, using his bum to shut the door behind him.

Tom wanted to gnash his teeth; Harry had been a nervous mess after breakfast, and Tom was going to do what he does best and diddle the fuck out of him, replacing all of the anxiety with happy feelings and chemicals. But Harry can be an obstinate little shit and decided he had to make up a gift of some sort to give the Potters and had soundly rebuffed Tom's advances.

So, now here Tom sits.

Alone.

Half-dressed.

And horny as all fuck.

Shutting himself up in the Consort chambers, Harry tossed himself back into an overstuffed (and frankly ostentatious) chair in the sitting room. He had fetched the arm panel for the adult-sized Aran sweater he had cast on last night, along with his cabling needle, when he was interrupted by a visitor.

"Oh, look at the little fae," Xenia cooed. Her painted visage was soft as she looked at Harry from the portrait hanging over the fireplace. "What is our newest Slytherin Consort making today?"

The ticking of his steel knitting needles slowed (but never stopped) as Harry looked up. "Oh, er, I making me a sweater." As Xenia made a soft, inquiring sound, he continued. "Er, me an' Tom are supposed to meet with the Potter's for brunch tomorrow, who might be my cousins, er, maybe, and I'm REALLY nervous because they an' Tom don' like each other and I don't-know-if-they'll-like-me-an-"

"Little fae, breathe."

At the command Harry gasped, unaware that he had stopped breathing as his mouth got away from him.

"There," Xenia said softly. "Now, these Potters. Do you KNOW if they're family?"

Harry nibbled his lip. "...no. But, apparently, I look so much **like** a Potter that even strangers think I am. And the littlest one, a wee thing, mistook me for her Da."

"Ah," Xenia breathed. "Sadly, I passed before the Potter family gained most of their status, so I can't say if you do have that look to you."

At this, Harry brightened up. "When did you live," he asked excitedly. It was only when she started to laugh uproariously that he realized how insensitive that was and blanched. "Ah! Er, you don' have to answer that! Ooh, but Ms. Cole would have turned me ear-! "

"Oh, sweet fae," Xenia giggled, flapping a hand at him while she giggled uncontrollably, her chest jiggling and nearly falling out of her low-cut bodice. "I was born in 1715, in this chamber, to a Slytherin mother and a bastard Habsburg father, and I later became Lady Slytherin in 1740. I schooled in Austria as a child, and shared a tutor with my cousin, Maria..."

Soothed by her voice, Harry settled down and picked back up his needles, his attention devoured as Xenia told stories about herself and her cousin, a girl who would grow up to be the most formidable queen Europe had seen, an Empress by marriage, and the mother to another queen whose life ended in revolution.

Effectively banished from Harry's presence, Tom decided to put his restless energy to good use and go down to his forge. The copper bowl he made for Harry's yarn still needed a final few touches before the inside was glazed smooth, and there have been a few other projects knocking around his head that he's been thinking of trying.

Once in his forge gear and ensconced near his bellows, he had Zarba fetch the bucket of stones Harry had dug up.

As they tumbled and rolled out onto his drafting desk, he let his ungloved fingers rove over the sharp, jagged surfaces and smooth planes. He drifted, his inner magpie greedily clucking over the finds. Each stone resonated in his mind; each had a different tone, some high, some low. One stone was discordant, pitching high to low before jumping back up to an ear-piercing screech. He flicked it to the side, instinctively knowing that that one would need to be significantly examined before being worked and that it may only be fit for a specific type of ward matrix; as jewelry, it wouldn't do.

Getting his hands on the giant hunk of diamond was like holding a piece of the sun; the resonance was *perfect*. His own magic tingled in ways that whispered that he could make something **great**.

Summoning a velvet cushion, he sat the gem on it before pulling over his sketchbook and a few sticks of lead.

Returning to Tom's closet long enough to change into a simple set of woolen trousers and a long-sleeved button-up, Harry made sure to wear a pair of thick socks and grab one of the fur-lined throws from the sitting room (at Xenia's request) before following her portrait deeper into the Demanse.

He had been shocked to learn just how blue Tom's blood was. Having a distant (but decisive) link to the former muggle Austrian royal family, Habsburg blood, and links to most of the remaining royal families on the continent, he also has a close, current link to the English monarchy through his father.

That's just the connection to the muggle counterparts. Magical Russia still has an empire, there are Moorish rulers in southern Spain, and the Dutch have an enmeshed magical and muggle line; there is no distinction between magical and muggle heads of state, and the current king rules over both sets of subjects, albeit with different sets of powers and responsibilities.

*And Tom is related to them **all**.*

Hence the field trip; Xenia was excited to share her knowledge of her family, both past and future (to her). She had been the official Slytherin Genealogist before heading her family and still kept the Family Tree up to date.

Harry shivered, speeding up his pace in an attempt to generate warmth while pulling the throw closer around his shoulders. He had followed the lights in the floor (and Xenia's

sporadic appearances) deeper and deeper underground, and in contrast to his foray into the lava tubes, as he went further and further down the colder the air got.

"Almost there, little fae!" Xenia's voice echoed out of the stones surrounding him. Unlike the finely chiseled and smooth stones that made up the upper Demanse, or the roughly-hewn raw rock of the forge, the current hallway and stairs he was traversing were more akin to the stonework of ancient and crumbled Roman forts. Rounded boulders of roughly the same size were fitted together, the gaps between them plastered with crumbling mortar. It felt primitive, making Harry think that this may have been how the Demanse started, a raw and simple (if large) building, getting built on top of each successive age and generation.

At some point, he came to a lone door. The wood was wet and decaying, the ironwork on it the only thing keeping it together. The ring used to pull it open was ice cold, and Harry's fingers were aching by the time he heaved the thick monstrosity open.

Behind the door was a tall, deep cavern. Water dripped down from stalactites and into dips in the floor. Scattered inside the stone were small, micro-flecks of diamond. The room gently glittered like stars set into the velvet of space.

"Come closer."

Looking to the side, he saw an unframed canvas hanging on the wall. Xenia was seating herself on a tall, spindly chair, the legs so thin and pointed it looked like it would collapse from a simple breeze.

His eyes went wide as she barked out a word that sounded both German and French, but not like anything he's heard before. Seconds later, the wide wall lit up, and Harry gasped in astonishment.

In the bottom middle of the wall, tendrils of light coalesced. It soon took on the form of a marled tree trunk, with the primary root framing the name 'Salazar Slytherin'. As more and more lines formed, other names appeared, some familiar to Harry, with others completely unknown.

"Oh! I know that name!" Reaching out to the name 'John of Gaunt', Harry traced it with his fingers, his eyes squinting as he struggled to read. "He's kind of the father to most royal houses, here in England and abroad." Looking back over to a beaming Xenia, he asked, "Is this where Tom gets the 'Gaunt' name from?"

"Yes, and it's twice-over." At his quizzical head-tilt, Xenia shifted in her seat. "John of Gaunt had several children, and one of them was ensnared by a Sidhe Lord of the Dark Court. She bore him several children during her time under the hill, creating the fae Gaunt's. John's other descendants mingled in and out of the Slytherin lines several times, along with the Fae Gaunt's. Eventually, it all came together into the only surviving Slytherin line, with Tom the only current living descendant who can use that name, both in magical and muggle society."

Looking over more names, Harry's eyes then traced over to the far left corner. A line starting with a man named 'Peverell' had branches that intertwined with the early Slytherin

line, but what caught Harry's attention was his own name.

Crouching down, Harry traced the name 'Cadmus' until it tangled with the Gaunt's, before turning his attention to the name 'Ignotus'. He followed its line for a few generations before it joined with someone named Potter, after which what looked like a massive smudge of sooty light covered a chunk of the tree, only clearing up with his name, which was then connected to Tom's in the characteristic horizontal line used to denote a marriage in most family trees.

"Hmmm, interesting," Xenia murmured.

"What? That we're related," Harry asked while looking back at her over his shoulder. "It's pretty far back. Over sixteen generations."

Xenia snorted, her nose wrinkling. "Please. While muggle nobility has its share of inbreeding, most of magical society has quite a bit of it going on. Whatever is underneath... *that*," she flapped a peachy-toned hand towards the smudge covering Harry's ancestry, "can easily show a dozen more links of common blood. Albeit," her voice took on a slightly embarrassed tone, "I don't believe it would be **quite** as, well, TANGLED as your Tom's."

Confused, Harry found Tom's name before tracing back. His eyes widened before nearly bugging out of his skull when he saw generation after generation of questionable, incestuous pairings. "What? *HOW!?*" His voice nearly broke when he pointed at Tom's mother's name; her parents were brother and sister (and also her grandpa and aunt?), and going further back showed several generations of sibling-parents or parent-child relationships that produced children. The web of names just turned into a snarl of light, looking more like a pile of tangled yarn than a proper family tree.

Her father is also her brother, but her other brother is also her uncle? "His family tree is a feckin' STICK!"

Xenia, the witch, just laughed at him.

****THUNKTHUNKTHUNKTHUNKTHUNK****

scrape

****THUNKTHUNKTHUNKTHUNKTHUNK****

Huffing behind his face shield, Tom grunted as he pulled back the brightly-glowing metal rod currently getting pounded by his power hammer. He adjusted his grip on the tongs holding the hot material before pushing it forward again as the hammer went through another series of strikes. Reaching up, he pulled down on the lever sticking out of the head of the machine before sliding it into a groove. Steam released out the back of the machine as it went into standby, and he grabbed another set of tongs to carry the now-thinner rod over to his rolling press. Once he had it resting on a plate, he pulled a series of levers and knobs, the machine starting with a jolt and hum.

Waiting for the contraption to warm up, he returned to his drafting table on the far side of his workshop. Flipping up his shield, he took a deep breath of (relatively) cooler air before wiping his face with the back of his gloved hand, leaving a sooty smudge. He took a closer look at his notes, pulling out and setting aside certain pages as he searched for what he was now looking for.

He had already broken down both the diamond and several other stones, leaving them in appropriately-sized chunks for his ideas. He was letting them rest until further working on them; stones dug out from the Demanse had more magic baked into them than those found in the wild, and cutting them can cause them to 'sound' discordant. Working them before they've had a chance to settle can lead to pieces that won't hold their enchantments or twist them.

After all, what is the use of a *Ring of Fire Protection* if it protects the **fire** instead of the wearer?

He still had the urge to make, though, so he decided to get a start on the metal smithing and shaping. He had started with a copper ingot, heating and shaping it with his hammer. Now he was going to put it through his press several times, flipping it on each pass as it would slowly get flattened and rolled into a long rod.

Once he got to this stage, it would be time to cut the rod and reserve part of it. The reserved part he plans on recasting with silver and gold, a blend known as *rose gold* amongst muggles, but known as *Warder's Gold* in magical communities for the resilience of the metal in warding and enchanting. He plans on making a few jewelry pieces for Harry.

...And to maybe auction off one or two. For bragging rights.

Not that he needs to.

The rest of the unadulterated copper he plans on turning into something more practical (at least to Harry);

Knitting needles.

Yes, he knows he's working with copper and **yes** he knows they will bend, but working with heat infused with earth elements will do much to harden and firm the malleable metal. And Harry's metal needles always developed a slight bend to them, just from how he holds them.

That, and copper just looks pretty.

He's planning on making a few different sizes (the ones Harry most commonly uses), with the idea of placing a chip of unusable gemstone in the cap that will be on the end of each needle shaft. Once he has the shafts rolled out and cut, it wouldn't take long for him to mold the fine points and hammer the caps. If he's quick enough, he could slip them into Harry's bag sometime tomorrow.

Speaking of, he should sort through his stone chips. He wants to make sure each size matches with its partner; asymmetry would give him hives.

Back in Tom's quarters, Harry dug his toes into the soft cushion of the couch he was sitting on, his glasses set aside as he focused on the edges of Daisy's sweater sleeve he held together at the cuff. He was seaming it up with the quick and efficient mattress stitch, the tip of his tongue sticking out as he squinted down at the edge stitches he was threading his darning needle through. The setting sun was blazing through the large windows that made up the wall overlooking the courtyard, throwing red, pink, and orange-tinged light all over the room.

Completing sewing the one sleeve to the body of the cardigan, Harry snipped his yarn after sewing in the end and plucking up the other sleeve. He quite likes this pattern and may make some more using the scraps and balls of yarn from the late Mrs. Twilfit and donate them to the St. Mungo's Children's Ward. It's quick and easy to memorize, and-

"OOF, TOM," Harry squeaked as a large and heavy body flopped on top of him. "Geroff, me, now and," pausing to sniff as he shoved the lardarse off, his face scrunched up even while he blushed. "You STINK and yer sweaty, and-"

"Oh, hush," Tom chided even as he shoved his face into Harry's neck and rubbed, spreading the sweat and grime clinging to it on the other. "You love my stink." He doesn't get it, but everyone has their kink. If Harry wants to get off by huffing his armpits, well, it won't be the weirdest thing Tom's had happen to him.

"No I don't," Harry bit out, incredibly embarrassed.

"Feh," Tom barked before stripping Harry of his shirt. Tom himself still had his forge apron on, and the shirt underneath it was drenched in his sweat. Flinging the heavy leather aside, he then picked the loudly protesting Harry up and drug him over the back of the couch and trapped him in his arms. He then proceeded to wiggle the both of them, laughing as he smeared his sweat and stink all over Harry who, despite his protests, was most definitely interested.

Taking pity, Tom dropped the other. Harry blinked owlishly, his face like a brick as he worked to control himself while Tom shucked off his dirty clothes. Unabashed, he walked naked towards the bedroom, a ball of yarn whiffing past as Harry snarked something at his back, with plans for a long and indulgent bath dancing in his head. He had had to do a lot of careful, precise hammering as he processed the gemstones, and his shoulders were screaming at him about the work.

It was only as he sat on the edge of the tub as it filled that he heard the pitter-patter of feet, his legs hanging over the side. Once the water reached his calves he carefully slid in, not hiding the moan of relief he made as hot water lapped at his waist. Sinking down, he sighed as his aching muscles ensconced in the heat.

Hopping on one foot as he pulled off his socks, Harry then shoved his trousers and pants off all as one. Kicking them to the side, he kneeled and slid into the bath. His foot slid a bit, but Tom's hands caught him before he could truly trip.

Tugging the other closer, Tom leaned back, the tub automatically creating a waving incline for him to lean against as he drew Harry into his lap. Unruly hair tickled his nose as Harry tucked up under Tom's chin, both shifting as arms wrapped around each other.

They stayed quiet, neither needing to speak. Both were lost in their heads, thoughts focused on different things. For Harry, it was with worry; does he have family, and would they want him? For Tom, it was a whirlwind of arithmetic equations and runic sequences, aesthetic notions darting in and out and discarded or set aside for contemplation at a later date.

"...Tom," Harry said quietly, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Hmm?"

"...will they like me?"

Dropping a kiss onto moist locks, Tom tightened his grip on the other. Harry had sounded very small.

"Darling, they will simply **adore** you."

What Was Lost

Chapter Summary

POTTAH FAMILY REUNION POTTAH FAMILY REUNION

Tom watched from the bed as Harry dashed to and fro, calmly eating his breakfast whilst his Consort lost his mind. When Harry was digging through the wardrobe, Tom was spreading a fat pat of butter on his rye. While Harry agonized over wearing something formal or casual, Tom was cutting into his omelet. As Harry dug through his yarn basket, arse up, Tom was drinking his tea and enjoying the wiggles.

It was only once Tom had dabbed his mouth with a napkin and floated the tray containing their breakfast to the side that something was done. With a scoop and a toss, he had curled his arm around Harry's gut and flung him towards the bed. It startled a squeak from the shorter male, which quickly turned into a shout as he went airborne.

Once Harry landed on the bed with a grunt, the breakfast tray slid back in front of him, and elf magic rearranged the plates, scooting Tom's used ones aside to make room for Harry's food. They were still somewhat following Healer Parkinson's diet recommendations, so for Harry, there was a plate of hash browns with three fried eggs on top, the yolks soft and runny, and the potatoes were crisped on the outside and buttery smooth on the inside.

"Tom-!"

"Quiet. And eat your breakfast," Tom responded with a flippant wave of his hand. After a few moments, he heard the sounds of cutlery on stoneware.

Heading towards the wardrobe, he then pulled out a simple white button-up, a pair of warm brown trousers, and slightly darker brown loafers. These were all things sent in by Tarragon and perfectly sized for Harry. They would go well with the creamy white cabled sweater Harry had knitted in an anxiety-induced frenzy; two days to knit and seam a cabled sweater is a new record.

"Here, wear this."

Looking over at Tom's selection, Harry gulped. "Um, isn't that a wee bi' too casual? I mean, they're magical, and-"

"Mr. James Potter is a casual man," Tom interrupted. "And this is a family brunch. Even amongst the more traditional and wealthy Purebloods, brunches are typically a rather relaxed affair."

Looking down at his plate, Harry scooted around a bit of eggy potato. "Er, how 'relaxed' is relaxed?"

"You won't have to worry about which fork is to be used for which food if that is your concern. Most likely, we'll start with tea and nibbles, then proceed to a simple three-course meal."

"A **three-course** brunch!" That is way more formal than the brunches he's heard about! Harry was expecting tea and scones, then followed by a simple one-plate meal. Something like sandwiches or the ilk.

But THREE courses!?

Tom wanted to sigh but held it in. Of course, Harry wouldn't know how brunch in most magical homes would work; Tom himself hadn't known until the summer before his final year at Hogwarts. "It's not nearly as complicated as it sounds. All three courses are smaller portions. Given that it's a *family* brunch, we will most likely start off with some sort of green plate, followed by either a chicken or fish dish, and finish with something light but sweet. More formal brunches will have pork or beef for the main, but those are heavier meals and typically reserved for heavier topics, so serving those at what should be a light-hearted event is just not done."

For all his faults and casual attitude, James Potter is a better host than his uncle, Regent Lord Potter Charlus. Not long after his ascension, Tom had sat for brunch with Charlus and not been particularly impressed. Fleamont Potter had been a better fit for the Potter lordship, and Tom actually mused for a few moments what a shame it was that the spry man was no longer alive; he, at least, while casual, knew how to properly brunch!

Unfortunately, his comments (meant to reassure Harry) did the exact opposite and sent the other back into a tizzy. "My manners! Wait, Tom, what are the rules for passing a plate? Conversation, for tea and sitting at the table? What about-, *mph!*"

Sighing against greasy lips, Tom chastisingly bit the lower one, making Harry squeak. He pulled back just enough to drop a kiss on the other's forehead, breathing in the scent of eggs and butter, along with the stale odor of dried sweat. "Don't worry about it. Now," he pulled back, picking up a piece of buttered toast and shoving it into Harry's mouth when he opened it to faff about (AGAIN). "Hop in the shower. You should have just enough time to do a quick wash. And, Darling?" Once Harry looked up from beneath long lashes, Tom gave a roguish smirk, "they will **love** you."

Lily watched from the kitchen door as James dashed to and fro. She crossed her arms as he darted to the pantry. She leaned against the doorframe as he dashed to the stove. And then she sighed fondly as he fuffed about in nervous energy in front of the island. The man had woken at the crack of dawn and scoured their home from roof to cellar before barricading himself in the kitchen and cooking up a storm.

And he very **literally** cleaned from roof to the cellar; Lily had found him on the steeply pitched gable roof of their Tudor-style cottage, blasting cleaning charms at the tiles. She nearly had a heart attack.

She watched as he cast an emulsion charm on the mixing bowl holding the ingredients for the raspberry vinaigrette dressing for their green plate, the man not even stopping to see if it was working correctly before turning back to his chicken breasts and butterflying them open on the counter behind him. If she looked to the left, she could see the whisk and ice bowl rocking as the ingredients for raspberry-mango sorbet came together and chilled.

Lily counts herself lucky; she has a man who doesn't shy away from childrearing and household work. He is equally as likely as her to be in the kitchen cooking or giving their littlest one a bath. It had been an absolute relief when, after birthing little Harry (and, oh, how her heart still **aches**), James was the first one up to change or cuddle him, or shift her in her rest so their baby boy could nurse. And it had carried over to each pregnancy after that.

But she has never seen him like THIS; a whirlwind, tearing through the house, chivving the kids into neatening up their rooms and tidying their appearance. They've had important guests before, but James never reacted quite like this.

"Jimmy?"

"Yeah, Lils," he said absently over his shoulder before silently cursing the chicken.

"What's up?"

"Hmm? There, got you, you little bastard!" Crowing in victory, James held up the long sliver of bone he wrestled from the meat.

Rolling her eyes in exasperated affection, Lily walked up to her husband. Wrapping her arms around his middle, she placed a small kiss on the back of his neck. She could smell the acrid tang of vinegar and the sweet, almost custardy softness of mango clinging to his skin. "You're nervous. If anyone should be going insane, it's me."

Setting the paring knife in his hand aside, James bowed his head while leaning back into his wife's embrace. "Er...it's...I know how you feel. About the whole, er, murderous Minister coming into our home. And I think you're PHENOMENAL for trying!" Turning, James gripped her upper arms before gazing into her worried face. "But...I..."

Leaning up, Lily rested her forehead against his.

"Da and Uncle Charlie had a falling out, back when I was a babe. Maybe even before then," James murmured. "I never got to grow up with my cousins, and it's even carried over with our children. I just-"

"You want to give our kids something that you missed out on," Lily finished for him. "I understand."

And she does. She only met Charlus and Dorea once before she married James. Dorea, while warm and civil, was the opposite of her husband. Charlus had been polite but cold and wore the Lordship he was regent of like armor. James never got into the details (and may not even know the whole story), but she knows he never got to grow up with his closest cousins as a result.

Being an only child, it must have been lonely.

They were quiet for a few moments longer before James broke the spell. "I'm not happy that Gaunt will, once again, darken our doorstep, but, if Harry is of the good sort, I'd like to know him."

Going to her toes, Lily gave him a quick kiss. "I'll see what I can do. No promises!" Backing away from him, she shot the other a cheeky grin (her heart leaping at the soft, silly look on his face). "By the way, you should check your dressing!"

"WHAT!?" Jumping, he looked towards the island, where an overmixed slurry of oil, vinegar, and raspberry foamed out of the bowl and all over the counter and floor. " **FUCK!**"

Serves him right, for putting his chickeny hands on her! HA!

With an eyebrow arched in amusement, Tom quietly chuckled as he watched Harry waffle on the front stoop of the Potter Heir's home in Godric's Hollow.

Tom had apparated them to the local point in the sleepy village's town square before escorting the other to his cousin's home. From how mentally lost in his own head he's been, Tom doubts the other even took in their surroundings.

Godric's Hollow is...quaint.

Tom wanted to curl his lip at his surroundings. The little village itself is quite nice. Clean and well kept, it still had its original cobbles from when it was first settled back in the early 1000s. There was a small kinder center for the local families, and a greengrocer or two. The area consisted mostly of two-story homes with picket-fenced yards, with large, pastoral fields surrounding it.

No, what Tom disliked about the place was how...boring everything was. Excellent for starting a family, he supposes, and he winced as he heard children yell excitedly in a yard down one of the side lanes.

But not for him. He'll take his hulking fortress and mountains over whatever this is, any day.

But that was then, and this is now.

And right now? Harry's indecisiveness over ringing the doorbell was giving him a rash.

"Oh, for Morgana's sake," he muttered, before yanking the bellpull.

Looking up from her book, Violet blinked behind her glasses as she tried to figure out what caught her attention. It was only when she heard it a second time that she realized it was the bell above the front door ringing. "MUM! Do you want me to get the door!?"

She heard a muffled reply from deeper in the house, but couldn't make it out. Marking her page, she stood up and tried to make her hair presentable, even though she knew it was a lost cause. Leaving the drawing-room she walked down the hall and towards the door, almost certain she knew who it was.

Tugging the bronze knob, she blinked rapidly at the sudden sunlight in her eyes before focusing on one of their guests. "Oh! Hullo. You must be Harry! I'm Violet!"

Tom wanted to laugh; the Potter girl was the same size as Harry, maybe a centimeter or two shorter. The sudden reminder of their size difference made Tom feel both smug and disgruntled. Smug, because it meant he could easily manhandle Harry (oh, and there were **so** many ways to manhandle!), and disgruntled because it would be a constant reminder that Harry had given so much to the children under his care (Tom included!) that he will never reach his full, physical potential.

Following the two into the Potter home, Tom saw just to the side a cloak rack and shoe keeper. Harry easily slipped his loafers off while chatting lightly with Violet, but Tom elected to keep his on.

"I'll let Mum and Da know you're here. Da's been a wreck all morning." Entering the drawing-room, Tom guided Harry to the couch Violet pointed out. "Tea will be out shortly."

Leaning back into the supple leather couch (which, while nice, is not as nice as what's available in his Demanse), Tom sighed and kicked out his long legs under the tea table. He could feel Harry frown at him as Tom's boots made an appearance, but Tom is the *Minister* and if he chooses to keep his shoes on, then so be it!

"*You're such a tosser,*" Harry muttered at him, and not for the first time today.

Tom preened. "It just means you're paying attention to me, Darling. And believe me, I enjoy **all** of your attention," he purred while laying his hand on Harry's knee.

Lily gagged, nearly losing her focus on the tea tray she was levitating out in the hallway. Him? *The Dark Lord?* ***Flirting!***? And in HER house!?

Blech!

Time to be a cock block, she thought gleefully. "Hello, and welcome to my home! Tea?"

Harry was once again blindsided by a redhead, though thankfully this time an adult. And he was a bit thankful for the interruption because Tom had scootched a tad too close and Harry was fixing to smack him if the hand on his leg slid just an INCH higher- "Thank you for the invitation, Mrs. Potter," he chirped while not-to-carefully slapping Tom's hand aside. "Although, er, I imagine it must be awkward for your family, given the, er, political climate."

Lily floated the tea tray onto the table before flicking her wrist to enlarge the teapot, cups, saucers, and plates of little cakes and other assorted light fare and sitting down. "Oh," she said. "So, you're already aware of how...things, are, between us?" Her voice finished on a frosty note.

Tom went as still as a board.

Taking the pot in hand, Harry filled up his cup before fixing Tom's just how he liked it (entirely too much sugar, a dash of cream) before nodding sagely. "Umhmm. Tom said you were on opposite sides of the Revolution, but that at some point your family backed down."

"He murdered a family member," Lily statedly flatly.

James took that moment to burst into the room. "Hi, hello, and welcome to my home! Minister Gaunt, how was the walk," he said, loud and fast, with his hand held out to shake. His voice had a slightly hysterical note to it, underneath the bravado.

Amused, Tom reciprocated the gesture, baring his teeth while doing his best to not make it look like he was crushing James' hand. "While a tad cool, it was a nice walk. Sadly, the environment is not my cup of tea."

James let out a forced laugh as he felt Lily's glare deepen. "Oh, I agree, country life isn't for everyone! I'm sure you're far more used to the hustle and bustle of London. My flower, please, come sit, and let me bask in your presence," he asked his wife while sitting down on the couch opposite their guests, patting the seat next to him.

Once all four were seated, it became very awkward.

Well, for everyone except Tom. He enjoys making others squirm. The sadist inside him is taking great joy in the discomfort of his hosts and didn't go to any lengths to hide his amused smirk behind his teacup. He just quietly sipped his tea (not the highest quality of leaf, but, he surmises, appropriate for the event, given the Potter's feelings towards him.)

And then he glanced over the rim towards his Consort.

*He did **not** like what he saw.* His sweet little Harry was folded in on himself, gently twisting his teacup on its saucer while staring down into the dark liquid.

Oh, but what I do to suffer the slings and arrows of love. Setting down his tea, Tom pasted on his signature smile. "So, it is my understanding that Tristan Potter may be-

"Hi! Hiiii! Hi hi hihhi!"

Flinching slightly, Tom braced himself as a redheaded toddler ran in, her hair in pigtails and a pinafore on her dress. The child screeched and homed in on Harry, literally throwing herself at his legs and hugging them. Behind her was her harried sister, Violet, and the girl looked embarrassed six ways to Sunday.

As Harry lifted the babbling child onto his lap, Tom resigned himself to temporary hearing loss.

"I'm so *sorry*," Violet said in a rush, her glasses askew on her nose. "Daisy's a handful on a good day, but she's a monster when we have guests!" She ignored her mum's scolding and father's chortling at her remarks. At least Harry gave her a knowing, commiserating look over Daisy's head as the youngster blubbered about something.

"Oh, it's no issue. I've had more than my fair share of rascallions over the years," Harry beamed, his eyes crinkling as he lifted and adjusted the surprisingly hefty toddler with a quiet *oof*. "Hello, darling Miss Daisy," he crowed at her, pulling a loud laugh from her. "It's nice to see you again! I have a present for you! Would you like one?"

Not wanting to leave her sister alone so close to the Minister (her parent's past remarks about how **evil** the man is ringing in her head), Violet shuffled to Harry's free side before taking a seat and looking at the two men. *Da's right, the Minister is a prat*, she thought while shoving her round spectacles up her nose. While Harry was dressed casually but neatly (she wants his sweater!), the Minister was wearing a set of robes so rich and decorated that one would think he was going to a foreign summit. Far too formal for a simple brunch.

Berk!

James's hazel eyes bounced like tennis balls between Violet and Harry.

The resemblance between the two was **uncanny**. Both were short and slim, Violet because she was a twelve-year-old girl, and Harry because he (supposedly) grew up a starving orphan. Both also had untidy, messy black hair and his Lily's eyes.

And it didn't stop there: both had his mother's, Euphemia's, slim but pointed nose, but they also had his (and his father Fleamont's) distinguished jaw. But they had a hairline like his, that soft widow's peak that let his hair flop over his forehead in that charming way that set the schoolgirls a titter when he was a student. And he swears that they have Lily's cheeks and brow ridge, but whereas Violet's features still had a bit of puppy fat to them, there was something almost fox-like to Harry's.

*Now I get why Lily was so **certain** he was ours.*

Just like James was examining Harry and Violet, she was examining them AND him. Out of all their children, only her Harry and Violet had such coloring and had so many features like James. Out of their surviving children, Gideon and Arthur had her red hair, and Rosalind had that brown-red color that only happens when two types of hair try to be dominant at the same time, but only Violet had their father's pitch hair. Daisy had that orangy hair that only babies can get, and she is still too young to see how it may change. And aside from her Harry and Violet, the other children have either brown or hazel eyes (except for Arthur; he inherited a set of dark blue-grey eyes from one of his grandmothers).

Looking at Harry and Violet was like looking into a reflected mirror.

If her Harry had lived, she wonders if he would have turned out like this Harry.

End Notes

Hey so you can find me on tumblr: un is classlesstulip. You can occasionally find sneak-peeks of, like, smut and stuff. I'm also on Twitter @ClasslessTulip

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