

Your Name on My Heart

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Your Name on My Heart

by [whitedandelions](#)

Summary

Bearing the Dark Lord's soul mark on his chest certainly isn't easy when his family is firmly on the Light Side. HarryxVoldemort SLASH. Set in the Past.

Notes

Title: Your Name on My Heart

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Pairing: Harry x Voldemort

Summary: Bearing the Dark Lord's soul mark on his chest certainly isn't easy when his family is firmly on the Light Side. HarryxVoldemort. Set in the Past.

Author's Note: Completely AU! Wanted to do a spin on the neglected!Harry + Harry as student and Voldy as DADA professor because I read the Translation of Through your black hair, my hands and was completely smitten with it. And then I wanted to do SoulMate!Au so you can completely say this story is written PURELY FOR MY OWN BENEFIT. Please do not flame/be too harsh on me, because while other people DO value constructive criticism I am not one of them, so please don't do it to me because it completely kills ALL of my inspiration. Of course, friendly advice is allowed but things like "why would you write something like this" is just utterly heartbreaking for my frail and fragile heart so please keep such mean words to yourself :(I don't even mind short reviews like update please or nice chapter because those two little words really do wonders to boost my inspiration. Anyway, thank you for reading and please enjoy! :)

The First Meeting

Harry was seven when *Tom Marvolo Riddle* appeared on top of his heart. It was etched in a deep dark black, the l's and d's interconnecting with their loops in cursive. It was utterly beautiful, and little Harry spent the better part of the night tracing over them with his pointer finger in front of the mirror.

He couldn't wait to tell his twin, James Potter, about his soul mark in the morning. James had gotten his soul mark when he was only five, and had crowed on about it for the better part of the two years. *Against All Odds* featured prominently on his right shoulder, and James had taken to repeating the phrase whenever possible. Harry figured it was a beautiful phrase and that James had a wonderful soul mate that embodied those words.

His parents weren't so pleased when they saw his name. In fact, his mother had shrieked with *horror* and not the joy that had accompanied her shriek when she had seen James' soul mark.

She had buried her face into her husband's chest, almost as if she couldn't bear to see the black markings on her son. Harry stood, dumbfounded, his little arms outstretched as if he could somehow comfort his mother.

His father's eyes were hard, and his body stern as he knelt in front of Harry. "Listen," he had said, his mouth drawn into a hard line, "Never let anyone see your mark."

Harry nodded, still confused; he had learned this rule a long time ago when they had first lectured James on it. He knew he had to keep his soul mark hidden; soul marks were a private thing and bad things happened when your soul mark was left bare to see.

His parents left almost immediately after the parting words, grabbing their cloaks and kissing James good-bye on the forehead before departing with a loud crack.

It wasn't long before things changed. Harry tried not to blame the changes on himself; it wasn't his fault that his parents didn't like his soul mark and subsequently didn't like *him* as much. He had used to be the favorite of the two brothers; with James' rowdiness and tendency to cause trouble, it wasn't difficult to like Harry better. But suddenly, his parents had started to shower all their affection on James and seemed to like to pretend that Harry didn't exist. They didn't ignore him, per se; they still hired expensive tutors for him and tried to teach him magic to the best of their ability. But they didn't give him the same warm affection they had used to, and Harry didn't understand why.

Harry tried his best not to mind; he spent the better part of his days in the library with the practice wand his mother and father had bought him. Magic came easy to him, and it always delighted him whenever he accomplished a spell on his first try.

It was a hot summer afternoon that Harry conquered his fears and looked up his soul mate.

It didn't take long to find Tom Marvolo Riddle; Harry had first tackled the history books and had found him listed in the index of the History of Hogwarts. Harry had traced the name on the page

for a minute with a quivering finger, his heart beating erratically in nervousness. He flipped the pages until he saw his soul mate's name, and read on until the lights in the sky had died.

There wasn't much on his soul mate. However, there were glowing accolades about how he was Head Boy during his studies at Hogwarts and one of the best professors of Defense against Dark Arts the school has ever had.

Harry hungered to know more, especially since his parents had reacted so unfavorably when they had heard his name.

He devoured the words within a few minutes, and was left sorely disappointed.

Still, it was a lot to digest. His soul mate was obviously much older than him. However, age was no matter to soul mates, so Harry tried his best not to let that fact bother him. And his soul bound was obviously very skilled in magic, something that had thankfully passed onto Harry.

He found a book on soul mates next, finishing it in a couple of hours. Soul mates were destined to share the same proficiency of magic, which made sense considering it was magic that had destined them to be together in the first place. The marking was known to be obscure; it was only special cases that one soul mate was given the full name of the other. Harry worried quite a bit over the fact he had been given his soul mate's whole name; he suspected that they were destined to have quite the harsh fate in the future if this part was made so easy for them.

The most gruesome part was the line that read if a soul mate ever turned a wand on his bonded, the soul mate would suffer a fatality. To little Harry, who hadn't known violence or death yet, the sentence was chilling. To think that someone would *ever* reject their soul mate was something that Harry didn't want to comprehend.

He wondered what mark Tom Riddle had, what words could possibly encompass who *Harry* was.

His dreams that night consisted of no one but Tom.

Tom Riddle became a saint in Harry's eyes. Whenever things got tough, Harry would turn his dreams inward, hoping that one day his Intended would save him from the harsh looks and environment that housed his family. He wondered constantly what kind of man Tom Riddle was, and searched desperately for any kinds of information he could find on the man.

He was eight when he finally got his answer. Charlus Potter, his uncle and a man that was more of a father than his real one, had finally told him the truth one cold winter night. They were in front of the fireplace and Harry had just withstood a scolding from his mother for using too explosive spells. It wasn't Harry's fault that *Bombarda* reacted so well with his magic. He had blasted the tree from its roots, and the wood had turned into ashes a second later, melting the snow it had fallen on.

Charlus had praised him after his mother had left, and then had continued on a vein that Harry hadn't expected.

His intended was a Dark wizard. And not just *any* Dark wizard, but the leader of the faction that his family was firmly against. It was no wonder his parents had reacted so horribly when they

had learned his intended was Tom Riddle, and it suddenly became clear on why they favored James Potter so much more than him.

Harry couldn't stop the tears from rolling down his cheeks, and was shocked when Charlus pulled him into a hug. "Harry, being Dark isn't something that you should fear," he had said, gently. "My wife, Dorea, she's a Black, a family known for being Dark. She's Dark, but I'm still Light. Your parents are too narrow-minded to look past that, but you *can* prove them wrong."

Harry kept those words close to him in heart the next couple of years, even though his mind was still whirling at the fact that his intended was *the* Dark Lord. He had learned more about him from Charlus, and had been horrified at the amounts of Unforgivables the Dark Lord was known for using. Dark Magic was *scary*, and Harry was absolutely terrified that he would turn Dark despite his uncle's reassurances. After all, he was sharing magic with the Darkest Wizard of them all.

Things got worse. When he was eleven, his parents did something that no pureblooded family should ever do; they designated James Potter as heir even though Harry was twelve minutes older. Harry had hidden that night, tears falling down his cheeks and hands covered over his ears as the shouting from down below floated up into his bedroom.

"You idiots," snarled Charlus Potter, the younger brother to Harry's father. "You never should have done this."

"Please, Charlus," said Harry's mother, "think of your health. There is no reason to be so worked up over it."

"No reason...!" There was a pause, and then a loud sigh was heaved. After a long pause, Charlus continued in a significantly calmer voice. "Everyone will know that Harry Potter was deemed unworthy of being heir! Is that what you want for your son?"

"My son?" asked Harry's father, and Harry could imagine how his father's face was contorted into one of deep disgust because of how often it had been aimed at him lately. Harry shivered violently at his father's next words, a new onslaught of tears making its way down his face. "He is no son of mine! He's destined to be the Dark Lord's *mate*!"

"You don't *know* that," argued a female voice, and Harry vaguely recognized it as Charlus' wife, Dorea Potter.

"He's marked with *Tom Marvolo Riddle*," spat out his mother. "The next Dark Lord."

"Yes, but that doesn't mean -"

"It means he's destined to be Dark," scorned his father, "and no son who is Dark is a son of mine."

"In fact, if it wasn't for Dumbledore, we probably would have disowned him already."

"I'll have you know," spoke a quiet, but no less deadly voice, "my family was also Dark."

There was a long pregnant pause before Harry's mother continued, "Well, yes, but you married Charlus."

"I am still a Black, even if my last name is now Potter," continued Dorea, her voice dripping with scorn.

"You can't be feeling sympathy for the boy," said Harry's father, incredulous. "We are a *Light* family, we can't be off raising a Dark son. And besides that, knowing what we do, it hardly seems plausible for us to waste resources on a son leaning toward the Dark when we have one so firmly Light."

There was a long pause, only to be broken by his mother's stern voice. "The heir naming ritual has already finished and there's nothing left to be done. Let us get ready for the celebrations."

Harry ended the eavesdropping spell with a simple wave of his wand and was promptly startled by a sudden sound. He turned, blinking wet, glistening green eyes at the envelope that sat in front of him, a wry smile crossing his lips as he looked at the crisp parchment.

His Hogwarts letter had arrived at last.

Harry got his first glimpse of his soul bound in Diagon Alley. He was tall, handsome, and absolutely *stunning*. True to the pictures he had seen in the history books, Professor Tom Riddle possessed silky brown locks and piercing red eyes all set into a truly regal face. But beyond the expensive robes and the fit physique lay a haze of magic power that seemed to permeate the surroundings around him. It was simply intoxicating and Harry found himself in a daze as he got his first feel of his mate's magic.

Even though he knew that the man in front of him was a Dark Lord and certainly *dangerous*, Harry couldn't help himself. He *had* to hear his mate speak.

Luckily his parents weren't paying much attention to him; they were too focused on buying James Potter the newest broom out, certain that their favorite son would be on the Quidditch team in no time. He was easily able to slip away from them, getting through the crowd fast enough to catch another glimpse of the Dark Lord entering Flourish and Blotts.

He was just following his soul mate down a corridor filled to the brim of books when he was suddenly ambushed by the very person he had been following.

Up close, Tom Riddle was even more stunning. Harry was close enough to see the stunning quality to those red eyes that seemed to entrance so many others, and close enough to inhale his scent. Harry was struck dumb by the way the man's magical power seemed to surround him, and he felt instantly inferior even though he knew magic had made them equal.

He stuttered and stammered out a series of words that he was sure didn't make sense, a heavy flush making his way to his cheeks. The Dark Lord looked indulgent of his actions, a sense of amusement in his expression. Harry only blushed even harder when he noticed; he must look a right sight next to the taller Lord when he was only eleven and reached up to the man's chest.

"The Potters' disgraced son, hm?" asked Tom Riddle, and Harry *shivered* at the sound of it. It was every bit as delicious and wonderful as he thought it would be and despite the amount of

absolute danger he was in, found himself not regretting his impulsive action. After all, he could now memorize the husky voice of his Intended and imprint it into his memory forever.

"Have you come to regain your honor for your family?" continued the Professor when Harry made no move to reply. "You're many years too early to be a match for me."

"I," stammered out Harry, his mind searching frantically for a reason for why he had been following the older man. He half wanted to just lift his shirt and show the words printed on his chest; the words that had been a burden from the very moment they had appeared. He wanted to tell the Dark Lord that Harry was *his* and that they were meant to be forever and ever, but ...

Harry couldn't betray his family like that. Even though he knew his mother and father were extremely disappointed in him, he couldn't help wanting to prove them wrong. That he was Light and not Dark, and he *could* be the son that they had always wanted him to be. And besides his parents, he couldn't leave James behind like that.

James had pulled him aside before they had left on the shopping trip, his brown eyes fierce and determined as he spoke, "You can't turn Dark, Harry, you're my *twin*. You can't let *Him* win. And forget Mom and Dad, you're Light, Harry, and I don't care what they say."

The warmth of his brother's hug stayed with him all throughout morning, even when the sting of his parents' rejection had gone down to his very core.

Letting the Dark Lord know would ruin everything. And there was no guarantee that he was even the Dark Lord's soul mate; there had been instances of one sided loves, and with the way Harry's luck was going in the world...

"I wasn't following you," ended Harry, and immediately turned red at the sight of Tom Riddle's delicately raised eyebrow.

"You weren't," said the Dark Lord flatly, and although Harry squirmed under his heavy gaze, Tom Riddle's lips were suddenly upturned. "I am curious, though, why *do* your parents think you'll turn Dark?"

Harry frantically strengthened his barriers, thanking the Heavens that any mentions of soul marks and soul mates were protected from Legilimency. How could he forget that he wasn't dealing with a regular Hogwarts Professor and dealing with a very intelligent and intrigued Dark Lord. "That's - you're not allowed to use Legilimency on a minor!"

"And who do you think they'll believe?" asked Riddle, and this time his lips were definitely in a smile, even though it looked more predatory than happy. "The esteemed Professor of Hogwarts or the young Potter who couldn't even muster up enough magic to be considered as Heir?"

In that moment, Harry *hated* his soul mate.

"You're a right git," he snarled.

"Tsk, ts," mocked the Dark Lord, a slight feral grin on his face, "Young children like you shouldn't be using such language."

He was suddenly grateful that he hadn't lifted his shirt, that Tom Riddle had no idea that his name was currently etched onto Harry's skin. He clenched his hand into a tight fist, wanting to use magic to lash out at the arrogant Lord, but knowing that it would be useless against his soul mate.

"Answer the question, little Potter. I am growing impatient."

He knew he shouldn't; he didn't want the Dark Lord to know how truly proficient he was in magic or else he would know that Harry shared his magic. He wanted to stay hidden, but at the same time, he really didn't know how to answer and he wouldn't put it past the Dark Lord to kidnap him. After all, he wasn't even sure if his family would care enough to search for him even if he *did* go missing. And he could always blame it on accidental magic later.

When he opened his eyes again, he was back in the Quidditch shop. Luckily, no one had noticed him, not even the shopkeeper who was busy interacting with a large family.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief, hoping that the Dark Lord would forget about the encounter within a couple of days. It didn't take him long to find his family again, and he was grateful that James had finally gotten his broom. James gave him a funny look, probably having noticed his disappearance, and then locked arms with Harry, silently forbidding any more running off. Harry didn't mind, he certainly wasn't planning to confront the Dark Lord one on one anymore. After all, he wasn't sure he would live to see the end of the day if he was stuck in such a bad situation anymore.

But...it was worth it, because his intended was utterly beautiful. He would never forget those red eyes as long as he lived.

Back in Flourish and Blotts, one Tom Riddle stood with his lips turned upward into a lazy smirk. "Harry Potter, hm?" he murmured, and lost in thought, departed to finish preparing for the now more interesting school year.

First Year Part I

Chapter Summary

Author's Note: I'm literally dying trying to keep up with actual history of James Potter's time (I CAN'T EVEN FIGURE OUT HIS PARENTS' NAMES?) Like I want Narcissa Black and Lucius to be only two years older than Harry, but when James Potter is a first year, Narcissa is a fifth year? So like...Disclaimer: I am done trying to keep up with actual history and students might have different backgrounds and I may actually have to make up a few characters. Also, unless reviewers will be very angry with me I am not including Peter Pettigrew in my story since I have other plans for Sirius Black and James Potter and don't want the Marauders to be formed this time around and that character is disgusting D:

Side Note: THANK YOU SO MUCH WONDERFUL PEOPLE FOR COMMENTING! You guys make me want to write more and more and after reading all your lovely comments I literally started writing for three hours straight and thus this was born. So thank you lovely, lovely people!

It didn't take long to find Harry's wand. Soul bounds always shared similar wands, and with Harry's soul bound being the Dark Lord, Ollivander only had to think for a second before pulling out a holly wand with a phoenix feather as its core. "A powerful wand for a powerful wizard," he had murmured, almost as if to himself after Harry had handed him the required payment.

Harry would have never had the courage to speak up if his parents were still around. They somehow had the ability to make him feel like an idiot for every word he spoke, so he had started to not say a thing whenever he was in their presence. But his parents didn't want to be there when Ollivander learned just who he was soul bound to and had ushered him off to the wand shop alone. Harry didn't mind; he had already faced down the Dark Lord earlier in the trip and no one else could be as dangerous as him. "Do you think it'll be difficult, sir?"

Ollivander startled, almost as if he had forgotten that Harry was still there. The galleons in his hand clattered noisily onto the floor as they fell, rolling a few feet before they stopped. Harry watched them for a while before training his emerald eyes back onto Ollivander. "Difficult, you ask? It will be so, I'm afraid. I trust you know by now the true nature of your Intended."

"The Dark Lord," Harry answered, sullenly. His intended *was* a right git and it definitely was not going to be an easy match. He could hardly imagine the Dark Lord falling into his arms as soon as his soul mark was laid bare to see; he could instead imagine the Dark Lord sneering and rejecting him as soon as it became clear that Harry thought Tom Riddle was his soul mate.

"*A mere child on an equal level with me? You must be out of your mind,*" he would say. Harry grimaced at the thought, and Ollivander patted him sympathetically on the arm.

"I can imagine how conflicted you must feel, young Potter. But don't despair, these things have a way of working out."

"Sir, you've seen a lot of soul matches, haven't you? Are there any instances in which soul mates don't match?"

Ollivander nodded, pity shining clearly in his eyes. "It's not as uncommon as you would think, Mr. Potter."

Harry winced at the wandmaker's words, fear and despair running fast through his heart. He wasn't wrong then; he should stick to his family and stay firmly away from the Dark Lord.

Ollivander caught his attention again by lightly placing a hand on his shoulder. "But I have a feeling that you two are soul mates. You mustn't give up hope."

Harry thanked Ollivander for the wand and for the kind advice, almost fleeing the wand shop in hopes of finding somewhere to be alone.

He wasn't so lucky; his parents had finished shopping for the books and potion supplies, and it wasn't long before they were heading toward the pub to floo home.

Harry spent the rest of the summer getting acquainted with his wand. It was *loads* better than the practice wand he had been given because this one chose him. It was wonderful and he was able to cast spells that had continuously been out of reach for him. The most noticeable one that he enjoyed was the Bubble-head charm. It wasn't particularly hard, but the movements were tricky enough that he had been unable to do it with a wand that didn't particularly respond well to him.

He used it to explore the more dusty areas of the library that he had been scared to explore before. Even though they were a Light family, they possessed some books that were Dark enough to be cursed. His parents probably would have removed them if they had remembered they were still in there, but fortunately his parents weren't the most well-versed of pure-bloods.

They were still taught their pure-blood manners, but compared to the Malfoy family, they held far less parties. They still went to the main events that the Malfoy family held, but considering Malfoys were not firmly on the side of the Light, his parents more often than not rejected the invitations. Instead, they were frequent visitors of the Longbottoms and the Weasleys, families that were so disgustingly Light they practically shone with it.

Harry didn't mind. He didn't mind Light Magic, and he *knew* if he wanted to evade detection from the Dark Lord then he had to be an avid practitioner of Light magic. And if he *truly* wanted to not let the Dark Lord have any ideas, then he had to play the part that his family had made for him. He had to be the son that was a bumbling idiot, the son that a pure blood family could not stomach making Heir. It was going to be hard to rein in his magic and his talent, but he was used to scorn and ridicule from his parents, and consequently, most other people he had interacted with.

And his parents didn't expect much from him anymore.

It would be easier to accept their disappointment than their wrath that would descend upon him if he did better than James in school anyway.

With this mindset, as long as he did barely better than passing, then James Potter would definitely do better than him.

Harry didn't begrudge his twin for the life he had been given. In a way, James took on a set of burdens for him that he would never truly be able to know. Being a pure-blood heir called for a strict set of manners and Harry didn't envy James for the amount of pure-blood etiquette he had been forced to learn. And if Harry wanted to skiv off during an important party, then his parents didn't make a big fuss, *especially* since none of their friends wanted to particularly meet Harry anyway.

Harry had a sinking idea that they all knew Harry was Tom's soul bound, and it was only their manners keeping them from treating him as if he had gone Dark already.

James was the only good thing in his life right now. James ignored their parents and continuously stayed the same good twin he had been even before the soul mark had appeared. Harry was eternally grateful that James hadn't turned his back on him; instead, James seemed to be on his side more than ever before. He had gotten into countless arguments with their parents about Harry's supposed Dark nature, and would still be getting into them if Harry hadn't told him to stop. It was sweet, what James had done, but his parents' mind wouldn't be swayed by him no matter how many arguments James would come up with. At least Harry would repay him by making James look amazing, well, at least compared to him. He knew James wouldn't like it; James hated it when others would look down on Harry because James knew that Harry was actually really amazing at magic. But Harry didn't mind the ridicule, and James would just have to get used to it.

He also found himself using the Bubble Head charm to explore the depths of the Lake that was behind their Manor. Just because James was the more athletic of them in his love for Quidditch that matched their father's didn't mean Harry didn't like to do some outdoors activities too. He *would* enjoy Quidditch if he actually enjoyed other peoples' company, but every time James would draw him into Quidditch matches, the other pure blood heirs would awkwardly try to accept him on behalf of James. But swimming was a solitary exercise, and his parents couldn't find him when he was deep into the lakes' depths. He spent most of the summer learning spells that he could practice underwater and when James was out with the other pure-bloods, he spent it deep underwater, in a place where no one could find him.

The day they went to Hogwarts was also the day that James Potter met Sirius Black and promptly became best friends. They rode in the same carriage on the Hogwarts Express, and there, Harry was made to feel awkward as the two bonded over things that he held no interest in.

The Sorting Hat broke out in song as soon as they made their entrance into the Great Hall, startling most of the first years enough to quiver in their steps. Harry watched the sorting hat with hooded eyes, his heart beating fast as he did his best to ignore the fact that his Intended was currently in his point of view. He knew what he was getting into when he decided to enroll in Hogwarts. That he would be able to see his Intended each and every day and know that he had to withhold the desire to shout out that they were meant to be. That with any mistake, the Dark Lord would find out that his name had branded Harry to be his, which was an outcome that Harry desperately wanted to avoid.

It wasn't long before the Sorting Hat was being placed on Harry's hat by a kind lady called Minerva McGonagall. Harry aimed a smile at her before his eyes were dwarfed by the rim of the Sorting Hat.

Ah, the soul bound of our esteemed Professor, eh?

Harry startled, and couldn't stop himself from turning to face where Tom Riddle was, even though he *knew* internally that the hat's words wouldn't reach the Dark Lord. He aborted himself halfway through the motion, even though he knew he had probably already given himself away. *Please, don't tell him*, he settled for pleading.

The sorting hat gave a pleasing hum, *You would do well in Slytherin, Harry Potter.*

I can't, please! My family...they would never understand if I'm sorted there. I need to go into Gryffindor.

You do not belong into Gryffindor. Out of all the houses, that house is not suited for you.

The words stung, and Harry clenched his fists so tight that his fingernails left angry, red marks. *Why? Is it because I am destined to be Dark?*

If you continue down this path, you will live a life trying to pretend you are someone you are not.

Is that so bad, really? To pretend in order to get love? Sometimes, it is better to pretend than to be someone truly unlikeable.

To think that, you are definitely a -

Wait!

"SLYTHERIN!"

The rest of the Sorting passed with a blur. James was sorted into Gryffindor as expected and the rest of the other names hardly mattered to Harry. He sat through the last speech of the Headmaster, and when the Feast began, he couldn't even muster up the energy to eat. He simply buried his face in his hands, completely miserable. He couldn't believe that this had happened. His worst nightmare was coming true. He couldn't avoid the Dark Lord's attention if he was literally right under the Dark Lord's nose! And there was a reason there was no under-performing Slytherin; they were rumored to be tortured by their house if they received anything under an E. He couldn't very well continue his plan if he was Sorted into Slytherin.

A hand landing on his shoulder startled him out of his maudlin thoughts and suddenly arms were being wrapped around his torso and he was being bodily lifted up out of his seat. Harry yelped and flailed, but James, the more athletic of the two, was used to Harry's antics and solidly pressed on.

"James!" protested Harry, but it fell on deaf ears as James continued to haul him out of the Great Hall and into a private alcove. He wasn't sure what to think, but fear gripped his heart as he realized that this time, his twin might be *really* disappointed in him.

So he was completely startled when James simply poked him in the forehead, a grin on his face. "Cheer up, Harry! I saw you looking like the world had ended so I knew I had to come get you."

"I wasn't," he started to protest, but fell silent a second later as he realized he really *was* feeling that way.

"Knew it," said James, crossing his arms and trying his best to look stern at Harry. "Were you thinking about Dark and Light again? I swear, you're the only eleven-year-old who thinks so hard about things like that. Sirius was sorted into Gryffindor and he isn't freaking out like you are. And his parents might actually *kill* him for it, so you should stop being so dramatic."

"I wouldn't count our parents out," muttered Harry, and did his best to look contrite when James' expression turned into a glare. "Okay, okay, it's not *that* bad. I mean our parents probably already expected I'll be in Slytherin and really, the only horrible thing is I can't actually pretend to do bad at classes to make Mum and Dad happy - " He trailed off when James' expression morphed into a murderous one, and mentally backtracked to see what he could have said to have set his twin off.

"Merlin, Harry! I always thought you were just nervous when you performed magic in front of my friends, but you ...you tosser! You've been messing up on purpose! You made me look like such an idiot; I swear, this is the last time I'm singing your praises to my friends!"

"You've been..." Harry paused, his eyes wide as he looked over at James, suddenly aware he had a lot more than he had thought to thank his twin for. "James, you didn't have to..."

"And you git, just because your spells are *slightly* overpowered and you spend all your free time in our library doesn't mean you're so much better than me at magic! Don't you dare hold back or else...or else I'll tell Professor Riddle the truth and that is a *real* threat, Harry, and why are you laughing at me?" James ended his rant with a pout, and then he was suddenly pouncing on Harry, using his strength to ruffle Harry's hair in the way he *knew* Harry hated.

"I'm not laughing at you!" Harry got out between his dying chuckles. "It's just such a relief. I thought you would be angry and never talk to me again."

James shrugged, not even looking hurt at Harry's confession. "You're still my twin brother, Harry, even if you're a slimy Slytherin now. And you were under there a long time, Harry, I'm pretty sure you didn't want to be sent there."

"James," said Harry, touched by his brother's words, and was just about to pull James into a crushing hug when his twin continued.

"And the best part is that I don't have to share a room with your snoring anymore! I swear, sometimes I couldn't even fall asleep because you were so loud."

"I do *not* snore!" he protested and at James' answering snort, launched himself at his twin in order to get his revenge.

"Soul marks are interesting things," started out Professor Flitwick. "They can arrive at any time of your life but will be there forever; there is no known way of removing a soul mark once it is there. Soul marks are intensely private since they are the only link you will have to your

Intended. The first charm we will be learning is a glamour; it is highly complicated but I hope you all will work hard on learning it. After all, it will be your best bet to keeping your soul mark hidden from view."

Harry tried to pay attention, but the Professor's words were already common knowledge to him. He had learned the glamour only a few weeks after Tom's name had appeared on his chest and had mastered it only a day later. Desperation fueled his desire to learn, and he had gone on to one of the most complicated charms. It was fueled by a rune that he had carved onto a silver necklace and as such, could not be finited or removed even if the necklace went missing. It had taken him the better part of a few years to finish, but Harry was proud of his work. It was necessary, after all, when he was carrying the soul mark of a man that had more enemies than friends.

The charm they were learning now was only the beginning of a long series of increasingly complicated spells. He figured they would learn it over the school year, and those that had already gotten their soul marks would have to find another way to cover it up.

His green eyes landed on his twin, a slight smile on his face as he watched James practice the wand movements for the spell with a look of intense concentration. Harry had given another silver necklace to his younger twin, and James hadn't taken it off ever since he had gotten it. Sirius Black was practicing as well, and his face looked even more determined than James' face did. He was currently wearing his scarf so high up it looked uncomfortable. It was easy for Harry to tell that Sirius' soul mark was on his neck.

Harry wondered if he should try to hold back and pretend he didn't know the spell, but at James' warning look knew better than to even try. So when Professor Flitwick handed out the feathers, Harry waited until everyone had gotten their feathers before taking out his wand and casting the spell effortlessly. Professor Flitwick made an exclamation, awarding ten points to Slytherin and praising Harry's spellwork.

Harry flushed, not used to praise from those older than him, but accepted the praise gratefully all the same. He returned to people-watching a second later, bored out of his mind as he watched his fellow first years practice diligently. One pretty redhead had one hand still clasped around her left wrist and she looked supremely uncomfortable as she watched the other first years practice the glamour.

"It says Forever," offered up another first year. Harry blinked, startled that someone who wasn't James was actually talking to him, and turned to look at the speaker. The young boy, a first year Slytherin, realized that Harry probably had no idea who he was and a wry smile appeared on his face. "Severus Prince." He held out a hand and Harry shook it, still puzzled on why the boy had offered up information so freely.

"Harry Potter," he responded. "How do you know?"

"She got hers during breakfast today. She had no clue what it was and showed me before I could tell her it was supposed to be private."

"Oh," said Harry, "a muggleborn then?"

Severus' face looked pained and then he heaved a soft sigh. "I don't even know who she is."

Harry recognized Severus' face of discomfort; Harry, as an introvert, could never understand how others could talk to people they didn't know so freely and could tell that the redhead had started talking to Severus out of the blue, probably startling the poor boy enough that he was still feeling uncomfortable.

"But," continued Severus, still looking pained and unhappy, "it doesn't matter because..." he trailed off, looking lost and then a second later, was studying Harry's face carefully. "Your family is Light, right?"

Harry stiffened up, "I already know I'm not supposed to be in Slytherin."

"It isn't about that, though that *is* strange. I was just wondering your stance on muggleborns."

"Why?" asked Harry, puzzled. It took him a few seconds, but at Severus' expression and the way he was holding his right wrist...

He leaned forward, placing one hand on Severus' left one. Severus looked panicked before he sighed, pulling up his sleeve and leaving his right wrist bare. & *Always* was printed onto his pale skin in black, and Harry's breath hitched at the sight of it.

Severus was pulling down his sleeve a second later, looking utterly miserable. "I gave you too many hints."

Harry shot the boy an apologetic look, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have pressed."

"It's alright," said Severus, kindly, "I think some part of me wanted someone to know. I never would have imagined I would be soul bound to a *muggleborn*," he hissed lowly under his breath, and Harry, even as solitary and introverted as he was, couldn't help placing a comforting hand on Severus' shoulder.

"They're really not all that bad."

Severus shot Harry a look of disgust, and Harry couldn't help but to shake his head sadly at Severus' reactions. He felt sorry for the redhead, and wondered if maybe magic had actually made a mistake this time. He couldn't imagine Severus with her despite not knowing the girl at all; they were too different with Severus' pale and sour face and her vibrant, expressive one.

Harry was so nervous the first Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson that he had dropped his textbook during the middle of class, startling everyone and bringing amused red eyes to his own. Harry had flushed and mumbled out an apology, and Tom Riddle thankfully did not say a word.

But then, Tom Riddle *continued* to ignore him. Harry knew he shouldn't be feeling so distraught over it; he should be rejoicing that the Dark Lord had deemed him unworthy.

But all Harry wanted was for Riddle to notice him. He did his best not to raise his hand whenever Professor Riddle asked a question even when he *knew* the answer. Lily Evans, the muggleborn Severus was soul bound to, had the bad tendency to do that, and Harry knew it was only a matter of time before their professors got annoyed. She rambled, but her answers were generally correct and in the end, the Professors were forced to award her points for them. Harry only shared Charms and Potions with the Gryffindors, and he wondered what she was like

during Riddle's class. He could hardly imagine his Intended being as patient as the other teachers.

Severus and Harry were starting to become fast friends, and although Harry hadn't shown Severus his own soul mark as a sign of good will, Severus didn't seem to mind. Severus had taken to watching Lily Evans with sharp eyes whenever they had a class with the Gryffindors, and had even started sighing whenever Lily rose her hand to the harsh whispers of the others in the class. Severus was absolutely horrified at the idea of being soul bound to a muggleborn and was still slowly coming to terms with it.

Harry was more amused at the whole thing than not; to him, Severus was making a big deal out of nothing. After all, Harry would gladly give up his magic to be soul bound to someone as innocent as a muggleborn. After all, the muggleborns' only sin was to be born to someone not pure of blood while his soul bound... his soul bound was *the* Dark Lord, and there really was no excusing that.

Harry did his best in classes, casting his spells with a slight overpowering in hopes that his Intended would finally notice him. It was finally in their fourth class that Tom Riddle finally granted his wishes, asking Harry to stay after class.

"I must apologize," started out the Dark Lord after class had ended, freezing Harry into blinking terrified eyes up at the older man, who was still seated behind his mahogany desk. He was straightening out the papers from their class before, but his intense red eyes were still fixated on Harry.

"For what, sir?" Harry stammered out, his heart beating erratically.

"I assumed you weren't chosen as Heir because you were lacking in magic. But your abrupt departure from before tells me otherwise."

"It was accidental magic, sir. I was - it just happened."

Riddle sighed, "Do not lie to me, Potter."

"You're not allowed to use Legilimency on students!"

Tom Riddle's predatory smirk was back, and he lifted an eyebrow as if to challenge Harry to say something more about his unauthorized use of Legilimency.

"You're a *git*," Harry grumbled, and flushed when Riddle actually *chuckled*. The sound made his insides feel funny, and brought his cheeks to a further red.

"Tell me, Potter, how far along are you in magic? Something tells me you aren't like most of the other first-years."

"Why don't you just read it out of my mind?" Harry muttered under his breath.

"Is that an invitation?" asked Riddle, a slow smile making its way across his face. The smile made Harry's brain short circuit, so he wasn't able to say anything until Riddle had already risen from his chair.

He was finally shaken out of his stupor when Riddle was standing across from him, stammering out a quick, "No!" and falling back from the taller Lord.

Riddle looked amused again, and stepped forward so that Harry's step back was nullified. "But it would make things so much easier, wouldn't it, Harry? And I promise it won't hurt," he said in a low voice.

"You're lying! And no means no," growled Harry, glaring hard at the hand that had been reaching toward his face.

"Then stop me," said Riddle, and suddenly the hand was making contact with his chin and his green eyes were meeting with deep intense red.

Harry reacted instantly with an overpowered wandless *lumos*, flashing the room with one second of an intense flare. Riddle was forced to blink, and that one second of contact was more than enough time for Harry to break the legilimency connection.

Harry felt the elation of getting one up on his Intended, and shot a triumphant glance at the Dark Lord. His stomach dropped as soon as he saw Riddle's expression, and he belatedly realized he had played right into his soul mate's trap.

The intense gleam of satisfaction resided in Riddle's red eyes, and his smile looked pleased. "Very interesting, Harry. I think that's all I need to know for today. I will see you every Tuesday at eight o'clock in my office."

"You can't just - " he started to protest, but Riddle's expression hardened, and he cut himself off with a small pout. "Do I have any choice here?" he finished in a resigned tone.

"You could refuse, but then I'll just have to assign a few detentions..."

"Git," Harry grumbled, and rich, deep laughter filled the room. Harry flushed; Riddle's laughter was doing strange things to his stomach and for some reason, he wanted to hear more of it.

"You're an impudent little brat, aren't you? No matter, I will work it out of you soon enough."

"I'll like to see you try," Harry muttered and when Riddle shot him a warning glance, knew he had pushed hard enough. He excused himself to another amused expression from the Professor and found himself in the hallway with flushed cheeks and an erratic heartbeat.

He had failed miserably at not catching the Dark Lord's attention, but for some reason, Harry really and utterly did not care.

Author's Note: Well, I messed up here :P. I realized too far in that I had too many ideas for first year...so instead of time skip, I'll end up like finishing first year so that means MORE SCENES IN WHICH I HAVE ROMANTIC! TENSION WITH old Tom and underage Harry which makes me feel SO very uncomfortable :(Also, I hate slow build fics...but here I am writing one haha. I wrote all three confession scenes already too D: sigh, all I want to do is have Voldemort and Harry together already. Anyway, do you guys want me to time skip/continue writing each year? Also, I know I wrote in a lot of controversial stuff ish in this chapter with Lily and Severus paired together and changing Severus' past, so I hope you guys don't mind :(don't hesitate to let

me know your thoughts! Also, Tom didn't actually perform Legilimency on Harry this time; he just read it on Harry's face and decided to tease him a little bit.

Thanks again for all the lovely feedback. They really help me write and it's thanks to all you guys that this came out so fast. Look for another chapter next friday morning!

Severus' background: So, I wanted to do something a little different and I wanted to make Severus have a happier lifestyle because I didn't want to write a jaded abused Severus soooo since there are soul marks in this story...Eileen Prince married a Muggle because she didn't have a soul mark but it faded in like after severus was born and then Tobias Snape started to be a right bastard to Snape and her so she moved out and took Severus with her so they lived in the Prince Manor/lived a good life so Snape had no idea who lily was until Hogwarts came :D.

First Year Part II

Chapter Notes

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

Dinner was mashed potatoes and roasted chicken. Harry could barely swallow a thing, his mind making up scenarios of what would happen in Riddle's office just an hour later. As such, he barely noticed when a second-year approached Severus, who was seated next to Harry.

"Prince," started out the platinum-haired boy, and sneered when Harry looked up at his friend's name. "Potter."

"What do you want, Malfoy?" asked Severus, finally drawing his eyes away from where it had been resting on Lily Evans.

Malfoy noticed, a flash of disgust crossing his face before it was replaced with a neutral expression. "It's almost eight," he paused, then sent a haughty look toward Harry, "Professor Riddle will be expecting us soon."

His words stung and Harry's face fell. He knew he shouldn't be so disappointed that their lessons weren't going to be private; he should be ecstatic that the Dark Lord hadn't actually singled him out. But he couldn't help how he was feeling and he almost wanted to spite the Dark Lord by not showing up.

Severus shot a glare at Malfoy, misinterpreting Harry's fallen face. "Harry, it's not a big deal. You're *really* talented in magic and the only reason you weren't invited was because you're a Potter."

The words took a minute to register and then Harry was shaking his head, oddly touched that Severus would go out of his comfort zone to try and make him feel better. "I was invited, Severus."

Malfoy scoffed, "Please, Potter, Professor Riddle probably doesn't even know who you are."

Harry ignored Lucius, instead talking directly to his friend. "I just thought they were going to be private lessons."

"You're a *Potter*," snarled Lucius, annoyed that Harry was ignoring him. "And even accomplished adults have trouble getting Professor Riddle to notice them. Why would he notice someone who doesn't even belong in Slytherin?"

Harry blinked, puzzled on why Lucius was being so hostile toward him. He was just about to respond when Severus rounded on Lucius, an angry expression on his usually dour face.

"Sod off, Malfoy. We can get to Professor Riddle's office on our own."

Malfoy scowled, but turned on his heel, angrily stalking back to his seat further down the Slytherin table.

"Sorry," said Severus, a grimace on his face as he turned back to his mashed potatoes. "That was Lucius Malfoy. Mum refused one of their invitations last year and now Malfoy is determined to get me to pay up for the slight by becoming his minion. It's rather annoying."

"Thanks for standing up for me," said Harry, and watched as Severus turned pink at his words.

"It wasn't for you, Potter. Malfoy's just a git," said Severus, even with his cheeks pink. "Now come on, we don't want to be late."

Riddle's office was bigger than it seemed thanks to magic. The room was dimly lit and there was a fire roaring in the background. It painted a cosy picture, but the man standing in the middle differed from it. Tom Riddle cut a dominating presence, and his impressive, expensive robes ensured everyone's eyes stayed on him.

His red eyes landed on Harry as soon as the two of them walked in, and a slow smile started to appear on his face. Harry made sure to ignore the Professor's attempt at making eye contact, still sore about the fact that the Dark Lord had misled him so spectacularly. There were other Slytherins in there, and Harry took his time studying each one. They were all young; Lucius was the eldest one being a second year.

Lucius stood up when they walked in, a scowl still on his handsome face. He took one glance at Professor Riddle and when Riddle didn't say anything about Harry Potter, he angrily opened his mouth, a look of disbelief on his face.

"Professor Riddle. I believe there is a Gryffindor here," Lucius sneered.

Harry didn't let the sting from Lucius' snub bother him; he was used to kids being petty and bullying was something that hardly penetrated his thick skin anymore. He was more interested in seeing how Riddle would respond to something that so undermined his authority and wondered if Riddle would defend him or not.

There was a long silence after Lucius' words, and finally Riddle spoke. "Are you talking about yourself, Mr. Malfoy?" he asked in a dangerous, low voice.

Malfoy flushed, shame coloring his face red before he gathered up his courage again. "He is a Potter! He shouldn't be welcome to your meetings, my Lord."

Riddle's eyes flashed with anger, "You are not allowed to call me that within these walls, Mr. Malfoy."

Malfoy stiffened, "I apologize, sir."

Riddle watched him for a minute longer, his red eyes intense as they stared at the Malfoy heir. "See to it that it doesn't happen again."

Malfoy hung his head in shame, but still had enough courage to keep going. "And Potter, sir?"

"What about young Mr. Potter?" asked Riddle, a hint of annoyance in his voice.

"He doesn't belong here!"

"Ah, so that's how it is," said Riddle, tilting his head with a small smile on his face. "Are you feeling threatened by a mere first year, Mr. Malfoy? How unbecoming."

"I -"

"You came here thinking you could get my attention," said Riddle, his smile growing wider as Malfoy quivered where he stood, only confirming Riddle's suspicions. Riddle paused, looking like he could go on and possibly destroy Malfoy's status and confidence, but for some reason didn't. His smile stayed, but his words became kinder. "No matter, Mr. Malfoy, if you are so worked up about it, I'll give you a chance to prove yourself."

Suddenly, red eyes were looking directly at him and Harry jumped at the intensity burning in his Intended's eyes. "Come here, Harry."

Every inch of his being didn't want to - he didn't even want to be *here* in the first place - but Riddle's eyes promised punishment if he didn't obey, so Harry followed Riddle's instructions.

Riddle's smile only grew bigger. "I propose a duel. Loser forfeits the privilege of attending Tuesday's lessons."

Harry's eyes widened at the proclamation, turning a confused glance at his Professor. Riddle's smug smirk confirmed it; his Intended was definitely playing around with him. Riddle *knew* Harry had no desire of being here, yet he was handing him the way out on a silver platter? The whole thing was fishy.

Malfoy also looked confused at the matter, but the confusion gave way to confidence. After all, no matter how talented Harry was, Malfoy was a second year and should therefore know a lot more spells than Harry.

"Sir," spoke out Severus, his eyes wide and his lower teeth worrying his lower lip, "Malfoy is a second year. Harry can't duel someone like that."

Riddle looked amused again, which seemed to be his default expression among the first years, "And how does Harry feel about the duel? Do you want to back out?"

Harry was startled again; he hadn't expected the Professor to actually give him a choice in the matter. But at Riddle's hard eyes, his heart sank. Riddle wasn't actually giving him a choice; he was still messing around with him. If he backed out, then Malfoy would think he was a coward and he would be bullied even more. And even if he accepted, he couldn't get out of the Tuesday lessons because he couldn't actually *lose* the duel. If he did, Malfoy would use him as a stepping stone for the rest of his school years. He stifled the urge to sigh and instead shook his head, signifying his consent to the duel.

"Perfect," said Riddle, and by the knowing glint on his eyes, Harry *knew* that Riddle was *enjoying* this. "However, it *would* be unfair to let a second year face a first year without some sort of advantage." Riddle suddenly clapped, and both Malfoy's and Harry's wands were in his hands. "No wands."

"But sir," started Malfoy.

Riddle turned to look at Malfoy, a stern frown on his face, "Don't tell me you have another objection, Mr. Malfoy."

"You would have us fight without magic? Like...like muggles, sir?" asked Malfoy, aghast.

Riddle gave a derisive laugh, "Without magic, Mr. Malfoy? Have you never heard of wandless magic?"

"No right-minded wizard would ever -"

Riddle snapped, and the oxygen above his now outstretched palm combusted, forming a small fireball. The flames flickered loudly in the ongoing silence, casting long shadows onto Riddle's smirking face. Riddle closed his hand on the fire a second later, snuffing it out in one quick motion.

"I imagine this duel may cause trouble for you, Mr. Malfoy. Harry, here," he paused to reach out and pat Harry on the head like they were actually close, "has performed wandless apparition."

Harry jumped at the sudden contact, and when Riddle left his hand there, glared upward at the offending appendage. Riddle didn't seem to notice, his eyes trained on Malfoy.

"Still up for the challenge, Mr. Malfoy?"

Malfoy startled at the question, "Of course I am," he stammered out.

Riddle took two long blinks, his smirk growing, "Even when you cannot perform wandless magic? Please, Mr. Malfoy, you are being purposely obtuse."

"But I..."

"Sometimes it is better to back down when you know you are beat," said Riddle, not unkindly. "Abraxas, your father, had the same problem in his youth."

"You were close with my father, sir?"

"We were in the same year in Hogwarts. Has your father never mentioned me?"

Malfoy colored, lowering his head. "He told me to form my own opinion of you, sir."

Riddle laughed, startling Harry at the mirth contained in it. He never imagined that his Professor could actually show emotion so openly; he was used to the closed off Riddle that taught well, but not affectionately. The sound was intoxicating.

"Malfoy probably just thinks you're a git now," grumbled Harry under his breath, bringing Tom Riddle's red eyes back to him.

The smirk was still there as the Professor removed his hand from Harry's soft, brown locks, "Tsk tsk, children shouldn't use such crude language, Harry."

Harry scoffed, only helping to widen Riddle's smug smirk. Riddle deposited one last fond pat on Harry's head before clapping his hands and getting everyone's attention.

"That brings us to the reason why I brought you all here. As Mr. Malfoy has shown, wandless magic has been outdated for centuries now. Most wizards don't even remember they can do magic without a wand. But what is a wand but a simple channel for wizards to do magic? As I have shown earlier, an experienced wizard can channel their magic through anything. I simply use my hand as a conduit for my magic, and by calling my magic, I can ignite the air."

Riddle paused when a first year Slytherin raised her hand. He nodded, giving her permission to speak. "But sir, aren't we stronger *with* a wand?"

Riddle's smile was derisive, "Are you stronger with something limiting you so greatly? Many wizards cannot perform without their wands and as such, when it is taken away, you are nothing *but* a Muggle. If you cannot access your magic, you might as well not be a wizard."

"But the wand is supposed to react better with our core, sir? It's supposed to make magic easier."

"Easier, maybe, but is it necessarily better? I may have to concentrate a bit more to get the same spell working, but the power and magic exerted is exactly the same. Wand movements and incantations are simply training tools. A wizard without a wand is able to cast the same spell with the same power as one with a wand. To put it in easier to understand terms, what is one way to win a duel?"

"To summon the opponent's wand," answered Malfoy.

Tom nodded, "And without a wand, your opponent is harmless. This is why the Ministry likes to promote the usage of wands. To punish criminals, they snap their wands in half. But are we so out of tune with our own magic that we cannot perform without something that was made by humans? Magic has been around for centuries, all of it starting with Merlin. Merlin was well-known for his ease of performing magic without a conduit other than his body. This is not impossible in this time and day."

"Then sir," spoke the girl, her eyes full of curiosity and interest as she leaned forward, "are you going to teach us to perform magic without a wand?"

Riddle's smile was kind, almost as if he extremely enjoyed passing on this type of knowledge. Harry was entranced at the sight, and was reminded exactly of why the books had so much praise for Tom Riddle as a teacher. When he was teaching something he *wanted* to teach and not the first year curriculum for Defense against the Dark Arts, he was passionate and it was utterly beautiful.

"Yes, I will. It will be hard work, but I handpicked you students especially because you all have an affinity for wandless magic. You must start at a young age or else you would have leaned too heavily on a wand as a crutch. Wand-using magic is a hard habit to break."

"Why didn't you start teaching us earlier then, sir?" asked Malfoy.

"Because," said Riddle, pausing to aim an amused look at Harry, "I have never had a student so proficient in wandless magic before. Harry Potter will be helping me teach."

Harry glared daggers at the Professor, only causing Riddle to raise his eyebrow at his actions.

"Our first lesson would be the light gathering spell," said Riddle. "Most of you should have learned it by now. The incantation is *Lumos* and it is an easy spell to use with or without a wand. You simply concentrate your magic at the tip of your finger, like so," Riddle held up his finger, showing the bright light that shone from the tip of it. "Harry has demonstrated his usage of the spell to me a while back, and he will be able to assist you if you need help."

By the end of the lesson, only Harry and Severus were able to produce the wandless *lumos*. Malfoy had been using his wand for too long and could barely summon up a flicker of light. His animosity toward Harry only hindered his progress.

Harry was left baffled at the end of the session, and was towed away by Severus before he could approach the Dark Lord demanding answers.

"Why?"

Riddle sighed, drawing his wand and casting two spells in quick successions. "Privacy spells," explained Riddle at Harry's questioning look, and he gestured toward the seat in front of him. "Sit, Harry."

Harry obeyed, sitting himself in the green armchair his Intended had gestured at. He had come demanding answers during Riddle's office hours because Riddle had seemed content on not explaining himself. Classes had progressed naturally and it was fast approaching Tuesday again. Harry was not fancying another confusing lesson and had worked up his courage to ask.

There was a long pause, in which Riddle spent it searching Harry's face. "Why teach wandless magic? I am sure I explained it during Tuesday's lesson unless you weren't paying attention?"

"No, I was," colored Harry, biting his lip and hating the way Riddle seemed to be able to dance around him with his words. "I mean why choose me?"

"Hm," said Riddle, a smile on his lips, "I guess I can tell you since you already know most of it. Tell me, how are you and your twin brother?"

"James? If you do something to James, you git, then I'll -"

He was cut off by a laugh filled with mirth, and Harry blinked at the sound. "I don't understand how you twins are so close considering the circumstances."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, warily.

"You must know that Dumbledore is the leader of the Light. He has already staked a claim on your twin to be his heir."

"He has? I didn't - James never told me."

"James doesn't know," explained Riddle. "But it's rumored to be true. Dumbledore has already given special lessons to your twin. I was curious, I admit, when the scandal came out in the papers. After hearing of Dumbledore's stake on James Potter, I brushed it off as you having little to no magical power. But after meeting you, I had to wonder, why *would* they pass up someone who is so obviously stronger than James Potter? And then, I thought, it was time I chose an heir."

And who better than the twin they refused? Not only are you magically proficient, but I have the added benefit of the heir of the Light being unable to kill you. It is wonderfully evil, isn't it?"

"What?!" yelled Harry. "No," he said firmly, shaking his head, "I absolutely refuse to be part of your scheme to get back at Dumbledore."

"Oh, Harry," said Riddle, his eyes gleaming with amusement. "It was already sealed in place when you were Sorted into Slytherin. Don't you wonder why you have been given such an easy time in Slytherin despite being a Potter? If Dumbledore is trying to make James Potter a Prince of Gryffindor, then I *will* make you into the Prince of Slytherin."

"I am *not* Dark! And whatever you say or do, I will *never* be your Heir!" Harry angrily stood from his seat, glaring at his Intended. He couldn't believe the *nerve* of Riddle, even knowing that the man was the Dark Lord. To play around with someone else's fate like that and not even give that person a choice?

He was the Dark Lord's pawn, and he *hated* it. He wanted to punch the smug smirk off Riddle's face, and he wanted to go back in time so he was never ever sorted into Slytherin. If only he had been given Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff, then he would have never ensnared the Dark Lord's attention so completely.

"Say what you want," said the Dark Lord, a tad smugly, "but I have already made you mine."

Harry colored at the choice of words, before turning to leave the room in a huff. His Intended was *really* a git who only cared about himself.

"And Harry? I'll see you on Tuesday at eight or I *will* assign you detentions for the rest of the school year."

Harry shot one last hateful glare at Riddle before storming out of the office and slamming the door.

A/N: I'm really sorry guys. I really thought I could get this chapter up to par but I've been having a really busy week :\. I reread this over and over and I'm still not sure if I should add in the last part? I'm sorry if this chapter is disappointing, I just didn't have time to fix it and I didn't want to go back on my promise on having something uploaded on Friday. Ahh :(Please let me know what you guys think! Since I possibly have a better week coming up, I'm thinking about coming back and fixing this one / rewriting it QQ. Let me know! And thank you ALL for all the lovely feedback because they make me giddy and happy and wonderfully inspired to write even more!

Also, because Tom is wonderfully evil, what he means is that Dumbledore would hesitate to kill Harry because like you know, Dumbledore has the tendency to want to save kids (case in point: Draco Malfoy in the books) and Tom won't hesitate to kill James xD. And James would never want to kill Harry sooo... and plus, Riddle just doesn't want to be one-upped by Dumbledore so if Dumbledore has an heir, he's gonna get one too xD.

See you guys next Friday :) and thanks all for reading!!!

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: 3/6/2015: Thank you all for the lovely comments and all the kind words. I will be continuing this fic and I am so sorry that I already blew my update schedule already! I'm currently swapped with lab work and my all consuming love of Larry Stylinson (like I just found out about this 3 weeks ago and it's all I can think about) so I have most of Chapter 4 written and as soon as finals are done I'll be sure to get around finishing it. I am so sorry and thank you all so much for writing such wonderful words and I'm sorry for being so irresponsible!

First Year Part III

"Harry," said James in a soft voice, wiggling his small hands until they were entangled in Harry's silky locks. "What happened, Harry?"

Harry made a noise in response, but kept his face buried in James' sheets.

James sighed, "Harry, I can't help if you won't tell me what's wrong."

"Can I stay here tonight?"

"Course," James replied immediately, "you know you're always welcome here."

The words made him smile into the sheets and then he turned so he could grin up at his younger twin. James looked exasperated, but his expression was fond, and the sight made Harry happy. They had only gotten closer as their first year progressed. James had kept to his promise of sticking by his side even as a Gryffindor and Harry was sure that Sirius and Severus hated them both for making them spend so much time together. It had started in Potions, when James had pulled Harry up from his seat by Severus and into the seat next to him, his trademark cheeky grin on his face as he proclaimed that brothers should stick together. Harry had laughed, oddly touched, even when he knew James secretly wanted to be his Potions partner for his expertise.

Sneaking into the Gryffindor's tower came a month later. The other Gryffindors weren't too keen on spending time with Slytherins, but what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them. It was easy for the two of them to look like each other; with James' glasses hiding his green irises and the Gryffindor mark on his robes, no one really noticed the difference. And Harry knew enough privacy spells to keep the others from noticing if he really did decide to spend the night.

Harry leaned into his brother's soothing rubs, making a contented noise as his brother continued to stroke his hair. "You're the best, James."

"Course I am," said James, cheekily, but the smile slipped off his face a few seconds later. "What's the matter, Harry? I've never seen you so worked up."

Harry couldn't help stiffening and pouted when his brother withdrew his hands. "It's stupid, really."

"It's not stupid if it's got you all worked up like this," responded James, and he crossed his arms in front of him to look more stern.

"It's just...do you ever think Magic messed up?"

There was a loud, suffering sigh, "Should've known it'll be all about Professor Riddle again."

Harry sat up straighter, an offended look crossing his features. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's all you talk about!" countered James. "We'll be at dinner and you'll open up with 'You'll never believe what that bastard said!' and like, honestly, Harry, I think it's getting pretty difficult to convince Sirius that you *don't* have a crush on the man."

Harry could feel the hot flush on his face and he buried his face into his hands. "Is that - do people think I?"

James snorted, "*Everyone* has a crush on the Professor, Harry. You're just special because he's *yours*."

"He's not *mine*," Harry immediately said, and couldn't help feeling offended when his twin just rolled his eyes.

"Right, and what do the words on your heart say?"

"I don't know how you're so easygoing about it," said Harry, sullenly. "He's the Dark Lord! Why am I the only one panicking about this?"

"It's not like I'm forgetting who he is, Harry. But he's your Intended. And Magic doesn't mess up. There must be a reason for you two to be together and I'm going for the route of you changing him to be a better person rather than you turning Dark, too."

"You're so bloody optimistic," grumbled Harry.

"Hey, one of us has to be an eleven-year-old, and it's definitely not going to be you, Mr. I like to read books more than I like moving."

Harry scowled and James' expression softened.

"We're too young to be worrying about this, Harry! We're supposed to be having fun learning new things and looking for love. You should be happy that you already know who Magic Intended you for."

"But -"

"No buts!" said James, sternly. "Love is a beautiful thing and you should just be happy!"

"You're ridiculous," Harry said, but James shrugged off his insult with a cheery smile.

Harry knew he should confront his brother about the lessons with Dumbledore. It had been the reason he had come up to the Gryffindor Tower in the first place. But James was just so cheerful and he was *right*. They were only eleven and even *if* his Intended and Dumbledore were using them as political pawns, he didn't have it in his heart to make his brother worry.

He buried his misgivings about Dark and Light, and settled in for the night.

It was easier said than done. The stark differences between the two were all too easy to see in even the most innocuous of things. The animosity between Gryffindor and Slytherin were an easy juxtaposition to the rivalry between Dumbledore and Riddle, and it presented itself to Harry each and every day. Harry wondered if his classmates ever thought about why exactly they were supposed to hate each other and in the end, couldn't stop thinking about what actually *were* their differences.

Harry had realized all too soon that he honestly did not have much of an idea of what exactly their differences were. The books that he had been able to buy from Flourish and Blotts weren't exactly forthcoming on their differences, and he lamented the fact that he hadn't thought to purchase a book on political parties before coming to Hogwarts. And he was much too wary of going to the library to borrow one; for all he knew, the records could get back to his parents and then he would have to be subjected to another episode of finding out that his parents really did think he was going to go Dark.

The whole thing was confusing, and asking Severus hadn't helped matters much. Severus had simply said, "Those who are Light are idiots. If you don't want to be an idiot, then be Dark."

And had refused to say much else on the matter.

It was bloody frustrating, and there was no way Harry was going to ask Lucius for a more thorough explanation.

After sitting through another three tortuous sessions of teaching wandless magic to the Slytherins Riddle had picked out, Harry couldn't help deciding to turn to Riddle for help. After all, his Intended was a Professor and the topic was definitely one the Professor would feel passionate about.

"Is there a reason you're still here, Harry?" asked Riddle.

"Uh," he stammered out, his nervousness only made worse when the Professor raised a single elegant eyebrow. He didn't know if he was ever going to get used to being alone in his Intended's presence and even when he was feeling confident, he couldn't help getting tangled up in his own words.

Riddle gave a small chuckle, "If you don't say it, I'll read it from your mind."

Harry scowled, "That's still illegal, you know."

Riddle gave a little shrug, as if he couldn't be bothered by such small details. "Dark Lord, remember? And you *are* my heir."

"I didn't agree to that," he grumbled.

"You turned up for lessons and you've been a proper good boy for the past month. So I'll indulge you, Harry. Ask away."

"What's the difference between Dark and Light?" he blurted out before he could lose his nerve.

There was a beat of silence, and then another, and suddenly the Dark Lord was laughing. "You're my heir and you don't even know that? Merlin, what have your parents been teaching you?"

Harry flushed in embarrassment, and he looked down at his clenched hands in shame. "They haven't been teaching me much about anything, honestly," he settled for responding.

The laughter was cut off as abruptly as it came, and when Harry looked up, the Professor looked irritated. "The nerve of them," he bit out, and Riddle cut himself off with a frustrated sigh.

"They never do seem to learn, really."

"Professor?"

"It's better if you learn from me," said the Professor, thoughtfully, his red eyes dancing in delight. "Books could never describe what the world thinks being Dark entails and I think you'll be far more interested with a demonstration. Detention, Potter, Saturday in the afternoon."

Harry rolled his eyes, "You don't have to give me detention to make me go somewhere."

"Tsk ts, Harry, use your mind and think on why I am doing so."

"To make my life miserable?" he responded immediately, and was rewarded with an even more irritated Dark Lord.

"Dumbledore is a meddling old man and I prefer him not to learn of my interest in you until it's too late. Stop being such a brat, Harry. I'm doing you a favor."

Harry blinked, cutting off the cheeky retort he had been planning on using. His Intended was doing him a favor, and there was no reason for him to anger him. Still, an afternoon with just him and the Dark Lord seemed to be just asking for trouble...

"Can my brother come? I mean, he doesn't know much about Dark and Light either and maybe you can convince him, too?"

Riddle looked amused, "Just him. I am not teaching a whole class of your friends, Harry."

Harry looked down, a pleased flush crossing his cheeks. "Thanks," he murmured and was rewarded with a soft chuckle from his Intended.

Now all he had to do was convince James...

"I don't know how you get me to agree to these things," sighed James, wrapped up in his warmest cloak and bundled up in his red and gold scarf with matching mittens and earmuffs. "If we die, I'm coming back to haunt you."

"But if I'm dead too, how can you haunt me?" puzzled out Harry, who was similarly dressed to younger twin. They were out on the grounds, heading toward the meeting point Professor Riddle had set.

James pressed on as if he hadn't heard Harry, "I'm the *best* twin ever to agree to this. You owe me a million chocolate frogs. I mean, we're going off to meet the Dark Lord *alone* to understand what it means to be Dark and Light and our parents will *kill* us if they ever find out about this! Not to mention if the Dark Lord decides to kill us, our bodies would never be found! Why do I ever listen to your crazy schemes."

"You're the *best* twin ever, James," Harry dutifully parroted.

"Bloody right I am," said James, pressing his arms closer to his sides to keep himself warm. "Now I'm going to stop talking because it is so bloody cold I can't even feel my fingers and

bloody hell, how far are we going to have to walk?"

Despite James' complaints, it wasn't long before they reached the meeting point. Professor Riddle greeted them when they arrived, dressed as he normally was despite the freezing cold temperatures. He looked at them with amusement, before drawing his wand and casting two warming charms.

James let out a loud sigh of relief at the warming temperature before stiffening back up as he realized whose presence they were in.

"Better?" asked Tom Riddle, a small upturning of his lips conveying his amusement.

"Sir, yes, sir!" yelped out James, his face a picture of absolute fright. Harry couldn't help but feel overwhelming love for his twin at that very moment; James had come even though he was obviously quite terrified.

Riddle looked even more amused, sending a glance over at Harry. "Tell me, Harry, why is James so terrified of me when you hardly feel the same?"

Harry grinned at his Intended's question, "Because you're really not that scary, Professor, with all due respect."

Tom heaved a sigh. "Impudent brat."

James watched their interactions with a raised eyebrow, and then, even though he was still terrified, sent Harry a knowing look. Harry rolled his eyes at his twin, even though his cheeks were stained pink and he was finding it difficult to gather up enough courage to look at his Intended.

His Intended hardly seemed to notice the interactions between the two; he was bending down, with one hand in the soil beneath their feet. He straightened up as soon as Harry sent his twin a withering look, and then he was talking.

"The Light side tends to think magic is simple. Say the correct words, use the right wand movements, and your will is accomplished. But, Harry, we both know that isn't true. Wizards don't even need a wand to use magic."

His words trailed off, and suddenly the soil in his hand was being molded into a perfect circle. There was a rare smile gracing the Dark Lord's features and suddenly he was throwing the circle up into the air and it morphed shapes in quick succession. The sight was fascinating and when gravity finally pulled it back down, it collapsed back into its natural state.

"What spell would you say I used?"

"You didn't use one," answered Harry immediately, his tone reverent and his eyes wide in awe.

"Correct," murmured the Dark Lord. "Spells are used to sharpen our focus, but are ultimately unnecessary. The Light tends to think that our magic needs to be regulated. There are rules upon rules on what kind of spells we can use and which ones are illegal."

"But there *are* bad spells," interrupted James boldly and promptly cowered under Riddle's stare. He straightened up a few moments later, his Gryffindor nature giving him courage. "The Unforgiveables, sir."

"Ah, but that is where you are wrong, young Potter," said Riddle, with a small upturned quirk to his thin lips. "There is no magic that is unforgiveable."

"But the Killing curse, sir," said James.

"There are many ways to die, Mr. Potter. The Killing Curse is just one method. But the nature of our spells is not what sets us apart from the Light. It is our belief system. As the years have gone on, the Light has started to think themselves superior. That we wizards are the only sentient beings on the planet and thus, everyone else should bend to our will."

"You don't think that, sir?" blurted out Harry. He winced when the Dark Lord's gaze shifted over to him, and he didn't have the courage to meet his eyes. "It's just, they say you're the most arrogant of them all, sir."

"I can see why they would say that," said the Dark Lord, not unkindly. "My views are different from them, Harry, and I had the audacity to actually do something about that. And I can't say I object to being called arrogant. It is not too far from the truth to call me that."

"But sir," Harry started, but Riddle simply shook his head firmly.

"As you grow up, you will find words from your enemies that are unkind. It is not something you can avoid, and it is something you will have to learn to live with."

"But they say you're a killer!" He immediately knew he messed up, even without James' hiss of his name. He was just about to apologize when the Dark Lord spoke again, and this time, his words chilled him to the bone.

"And who says they are wrong?"

There was a long silence before James broke it. His voice was quivering and his brown eyes were blazing, "You're *wrong*, Professor. No matter what you say, there are things that are Unforgiveable, and killing someone is one of them." He spun on his heel and Harry jumped when he felt his twin's hot stare on him. "Let's go, Harry."

Harry stared mutely at his brother's outstretched hand before raising his eyes to stare at his Intended. Riddle met his stare head on, an amused upturning to his thin lips that didn't waver even as the silence stretched. His eyes held a challenge in them, almost as if the Dark Lord was daring him to take James' hand and retreat back to Hogwarts.

And Harry knew he should leave and be as outraged as his brother, but there was something to the charged air around them that was stalling him from taking his brother's hand.

As stupid as it was, he didn't *want* to disappoint the Dark Lord.

"Harry," came his brother's imploring voice, and Harry steeled himself by taking one deep breath.

"Go, James," he said. "I'll catch up with you tonight, okay?"

His twin's brown eyes widened and there was a stubborn tilt to his frown a second later, "No."

"James," he said, and the way he said it made his twin pause in his rant. "You *know* I have to."

"But he's a killer, Harry."

"You know that doesn't matter to me as much as it does to you. We may be twins, James, but we're *not* the same."

James flinched away from his touch as if he was burned, his brown eyes going wide with shock. "You can't mean that, Harry. You can't mean killing is okay; you were raised better than that!"

"Raised? I was never *raised*," he couldn't help spitting out, and he immediately regretted his words when he saw his twin's expression fall.

"Fine," said James, his tone cold. "You stay here with the cold-blooded killer if you want, I'm going back and I don't bloody care what happens to you."

And he was off, his black cloak flapping in the frigid air as he stomped his way back up to Hogwarts.

Harry clenched his fist tighter, his nails digging into his palm painfully and keeping him from shedding tears. He knew James couldn't possibly mean his words, that James *would* care if the Dark Lord offed him right now. And he knew that if the Dark Lord really did decide to kill him that James would hardly offer any type of help against a fully trained wizard.

But it hurt. James had never looked at him with such unbridled hatred before, and it had shocked him to his very core. He regretted staying immediately; he wanted to run after his twin, but knew that in this state, James would refuse to talk to him.

"Harry."

Harry jumped; in his inner turmoil, he had forgotten that Riddle was still there. "Professor," he offered up weakly.

"Do you still want to continue the lesson?"

Harry met Riddle's eyes and found not an ounce of sympathy in them. He let out a soft sigh under his breath, wondering just what he did in his past life to be given Tom Riddle's soul mark. "Yes, Professor," he mumbled out.

"Good, it is comforting to know that you are not as close-minded as your twin."

"He's not -" he immediately started, and cut himself off when he realized that James really was. "It's not weird to freak out when you find out your Professor is a killer, sir."

"We're leading up to war, Harry. As one of the leaders, it should not be surprising that I have killed before. And make no mistake, Harry, as my heir, you *will* kill."

"No," Harry responded immediately. "I will *never* kill. And war? Against who, sir?"

"The Light, of course," said the Dark Lord, and Harry bristled at the tone of amusement coating his tone.

"You're looking forward to it," he accused, lowly.

"The Dark have been oppressed for a very long time, Harry. Don't you find it strange the amount of Dark Lords that have been popping up in past history? There is a purpose to this, Harry, and while you are too young now for me to tell you the truth, know now that the Light are not the good guys."

"So the Dark is?" Harry couldn't help spitting out. "Forgive me, sir, but that is hard to believe. You seem amused at the concept of war and you don't even hesitate when you admit to killing."

"Oh, dear Harry, I am not *amused*, I am joyous. Our time has come, and whether you like it or not, you are on the winning side and I am going to make quite good use of you."

"I can go to Dumbledore," he countered and was shocked when his Intended actually threw his head back and laughed. The sounds of rich laughter continued for a long few seconds and he shifted awkwardly when it seemed it wasn't going to die down anytime soon.

"He has no need of you, Harry, he has your twin. And for what I have planned for you, not even Dumbledore can save you."

The words chilled him, and he abruptly took two steps back from the intensity of Riddle's red eyes. "You can't just -"

There was a shark of a smile on the chiseled face of his Intended.

They stood there, locked in place before Harry spun on his heel. He knew he was being childish but he couldn't -

Laughter followed him up the steps to Hogwarts.

The rest of the year was dismal. Riddle hardly cared that he had fled the scene and had instead treated him as he always did during their weekly meetings. James, on the other hand...

James hadn't spoken to him after the fateful lesson. Despite Harry's pleas and frequent attempts to sneak into the Gryffindor Tower, James wanted nothing more to do with him. It was a horrible month before he gave up, filled with jeering laughter from the other Gryffindors as he tried his best to win his brother back to his side. It wasn't hard to see that the Gryffindors were happy that James had finally stopped hanging out with a Snake, even if the Snake was his twin brother. Though in their defense, the Syltherins weren't much better.

Severus was overjoyed. He had been sick of hanging out with James, and worse, Sirius, and had a difficult time masking his joy when he was trying his best to comfort Harry. There were multiple hidden insults in his comforting words, things like "Hey, now we can actually do decent in Potions since you can be *my* partner," and "At least we don't have to put up with the Gryffindor's lack of table manners," and although the words stung, Harry's fond exasperation at Severus took up the brunt of the pain.

Lucius grudgingly became one of his best friends. Harry never thought he could forgive the older blonde for his words during the first weekly meeting, but it changed one day. After breakfast, Malfoy had approached him with a sour expression, begging for help with wandless spells. Harry had tried his best to reign in his utter distaste for the boy, and in the end, after Malfoy had finally gotten a light to shine from the tip of his finger, he had turned to Harry and said "You're alright, Potter." And then with the gap of his twin brother from his life, Harry found himself becoming quite close to the haughty rich boy.

As the year progressed, Harry found himself enjoying the wandless lessons more and more. As people started to catch up, Harry became less of a teaching assistant and more like a student. And Riddle was a bloody brilliant teacher. Harry learned a lot, and sometimes, Riddle would hold private lessons for him, teaching him politics and more advanced spells than the ones intended for first years. One of the best parts about being forced into the position of Riddle's heir was the amount of books he was given to read. Riddle never had a shortage of books and as such, Harry never found himself without a book that he had been ordered to read.

Harry didn't mind though. He loved reading and he absolutely lived for learning. He was put on a strict schedule by the Dark Lord that was really only interspersed by his budding friendships with Prince and Malfoy. As such, he never even had time to ponder on his deteriorating relationship with his twin until they were standing face to face on the train platform.

James' face was sour and Harry's heart twisted as he realized he hadn't really spared a thought to his younger twin during the school year.

"James," he started, and was startled when James' eyes narrowed in anger.

"Coming home for the summer, then? You *missed* Christmas."

Harry didn't have the heart to tell his twin that he didn't *miss* Christmas; their parents had owed him a week before asking him not to come home. Of course, they still gave him the monthly allowance and there was a book on Light politics as his present, but the intention was still clear even if it was veiled lightly with fluffy words and subtle suggestions. He was sure he could have fought them on their 'order', and a few weeks ago, when James and him were still as thick of thieves, he would have, but...James was still not even looking at him and James would have never fought for him.

"Of course, you can't stay with your *precious* Intended during the summer."

"James," he frowned, "you're being ridiculous."

"I'm not!" spat out James, his tone acerbic. "Your Intended is a *killer* and you're...you're okay with it! He took someone's *life*, Harry."

"What happened to 'Love is a beautiful thing and I should just be happy that I've already found my Intended?' You told me that, James!"

"Well that was before I found out that your Intended is someone no one should be with!"

"You can't just take back your words like that, Jamie," his childhood nickname slipping out in a lapse of judgment.

"Don't you dare call me that, Harry. I *fought* for you. And now you're Dark just like him and I can't even look at you."

And before Harry could say a thing, their parents were there and they were sweeping James up into tight embrace. Mother was whispering words of 'I missed you,' and 'You've grown up so tall,' and Harry spent those loving moments staring at his shoes.

It had been hard to accept, but his time at Hogwarts - with Severus and Malfoy and god forbid, Riddle - had taught him that his parents didn't love him and he was well on the path of becoming Dark.

A/N: I am so sorry, the quarter caught up with me and this is blatant advertising but you guys should all look up Larry Stylinson because it caught me up for six weeks and wouldn't let me go, but I'm back and I've already started writing the next chapter and hopefully we can get back on schedule. I think I was having such a writer's block because of the age difference, so next chapter will be skipping to 4th year and some exciting developments are underway.

Hope you guys enjoyed and please comment because I love hearing everyone's thoughts! And thank you for such overwhelming wonderfulness of a response <3 it makes my heart fuzzy and warm.

Sixth Year Part I

A/N: To clear a few things up: We are timeskipping to Harry's sixth year. Also, I've decided to not include Pettigrew in this story. And the Merlin I am referring to is BBC's Merlin but you don't have to have watched the show to understand the references to him.

"Bloody hell," cursed Regulus Black, his trunk crashing noisily against the wall as he tried to lug it down the hallway. Sirius had left him as soon as he got onto the train and now Regulus was left on his own. He scanned the empty hallway with trepidation, and was just about to move when the door to his left slid open and Prince appeared.

He looked stunning in his expensive robes, his long black hair falling in waves against his shoulders and framing his face quite nicely. Prince's black eyes were sharp as he took in the appearance of the second year, and a small smile started to form on his thin lips.

"Black," greeted the sixth-year.

"Prince," he responded, just as formally.

"Did your brother just leave you here? You can sit with us, if you'd like."

"Us?" he murmured and his eyes grew wide when Prince moved and he was able to see further into the compartment.

He saw Malfoy first, his long platinum blonde hair grown out over the summer till it reached past his shoulders. It was swept to the side and when Prince had moved to allow Regulus a look, his sharp silver eyes had moved to rest on him. The lack of warmth in them didn't change, but he didn't move to protest, simply staring silently.

Regulus gulped, just wondering what he had done to be given this chance. It was a poorly kept secret that Malfoy and Prince were highly regarded and that they were so because they were the best friends of Harry Potter. Not only was Harry Potter extremely intelligent and handsome, he was also the Dark Lord's *heir*. As a son of the Black family, Regulus knew exactly how much prestige that position brought. He hadn't met Potter before this moment; his first year had been spent just trying to get through a Hogwarts that had been made his older brother's home. He had spent countless nights in the infirmary after one of his brother's 'harmless' pranks. He made his way further inside, and stopped when he got his first glimpse of Potter.

Harry Potter sat across from Malfoy, his bright green eyes cast downward as he continued to read the thick tome in his lap. His hair looked feathery and the silky brown locks seemed to be spelled into an artfully messy hairstyle that seemed right at home on him. His body was wiry and lean, and even though he was only sixteen, he looked much more mature and very handsome.

Regulus mumbled his thanks to Prince, a small flush on his cheeks as he tried to lug his very heavy trunk into the compartment. He cursed when the trunk rolled to its side, his flush becoming even more prominent as he realized he was embarrassing himself.

He couldn't help the small gasp that escaped him as his trunk suddenly became lightweight and a second later, floated itself up to the compartment above them. He blinked, amazed and shocked for the spells were done wandlessly and nonverbally, before turning to the one responsible.

Harry Potter smiled at him, his green eyes dancing with amusement. "Regulus Black, I presume?"

Regulus nodded, his head spinning as he took in the sight of Potter's aristocratic face. Looking at him face to face only brought home just how sharp his cheekbones were and the stunning green eyes that everyone in their school talked about was simply gorgeous to behold up close.

Potter seemed to know what his thoughts were, and he only tilted his head to the side a little bit as he regarded Regulus back. He seemed more amused than anything else, and the sudden closing of his large tome brought Regulus out of his muddled thoughts. He watched as Harry set the book to the side, his pale elegant hand patting the seat next to him in a clear invitation.

"Sit, Regulus," said Potter, and when Regulus did, his smile only widened.

"I feel like we'll be very good friends, Regulus," murmured Potter, and the words felt like a promise.

"The Feast always takes so long," Harry complained, his charming persona shed as soon as they entered their private rooms.

Severus sighed, and Harry threw himself face-first on the four-poster bed, letting out a small sigh of relief at the sensation of soft pillows and warm blankets. "Why can't you be charming all the time?" Severus wondered out loud, waving his hand and wandlessly spelling their trunks into their room and shutting the door after them. He sat primly on the edge of his own bed, watching as Harry rolled over to aim one bright green eye at him. "You charmed the pants off of my poor childhood friend."

"It's not my fault the Dark Lord has me on such a tight leash," pouted Harry. He lowered his voice in an attempt to imitate his Intended, "You have to do this, Harry, or else you'll be an impudent brat for the rest of your life."

"He sounds nothing like that," remarked Severus, dryly.

"You're missing the point, Sev! Being the Dark Lord's heir is *tiring*."

"And the Dark Lord's Intended even more so?"

Harry flushed, immediately straightening up from where he was lounging before. "You can't just talk about it out loud like that!"

Severus let out a long-suffering sigh, "Not even in the place that *you* warded heavily with privacy charms? Where else would we talk about it?"

Harry couldn't help the pout that occupied his face, sullenly looking down at his hands. "It just doesn't seem real sometimes."

"I mean if you're having doubts, all you *really* have to do is look down at your chest."

"Stop being such a prat," scowled Harry. "I regret telling you each and every day."

"I don't remember being told," started Severus and was promptly cut off by a loud groan of distress.

"I absolutely *despise* you, Prince."

Severus just laughed, used to Harry's childish antics now. Harry had been forced to grow up too fast thanks to both his falling out with his twin brother and his position as Riddle's heir. Thus, Harry ended up only really unwinding when he was alone with either Severus or Lucius and he took the opportunity every time it presented itself.

"So," started Severus slowly, "since you despise me so much, maybe I shouldn't tell you that the Dark Lord summoned you to his quarters after dinner?"

"What? Why didn't you tell me earlier?" asked Harry, immediately jumping up from his bed and lunging for Severus. Severus reacted quickly, but not fast enough to block Harry from tackling him onto the bed. After a quick scuffle, Harry sat down on top of Severus' stomach, a triumphant smirk on his face. He was light enough that the weight wouldn't hurt his best friend, but still heavy enough to bear uncomfortably down on Severus.

"Because you're a *brat*," scowled Severus. "Get off me, Potter!"

"Nope," said Harry cheerfully, popping the 'p'. "Someone needs to learn that there are punishments to crossing the Dark Lord's heir."

"I know your secrets," warned Severus, lowly.

"Like the Dark Lord would ever believe you," he scoffed. "Evans, on the other hand..."

He watched with amusement as Severus turned pink, even as the black orbs narrowed dangerously at him. "I mean," continued Harry, his glee apparent in every word he spoke, "you two *have* been awfully close lately."

"She just needed help with potions," said Severus, darkly.

"I know," said Harry, mournfully and adding just a touch of despair to his tone. "I had to suffer all last year without my brilliant potions partner because of it. Curse Lily Evans and the very day she started failing potions."

The color was gone from Severus' cheeks and instead, his best friend looked simply irritated at him. "You're really not funny, Potter."

"I'm not?" asked Harry, but he dutifully slid off his best friend, patting him on the cheek as he did so. He waved his hand, casting a spell to find one of his more formal robes. Although his monthly allowance was quite the sizeable amount even though his parents couldn't stand the sight of him, the money he had could never afford the expensively tailored robes he owned. Most of the robes he owned were given to him by Riddle. It made his heart warm even though he knew Riddle gave it to him because he had to look presentable as the Dark Lord's heir. He

slid the robe on over his well-fitted trousers and white collar shirt as soon as his magic brought it to him.

He was out the door a few minutes later, calling out a farewell to a sulking Severus.

After six years of frequent visits to Riddle's quarters, Harry had the route memorized. Despite his initial hesitance, Harry absolutely enjoyed being the Dark Lord's heir. It was still a secret to most of the other Houses of Hougwarts, but all of Slytherin knew his status as soon as he was a second-year. The pressure from the watchful eyes of the older-years was daunting at first, but as Harry continued to learn more and more from his Intended, the pressure melted away into nothing. After all, Riddle had chosen him for a reason, and after dueling during their wandless magic meetings was implemented in their third year, no one dared to question his position as the Dark Lord's heir anymore. His expertise in magic as well as Prince and Malfoy's backing was enough to solidify his ranking in Slytherin.

The manners Riddle had drilled into him through countless lessons helped convince the rest of Hogwarts. That and the grooming that he had been forced to endure. He had also been forced to accompany the Dark Lord on multiple hikes into the Forbidden Forest, thus keeping him well fit and his muscles toned. The countless dueling drills Riddle had them do during weekly Tuesday meetings also helped.

The many admirers and envious looks didn't matter much to Harry, but he knew they were what Riddle wanted so he put up with it. It was important to put on a mask in front of people that weren't his close friends; he was there to present as a pure-blooded heir to the Dark Lord and as such needed to act proper at all times. It got tiring sometimes, especially since Harry was a prankster at heart, but it was fun to see the reactions to the character he built. And it helped him blend in with the other pure-blooded heirs and kept him detached from the countless drama that ran rampant through the school.

It wasn't long before he was standing in front of the huge doors of his Intended's quarters. Harry placed his hand onto the door, grimacing as foreign magic ran over it. It swung open as soon as it confirmed who he was.

Riddle had his back to him when Harry entered, his head bowed as he continued to look though a heavy book. It was a problem the both of them shared, the thirst for knowledge. Harry didn't bother clearing his throat, instead opting to settle himself down onto one of the comfy armchairs in front of the fireplace. Riddle's quarters looked similar to his office; filled bookshelves took up most of the walls and there was an inordinate amount of armchairs around the fireplace. It wasn't because Riddle liked entertaining guests; in fact, the Dark Lord hardly let anyone into his private chambers. Riddle had a soft spot for armchairs, preferring to curl up with a book in a different one each night. Harry only noticed when he had been called to Riddle's quarters in a series of nights in his third year, and the information had only helped confirm his thoughts that Riddle wasn't as inhumane as others thought he was.

A book floated toward him, its cover shiny red and the pages few in number. He opened it as soon as it was in his hands, his green eyes scanning the title with interest. Ancient Runes. Besides the rune he had carved for himself to hide his soul mark, Harry actually didn't have much knowledge on the topic. It was an esoteric topic and wasn't taught in Hogwarts because of

the lack of funding and interest. Still, Harry knew it had the ability to be powerful if used in the right hands so it was with enthusiasm that he started the first chapter.

He was nearing the second chapter when Riddle appeared in front of him, taking the book gently from Harry and sending it off to one of the many bookshelves with a wandless spell. "Harry," he spoke in his husky, pleasant voice, "How was your summer?" He settled down onto one of the closer arm chairs, this one a deep forest green.

"Horrid," he answered, truthfully, his brows furrowed as he thought back to the countless days spent avoiding both James and Sirius. Over the six years, his animosity with James had lessened but the two of them still didn't exchange words until it was absolutely necessary. Sirius had seemed torn when the fight had first happened; Harry and Sirius had been well on their way to a budding friendship, but the rift between James and him was too big to surmount. Harry had taken pity on the Black heir, pulling him aside one day to tell him there was no hard feelings if he decided to take James' side. After all, he still had Severus and Lucius, and even if James wanted nothing more to do with him, Harry still wanted someone to look after James. Sirius had taken his words to heart, but still sometimes sent Harry letters and never forgot to send presents for Christmas.

"And why was that?" asked Riddle. "Still fighting with your twin?"

"Dumbledore came over sixteen times until James threw a fit about wanting to enjoy summer," he settled on for an answer.

Riddle regarded him silently for a few seconds, his mouth pursed into a thoughtful frown. "Dumbledore must be getting desperate."

Harry blushed at the subtle praise; it wasn't as if James was a bad student, but he cared too much about Quidditch to put much effort in his studies. Grades didn't matter to James as they did to Harry, and it had been that way ever since they were young. When they grew apart, grades started to matter even less, and even though James still possessed a lot of charisma and drew people to him because he was Quidditch Captain, Harry was the one people truly admired.

"When do you think the war will start, sir?" Harry asked this question frequently, and it was a favorite past time of his to keep track on the state of things. After all, the upcoming war *was* his future and he had finally accepted that in the middle of his second year. Riddle humored him, and sometimes Harry speculated that Riddle changed his answers arbitrarily because he wanted to mess with him.

"No sooner than the end of your years here at Hogwarts," answered Riddle, a teasing smile on his lips.

"The meeting with the Vampires didn't go as planned, then?" Before summer, Riddle had speculated the war might start at the end of his sixth year.

"We can speculate all we want, dear Harry, but the beginning of the War relies on the Light."

"Because a rebellion started by us will only lead to chaos," recited Harry dutifully. They needed the people to be on their side, to see how much better it could be under the Dark's reign. If the Dark started the rebellion, it would seem to other countries that the Dark was the bloodthirsty ones and not see that the Dark was trying to right the wrongs of the oppressive Light regime.

"Right you are, Harry. Now, how have your studies been going? Have you finished the book on rituals?"

"Last night, sir," he answered, truthfully.

"And you remember what I proposed before you left for summer?"

"The memory-enhancing one. It's not as flashy as the others, but I'll like to start with something small in order to see how it works."

"I thought you'll choose that one," remarked Riddle, waving a hand and the materials for the ritual appeared on the floor in front of them. "Since you're just starting Ancient Runes, I'll carve the rune on you myself."

Harry froze, his response fizzling out as he started to panic. "Would it interfere with the rune on my necklace, sir?"

"Ah," said Riddle, his red eyes sharp as they studied Harry carefully. He suddenly stood, and in two quick strides was kneeling next to Harry. Without asking permission, he reached out, trailing one pointer finger along the chain before twisting his finger underneath and pulling out the necklace. Harry shivered at the feel of his Intended's finger on his bare skin, his eyes wide as Riddle stared intently at the rune. "If I remember correctly," Riddle murmured, "You carved the rune yourself when you were only nine?"

Harry nodded, the proximity to Riddle taking away his ability to speak. He was even more beautiful up close.

"Impressive," breathed Riddle, his red eyes darting up once to meet Harry's green ones. There was a small smile on his face, "Now what would make you want to hide your soul mark at such a young age?"

"It wasn't a big deal," he mumbled, searching frantically for something to say that didn't scream, 'Because it's *yours*,' blatantly. "I just didn't want people to see."

Riddle looked amused, his long, elegant fingers still playing around with Harry's necklace. There were several long moments, the air so charged with tension that it was making it hard for Harry to breathe. "I made mine as soon as I got to Hogwarts. My soul mark is quite visible, you see, and the Muggles at my orphanage certainly didn't understand it."

"Orphanage?"

Riddle blinked, dropping Harry's necklace and straightening up a moment later. "The rune shouldn't interfere with the ritual. Remove your robe and your shirt, Harry."

Harry did as he was told, even though he knew his face was probably bright red by the time he had obeyed Riddle's instructions. Riddle had his back to him, examining the materials that the House-elves had provided. Harry had memorized the needed materials: the blood of a Jobberknoll mixed with three other potions ingredients used to enhance memory. The mixture was used to stain both the ground and the dagger. The rune was supposed to be small and it drew on the subject's innate magic core to sustain itself. Most people didn't use rituals to improve themselves because it relied heavily on the magic user, but since Harry had an excess of magic,

Riddle had suggested it and Harry had agreed. After all, the rune wasn't permanent, even though it was carved into the skin, and he could easily remove it if he didn't like the strain.

"It will hurt," warned Riddle, the dagger in his hand sharp and dripping with the blood-red mixture. Riddle had already spread the rest of the mixture on the ground and had guided Harry into the center of it.

Harry nodded, not trusting himself to speak. Riddle was pressing the dagger into his skin a moment later, and it felt *intimate*. It hurt, but the sound of Riddle murmuring the ritual's incantation was soothing and it was easy to focus on the proximity of his Intended to him instead of the searing pain the dagger inflicted on his bare skin.

It was over in a few minutes, and then Riddle was spelling away both the mixture and the dagger in one wave of his hand. A second later, and Riddle was wrapping Harry's formal cloak around his shoulders.

"You did well, Harry," Riddle spoke in a low voice, his breath close enough to feel and induce a shiver in Harry.

Harry was sure that his cheeks were pink, and he kept his face turned toward the fire, watching the flames flicker. "When will the effects take place?"

"You'll notice them eventually," said Riddle. "The strain should already be apparent."

Harry nodded; he could already feel the rune sucking away at some of his magic. It didn't take much, but it was a bit uncomfortable. "It's not pleasant."

Riddle hummed in agreement, "I'll make you a ring soon. It'll help direct the drain toward the magical environment rather than yourself."

"I've never heard of that," said Harry, forgetting how close he was in his excitement of learning something new. He had turned, and was startled at how close Riddle actually was to him. They were only a few inches apart, and Harry's eyes were immediately drawn to his Intended's lips. They were a soft pink, a contradiction to the harsh personality of his Intended. It was moments later that Riddle finally moved, standing and moving to one of the many bookshelves against the wall.

"I know it'll be a busy year for you, Harry, but I want you to finish this book in two weeks." The same book Riddle had given him earlier floated itself back into Harry's hands. "I'll be teaching you an important ritual when you finish, one that is necessary to the War."

Harry nodded, standing from where he was still sitting in front of the fireplace. Riddle watched him as he collected his shirt, his red eyes studying him intently. "You've grown, Harry."

Harry blinked, looking down and seeing the cloak that was still wrapped around his shoulders only reached to his mid-calf. He looked back up to Riddle's thoughtful expression.

"I could work in a visit to Diagon Alley this weekend. You need to be measured again."

Harry nodded, not trusting himself to speak because his mind was still whirling around the fact that Riddle wanted to buy him clothes *again*. He knew he shouldn't let it get to his head, but he

was feeling special and he wanted to bask in the feeling forever.

"Also, I've decided to gather up a group of first and second years for our wandless magic meetings. You'll be teaching them. Prince and Malfoy are instructed to help you as well."

Harry paused, contemplating the information before nodding once again. Teaching didn't scare him and he would have his best friends by his side. And wandless magic was easy to teach; the ability still came easily to him after all these years.

"You may go, Harry," said Riddle.

Harry nodded one last time, leaving the room a second later.

Riddle looked comfortable. His robe was missing and he was dressed in some well fitted trousers and a formal collared shirt. He still looked stunning, despite the lack of a formal robe, and he waved Harry in with a small smile.

Riddle's office was still cleared from the wandless magic meeting yesterday and there was a huge expanse of open space in the room adjoining his office.

"How was your first teaching lesson, Harry?" asked Riddle, his yew wand in his hand as he cast a series of complicated spells. Harry shivered at the feel of his Intended's magic taking shape in the air around him, and did his best to seem unaffected as Riddle's red eyes shifted to him.

"It went alright. None of them could produce a *lumos*, but I'm sure we'll be able to teach them eventually." He thought back to the occasion with a small frown; the younger years were easily excitable and they were all abuzz at the fact that the Dark Lord's heir was going to be teaching them. The only one he actually was able to stomach was Regulus, who had watched his fellow years with a calm disposition. Regulus reminded him a lot of Sirius and although Harry could tell Regulus fancied him quite a bit, Regulus was able to keep his calm and kept up pleasant conversation while Harry was teaching the younger boy wandless magic.

"Maybe I'll sit in on the lesson next week."

"Please don't," Harry responded immediately and then winced when he realized he spoke without thinking.

"And why is that?"

"You'll scare them," he pointed out. He was startled when Riddle actually laughed.

"Am I really that scary, Harry?"

"You're the Dark Lord," he said, flatly, and was regaled with an amused expression from his Intended.

"You do speak some truth," Riddle admitted. He waved a hand, closing the door that led to his office and stepped further into the room. He hissed, the words intelligible but Harry knew without a doubt that the Dark Lord was speaking parseltongue.

A pale green snake slithered into view, its tongue flickering out a few times to test its surroundings. Riddle knelt, his hand outstretched until the snake could easily climb onto the limb and then onto Riddle's shoulders. The snake wasn't normal; Harry could feel the magic emanating from it. It had a small pair of wings, and when the snake opened its mouth, Harry could see a clear blue venom dripping from it.

Riddle hissed, *"Here's the boy I was telling you about. He's going to perform a ritual on you, but I promise it won't hurt."*

Harry stiffened, his eyes going wide but he hid it by training his eyes downward. Of all the times to find out the gift he shared with the Dark Lord was *parseltongue*! If the Dark Lord found out, it wasn't that much of a stretch to figure out that they were soul bound.

In his panic, he didn't hear the snake's answering reply, and was startled to see the snake making its way to the center of the room.

"The ritual I want you to learn is difficult and will incorporate the runes I asked you to practice." He paused, and using his wand, he drew the runes into the air, leaving golden strokes shimmering in front of them. The runes roughly stood for 'without magic' and Harry had spent the better part of the last week transcribing them over and over into his notebook. Ancient Runes was dependent on the penmanship on the writer and Harry was determined not to make a mistake in front of Riddle.

"This ritual is magically draining depending on the size and duration of the field you will make. The medium you use to draw the runes is insignificant, but the magic power isn't. I usually just use my wand to draw the runes, as I've just demonstrated."

Harry blinked, understanding the hidden command and drew his wand, copying the Dark Lord and leaving his own copy of golden letters in the air next to Riddle's. Riddle smiled, waving a wand and dispelling both of them.

"The field you make will render the inhabitants magicless."

Harry had guessed so much when he had found the runes' definition, but hearing it out loud was still startling. He furrowed his brows to Riddle's amusement. "Do you have a question, Harry?"

"It seems rather tame," he started hesitantly, and since Riddle's expression didn't change, he continued, "since it'll be used for the War."

"I'm not looking to spill magical blood, Harry." He hummed thoughtfully, regarding Harry with sharp, piercing eyes before suddenly smiling. "Sit, Harry. I have a story to tell you."

Harry blinked, uncomprehending until a hand was placed on his shoulder, lightly pushing him downward until he was sitting cross-legged on the carpeted floor. "A story, sir?" Riddle sat down next to him before he answered.

"When you were a first year, I told you that you were too young to know the truth. Now that you are a sixth year, perhaps it is time for me to tell you the real purpose of being Dark."

Harry knew his eyes were wide and his mouth open, but he couldn't help it. He had been wanting to know ever since that fateful day and he thought he wouldn't find out until the War

actually started.

Riddle paused, hissing his next words. "*Come, there's been a change of plans.*" The magical snake looked up from where it was laying, regarding Riddle solemnly until it slithered over and promptly lay itself across Riddle's lap. Riddle smiled down indulgently at it for a few seconds, one elegant hand resting on the warm scales.

"Tell me, Harry, how much do you know about immortality?"

Of all the things Harry thought the Dark Lord would start with... "Nothing, sir. I haven't come across it in my studies besides the Philosopher's Stone."

The Dark Lord scoffed, "A mere imitation of what it means to be truly immortal."

"But the Flamels have been living for years now."

"Yes, but their magic has waned. Mine," he paused, waving his hand and immediately transforming their surroundings until it seemed as if they were outside. Harry startled, but the snake didn't even look up from its comfortable position across Riddle's lap. He had never heard of a spell like this before; he could actually smell the outside and feel the breeze across his skin. It seemed as if they were in the Forbidden Forest and it was daytime instead of night.

"How?" he stammered out, his eyes blown wide as he continued to look around.

"Do close your mouth, Harry," said the Dark Lord, but the pleased smile on his face spoke otherwise. "It is merely an overpowered illusion."

"It's bloody brilliant is what it is," he murmured, weaving one of his hands into the grass beneath him. It felt real to the touch and Harry could feel a bubble of elation at the sensation.

"Glad to see you approve," remarked the Dark Lord, dryly. "But as I was saying, my magic hasn't been hindered at all."

He paused, sending Harry a pointed look. Harry, still lost in amazement at his Intended's magical strength, didn't notice, his green eyes still dancing across the scene in front of him.

The Dark Lord sighed, "Yes, Harry, that *does* mean I'm immortal."

Harry whipped his head back to stare at Riddle, his mouth open in shock. "What?"

"I can't die," said the Dark Lord. "Not even by other wizards, and especially not by old age."

"How?" he stammered out.

"There's only one technicality," he said, almost casually, but the way his eyes were trained on Harry was anything but. "But I believe I have it covered." Harry shivered at the intensity in those red orbs, entranced as he always was by the sight. It was a few moments later that he was able to work up the courage to speak.

"You're not going to tell me, are you." Harry said, flatly, and was shocked again when the Dark Lord actually threw his head back and laughed gleefully. The rich laughter danced around in the

room until it died down, and Harry couldn't help pressing the laughter into his memory so he could remember the sound forever.

"Now, Harry, why would I tell you the only way to kill me?"

"Well, you *were* working up to it," he said, a tad petulantly, and watched as a smile slowly started to form on his Intended's face.

"I was in my sixth year when I found out about Horcruxes. They are a *vile* thing, Harry, but they get the job done. The only downside was that it would sever my link to my soul bound."

Harry startled, and he hoped that the Dark Lord couldn't tell how agitated he was by his words. "Your soul bound?"

"Surely you know about soul marks," teased Riddle, his eyes moving to rest on the chain visible around his neck. Harry was wearing a simple T-shirt this time, and he had shrugged off his constricting robe when he had gotten into Riddle's office. Riddle had sighed, but hadn't asked him to dress formally so he ended up not saying anything. Harry was used to pushing Riddle's buttons so he didn't feel a hint of guilt.

Now though, with his collar bones exposed, he was regretting his earlier decision. Riddle's eyes were cloudy and he reached out with a pointer finger to trail along the chain around his neck. Harry watched him with wide eyes, the sensation of Riddle's finger doing weird things to his stomach.

"Quite brilliant," whispered Riddle, as if he was afraid to break the trance that had taken them both, "to come up with such a complicated contraption when you were only nine. Makes you think though..."

"You haven't found your soul bound then, sir?" Harry prompted in a low of a voice as the Dark Lord's, almost hesitant to break the silence that had descended upon them.

Riddle withdrew his hand, his lips pursed into a thoughtful line. "You already know the answer to that, don't you, Harry?"

Harry's heart felt like it was beating out of his chest and he felt as if he was having trouble breathing. Was this - did the Dark Lord know? It felt as if the words on his chest were blazing hot and he couldn't bring himself to meet the Dark Lord's eyes. Was Riddle *giving* him an opportunity to confess?

The desire to do so was overwhelming. To tear off the necklace and cancel the rune and show the words that had marked him since he was seven. He *wanted* to see how Riddle would react, wanted to see if Riddle actually had a soul mark that matched his. The possibilities were endless, and after six long years of keeping the secret from Riddle, Harry just wanted to lay it all to bare. Six long years of reigning in his emotions before he got in too deep, six years of interacting with the one he was born to be with and yet staying his heir and not his mate. Because six years had taught Harry that his soul mate *wasn't* evil, that he was a Dark Lord, but still as human as they could come.

Because Tom Riddle was a Dark Lord but he was also kind, compassionate, and a bloody brilliant teacher. He never would have thought to use those words to describe Riddle when they

had first met. After all, the older man had performed illegal Legilimency on him. Because back then, Harry hadn't understood what it meant to be a Dark Lord; he had been so prejudiced by his parents that he had thought being a Dark Lord was synonymous to being evil. But Riddle seemed driven for a purpose and although he was a killer, he also seemed to treasure life just as greatly. It was only last week that Harry had seen Riddle interacting with the creatures in the forest with kindness. It was weird, to think of the Dark Lord as *kind*, but after six years of the Dark Lord treating him as his heir, Harry was convinced that the Dark Lord truly was kind in his own way.

But the consequences were severe and too horrifying to contemplate, and Harry was still *only* sixteen. Age differences didn't matter for soul bounds, but Harry wanted to be on equal footing with the Dark Lord before confessing. He didn't want others to think that he was given the position of heir just because he was the Dark Lord's soul bound and more importantly, he didn't want the Dark Lord to be able to push him around. They were still in a teacher-student relationship and Harry didn't want to sully their relationship by starting it when he was only sixteen.

"And how would I know?" he settled for asking, hoping that his nervousness wouldn't show through his words.

Riddle stared at him after his question, the thoughtful tilt to his head still there as they sat in silence. It was a long minute until Riddle replied, "Because you are my heir. I would hardly keep such vital information from you."

"It would change things, wouldn't it? Finding your mate."

Riddle actually chuckled, "Of course. Soul bounds share magic after all. Finding my soul mate will help greatly for the War."

"Then," and Harry tried his best to aim for casual, "that's all you want your soul bound for? For the War?"

"Hardly," scoffed the Dark Lord and when Harry sent him a pointed look, his expression actually softened. "Harry, I just told you I gave up a form of immortality for the possibility of finding my soul bound."

Harry flushed, and he knew the blush on his cheeks was probably visible but thankfully, the Dark Lord didn't say a word. The confession was on the tip of his tongue when the Dark Lord pressed on.

"After giving up on Horcruxes, I ended up taking a year-long trip in England near Stonehenge. It's a place brimming with magic, and there's a village there that is hidden from Muggles' eyes. It was there that I found the answer to my immortality problem."

He paused, snapping his fingers and the view around them changed. They were in some place new now, and if Harry squinted, he could just make out Stonehenge in the distance. The place they were in was just as wild as the scene prior, but instead of trees as far as the eye could see, there was a stone temple right in front of them.

"I used to be arrogant, Harry. Used to think that wizards were the only ones that mattered on Earth, that there was nothing that could possibly stand above us. I didn't think that there had to

be a reason we were *given* magic."

"Given? Are you suggesting that there's a -"

"Higher power, yes. It's not like the Muggles, though. I'm not proposing a God that watches over us benevolently, it's something much simpler. Remember how I told you that there was a reason we were given magic?"

"I don't really get what you're trying to say, sir."

Riddle hummed, before waving his wand and creating two holograms representing humans in front of them. "How much do you know about Merlin?"

"Not much, sir."

"Magic was unheard of back then. People who had magic burned at the stake for their differences. Muggles couldn't comprehend the differences between us and them and it was a bitter fight between us for several years. Merlin here," and the hologram representing a scrawny bloke waved hesitantly at Harry, "as you know, is the founder of our magic now. King Arthur, on the other hand, was a Muggle."

"Are you suggesting that we're supposed to combine our differences with the Muggles now?"

That startled a laugh out of Riddle, "Merlin, no. Something much darker. Merlin was put on Earth for a single purpose, to help unite Albion."

"By who, sir?"

"I know this is going to be hard to comprehend, but Magic, herself, put Merlin to the task. Or as they say, destiny."

"That's..."

"Hard to believe, but the proof is right in front of you." He waved at the temple in front of him, "Merlin built it himself before he passed away. I happened upon it during my travels and it was run down, almost crumbled to the ground before I put it back together. I didn't hesitate on entering, still drunk on the arrogance of being a wizard, and had I been anyone else, I probably would have been smited on the spot. Instead, She appeared in front of me and made a proposition."

"You're having me on," murmured Harry, but he didn't really mean the words.

Riddle just gave him an irritated look, but when Harry didn't continue, he pressed on, "They're killing Her. With pollution from industrialization and the horror that was World War II."

"She wants us to kill the muggles then? But we're preparing for War with the Light."

"Nothing so drastic, Harry. She wants us to first unite the wizards. We're spread across the whole world and the divide between Light and Dark is great."

"If she's so powerful, then why can't she do it herself?"

"She's weak, after so many years of disabuse. Her waters are running dry, temperatures are rising steadily, and animals that she birthed herself are going extinct each and every day. She doesn't have much strength left."

"How can you trust her?"

"Because she gifted me first with the task, and then one wish of my own. I wished for immortality, Harry, and to share that gift with my soul bound. She gifted me immortality, but to give me such overwhelming invulnerability was beyond her power. My soul bound would remain mortal to everything but old age. And to prove Her words, She killed me and left me to wake outside the temple with a scroll in hand."

"That's a lot to take in," Harry settled on answering when Riddle looked like he was waiting for an answer.

"It is," offered the Dark Lord, and suddenly he was standing. He waved his hand and their surroundings melted back into the familiarity of Riddle's office. He motioned for Harry to stand and Harry dutifully obeyed. "I'll let you sleep on it, and if you need more convincing, I'll take you to the temple myself. But before that, I'll like you to practice the ritual. I'll cast the incantation myself until you learn the words, but the runes will draw on your magic."

Harry nodded, pulling out his wand and moving to the center of the room. A soft hiss, and the magical snake from earlier was slithering her way until she was in front of Harry. It was easy to tell that she was the test subject - to see if his field actually worked. He concentrated on drawing the runes correctly, writing them four times in four separate places on the floor until it formed a square around the snake.

The runes flared three times brightly before it settled into place and it was with a searing blaze that they started working after Riddle's murmurs of the spell. The strain on his magic was great and Harry knew he could only keep it up for a few minutes before he would have to draw on outside sources.

Riddle was hissing delightedly with the snake, but Harry couldn't understand a word that was being spoken with all his energy concentrating on keeping the field going. It felt like hours before Riddle was clapping a hand down on his shoulder, shaking his head and canceling the runes himself by getting rid of the bright letters on the ground.

Harry slumped forward bonelessly, grateful that the Dark Lord actually moved forward to catch him. "You idiotic boy," Riddle sighed, "you should have stopped the ritual ages ago."

Harry knew he was being silly, but he was drained of his magic and his body felt as it had just run a marathon. He pouted at the Dark Lord, nuzzling into the warmth that was his Intended. "*Your* fault. You should've stopped me."

"Right," laughed the Dark Lord, and before he knew it, he was being spelled over to one of the couches that were resting against the side of the wall. "Sleep, you silly boy, Prince will be here to collect you soon. And do think about what I have told you."

It was when he was dozing off that he heard the Dark Lord murmur, "Sweet dreams, my precious Heir."

Harry fell asleep with a smile.

A/N: It's my birthday! So I decided to reward myself by giving you guys the next chapter! :3. The response has been overwhelmingly amazing and I'm so touched that you guys like this story so much! I really do enjoy writing it and sometimes it seems like I just can't write fast enough! I have so many ideas and plans for this story but it just takes too long to write everything out but I'm trying my best! I already have next chapter written and it most likely will be up by either Wednesday or Friday (depending on how much time I have to proofread it). And there's probably a lot of grammatical/spelling errors here, but I'm going to go celebrate my birthday now and I'll come back to reread it soon. Let me know if you guys have any questions!

Also...I realized I confused myself haha so to clear things up, soul bounds/Intendeds share the same proficiency in magic, not the actual kind of magic ? because everyone has nearly the same type of magic (all from Magic, herself) but soul bounds will be equally skilled. That way some people can have soul bounds that aren't mutual.

Sixth Year Part II

"Look," said Lucius, "if she says no, then she's probably not your soul bound and you're free to find someone that's *not* a Mudblood."

Severus frowned, and it was with a quick flick of his wand that he sent Lucius a stinging hex. "Sev!" complained Lucius. "That *hurt*."

"That's the point," grumbled Severus. "I told you not to call her that."

"But she is one," protested Lucius and promptly got another stinging hex sent his way. He tried to avoid it, but Severus was proficient in his spellcasting and the spell hit him head on, causing another yelp to leave the seventh-year's mouth. "Harry!" complained Lucius, one hand rubbing the place the hex hit, "help me!"

Harry was only half-listening to his two best mates bicker, his attention held by another book on Ancient Runes. He turned a page, and was promptly sat on by one Lucius Malfoy. "Don't ignore me, Potter," warned Lucius, and it was with a roll of his eyes that Harry sent a wandless tickling spell toward him, rolling out from underneath Lucius as the older boy started to laugh.

After a few moments, Severus took pity on Lucius, waving his wand and canceling the spell. Lucius glared at them both, his arms crossed angrily. "Sometimes I think the two of you keep me around because you like picking on me."

"Can't say I have any objections to your way of thinking," said Severus, dryly, and at Lucius' affronted look, Harry burst into delighted laughter.

"He's having you on, Lucy, we love spending time with you."

Lucius huffed, but the way a smile kept on threatening to break out on his face told them otherwise. Harry sat back down next to Lucius, a smile of his own on his face. "Now what's Sev so worked up over?"

"He wants to ask Evans out for a Hogsmeade Weekend."

"Oh," said Harry, "Is that all? She'll say yes, of course."

"How are you so sure?" asked Lucius.

"*You* haven't been in our potions class. I have to sit behind them, Lucy! It's *agonizing*. It'll be like "No, Lily, it's not *that* ingredient, you'll hurt your pretty little fingers if you put that in first."

Severus was bright pink, and his eyes were narrowed in a glare, "Another word out of you, Potter, and you'll be getting your own stinging hex."

"As if you could hit me," challenged Harry, and promptly squeaked as one hit him on the arm. "Merlin, Sev, have you been practicing? That *hurt*!"

Severus scoffed, "Teach you better than to tease me."

Harry's eyes softened, "You're worried, aren't you, Sev? You don't have to be. Evans likes you, too. Promise."

Severus' harsh exterior melted at his words and he looked down at his clenched fists uncertainly. "You really think so?"

"Like I said, there's only so much flirting I can witness," teased Harry and when Severus gave him a brilliant smile in return, knew he had finally convinced his best mate.

"I'll ask her tomorrow," said Severus, a finality to his voice. "After breakfast."

"I would wish you luck, but trust me, Sev, you don't need it."

Severus was shaking next to him, his legs bouncing nervously underneath the table and one of his hands clenched tightly around Harry's knee. Harry humored him, focusing on cutting his omelet into perfect little squares and trying his best not to get caught sneaking glances at his Intended. Meal times were the worst because Riddle looked stunning from even far away and Harry would find himself sometimes staring for long moments without even noticing. Luckily, Severus was the best mate ever and would usually poke him into being more subtle. However, today, Severus was about to ask Evans on a Hogsmeade Weekend and could probably care less about Harry's tendency to admire his Intended from far away.

It was nearing the end of breakfast when Severus stiffened, startling Harry from where he was keeping his eyes dutifully trained on his food. When he looked up, it was to see his twin brother striding in from one of the hallways, dressed in a robe marked with the Potter crest. Sirius trailed after him, his mouth in its customary smirk but his eyes looking miserable. It wasn't a noteworthy occurrence, his twin's entrance, but the huge bouquet of lilies *was*.

Harry's heart beat sped up, and Severus started to dig his fingers even harder into Harry's knee. "Bloody hell," Harry cursed silently underneath his breath as he watched his twin saunter up to where Lily was sitting, tapping her once on her shoulder until she turned around.

Even from far away, Lily's expressive green eyes were easy to read. Her mouth was shaped in an 'o' in shock, but her eyes looked *pleased* and it was with a sinking heart that Harry realized what was happening. Severus stood abruptly, his back unnaturally straight and his hands clenched into fists by his side. Harry looked at him with pity before turning back to the scene at the Gryffindor table, wincing once when he saw Lily throw her arms around James. She accepted, then.

He looked back up to see Severus gone, and he frowned, standing up and making his own polite apologies to their tablemates, before striding regally out after Severus. It wasn't hard to figure out where his best mate had gone; even distraught, Severus would never miss class and it was uncomfortably close to when their first class was. He found Severus in an empty hallway, and although Severus wasn't crying, his arms were wrapped up around himself and he could see where his fingernails were making indentations.

"Sev," he murmured as he approached.

Severus whirled on him, his black eyes glistening bright with unshed tears, "You said she'll say yes!"

"I thought she would," he answered, truthfully, and watched as Severus seemed to deflate on himself.

"I should've asked her earlier," Severus mumbled mournfully. "Maybe then your bloody twin wouldn't have..." He trailed off, his lower teeth worrying his bottom lip before his eyes suddenly lit up. "Your twin! There's no way their soul marks match, do they?"

Against All Odds and Forever. "No," he started out slowly, not sure if he wanted to betray James' confidence or not. "They don't match at all."

"Then you'll tell James, right?" Severus trained hopeful eyes on him, and Harry's heart broke at the sight.

"Sev..."

Severus blinked and then an expression of horror overtook his face. "Oh, Harry, I didn't mean...I know you and James aren't exactly..."

"Don't apologize, Sev. It's not your fault we're not talking anymore. And well, it's almost Christmas. Maybe I'll actually go home this year. James can't avoid me if we're opening presents at the Christmas Tree, after all."

Severus looked extremely distraught at his words, and was just about to say something when there was a sound of footsteps near them. Lucius appeared a moment later, soft pants leaving his mouth as he skidded to a stop. "Couldn't one of you given me a heads up? I've been looking everywhere." He caught onto the situation a second later, and he drew closer to Sev, awkwardly bringing the younger boy into a one-armed hug.

Severus stiffened at the touch, but when Lucius didn't pull away, he relaxed into it. "Thanks, Lucy."

"She doesn't deserve you, Sev," said Lucius, vehemently. "You'll find someone better, promise."

Harry nodded his assent, pressing himself against Severus' left side in order to offer his own form of comfort. He took Severus' hand into his own, stroking a promise onto the palm. He wouldn't let his first friend down.

He was luckier than he thought he would be. His parents had sent him an owl earlier on in the week, asking him to come home for Christmas. It was suspicious, but since it aligned with Harry's own goals, Harry hadn't done anything but write a letter of assent.

Riddle had seemed a bit worried when Harry informed him of the change of plans, but he didn't seem worried enough to do a thing about it. Instead, he had presented Harry first with the ring and then with a stone that stored magical energy. The first would help with the memory enhancing rune and the second with the ritual he was still trying to get a hang of. The magical strain was still great, but Harry had worked out a few tricks to keep the strain manageable. The radius of the field was getting larger each and every time he practiced it and the effects were still as successful as before.

Harry had spent the days leading up to Christmas both trying to track down James and perfecting the magicless field. The former wasn't a bit successful, but the second one was coming along nicely. Harry suspected he would master it by the end of their break.

He was reading a book as he wandered down the hallways of Potter manor when he felt it. It startled him so much that he dropped the book in his hands, his head snapping up to attention as a series of magical signatures popped into their manor.

He knew it shouldn't be odd; it was Christmas Eve and people were welcome to come say their greetings to the Potters. But something felt *off*. There was no Christmas Eve party planned and they wouldn't be coming so late at night if it was a simple party.

He crept closer, making sure to mask his magical signature as he cast out a spell that would help him hear more clearly.

"Abraxus Malfoy was just sighted in Diagon Alley a couple of minutes ago," remarked a male voice coldly.

"On his own?" came his mother's voice.

The man must have nodded in assent, because his father's voice was gleeful. "It'll be fast. He's the Dark Lord's right hand man; without him, the War is essentially ours."

"It won't be murder though, right?" contemplated his mother, "We'll just put him in a coma. It'll be better that way because then the eldest son can't inherit. He's almost eighteen, isn't he?"

Harry froze and it was with a chill that he realized they were talking about Lucius' *father*. He never thought the Light could be so cruel and he almost didn't want to believe it. But as they continued to make plans and contingency plans if the first ones didn't work out, Harry was forced to face the fact that it *was* real and it was happening if he didn't do anything to stop it.

He stepped away, leaving the eavesdropping spell running while using his wand to spell a Patronus into place. He had mastered it in his fourth year under Riddle's strict tutelage and had been mortified when he found it matched Riddle's Patronus. It wasn't the same exact snake as his soul bound, but Harry had still been horrified when he found the Patronus forming. Luckily, Riddle didn't remark on the snake, simply raising his eyebrows and continuing to give Harry tips on how to make it more corporeal.

Now, Harry was grateful for it because it meant Riddle would know exactly who the Patronus was from. Since no one was around, he bent down and hissed quietly in Parseltongue for the Patronus to find Riddle quickly and tell him to find Abraxas and get him safe. The Patronus was slithering through the walls as soon as he hissed the last word, and Harry straightened and pressed closer to the wall in order to better hear the wizards inside.

It was with a sinking feeling that he realized they were about to make their move. There was no way the Patronus would have reached Riddle already, and Lucius' father was in extreme danger if he didn't act fast. But he didn't want to blow his cover and he especially didn't want to fight with a multitude of trained wizards.

The magicless field would have to do. He used wandless magic to lock the door, ensuring that they would have to stay in the field until he canceled it.

Harry let out a shaky breath, raising his wand and drawing one set of runes on the door. The glaring yellow of it calmed him, and he moved to set up the rest of the runes. He wouldn't be able to make it a perfect square since the walls impeded his movement, but after countless practice of the ritual, Harry was sure he would be able to project the field outward by sheer will alone.

He pulled the stone out of his front pocket, gripping it tightly both to harness the magical power he had stored in it and to take comfort from the fact that it was Riddle's gift to him. He really hoped this wouldn't kill him, but there was little time to make his actions safer.

He finished the incantation as soon as the first wizard in the room was starting to apparate and he flinched when he felt the runes blaze into life. The strain came a second later, and he staggered to his knees, sweating heavily as the field demanded more and more of his magic. He had never made such a wide field before and neither had he had to deal with trained adult wizards struggling against it. Their magic may have been rendered useless, but holding them in that state was one of the hardest things Harry had ever had to do.

It seemed like an eternity before Riddle's answering Patronus was in front of him and it was with a relieved sigh that he finally released the spell. He heard three loud cracks as the wizards in the room apparated away and he fell tiredly onto his bum, still breathing heavily.

The snake regarded him with beady eyes before hissing Riddle's response that Abraxas was safe, and it was a testament to how drained Harry was that he answered with parseltongue without a moment's hesitation. The Patronus would have raised its eyebrows if it had any, but since it didn't, it just regarded him solemnly before weaving its way underneath Harry's arm.

Harry startled, but the form felt more corporeal than most Patronuses and he let it lead him toward his bedroom.

He was exhausted, and he really hoped that he wouldn't run into James on the way there.

It was halfway through Christmas lunch that everything went downhill.

His parents had been irritated all morning, refusing to give him much more than a glance and sitting tensely throughout the whole meal. Harry would have found the whole thing amusing if he wasn't so tired, but since he was, he settled for chewing slowly through the extravagant food the House-elves had prepared.

"Harry," started James, and Harry startled out of his thoughts, blinked surprised eyes toward his younger twin. James hadn't talked to him ever since he had arrived at Potter Manor and ...

His heart sank when he saw the gleam in his brother's eyes and he knew something was up.

"Why don't you tell Father and Mother what spell you've been practicing?"

"I rather not," responded Harry, curtly, trying his best to quiet his quickening heart beat. James *knew*.

"Oh?" said James, his face twisted in a truly horrid-looking expression. It was a mix of glee and triumph and it made Harry's stomach swirl uncomfortably. "I'm sure they would want to know

after the disaster that was last night."

His parents froze at the words and they slowly turned to look at Harry. Harry reacted instantly, sliding out from the dining table and drawing his wand immediately.

"*Expelliarmus!*"

He was too drained to deflect the disarming charm wandlessly, and he watched as his wand hit his twin's palm.

"Harry?" asked his Mother, and it looked like it was causing her pain to act so nice to Harry. "What is he talking about?"

"He's been practicing a spell that renders wizards magicless," responded James when Harry just stood there. "*He's* the reason your plans didn't go through, Mother."

His Father's eyes were hard, "Tell us, Harry. Did you take away our magic last night?"

For the first time in his life, Harry felt absolutely terrified. His magic was drained and his wand was currently in his twin's hands. He had no back-ups and he was basically trapped in the Manor because apparition was out of the question because of the wards. He knew his parents wouldn't hurt him, or he *hoped* they wouldn't because the way they were looking at him was not the way normal parents looked at their sons.

He sent James a pleading look but James simply ignored it, his normally pleasant smile twisted into a horrific smirk.

"Please, James," he pleaded when his look didn't seem to be enough, and for a second, he saw a look of doubt cross his twin's face. But it was gone as quickly as it came, and then James was looking at his parents for guidance.

His father was shaking in rage, and his normally clear complexion became blotchy red in his anger. "We raised you, Harry. You're our *son*. Why would you hinder our plans like this?"

And even though he was terrified, the words brewed up his rage and then he was spitting out in anger, "You *raised* me? I'm not your son! A son wouldn't have been left to fend on his own and a *son* would have been welcomed home for Christmas!" He paused, his eyes resting on James' stricken look and some part of him felt twisted pleasure at the sight. "You gave up on *me* ever since my soul mark appeared," he accused and watched as his mother actually flinched at his words.

Hot anger fueled his next actions and he was snapping the necklace off his neck, flaring his magic once to burn off the rune's effect. He was then unbuttoning his shirt until his soul mark was laid bare to see. *Tom Marvolo Riddle* stood out on his chest, and he gestured at it wildly, his green eyes blazing hot in his anger. "Does it *hurt* to see, Mother? To be honest, he's been more of a *family* to me than you three!"

That seemed to be all his parents could take, and his father slammed the dining table in an attempt to get back control of the situation. "If that's what you really feel, Harry," sneered his father, "then you're *disowned*."

Harry flinched at the words, stumbling backwards three steps in his shock. He almost thought he was exclaiming out in outrage because his mind was so muddled, but it took him a few seconds to realize it was James who had spoken.

"Father, you can't!" James had burst out with, his brown eyes wide with shock and desperation. "You can't disown *Harry*."

"You said it yourself, James," said his mother, calmly. "Harry's turning Dark, and as Potters, we can't afford to keep him here. And Harry's right, he was *never* our son."

Harry flinched again at the words; even though he had spoken the words earlier, he never expected to hear it repeated back to him so coldly.

"Mother, you can't mean that," said James, weakly, trying his best to regain control over the situation.

"I do. Your father is right, James. Harry doesn't belong here and he certainly *isn't* a Potter."

James looked utterly stricken, but Harry didn't have the compassion to feel sorry for him when it was his fault this was happening in the first place.

"From this day forward," said his father, a tone of finality in his voice, "you are no longer a Potter." It took place immediately, and Harry knew he was no longer a Potter. He didn't mind it as much as he thought he would've; he hadn't thought of himself as a Potter for a very long time and some part of him knew that this was going to happen a long time ago.

Harry watched in shock as his father drew his wand. James reacted the same way, watching with muted horror as their Father aimed the wand toward Harry.

"I'm not evil, Harry," spoke his Father with a grim expression on his face, "but you may have cost us the War."

"Father," pleaded James, "what are you doing? You couldn't possibly be -"

"There's this spell that the Light invented. It won't kill you, but it'll put you nicely out of the way until the War is over. That way you won't be interfering with any of our plans anymore."

"Father," James continued to plead, brokenly, tears starting to stream down his face. "You can't - Harry's your son, *please*, I don't approve of this!" His words were mixed together because of his horror and fear and Harry's heart almost stopped beating as he stared down his father's wand. He couldn't believe that this was happening, that after all this time of making excuses for his parents that he would actually come to harm from them.

He knew he should move, but the draining of his magic from the night prior was still wearing on his muscles and the horror of what his father was actually doing was freezing his limbs in place.

"*Protego!*" screamed James.

The spell took effect almost immediately, their father's spell bouncing backwards off the shield and Harry watched in horror as it hit his father head on. Their father collapsed immediately, and although James was still crying hard, he was casting the disarming charm a second later.

The action was over in a few seconds, and their mother's anguished cry echoed throughout their dining room. She was falling over herself to reach her husband's side, and she flung herself over him as soon as she got there. James' face was grim as he watched the scene, but he was at Harry's side a second later, grabbing his hand and pulling him away. As soon as the door shut behind them, James was pushing Harry's holly wand into his hand.

"I'm sorry, so bloody sorry, Harry," babbled James, nearly incoherent as his emotions got the better of him. "I didn't think - I've been a right prat, Harry."

Harry was immediately shaking his head, even though his body was already shaking hard from the excess of emotions running through his system. He lifted his hand and soothingly ran it down James' back, "No, Jamie, it's alright. It's not your fault."

"But it is!" James exploded, "I let my emotions get the better of me. You've always been so much smarter than me, so much more talented at *everything* but Quidditch, Harry, and I used our parents to feel better about it. I relished in their apparent dislike of you," he paused, hiccuping because the sobs were starting to wrack his body. "I'm bloody despicable, Harry, and I don't blame you if you hate me now."

"I could never hate you, Jamie," he promised and he pulled his younger twin forward into a hard embrace. "*Never*, okay? Even if other people think I do, remember that you're *my* twin and I'll love you forever, even if you are a right prat. And don't be too hard on yourself, I'm not that much better than you, alright?"

"But you are," James said softly, sliding his hand into Harry's and squeezing hard once. "You *are*, Harry, because you're comforting me right now when it's my fault that you're not a Potter anymore."

"Hey," interrupted Harry, "it's *okay*, Jamie. You were there for me until I was eleven, okay? Just let me return the favor."

James let a teary smile appear and he was hugging Harry back in response. "I'll make it up to you, okay, Harry? I *promise*. But before then, can you go to Prince's or Malfoy's or your Intended's? It's not safe here for you anymore. You can apparate out, and Harry, don't look at me like that, of *course* I know you've already learned that even though you're severely underaged. I have Father's wand, so I'll be able to create a hole in the wards for you. And," James paused, unlinking his own necklace and then moving forward to place it around Harry's neck. The magic flared intensely once before settling in place, and both twins looked down at Harry's bare chest to see it unmarked once again. "You can borrow mine until you fix yours."

"Thanks, Jamie. I'll owl it back to you when I can. And I think I'll go to Malfoy's. They owe me a favor and I don't want to put Sev in any danger."

"Not your Intended's?" asked James, his eyebrows raised high. "I thought it was mutual already?"

Harry shook his head, flustered beyond belief. "Of course not, Jamie! I'm only fifteen!"

"Then he knows? You're pretty bloody obvious, Harry."

"I'm not -"

"You stare at him sometimes, you know. During meal times. And like back in third year, when we had Defense against the Dark Arts together. I saw you drooling, once, when he showed up in dueling robes."

"Bloody hell, Jamie!"

James erupted into laughter and sobered up just as fast, his eyes grim. "I'm sorry, Harry, for everything. Your soul bound doesn't change who you are, and I'm sorry for making you think that. And for what it's worth, Professor Riddle is actually pretty cool, even if he *is* a Dark Lord."

Harry laughed, shoving James playfully as he got ready to apparate. "You're ridiculous. You're still as bloody terrified of him as you were when you were eleven. You can't fool me."

James' scowl was the last thing he saw before he apparated.

Lucius was the first one to find him. His usually immaculate hair was in disarray and his stormy grey eyes were bloodshot.

Harry had been to the Malfoy Manor multiple times before, but it had always been by Floo. Harry didn't like to advertise the fact that Riddle had already taught him how to apparate, besides the fact that he hadn't actually gotten his license yet. As such, he ended up apparating to the outskirts of the Manor and having to walk a mile to reach the edge of the wards in the thin slippers he had been wearing when he left Potter Manor. He really hoped James would come through for him and send him his trunk when he got his bearings.

Lucius must have been the one to feel the tingling alarm of the wards as Harry approached. In a rare show of emotion, Lucius grabbed Harry into a hard embrace, his body trembling as he buried his face into the crook between Harry's neck and shoulder. "You saved my father, Harry. I owe you a life-debt."

"Well, that's good," chuckled Harry, trying to make light of the situation while simultaneously trying to extract himself from Lucius' vice like grip. "Because I'm going to have to make use of it."

Lucius finally gave in to Harry's attempts, letting go and taking a small step back. "Merlin, have you already gotten yourself in trouble?" He paused after his words, and Harry watched as Lucius seemed to take stock of the situation.

Harry must've looked a sight. His robes were wrinkled and damp from where James had cried on him and his feet were in tattered slippers. And his usually styled hair was still soft and untouched because he had been too tired in the morning to fix his hair.

"Sort of? I'm well, to make things short, I'm not a Potter anymore."

Lucius exhaled hard, his eyes blown wide in shock. "What?"

Harry nodded sadly, and didn't protest when Lucius drew him back into an embrace. The warmth from one of his best friends was comforting and it took almost all of the self control Harry had to keep himself from crying. Although he hadn't loved his parents, they were still his and it was

a hard thing to accept that they didn't want him anymore - even harder to accept that his Father had been willing to induce a magical coma so he wouldn't be able to participate in the War.

Lucius was alternating between cursing the Potters out and doing his best to soothe him. His words became an endless babble, but for some reason still did its part in making Harry feel better.

"I'll call Sev over, okay? And I'm sure my parents will be overjoyed that they get to thank you. You don't even have to tell us the whole story, okay, Harry? Everything will be okay, I promise."

Harry nodded, still tucked into Lucius' warmth, and tried his best to forget the last couple of hours.

"How long has he been in there?" asked Severus, worriedly. He had rushed over as soon as Christmas dinner had finished, but Harry had already locked himself into the guest room by the time he had gotten there. He couldn't help but to feel guilty for the whole mess of events; after all, it was him who had urged Harry to go home for Christmas. Over something as silly as Lily Evans too! Not to say that he thought his soul bound business was silly, but it just seemed to matter so little when Harry had been thrown out of his home and disowned from his family name.

It was already a big deal to be passed over as an heir, but being thrown out of the family made everything a hundred times worse. Harry's reputation was already in shatters from the first debacle; now, Harry would be a laughingstock. After all, no matter how much Harry was put on a pedestal in Hogwarts, none of the public ever got wind of Harry's many accomplishments. Add in the fact that Harry was hiding his status as the Dark Lord's heir and it looked like Harry was being thrown out because he was *incompetent*.

Which was the furthest thing from the truth.

Severus had never seen anyone besides the Dark Lord wield magic as proficiently as Harry. It was to be expected, especially since they were soul bound, but the ease of which Harry wielded magic still sometimes took his breath away.

It was unfair that Harry had been born a Potter. Any other family would have appreciated his talent and nourished it for what it was. And they rejected him, over something as silly as having the Dark Lord as his soul bound.

Lucius drew him out of his thoughts with a soft sigh, and Severus turned to meet his friend's worried eyes with his own. "He's been in there since lunch. At first, I heard a lot of vases breaking, which of course is okay even though they're bloody expensive because *Harry*, but then I guess he remembered that he wasn't alone so he cast a silencing charm. I tried knocking, but I don't really think he wants company, Sev. Sorry for making you come all the way."

"How could I not?" remarked Severus, dryly. "Your letter didn't make much sense; I thought Harry was *dead*!"

"He might as well be," retorted Lucius, and promptly looked guilty a second after.

"Harry does not *need* the Potters."

"Sev, you know as well as I do that Harry's name is probably being smeared through the ground right now. I fear what the Daily Prophet will say once they figure out they can't say Harry and Potter as a name anymore."

"His father is a nasty piece of work," snarled Severus, his fingers digging into his soft robes in anger. "Who disowns their son without going through the proper paperwork? He left Harry with *nothing*! Harry doesn't even have a last name anymore."

"They've always hated him, Sev, you know that." Lucius reached over, taking Severus' hands into his and holding them firmly to keep him from ruining his robe. He shot Lucius an irritated look because really, who cared about his expensive robes when they were in a crisis like this? But he knew Lucius was just trying to help, so he reigned in his temper and let his friend do as he wished.

"At least he still has the Dark Lord."

"Does he?" asked Lucius and when Severus met his eyes, he was shocked to find that Lucius actually meant his question.

"Of course?" he answered, and then promptly realized a second later that Lucius had no clue that Harry's Intended was the Dark Lord. Although Severus regularly ribbed Harry for having the Darkest Wizard as his soul bound, the two of them never actually went into details about it. And Harry was close-lipped about it as soon as the topic was ever brought up, and Severus had never wanted to betray Harry's confidence by telling Lucius, even when it was killing him to keep such a large secret from first, his Lord, and second, his other best friend.

It boggled him sometimes that people couldn't see the relationship between the two. Harry *gravitated* towards the Dark Lord. Some people actually thought it was just a harmless crush, that Harry was just suffering under a bad case of hero-worship just like many other people in Hogwarts. But it was different for Harry. Harry met with the Dark Lord regularly and got a chance to catch a glimpse of who the Dark Lord really was. There was no blind hero worship going on between Harry and the Dark Lord.

Even worse, Harry was so *obvious*. He would lose himself while staring at the Dark Lord, and one time, Severus had watched as Harry had dipped his bread into his pumpkin juice instead of the soup that they had been provided and had promptly choked as soon as he had taken a bite. And Harry would talk about the Dark Lord with hearts in his eyes, and whenever Severus had the privilege to see the two interact, it was *clear* that Harry was extremely flustered in the Dark Lord's presence. Six years *should* have made a difference, but Harry still became a mess, a huge deviation from his usually calm disposition.

And Severus would be embarrassed for Harry except for the fact that Riddle had it even worse. He was sure Harry was still oblivious, and whenever Severus would try to tell him his thoughts, Harry would shoot him down immediately. Riddle sometimes watched Harry with such a fond expression that it made Severus feel awkward for even *looking* because it felt like he was intruding on a special moment. And it was bloody obvious that Riddle went far beyond what he should when it came to Harry. Harry could protest all he wanted, but buying that amount of clothes for someone was not normal and could not be explained by that Heir business the two of them had going on. Severus wasn't sure if Riddle knew he was being such a softie for Harry and he certainly didn't want to assume that Riddle's soul bound was Harry, but...

"Well," started Lucius, hesitantly, "didn't the Dark Lord only choose Harry as an heir because of James?"

"What?" asked Severus, more in shock than anything else but Lucius took his words seriously.

"I mean, that's what Harry told me, Sev. He said the Dark Lord was only interested in him because he wanted to get one over Dumbledore."

"Merlin, he thought that in first year, but shouldn't he have realized by now?"

"Realized what?" asked Lucius, and when Severus looked in his confused eyes, realized that there was no way he could tell Lucius the truth. Lucius didn't even *suspect* that the Dark Lord cared for Harry; he thought the Dark Lord thought Harry was a pawn!

"Does he really think that, Lucy?"

"You're not telling me anything," scowled Lucius, but he nodded anyway. "Harry told me that last week? He didn't say anything to you?"

This time it was Severus' turn to scowl, even though he didn't resent Harry at all for not coming to him. After all, Harry knew Severus liked the Dark Lord an exorbitant amount and probably would've tried his best to convince Harry otherwise.

He sighed, "So on top of having no family and name, he has to deal with thinking he lost the Dark Lord, too?"

"Hey!" protested Lucius, "He has family. *We're* here for him."

Severus looked at Lucius, "Because you're my best friend, I'm not going to point out how bloody Gryffindor that was."

"But you just did?" asked Lucius with pink cheeks.

Severus chuckled, patting Lucius on the cheek with affection. "I'm going to go fix this, alright? Your parents wouldn't happen to know where the Dark Lord is right now?"

"Normally, we wouldn't because who knows how a Dark Lord spends Christmas. But I'm pretty sure he's visiting the Vampires, right now. At least Father would know more." Severus nodded, grabbing Lucius' hand and dragging him toward where he remembered Abraxus' study was. Lucius continued to ramble on behind him, "But Sev, are you really going to owl the Dark Lord?"

Severus couldn't help the smile that crossed his face. "Better, Lucy. I'm going to go visit him."

Lucius squeaked, "But vampires!? Sev, are you bloody serious?"

"Deadly," responded Severus. "Don't tell me you're scared of vampires?"

Lucius sputtered for a few seconds and then sighed heavily. "This is why I told myself not to befriend you two."

Severus laughed gleefully, even though deep down inside, he was worried sick about Harry. Vampires didn't scare him, but the Dark Lord *did*, and Severus only hoped that he was able to convince the Dark Lord to come back. Because while Harry would protest if he ever knew what Severus was planning, Severus knew that Harry *did* need the Dark Lord and Severus was prepared to do anything to get Harry back on his feet.

The Dark Lord didn't look irritated which was a good start. He was dressed in black formal robes and his silky brown locks fell in curls around his head. It looked good on him, the change of style, but the softness of the curls did nothing to detract from the sharpness of his red eyes. He looked down at Severus with an unreadable expression, his head tilted to the side as he listened intently to Severus' words.

Severus was sure he was rambling, which was *odd* for him because Severus never rambled, but they were currently in a Vampire's den and it was impossible to tell the Dark Lord's expression.

Because while Severus was almost a hundred percent sure that the Dark Lord *cared* for Harry, the way the Dark Lord was acting was almost a surefire way of convincing him otherwise. He seemed as if he didn't care, almost as if he was going to be annoyed with Severus for bothering to come to him with such trivial information.

"And then, Harry was disowned and his Father almost put him in a coma."

Immediately, Riddle's disinterested expression changed, stiffening and his eyes became even more piercing. "Can you repeat that?"

Severus dutifully obeyed, and felt an intense surge of glee at the way Riddle's hand tightened around his wand in anger. Anger bled into his red eyes, and he was almost snarling. "Those Light *imbeciles*."

Severus continued, sure that he wasn't meant to have heard the last sentence. "Harry doesn't have a last name, anymore, sir. And he's, well, he needs to hear from you, my Lord."

Riddle froze at his words, and he seemed to realize that he wasn't acting *normal*. He tried his best to wipe off his expression, and to affect a disinterested tone again, "And do tell, Prince, why you think you needed to come to me with this information? I will be seeing him in a week."

"Because he's distraught, my Lord. And he still thinks that your interest of him hinges on his connections with the Potter family."

"What." said the Dark Lord, flatly, the word almost torn out of him by surprise.

Severus tried his best to contain his urge to cackle gleefully, because the way the Dark Lord was acting confirmed every one of his suspicions.

"I know, my Lord. Six years and he still thinks he means nothing to you." He realized a second later that this was the Dark Lord he was talking to and that meant he wasn't supposed to *tease* him. He flinched when those red eyes landed on him and waited silently as the Dark Lord regarded him for a few, long moments.

"Is Harry still at Malfoy Manor?"

"Yes, my Lord," responded Severus, bowing his head shamefully.

Riddle nodded, standing up in a sweep of his robes. When he passed by Severus, he laid a hand, almost gently, on Severus' shoulder. When Severus turned to look at him, he saw a small smile on the Dark Lord's face. "You did well, Prince. Wait here for me, and I'll apparate us back to the Manor."

And then the Dark Lord was gone, and Severus was left standing there, struck by the image of the Dark Lord's smile. It wasn't rare to see, but Severus suddenly knew why so many people were crushing on him.

Merlin, Harry was so lucky.

Harry knew he was moping. He prided himself on having a thick skin and he *knew* he didn't really care for the Potters. He was trying not to let this affect him too much, but the fact was that Harry was too scared to actually go out and face the world.

It was already nearing the second day of him hiding out in the room Lucius had given him, and he felt extremely guilty that he hadn't actually left to see his friends. Last night, he had felt Severus' magical signature outside the door, and if Severus decided to knock, he would've opened it. But his two best friends apparently knew him well enough to refrain from doing so, and Harry spent the rest of the night wallowing into his pillow. Nightmares plagued him for the rest of his night, and Harry was horrified to find that his Father featured in every single one of them.

The truth was...Harry didn't really care about being disowned from the Potter family. He knew they held no love for him, and after witnessing the love the Malfoys had for their son countless times over the six years, he knew that his parents were actually pretty cruel in their interactions with him. So being disowned wasn't the factor that he was worried about.

His status as the Dark Lord's heir was. He still remembered the day the Dark Lord told him of his plans and he remembered feeling as if he was just another pawn in the Dark Lord's schemes.

But Harry enjoyed being the Dark Lord's heir. He loved being able to spend time with his Intended without it being strange and he loved being able to learn more and more about the Dark Lord. But now, he was currently Nameless and he had nothing to offer the Dark Lord. Sure, the Dark Lord may have spent six years teaching him, but right now, he was more of a hindrance than an actual Heir.

Before he could sink further into his maudlin thoughts, he felt his privacy wards being ripped apart. For a split second, fear that his Father had somehow found him overwhelmed him, but it passed quickly because he was still in the Malfoy Manor and he knew the wards around the Manor were impressive.

Still, he scrambled to get up, wandlessly summoning his wand into his hand. As such, he was facing the doors as soon as they slammed open and was shocked speechless at the sight.

The Dark Lord stood there, framed by the light shining in from the hallway into the darkened room. He looked utterly stunning, with his curled locks and his formal robes, and even more so when he regally strode in, his cloak flapping behind him as he approached Harry.

Harry knew he should probably close his mouth, but he couldn't. Because the Dark Lord was right there in front of him and it just didn't make sense. He watched, still stunned, as the Dark Lord continued to stalk closer, and didn't move when Riddle finally sat down on the bed next to him.

They stared at each other for a few long moments before the Dark Lord waved a hand, simultaneously shutting the door and summoning a small ball that emanated a soft light. Because the light was dim, it didn't hurt Harry's eyes and all it did was help enhance the red glow to his Intended's eyes.

The door shut with a foreboding sound, and Harry shivered as he realized that the Dark Lord was still there in front of him and wasn't going to be moving anytime soon. "My Lord?" he ended up murmuring when the silence got too overbearing.

Riddle raised an eyebrow, "I know you were just disowned, Harry, but surely it didn't mess with your brain as well?"

Harry flinched at Riddle's words, curling into himself as he realized that the Dark Lord *knew* he was Nameless. "You know then," he stated quietly.

"Yes, I do. I fail to see why you think it's such a big deal though."

Harry stared at Riddle in muted shock, his green eyes wide in surprise.

"No reason to revert back to your eleven-year-old ways. I thought I made it quite clear that your parents don't matter. Does losing them hurt that much?"

Harry was shaking his head, and his voice was raspy from disuse when he spoke again. He was trembling, and he did his best to disguise it by clenching his hand into the soft blankets. He took a risk, even though his heart was beating so fast it *hurt*. After all, he already lost everything, being truthful couldn't hurt things anymore.

"You," he whispered, and when Riddle only tilted his head in confusion, he labored on, "It's *you* I'm scared of losing."

There was a long silence before he felt a gentle touch to his clenched hands. A second later, and the gentle touch turned into more as Riddle took his hand into his, turning Harry's hand over so he wasn't able to ruin the sheets. The touch felt electric, and Harry kept his gaze down on their interlocked hands as Riddle spoke.

"Let me tell you a story, Harry. A long time ago, Hogwarts accepted a young boy from a Muggle orphanage. He had no name, no prestige, and only knew magic from his own experiences. But he became the Dark Lord, and being Nameless did nothing to hinder him."

"But you're the descendent of Slytherin," he protested weakly, his mind whirling from the fact that his Intended was from a Muggle orphanage.

"Yes," said the Dark Lord, kindly. "But that was after my school years and yet people still flocked to me when I was in Hogwarts. Losing the Potter name isn't going to make me give up on you. I've spent six long years on you, after all."

The Dark Lord was *comforting* him. It was so beyond the realm of what was normal for Harry that he was reeling from the shock. He had hoped, of course, that the Dark Lord would come comfort him, but he had thought it was just a fool's pipe dream. He never actually imagined that the Dark Lord would actually be *here*. The shock and the emotions overwhelmed him, and he turned his head to hide the tears that were gathering at the edges of his eyes.

He almost flinched away when gentle fingers took the edge of his chin, turning his head so he was facing the Dark Lord. Harry blinked fast, trying his best to hold the tears at bay, but at the sight of the concern in his Intended's eyes, they spilled down his cheeks. And then it was as if a dam broke, and tears continued to stream down his face. He knew he was breaking down in front of his Intended, and the hot flush on his cheeks was evidence of just how embarrassing he found that to be.

"Oh, Harry," sighed the Dark Lord, releasing Harry's chin from his tight grip and reaching upward to wipe futilely at the edges of Harry's eyes, "Don't cry, my little Heir. I've fixed things."

Harry tried his best to focus on the Dark Lord's words, but the tears continued to come and he was hiccuping from the sole force of his sobs. He startled when he felt the Dark Lord move closer and even more so when Riddle actually started to stroke his back in an attempt to calm him down.

It felt like an eternity before he felt calm enough to stop crying. He had huddled closer to the Dark Lord in his breakdown and was currently wedged close enough to his Intended to feel the warmth emanating from his body. He was wrapped up in Riddle's arms and embarrassingly enough Harry had actually buried his face into the Dark Lord's chest. And even more boggling, the Dark Lord had *let* him.

Harry flinched away as soon as he realized, and stammered out a series of apologies as he continued to scoot back further into the bed's pillows, giving the Dark Lord back his personal space.

Riddle regarded him silently, an amused glint to his eyes as he watched Harry move. "Don't apologize, Harry. I know you've had a rather bad shock."

"That's no excuse, my Lord. I'm -" he cut himself off when the Dark Lord's expression changed into a dark one, and mentally backtracked to see what he could have said.

"What is with this 'my Lord' business? You've never been so formal with me before, and I rather have it not start now."

Harry flushed, bowing his head in shame and embarrassment, even while the elation from his Intended's words was blooming in his heart.

"Harry, your disowning makes no difference to your position as my Heir. Our relationship does not change in the slightest. And besides, just in case you didn't hear me the first time, I've arranged things so your status will not stay Nameless much longer."

Harry whipped his head back up in shock to stare into Riddle's amused ones. "What?" he mouthed quietly and was rewarded when Riddle's smile grew bigger.

"Let's get you fixed up, alright? I brought in some of your more formal robes; now all you have to do is wash up and fix your hair. And do try not to worry too much. Your new family won't reject you no matter how you look."

"My new family, sir?" Harry choked out as soon as he got his emotions back under control.

Riddle shook his head, "You'll know soon enough. Now, go wash up. You're a right mess, Harry."

Harry flushed, even as his mind was whirling. A new family? And more importantly, a new Name? Not having a last name was daunting; to Harry, it meant that he was *just* a Harry, he didn't even have any identifying characteristics to tell him apart from any other Harry. It made him feel ordinary, and that was something Harry never wanted to experience again.

"I'll go set things up. You'll be fine by yourself now?"

Harry nodded rigorously and watched as Riddle get off the bed. When Riddle got to the door, he finally mustered the courage to speak. "Thank you, sir, for comforting me."

Riddle turned to regard him silently, and Harry lost his breath at the intensity in his Intended's red eyes. They held a wealth of emotions that he couldn't name, but Riddle was already turning by the time Harry even started to decipher the first one. "You're welcome, Harry," Riddle murmured and then he was out the door.

A/N: This is one of the longest chapters I have ever written hahaha, and it was supposed to end after Harry was disowned but I was like I can't leave it there or else my lovely readers would think Harry's in a bad place when he really isn't! This is just the start to Harry's wonderful life :) and being disowned from his horrible family is only a good thing. His new family is going to treat him wonderfully and I'm sure you guys already know who they are! I'm really proud of this chapter, so I hope you guys like!

And thank you EVERYONE who wished me happy birthday. It really means a lot, and I really did have a good one thanks to all your lovely comments! Thank you again for reading and I hope you guys enjoyed because I had a ton of fun writing it!

Next chapter will be uploaded two weeks or so from now because I have a big engineering test on April 2nd and I actually haven't started studying yet haha and I haven't actually started the next chapter Dx. Just wanted to get this out here because I made a promise to you guys and because I'm not sure when the next time i'll be able to write. So thank you thank you for the response it really warms my heart and I read each and every comment I get. so thank you! (and i'm sorry i haven't been able to comment back, i'm with my boyfriend right now and he doesn't know i write hplv fanfiction xD so I haven't had the time to do it since we're on break! but I will soon!)

Sixth Year Part III

Harry took a deep breath before mustering his courage and pushing the heavy door open.

The first person Harry caught sight of was his Intended. Riddle was sitting on a loveseat near the fireplace, his formal cloak flung to the side, leaving Riddle's collared shirt visible to the eye. It looked good on him, especially because it was well-fitted and clung to every one of his muscles. Harry averted his eyes when he found his vision trailing lower and concentrated on the other people in the room.

Dorea Black sat on another loveseat, her posture stiff and her hands folded quite neatly in her lap. Harry hadn't seen her since he was eleven, but the six years had did little to weather her beauty. Even at age fifty, she still looked regal. At his entrance, a smile crossed her face, but she didn't move to stand up.

Her husband didn't share the same sentiment as her and he was jumping to his feet as soon as Harry made his presence known. Age didn't agree with Charlus as well as Dorea, but his appearance was welcoming and easy on the eyes. His hair was thinning and he had put on quite a few pounds, but he was still easily recognizable.

"Harry, how you have grown," said Charlus the moment he released Harry from his grip and then he sighed sadly. "I have much to apologize for."

Harry smiled awkwardly, and then yelped as he was pulled quite forcibly down onto the loveseat. He turned to look at the one responsible and was met with Riddle's intense stare. There was a disapproving tilt to his Intended's smile and while Harry was clueless to how he had caused it, he knew with certainty that Riddle was irritated with him.

After a long moment of intense staring Riddle turned away his gaze and when Harry turned back to look at the others he found the couple sharing knowing glances. The young wizard flushed instantly, he had forgotten that Charlus and Dorea both knew what the words on his heart said. Was it possible that they thought Riddle was angry because Charlus had hugged him? Harry very much doubted that was the reason Riddle was angry, but he could understand that from their perspective it was the only explanation.

"When you were sorted into Slytherin, your father put the blame on me," said Charlus. "And by extension, Dorea. Because I married a woman from a Dark family, it was obvious to him that I somehow tainted you. Utter rubbish, of course, but as your father is a dear brother of mine, I didn't want to fight him on it."

"You should've," muttered Dorea, darkly, but her expression shifted to a smile when Harry looked at her. Charlus just chuckled at her words, and it was obvious that this was a fight the couple had often.

"Your father wasn't always like this. You have a lot of his good qualities, Harry." Harry flinched at the words, hardly wanting to compare himself to the man who had almost put him into a

coma. "My apologies," continued Charlus, a frown on his face, "probably not what you want to hear right now. I spent many good years with my brother and I'm afraid my view is biased."

"Of course it is," scoffed Dorea, her thin eyebrows furrowed. "Your brother became an awful man. Tainted by Dumbledore into believing the worst of everyone who isn't Light."

"Well," protested Charlus, but Dorea just rolled her eyes and ignored him.

"Don't even try to deny it, honey. Your brother changed when he met Dumbledore."

Charlus sighed, "You're right, sweetheart."

Dorea's smile was sharp before turning back to Harry. "We don't agree with any decisions your father made, Harry, and we're here now to finally do what we should've done ages ago. We can't give you back your name, but you can take *my* name."

"Yours?" wondered Harry, "As in Harry Black?"

"It has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?" asked Dorea, a gentle smile on her face.

Harry nodded, albeit uncertainly, and was startled when there was a light touch to his thigh. "This isn't set in stone yet, Harry," said Riddle, kindly, "The Malfoys also expressed an interest in taking you in."

Harry shook his head, "No, it's alright, sir. If they would have me, I would be honored."

Charlus jumped up from his seat as soon as he spoke and was probably going to grab Harry into another hug when he froze. Harry blinked, confused, but the confusion was swept from his mind as Charlus took one of his hands into both of his. "It's my pleasure to welcome you to our family, Harry."

"The pleasure is mine," he responded, and met Dorea's eyes rather shyly. Instead of the guarded expression she had been wearing when he had first entered, her eyes were singing with joy and there was a wide smile on her face.

Harry switched his focus to Riddle, and felt his heart flutter at the sight of a smiling Dark Lord.

It wasn't Potter Manor, but Harry liked it because it wasn't.

It was hardly as lavish and opulent as his old home, but it was still sprawling over the lands and could probably still house a small town if it wanted to. It was *warm*, unlike Potter Manor, and when Dorea gently wrapped an arm around him to lead him past the extensive wards, Harry felt like home.

They seated him in one of the rooms overlooking the outside before departing to make some necessary firecalls. The view was beautiful, and the lake down there had a clear blue surface that reflected both the leafy trees and the sunny day. The place seemed to be in the countryside, although it was Unplottable and Harry actually had no inkling of where the Manor was actually located. He was sure they would tell him if he asked, but for now he was content leaving it a mystery.

Riddle had left Harry in their hands after they departed Malfoy Manor, muttering something about having to tie up some loose ends. Harry had been confused for a bit, until Severus had explained the Dark Lord had been negotiating with the Vampires. It was heartwarming to think that Riddle had dropped everything to come comfort him, but also extremely embarrassing to know that he had *needed* the comfort.

Because he had needed it. And it was odd to think that he had gotten it from the Dark Lord, but at the same time it *wasn't*. Because for six years, Riddle had been there for him when his real parents weren't, and had been the sole authority figure in his life. He couldn't even remember a time when he wasn't vying for the Dark Lord's praise.

He startled when a crack sounded in the air, and watched, fascinated, as a House-Elf started to set up the table in front of him. It wasn't a dining table, but it was wide and long and in a few moments, was full of different kinds of sandwiches and teas. The House-Elf bowed lowly to him before disappearing with another loud crack.

"Harry?"

Harry immediately stood, angling his body to where the sound had come from. Regulus stood in the doorway, his brows creased together in worry and his mouth drawn into a frown. Sirius, a head taller than the smaller second year, stood behind him, and unlike Regulus, wore an expression of ease.

Then Regulus was crossing the room and drawing Harry into an embrace. Harry didn't flinch at the touch, used to Regulus' caring ways, and wrapped his own arms around the younger boy. Regulus and him had gotten close through the weekly meetings, and Harry considered the second-year one of his close friends.

"Hope you don't expect a hug from me," Sirius casually teased, but approached the duo all the same. Harry chuckled, releasing Regulus and holding out his arms to Sirius. Sirius watched him warily, before throwing his head back and laughing. "Fine, but only because I like you."

Sirius released him when someone cleared their throat, and Harry was dropping into a bow as soon as he registered who it was. Walburga Black, the mother of both Regulus and Sirius, watched both of her sons warily, but a small smile appeared on her face as she watched Harry bow.

She fell into her own curtsy a second later, and her smile was still there when she straightened up. She held out her hand, and Harry bent to press his lips against it in the formal greeting.

"Harry, it is a pleasure to meet you. I've only heard great things."

He straightened up, giving her his own smile before taking two steps back. She watched him, before striding past him regally and seating herself primly on one of the loveseats.

Her two sons followed suit, one of them sitting on each side of her. Sirius leaned over, grabbing one of the sandwiches and plopping it into his mouth. His mother tsked, but didn't move to stop him as he reached for another.

A light touch to his shoulder got his attention, and he turned to see Dorea, dolled up in a regal looking gown with expensive jewelry hanging at her neck. The Black crest stood out amongst

the jewels, and her hair was done up in a regal looking updo. She gave him a small smile, her hand on the small of his back as she guided him toward the couches.

"It's been a while, my niece," she said as soon as she seated herself, and Harry was startled when Walburga actually stood and curtsied before seating herself again.

"Auntie," said Walburga, "Why have you called us here?"

There was a long pause before Dorea answered. "As you must know, times are changing. There will be a War, Walburga."

The silence was foreboding and then Walburga uttered a soft sigh. "It is unavoidable then. I had hoped it would come about after my two sons have graduated, but that hope is futile now I see."

Dorea sent her niece a look of sympathy before leaning forward and taking one of the teapots into her hand, pouring one cup of tea before pushing it over to Walburga.

Walburga took it with shaking hands, raising it to her mouth and sipping at the warm liquid. Regulus wrapped one of his arms around her in order to offer solace, but Sirius sat there, stiff, with both of his hands twisted on his lap.

"I'm taking my rightful place in the Black family, Walburga."

Walburga startled, dropping the cup of tea in her hand. Harry reacted instantly, freezing both the liquid and the cup with wandless magic.

Black eyes turned to look at his, the surprise easy to read within its depths. She gaped openly at him, and Harry ducked his head in embarrassment as he easily floated the liquid back into the cup and both back onto the table.

Dorea continued as if nothing had happened, "Charlus' brother was placed in a coma and as such, Charlus is now the head of the Potter family."

"I fail to see why you need to become Head of the Black family, however," muttered Walburga, obviously shaken.

"You've heard about Harry, I hope."

Those eyes were on him again, this time calculating and cold. Walburga nodded stiffly a moment later.

"He's been disowned and he needs a family for what's to come. You and I both know how important he will be."

"Important enough to need to be an Heir?"

The words were loaded, and all three boys stiffened at it. Harry kept himself from an outburst by digging his nails into his thigh, but Sirius didn't succeed nearly as well. He was already out of his seat by the time Walburga had finished speaking and his shoulders were shaking.

"Mother, you can't be serious!"

"Sit down, Sirius," commanded Walburga, her mouth twisted into a displeased frown. "The heirship was never meant for you in the first place."

"Not for -!" started Sirius, outraged.

"Sit. Down," Walburga hissed. "Unless you want to tell everyone the reason why. Actually," she paused, her eyes cutting to Harry and then sliding back to Sirius. "Maybe you should."

Sirius turned a bright red but he didn't obey, every muscle in his body tight as he vibrated with anger. His mother regarded him silently, folding her hands neatly into her lap as she watched her son. Sirius glared hotly at her for a few more seconds, before deflating, dropping back into his seat next to her.

"It'll only be temporary," offered Dorea. "Until the War is over. I suspect Harry will have more things to worry about than the Black family."

Harry flushed, knowing without a doubt that she was talking about his bond with Riddle. There was no way she wasn't referencing it, and at the way Walburga nodded her head agreeably only made Harry realize that Walburga suspected as well.

"Do I get any say in this?" he remarked, dryly in an attempt to quiet his beating nerves. "I didn't agree to be a Black so I could take Sirius' heirship."

Sirius perked up at his words, sending Harry a grateful look that looked more like a grimace.

Dorea sighed, patting Harry gently on his hands before continuing on as if he hadn't spoken. "I'll renounce my position as Head of the family when the War is over. You have my oath, Walburga."

Walburga nodded, her expression brighter as she slipped a ring off of her right hand. She slid it over to Dorea, who picked it up with one dainty hand. There was a flare of magic as she slid it onto her middle finger, and Harry watched, fascinated, as it shrunk to better fit her.

"If that's all?" asked Walburga, and when Dorea nodded, she stood in a rustle of clothes. She looked grim, but she was smiling, and within a minute, the three of them had left the room.

Dorea set about placing a few of the sandwiches on a plate, handing it to him with a smile. He couldn't begrudge her even if she had put him on the spot, and Harry sighed as he took the plate.

"Don't be so glum, Harry," comforted Dorea, taking another few sandwiches for herself. She sat down on the loveseat that the others had occupied, sitting across from Harry and regarding him solemnly. "This had to be done."

"It just doesn't feel right taking something that matters so much to Sirius. They're my friends, you know."

Dorea patted him sympathetically on the arm, "Friends don't exist in the time of a War, Harry."

Harry scowled, even though he knew she was true. Sirius was going to be on the Light side, and both of them knew it. He settled for a change in topic, "Is it really so simple to change Head of the House like that?"

Dorea chewed the rest of her sandwich slowly before answering. "I was the eldest in my family, and also the favorite. When Mother died, she named me the Heir. However, that was before I married Charlus and decided I didn't want children. I signed over my heirship to my younger sister, Walburga's mother, under the clause that if I decided to adopt I would take back the position of Head of the Family."

"Then, you only adopted me because?"

Dorea laughed, "Goodness no, Harry, I never wanted to be the Head of my family. The Blacks are intense, and I found solace in Charlus. The Potters are much less vocal about blood purity, for one, and I simply wasn't cut out to be a leader. But Charlus was right when he said you were mistreated, and now I'm doing my best to make up for what I should have done long ago. And besides, you have your Intended to thank for this."

Harry's heart sped up, and he was sure the flush on his cheeks was probably permanent. "Riddle did...he talked to you?"

"How do you think we knew about your disownment?" asked Dorea. "We were enjoying our vacation in France when we were suddenly ambushed by your very dashing soul bound. He basically commanded for me to adopt you."

Harry choked on his tea, gasping for breath as he colored a bright red. Dorea watched him with amusement, and when Harry could finally breathe normally again, she continued.

"At first, I was annoyed. He's younger than me, you know, so it rankled me that he thought he could order me about. But he was right, we *had* neglected you, and it was high time we finally did something about it. So we listened to his plea, if one could call it that, and decided to come back for you."

"I'm not a little boy," pointed out Harry, a bit petulantly. "I don't *need* parents."

"Oh, Harry," she said, and there was pity clearly shining in her eyes. "I know you're fifteen and the last thing you want are more restrictions, but please let us try? I didn't want to be a parent all those years ago, but looking at you now, makes me want to try. We'll both be trying, Harry, and I'm not here to boss you around. I'm just here to be here for *you*."

Harry flushed in embarrassment, staring fixedly at his hands as he blinked hard in order not to cry. He knew she was just spouting empty words in order to garner affection from him, but it was *working*. He had been so starved for parental affection, he was about to cry from the sweetness of her words.

He startled when there was a light touch to her hands, and he looked upward to see Dorea in front of him. She looked regal and stern, but the small smile on her face was a stark contrast. When she opened her arms for a hug, Harry didn't refuse.

It was three days after Christmas that he got a letter from Sirius. Sirius wanted to meet up to talk about the intricacies of being 'adopted' into the Black family, and since Harry still felt guilty about stealing the Heirship from Sirius, he agreed.

They decided to meet in one of the empty rooms in Charlus and Dorea's Manor around noontime and Harry wasn't surprised to find that Sirius was running late. He settled down into one of the chairs and finding it uncomfortable, eventually stood and Conjured a comfy armchair into existence. He was embarrassed to find that the shade matched his Intended's eyes exactly and immediately charmed it to sport a velvety green instead. When Sirius was still late, Harry decided to amuse himself further by Conjuring a chair for Sirius, making it a deep black. A House-Elf popped into existence next to the black armchair, bowing once and letting him know that Sirius had arrived. It popped away before he could even express his gratitude.

Sirius was rushing into the room a second later, panting heavily as soon as he skidded to a stop. "Sorry," he said as soon as he got his breath back, "Tripped through the fireplace as I was coming through." He shut the door behind him before walking further into the room, a smile breaking across his face as he caught sight of the chair. He was about to sit down when Harry held his hand up, standing up so that they were standing face to face.

Harry frowned when he realized Sirius was a few inches taller than him, but proceeded to spell the soot off of Sirius' robes anyway. It couldn't have taken longer than a minute, but when Harry looked up, Sirius was watching him with wide eyes.

"Merlin, did you do all that wandlessly? James was right when he said you're a prodigy with magic."

Harry laughed, taking a step back and falling back down into his chair. "Such kind words, Black."

Sirius smiled back, but didn't move to sit down into his chair. Instead, his smile slipped off his face and he sighed heavily as he met Harry's eyes. His hands were twisting nervously into each other, and he was fidgeting in place as the silence dragged on.

Harry was just about to speak when Sirius suddenly let out a hard exhale. "Okay, I'm just going to come out with it."

Sirius raised shaking hands up to his neck, which for the first time in a while was bundled up to the top with the Gryffindor scarf. It didn't register in Harry's mind that Sirius was showing him his soul mark until Sirius had removed his scarf and left his neck bare.

The Potter crest stood out in stark contrast to Sirius' pale neck and Harry lost his breath at the sight of it.

It was beautiful and Harry stood up on shaky legs to step closer to Sirius to inspect it. "Can I?" he asked and proceeded when Sirius gave him a nod. He pressed one of his fingers to the soul mark, feeling the magic emanating from it and knew without a doubt that it was real.

Sirius and James, huh? He could see how they could work; Sirius had stayed next to James all throughout their school years and the two of them seemed to be pretty close. Harry had never heard of them fighting at least. So many things made sense now. The pained expression in Sirius' eyes when James confessed to Lily. The fact that Sirius hadn't dated anyone even though girls had been throwing themselves at him since he was a first year.

"Harry?" Sirius' eyes were anxious, and Harry realized with a start that Sirius thought his soul bound could be *Harry*.

He was shaking his head a second later and watched as Sirius' expression fell. He only had a moment's hesitance before he was reaching up and undoing his necklace. Sirius watched him with hooded eyes and then exclaimed in surprise when Harry unbuttoned his shirt and left his soul mark to bare.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle," Sirius breathed out quietly. "No wonder you had a falling out with your parents."

"I trust you won't tell on me, Sirius. After all, you're my brother's soul bound."

Sirius flinched, and Harry watched in dismay as Sirius dropped heavily onto the Conjured armchair. He stared unseeing for a while before making a sound of distress. "So he is mine then."

"What's wrong with James?" Harry demanded, a hot surge of anger uncurling in his belly. He still loved James, even if James had been a right prat for the last couple of years. Because really, James hadn't actually antagonized him beyond the incident of his disowning. It had still hurt, of course, the constant ignoring, but it had been bearable especially because Harry had been just as busy as James and hadn't had a moment to spare for his other twin. They were destined to grow apart the second Harry was placed in Slytherin and not Gryffindor and Harry couldn't begrudge his twin for his actions.

"Nothing," responded Sirius quietly, not even seeming to have noticed Harry's anger. "Nothing's wrong with him and that's the bloody problem!"

"What?" asked Harry, dropping to his knees to see Sirius better.

Sirius' eyes were full of unshed tears and his cheeks were flushed. "He's perfect, Harry. He's perfect, and straight, and so in love with Lily Evans. Why couldn't I have been meant for you, Harry? Maybe then it wouldn't hurt so much." Sirius' voice broke on the last word and he suddenly covered his face with his hands, a single sob echoing throughout the room.

Harry stood there, feeling helpless as he watched Sirius break down right in front of him. They were friends but only through short letters and small trinkets given as gifts. The way Sirius was sobbing told him that Sirius needed a close friend with him right now, but Harry was the only one there. "And why would I have been a better choice, Sirius? We barely know each other."

"Because I'm so bloody in love with him that sometimes I can't *breathe*. And it tears my heart open to know that he doesn't want me back. That he'll *never* want me back."

"How would you know that? He doesn't even know what your soul mark is."

"Because he's *straight*, Harry! He's not going to *like* me because I'm a boy."

"Those things don't matter when it comes to soul mates, Sirius." Harry inched closer, throwing a comforting arm around the desolate boy. Sirius leaned into it, even though sobs were still wracking his body.

"I kissed him."

"You what?" startled Harry, leaning back to regard Sirius' face more clearly.

"It was just a few weeks ago...we were playing chess and he was being a sore loser and all I could think about was how bloody cute he looked and the next thing I knew I was kissing him."

"Oh."

Sirius looked miserable, and his hand was clenching painfully onto Harry's thigh, but Harry didn't dare move. He stayed crouched next to Sirius, his bottom perched dangerously on the chair's arm, and he rubbed soothing circles into Sirius' shaking back. "He didn't kiss me back, Harry. And when I drew away, the look on his face...he looked horrified, Harry. He left immediately, and by the time he came back to the common room, he had a bunch of lilies with him. And well, I guess you know what happened next."

Harry didn't say anything, his heart breaking inside as he imagined the pain Sirius was in. He would die if he ever took the leap of faith with the Dark Lord only to be shot down so spectacularly. "I'm sorry," he whispered, feeling utterly helpless.

"It's not your fault, Harry," murmured Sirius a few seconds later. He wiggled his fingers until they were tightly grasped in Harry's right hand. "Magic just decided to screw me over, you know? Like, let's not only give this poor boy the soul mark of a *Light* family, but let's also make sure it's unrequited. I can't even be mad, because I'm a prankster and that sounds like something I would do."

"You *wouldn't*," Harry said fiercely, his green eyes intense and blazing as he clutched tighter onto Sirius' hand. "You wouldn't wish this pain on anyone."

Sirius deflated, and his smile fell. "You're right. It really feels like my heart's breaking into pieces."

Harry wanted to tell Sirius about James' soul mark. But he couldn't; he would have to betray both Lily and James' trust in order to comfort Sirius and the fact that James' soul mark was so vague made it even more dangerous. *Against All Odds* could mean anybody, and if Harry told him, he was afraid that Sirius would try to act out those very words. Which would make the soul mark utterly useless.

He pulled Sirius deeper into his embrace and desperately wished soul marks didn't exist.

Riddle found him wandering the hallways two hours after Sirius left, Riddle's cloak slung across his shoulder and the top two buttons of his collared shirt left undone. Harry almost stumbled into one of the statues at the sight, but Riddle steadied him with one hand, before commanding him to come with him.

It wasn't long before they reached Harry's room, Riddle grumbling angrily under his breath about how difficult it was to track Harry down. Riddle made his way toward his closet as soon as Harry let him in, using his magic to unlock it and rifling through his clothes a second later.

He pulled out one of the more lavish ones, a deep green like Harry's eyes with jewels sewn into the bottom. It was one of the more gaudy ones, and although Harry did admit it looked quite nice on him, he *hated* wearing it because it made him look pretentious. He scowled, but didn't protest as Riddle flung it onto the bed.

"What are you doing here, sir?"

Riddle paused, turning to look at Harry with a small smirk. "We're going out to Diagon Alley."

Harry blinked in surprise; Riddle only took him there when they needed to buy something and to his knowledge, they had nothing to buy. "Why?"

"The Daily Prophet is being a nuisance and I want to quiet them."

"Are you sure this is a good idea?"

Riddle shot him an irritated look before moving closer and straightening up the collar on Harry's shirt. He continued to make sure there wasn't a single wrinkle on Harry's outfit, even going so far as to wave a hand and cast a spell to ensure that it would stay that way. He studied Harry for a few seconds intently, before waving his hand and summoning the cloak from the bed. It settled around Harry's shoulders and Riddle leaned forward to tie it into place. When he stepped back, a pleased smile was on his face.

"There," Riddle murmured, "you look the part. Just got to fix your hair," he paused, pulling out his wand and spelling Harry's messy hair into a presentable hairstyle. Riddle couldn't tame all the curls, but the spell was strong enough to straighten out most of them.

"It seems dangerous, sir. Going out into Diagon Alley right after my disowning."

"The Light's not going to attack you when you're right next to me, Harry," the Dark Lord pointed out sensibly, turning his back on Harry to start getting himself ready. "Besides, we need to clear your name."

Harry winced, thinking back on the cruel words that had been printed in the Daily Prophet just the other morning. He hadn't thought the story would have been big enough to make the front page of the Daily Prophet, but since their father had also fallen into a mysterious coma the same day, the story of his disowning was now known to almost everyone. It was shameful, but he knew the words that they wrote weren't true. He wasn't useless in magic, and he *was* going Dark, but going Dark didn't carry the horrible stigma it had always used to for him. And the ones close to him knew the true story.

He watched the Dark Lord get ready, settling down onto one of the more comfortable arm chairs around his bed. Harry had gone out with Riddle multiple times into Diagon Alley to get fitted for his many robes, but Harry had always gone under a few glamours to make him unrecognizable. Riddle also did the same, spelling his normally piercing red eyes to a dull grey and lengthening his hair until he could tie it into a short ponytail. After all, Harry had been hiding his status as the Dark Lord's heir since he had taken the role as his own, and as such, couldn't be seen in the Dark Lord's presence without causing a ruckus.

But now, when he was no longer Harry Potter and now Harry Black, being linked together wasn't the worst thing that could happen. In fact, having the Dark Lord vouch for his magical prowess was probably the only way he could get rid of the bad press of his disownment.

Riddle finished spelling his locks back into its straightened form, looking dashing as he turned to raise an eyebrow at Harry. He was handsome, with his collared shirt buttoned back up and his

cloak wrapped snugly around his shoulders. He had procured a tie from somewhere, and it only helped complete the ensemble.

As soon as Harry got close enough, Riddle wrapped one arm around the younger boy's shoulders. Harry startled, but before he could say anything, Riddle was side-apparating them through the wards and to the front of Tom's pub.

Riddle didn't even stumble when they landed, his firm grip keeping Harry from tumbling onto the ground. Harry jumped when he felt Riddle's hand on the small of his back, but didn't protest, letting the older man lead him into the Pub.

Talk ceased as soon as they walked in and it was moments later that Tom, himself, was approaching them. "Professor Riddle," the bartender said, a pleasant smile on his face. "What brings you here?"

"Simply passing by to Diagon Alley," responded Riddle, a charming smile on his face.

The bartender nodded, "Please don't hesitate to let me know if you need anything."

"Will do," nodded Riddle, tugging Harry forward toward the exit. It wasn't long before they reached the brick wall.

"That should do it," remarked Riddle conversationally, a pleased smile on his face as he tapped the wall in front of him with his wand. "It won't be long before they're swarming around us."

Riddle wasn't wrong. By the time they reached Flourish and Blott's, the people in the streets were watching them with interest, sharing whispers when they thought the two of them couldn't see. Harry forgot how famous his Intended actually was since in Hogwarts, no one really treated Riddle any different. Riddle was hailed as a prodigy, almost on equal level of Dumbledore even though he was much younger. Not only that, but Riddle also participated in charities and social events, which only raised his recognition level.

And Harry might be a little biased here, but Riddle was also extremely good-looking. The girls in the crowd watched his Intended as if he was a piece of meat. Harry pressed closer into Riddle's side, feeling irrationally possessive. Riddle glanced at him when he did it, but didn't remark on it, letting Harry press even closer.

Riddle paused when they got to a bookshelf in the store, pulling out a few books and handing them to Harry. He was just explaining the title of the third book when a timid-looking girl approached them. It was with a start that Harry realized there were a crowd of people around them, some of them sporting huge cameras within their hands. Reporters.

"Professor Riddle, sir?" she stammered out as soon as she was close. Riddle turned to regard her silently, tilting his head to the side to let her know he wanted her to continue. "If you don't mind me asking, I was wondering why you're in Diagon Alley today?"

"I trust the lot of you have heard of Harry, correct?"

The reporters' focus switched to him, and Harry flinched under the scrutiny. Most of the faces expressed open curiosity, but some were looking at him with disgust. It didn't bother him as

much as he thought he would; mostly, he pitied them for not even trying to understand the true story.

"The boy who was disowned?" questioned the girl, and Harry wondered why he ever thought she looked timid.

"The thing I detest most in this world is *prejudice*," the last word turned into a low hiss, but the reporters in front of them leaned forward anyway, enraptured by his Intended's words. "Harry was disowned through no fault of his own. As you all know, Harry used to belong to Light family. They thought he was going Dark because he was sorted into Slytherin so they disowned him."

"Those are some big claims you are making," remarked the girl.

Riddle's smile was sharp, almost predatory, "You misunderstand me. I am not blaming the Potters for Harry's misfortune, but society itself."

The reporters gasped, and Riddle's eyes were pleased as he looked at them.

"The spells forbidden by the Ministry are predominately Dark. But I am under the belief that no magic should be forbidden. It is the *intention* behind spells that makes one worse than another, not the nature of the spell itself. Society tends to run around on the belief that all Dark spells are bad and only Light spells are good. A Light wizard *can* cast Dark spells, so what makes them so different from Dark wizards?"

"Are you saying there shouldn't be Light or Dark wizards, then?"

"Nothing so drastic," murmured Riddle, a smile full of charm on his face. "I just want to remind everyone that Harry here is one of my prized students and it's painful to see him suffer under such a misconstrued perception."

There was a long silence after his words, until one reporter stepped up hesitantly. "Professor Riddle, may I ask for a picture?"

Riddle nodded, his smile still radiant as he pulled Harry closer to him. Harry let himself be pulled, melting into Riddle's side as the camera flashed.

The Daily Prophet was in front of him, the headlines sporting both a dig at the Potters and praise for his Intended. The picture was moving, and Harry blushed every time he saw how he had molded himself to Riddle's side.

Riddle sat in front of him, his long legs crossed and his cloak gone as he scoured his own copy of the Daily Prophet. He put it down after a couple of minutes, his smile pleased as he looked over at Harry. "I'll call this a success."

Harry nodded, "Sir, does no one know you're a Dark wizard?"

Riddle chuckled, "Of course not, Harry. I'm teaching Defense against the Dark Arts. No one suspects probably, except for Dumbledore."

"Why *are* you teaching Defense against the Dark Arts if you're the Dark Lord?"

"There were circumstances," started the Dark Lord slowly, his eyes intense as he regarded Harry. "None of which you may know of, of course."

Harry scowled, crossing his arms and feeling as if he was a child again. "Why does it feel like I know so little despite the fact that I'm your heir?"

Riddle just shook his head, "You know more than most, Harry."

"Somehow that doesn't make me feel better," grumbled Harry.

"Right," murmured Riddle, but the teasing smile on his lips gave him away. "I think it's time we discuss your position in the War. Now that you have been disowned, things have been changed a bit. I think it's time we publicize the differences between you and your twin."

"With James? But no one outside of Hogwarts knows about James being Dumbledore's heir yet, do they?"

"Yes, but secrets don't stay hidden forever, Harry."

"Is that what today was about? Discrediting Dumbledore?"

Riddle's smile was pleased. "There is more than one way to win a war, my Heir. I've been hard at work at this for a while now. It's easier than you think to spread rumors. Simply use a glamour and a pub, and suddenly rumors about Dumbledore's waning decline in sanity is floating about."

"That's positively evil," agreed Harry, and watched as Riddle threw his head back and laughed.

"All's fair in the name of love and war, Harry." He sobered up a second later, a wicked smile that did weird things to Harry's stomach on his face. "But back on topic, we need a way to let the public see the differences between James and you. After news gets out of your adoption by the Blacks, people will automatically assume you're Dark, despite the impromptu interview that just happened. We'll slowly seed the information that you're my Heir and that I'm the Dark Lord in your sixth year, and hopefully by then, we would have accomplished the goal of making your twin look absolutely horrendous in comparison to you."

"Is that absolutely necessary?" he ended up questioning, even though his words prompted an irritated look from his Intended. He was usually for any plan Riddle made, but he had just become friendly with his twin again.

"Since James' is Dumbledore's heir, he'll be the one to lead the Light when Dumbledore is gone."

"You're going to kill Dumbledore," said Harry, horrified. He had suspected, of course, when Riddle had started going down this line of thinking, but he had somehow forgotten that his Intended was a *killer*.

"Of course, Harry," responded Riddle, a displeased tilt to his mouth. "Have you forgotten just who I am, again? I won't hesitate to kill if it'll further my plans."

"But that's...isn't there another way?"

Riddle sighed, "We'll have to do something about that soft disposition of yours before the War breaks out."

Harry bristled, glaring hotly at his Intended even as his stomach was churning. "I told you before, I'm never going to kill."

"I'm tired of having this fight with you, Harry," warned Riddle, and Harry flinched as the air around them became heavy with his Intended's magic. Riddle's eyes softened at the sight of Harry's obvious discomfort and he sighed, "Why can't you see? Dumbledore will never understand why the Dark and the Light should be united. He'll rather fight a War than listen to my side of the story. And besides, haven't you heard that you're never supposed to turn your back on a living enemy? If Dumbledore lives, he'll be a constant thorn in our sides when we deal with the Muggles."

"Have you tried? Taken him to see Magic and see if She can explain it to him?"

Riddle frowned, "Why are you so intent on keeping him alive? I don't believe you've spoken more than three words to him before."

"Everyone has the potential to change, sir. And if we can get Dumbledore to understand, wouldn't it be just that much easier to deal with the Muggles?"

Riddle looked exasperated, giving him a look of disbelief that conveyed how irrational Riddle believed him to be acting. "You're acting like a brat again," he accused, lowly. Before Harry could protest, Riddle continued talking. "You may believe what you want, little brat, but Dumbledore will be killed. Before that, I was thinking, perhaps a tournament is in order? Nothing dangerous, but on a big enough scale that the public will be invested in it."

Harry knew Riddle was changing the subject, but he knew better than to call him out on it. "Like a Dueling Competition, sir?"

"That may work," said Riddle, thoughtfully, his long, elegant fingers tapping lightly on the desk in front of him. "So I have your consent, then?"

Harry nodded, bewildered that Riddle even thought to ask him. Riddle looked pleased, standing up from his chair and wandlessly summoning his cloak over from where it lay. He swung it on as soon as it reached him, looking handsome in the ensemble. "Good. However, I have things to attend to," he murmured. "I shall see you on the night of your adoption?"

Harry nodded, and a blink later, the Dark Lord was gone.

A/N: Thank you so much guys! It's amazing the response and I'm so scared to disappoint you guys! Ahh, so I hope you guys enjoyed! Also, a little personal, but I finally told my bf about my hplv fanfiction and he just laughed hahaha so at least I have more time to write now! We actually went to a coffee shop and he coded and I wrote :3. I'm glad he's so understanding haha.

A huge thank you to Kefalion on ao3 for helping me go through some important plot points! She also changed one of my paragraphs to flow better, so thank you! :)

Harry hasn't actually been adopted yet btw, that will come in the next chapter. Hopefully, I didn't surprise you guys with Sirius being James' soulmate! There will be some James/Lily in future chapters, but I decided that Sirius is endgame (though it probably won't happen for a while).

Centaurs and Werewolves and Magic

Harry pulled his arm back, using magic to enhance his muscles and give him the strength needed to complete his task. When he let go, the arrow flew true, hitting the center of the target with a loud sound and subsequently driving the object a few feet backward.

He let out the breath he had been holding with relief, dropping the intricately carved bow to his side and turning to his companion.

A centaur stood next to him, his face pleased. He stood taller than Harry by a couple of feet, and his lower part was that of a strong brown horse. He was shirtless, with long black hair reaching down to his well-defined chest. "You did well, Harry," he praised and Harry ducked his head in embarrassment.

"Thank you, Synes," he muttered, even as a small smile appeared. He had been training on and off during the rest of the school year, and it had only been now that he was able to wield a centaur bow correctly. Centaur bows were made differently than humans; they drew on the wielder's magic to aim true and it had been tricky for Harry to learn how to let something foreign access his magic.

Training with the centaurs had two benefits. First, Riddle had wanted Harry to interact with more Magical creatures before he graduated. Since the Light oppressed them quite radically, it wasn't quite a far stretch to assume they would fight on the side of the Dark when War broke out. They couldn't stand Riddle, but Harry was a different story. He was fresh, young, and still moldable, and they didn't protest much when Riddle proposed Harry's stay in their colony during the summer. It would only be for two weeks, and since Harry had been learning from them every other week during the school year, the centaurs didn't refuse. After all, Synes and a few of his other teachers were already fond of him.

And it helped that they were able to tell that Harry would be important to Magic.

That was the second benefit of his stay with the centaurs. The centaurs were the biggest worshippers of Magic; they still read her teachings and sometimes they were able to commune with her on nights full of magic. It was tricky, and required a ton of sacrifices, but they were the best bet on getting to learn more about Her.

Harry took his teachings on Her rather seriously. Riddle had promised a meeting with Her at the end of the summer, and Harry spent most of his nights worrying over it. He knew he wasn't in *danger*, but it was daunting to know that he would soon meet the one responsible for his magic. He never thought of as himself a religious sort, but he knew he would have to start worshipping her in order to survive the ordeal.

The centaurs were kind and patient when they were teaching him. Knowledge of Magic wasn't widespread; after her downfall around the same time as Merlin, she had lost much of her power. She had given most of it to Merlin after all, and when he ceased to exist, the magic had simply disappeared. It had taken her a long time to gather it all back, and by then, the Muggles had run rampant. They were of a different species than wizards; they couldn't access their magical core and neither could they understand why she was considered a God. Magic needed people to

worship her; she needed sacrifices and chants and had lost them all after Merlin had passed away.

But wizards needed Her. Their power had waned significantly from the times in the past. People like the four Founders were rarely found anymore and wandless magic had sunk into the deep depths of the unknown. Wizards had become a shell of their former selves. Muggles outnumbered them in massive amounts and wizards spent their time hiding from Muggles. They scrambled for a place to hide themselves, taking away small places in unpopulated areas as their own. They no longer lived proudly amongst the people; magic was that of a fairytale in the present world. At least in the past, the Muggles understood Magic and knew that she was to be feared.

Not only that, but the world around them was slowly losing its vibrancy. Water was slowly becoming more and more polluted; the magic too thin to withhold the nasty chemicals that got entrenched in them. Plants strained for any type of nutrients in the soil, but were sorely disappointed when they got none. Soil was dry, nutrientless, and hardly the recipe for life. Even the air was changing. Magic wasn't able to regulate the atmosphere, and with the rapid changes of the Muggles' lifestyles, the air was becoming increasingly warmer. If life continued the way it was, if the Light won and continued to cater to the Muggles, everyone was going to die.

It was a grim picture, and Harry hadn't wanted to believe it. But the centaurs took him out one night to show him the difference between the soil in the colony to the soil outside. It was damning evidence, but it also showed that there *was* a way to change things. Magic still had some power left, and she used what little she had left to regulate the environment in the Centaur's colony as gratitude for their continued worship.

It only made Harry more determined to make his Intended to see the error of his ways. It would be so easy to convince people to join their side if they realized Magic *was* real. The planet was slowly dying because of their ignorant ways and since the planet was integral to continued existence, he was sure there was no sane wizard out there that would object to joining the Dark side. The centaurs were in wary acceptance of his plan, since unlike him, they didn't seem to believe in the goodness of wizards.

But Harry was determined to prove them wrong. He didn't want War, even if he had already accepted the inevitability of it. If there was a way to make it bloodless, he would do it.

He glanced around his surroundings, taking in the leafy overhang of the trees around them and the running stream in the distance. It was utterly beautiful in the Centaur's colony, and Harry knew Riddle had accomplished his goal in sending him here. Because Harry was determinedly now on Magic's side, even without yet meeting her; the breath of fresh *clean* air was intoxicating and Harry longed for the past.

"The werewolves are coming."

Harry startled out of his thoughts and processed the centaur's words slowly. He wasn't surprised the werewolves were coming; the centaurs and Riddle had warned him months ago. He had been against it at first; he knew they weren't normal and that their condition was caused by an incurable disease. It had scared him but Riddle had promised to be there and Harry hadn't seen his Intended for a week already.

"Will this be the first time they'll be here?" Harry asked curiously as he started to unstring the bow in his right hand.

"They come after every full moon. It calms them, the clean air and the seclusion from wizards."

"Way to make us sound like horrible people," he muttered, under his breath.

Synes didn't laugh though, simply bending his knees so that he was parallel to the ground.

"Climb on. The wolves are fast approaching, and you are much too slow on two legs."

"Uhm," he started, about to protest, but he was able to stifle it fast enough. There had to be a reason Synes was offering this, and he wasn't about to refuse. He slung the bow onto his back before hefting himself up onto the centaur. It wasn't anything unlike riding a horse, and although he was sure he was going to be sore a few days after because there wasn't a saddle, it wasn't that bad.

Synes trotted off, and Harry watched in fascination as the scenery flew past them. He would never tire of the centaur's colony; it was beautiful, and if he had a choice, he would probably choose to stay there for the rest of his life.

It wasn't long before Synes slowed, and Harry was treated to the glorious sight of his Intended.

He was dressed casually, for him at least. His white dress shirt was left unbuttoned to the third hole, leaving an expanse of skin on display. The sleeves were pushed up to his elbow and his trousers were a dark black. His hair was pushed back, looking almost laidback, but his sharp red eyes and displeased frown spoke otherwise.

"That was cutting it a bit close," Riddle said, crossing his arms in front of him.

Synes bent immediately, allowing Harry to slide off with ease. He winced as soon as his feet hit the floor; horseback riding without a saddle made his thighs *sore*. Riddle was there in seconds, waving a hand and Harry shivered when he felt his Intended's magic dancing across his muscles, easing the soreness.

"Thank you, sir," he said, politely, as soon as the sensation faded.

Riddle nodded, "How have you been, Harry? Have the centaurs been treating you well?"

Synes stiffened at Riddle's words, and Harry had to heavily resist the urge to roll his eyes. No matter how brilliant he found his Intended to be, the fact remained that Riddle had little skills in negotiation. He was much too arrogant to worry about how other people felt, and while it *did* work because he *did* have no equal, it didn't bode well for the tenuous relationships of alliances.

Luckily, Harry had learned this after a couple years of knowing the Dark Lord, and he had practice apologizing for his Intended's nature.

"They took *really* good care of me," he said, for the benefit of Synes, and watched warily as the Dark Lord's eyes narrowed.

"Did they?" Riddle asked in a low voice.

"Yup!" he said, as cheerfully as he could muster. "I've finally mastered the bow. It was a bit tricky, but I figured it out."

"Good," said Riddle, but his expression looked annoyed. "However, I fail to see how they treated you well when they had you so close to the outskirts. The wolves will be here any minute now."

Harry frowned at the Dark Lord's words, but Riddle continued on anyway. "I thought I made it quite clear that Harry stays far away from the werewolves."

Synes didn't look impressed with Riddle's reasoning, his giant arms crossed in front of him. "Your Heir was quite safe, my Lord."

"How?" asked Riddle, his eyes narrowed as he aimed a challenging glare up at the centaur. "He wasn't with me."

"I am more than enough to protect your Heir from the wolves. And your Heir cannot learn if you coddle him. You trusted us with his safety for two weeks, a couple more minutes past is hardly cause for concern."

Riddle scowled, his eyes narrowed dangerously. "Synes, was it?"

Synes didn't back down, just tossing his head to show off his long mane. Centaurs only cut their hair when they lost in a duel, and the length of Synes' mane only showed off his prowess. Synes was *threatening* the Dark Lord.

Harry was about to step in when Riddle's arm snaked around his waist, pulling him flush against his side. Harry turned bright red, about to protest and push away when he noticed the magical signatures that were popping into the clearing. The centaurs that had been lounging around looked up, but they didn't seem too worried.

The werewolves didn't *look* threatening. They looked like normal men and women; some were old, some were young, but they all looked tired. They were dressed differently from normal wizards, their clothes were just scraps to preserve their modesty. They only numbered a couple dozen, but Harry was still fascinated to see them.

He had read about werewolves, and while he was *scared*, Riddle was still next to him. He knew he wouldn't come to harm with Riddle there.

A man who looked to be around his late twenties approached the duo warily, a younger boy with dull green eyes following behind him. He bowed as soon as he got within a couple of feet, kneeling to the floor a couple minutes after his action. The younger boy followed suit, and Harry wasn't surprised to see Riddle looking pleased.

"Rise," said Riddle after a few more minutes, and they complied immediately, looking grateful to be able to straighten back up.

"This is Harry Black," explained Riddle. Harry was sure he was still bright pink because he was still pressed up against Riddle and the thought made him shy enough to avoid meeting the two werewolves' eyes. "He's my Heir, and if he comes to any harm tonight, I'll hunt down every last one of you."

"I'm not completely harmless, you know," Harry muttered lowly, unable to stop himself.

Riddle just chuckled, "Right, Harry."

"I'm not," he protested, pouting petulantly.

"Sure, you aren't," humored the Dark Lord.

"My Lord," cut in the older werewolf before Harry could argue back, "thank you for agreeing to help tonight. If my Heir and I could go rest, I'll be extremely grateful."

Riddle looked surprised to be interrupted, but hid it well after a few moments. He nodded curtly, "Feel free to rest. The centaurs have prepared the necessary materials for tonight, so I expect to see you all when the moon first rises."

The two werewolves expressed their gratitude before bowing lowly once more.

Harry watched them go curiously, before tilting his head upward to look at Riddle. "What's happening tonight?"

Riddle hummed thoughtfully, "I suppose the centaurs wouldn't have told you. The werewolves come not just for the magical relief from the enhanced environment, but also for relief from Magic herself."

"Then you'll be summoning her?"

"Well, I guess you could say it like that. Since I'll be here tonight, Magic asked me to act as a conduit. I possess her magic, after all."

"What?" he said, eyes wide as he tried to process the Dark Lord's words. "You have her magic?"

"Yes, Harry. She gave me some of her magic when she granted me immortality. As such, my magic is soothing to the werewolves. The werewolves are," he paused, looking to struggle to find the right words, "there's not a nice way to put it, but they're abominations. They're certainly not Magic's creation, but she's not strong enough to cure them yet."

"That's terrifying," he admitted after a pause.

Riddle chuckled, "You have no reason to be afraid. I won't let you come to harm, Harry."

"I'm not scared of becoming a werewolf," he protested. "I just thought it'll be rather scary living as one."

Riddle's smile was indulgent, and he released Harry as he stepped away. "I think that's the same thing, Harry. Now, I recall you saying you mastered the bow?"

Harry nodded, easily handling the heavy bow until it was in his hands again. "It's different than normal bows."

"The magic is different," Riddle said. "Go ahead, show me what you learned."

Harry was sure he was still blushing, so he just turned his head to concentrate on the target. The centaurs were big on archery, and since there were still young in the colony, they still had random targets still set up around the perimeter. Just like before, he enhanced his muscles with magic, easily using his magic to pull the string and the arrow backward before releasing both, ensuring that the arrow flew true and hit the target head on.

The Dark Lord let out a sound of approval, "Pretty accurate."

Harry flushed under the force of his Intended's praise, shyly turning to face him as he lowered the bow in his hands.

"Your form needs a little work though," continued Riddle, stepping forward so he was in Harry's personal space again. "Shoot another, Harry."

Harry obeyed, lifting the bow to aim at the target once more. He was pulling the arrow back when he felt Riddle's hand on his shoulder. He yelped, letting go of the arrow and it was only thanks to Riddle's magic enveloping it that it stopped midair and didn't hit anyone.

"Uhm," he stalled for time, but Riddle didn't seem as if he wanted to discuss what just happened, simply nodding and gesturing for him to draw another arrow.

He listened, hooking another one onto the string and pulling back. This time he was ready for it, and he forced himself to concentrate on Riddle's words instead of his touch. "You're compensating for your poor form with an excess of magic. I don't blame the centaurs for not teaching you correctly; they probably don't even know the proper way humans wield bows."

"They tried, really," protested Harry, and was surprised to hear Riddle's soft chuckle. He was so *close*, he was nearly breathing into Harry's ear.

"Lower your elbow," Riddle instructed, using the hand on his shoulder to push Harry's elbow down. Riddle then moved his hand to Harry's other shoulder, lifting his unoccupied one to curl over Harry's hand that was still holding the bow upright. He was warm, and Harry was almost one hundred percent sure that the Dark Lord could feel his heart beating out of his chest at the contact.

"Hold steady now," whispered the Dark Lord, and Harry wondered what kind of picture they were making. Riddle was *so* close to him right now; they were practically pressed up against each other. "Breathe in, and when you exhale, release the string."

He obeyed, and the arrow hit the target straight on once again.

He sprang away as soon as the arrow left his grasp, breathing heavily and sporting pink cheeks.

Riddle just watched him, amused, "See, no need to waste magic on enhancing your muscles. You're plenty strong enough."

He nodded quickly, not trusting his voice to speak without wavering.

Riddle watched him with inquisitive eyes for a bit before gesturing for Harry to follow him. Harry obeyed, setting down the intricate bow onto the ground near the racks before trailing after Riddle.

The centaurs watched as they made their way through the colony, but none approached them. Harry waved fondly at the ones that he knew personally because of the lessons, and although they all waved back, they seemed much too wary of Riddle to approach. They ended up at a tent that Harry hadn't seen before, and by the way Riddle started to dismantle the wards told Harry that this was probably his Intended's.

"We will be staying the night," explained Riddle, pushing back the tent's entrance flap and holding it open for Harry. The tent's appearance from outside was misleading; the inside sported two bedrooms, one kitchen, and a bathroom, all done in the Victorian style that Riddle preferred. "I took the liberty of moving your stuff to your new room."

Harry nodded, used to the invasion of privacy; he knew Riddle meant no harm. He simply preferred it when things were efficiently done, and moving Harry's stuff for him was the faster way to go about things. "Just for one night?"

"We'll set out to see Magic the next day. I would prefer to go straight after the ceremony tonight, but I'll most likely be drained."

That got Harry's attention. He stared at Riddle, but his Intended didn't notice, simply walking further into the kitchen and rummaging around in the drawers. He never even *thought* his Intended could get tired. "Drained, sir?"

Riddle nodded, finally finding what he was looking for in the cupboards. "It takes a lot to be able to channel Magic's power. I've been trying not to use magic for the last couple of days to prepare."

"But you used magic on me earlier," he said, slowly, as he comprehended what Riddle was saying.

"Don't be silly, Harry. I could hardly leave you in pain, now, can I?"

"I could've healed myself," he protested, but Riddle just snorted.

"Let the adults do as they want, okay? Besides, you would have been rather useless for the rest of the day if I hadn't."

He pouted, but let the topic go, drifting closer to watch as Riddle fiddled around with the things he pulled from the cupboards.

"Are you making tea, sir?"

Riddle was filling a cup of water when he answered, "Yes. Now be useful and warm that up for me, Harry."

Harry rolled his eyes, but acquiesced with a wave of his hand, heating the molecules in the water until the water was boiling hot. He watched as Riddle's nimble fingers removed a tea bag from its confinement and set it inside of the cup.

They sat in comfortable silence for a minute or so until Riddle removed the tea bag, neatly placing it onto a napkin before throwing it into the trash. Harry used magic to make the liquid cooler, drinking in Riddle's grateful look before his Intended started to sip at the tea.

"I've got letters for you," said Riddle, setting down the tea onto the counter. "Merlin only knows why your friends feel the need to talk to you so frequently. You just saw them two weeks ago."

Harry nodded, and followed behind Riddle as he led him to one of the bedrooms. Riddle was handing him a stack of envelopes a second later, all held together by a piece of string. "You have the afternoon to do as you want. I'll come get you when the ceremony starts. For now, I have to go set up some things with the centaurs. You'll stay in here."

"Will you be okay without magic?" he asked, worried even when he knew he shouldn't be.

Riddle looked pleased though at his question. "No need to worry about me, Harry. I'm not completely defenseless without magic. But you can do me a favor if you're so worried."

"I'm not *worried*," Harry protested, but Riddle just arched an eyebrow at him in response.

"Right. Would you like to help?"

He resisted the urge to pout, instead crossing his arms and leaning lightly against the doorway. He nodded, and watched as Riddle's knowing grin grew wider.

Riddle turned, bending over and rummaging through the drawers in the bedroom. A stone that shone with a blue light appeared in his hands, and he placed it down on the top of the drawer, gesturing for Harry to come closer. It was clear, light, and beautiful, and Harry was fascinated.

"You'll need your wand for this," said Riddle.

"For what? How is a stone supposed to protect you?"

"Don't be daft, Harry. I want you to transfigure a sword out of this for me."

Harry blinked, "You can wield a sword, sir?"

"I sent you here to learn archery. It shouldn't come of a surprise that I also know how to wield a weapon," he pointed out.

Harry flushed, but Riddle didn't comment on it, instead forging on. "It'll be stronger transfigured than conjured. The blue stone has its own source of magical power and if need be, I can draw from it rather than my own sources."

"If you can cast spells using this, then why do you need a sword?"

Riddle leveled him an annoyed glance, "Because I don't want to waste the blue stone, Harry."

"You sure you're not just trying to show off?"

"You are very lucky I am in a good mood, Harry," warned Riddle, and that was enough to spur him into drawing his wand.

It was remarkably easy to transfigure the stone. It was as if his magic knew exactly what the stone wanted to be and just needed to give it a little push. In the end, the sword created was one-handed, about an arm's length of a blade, and possessed a hilt embedded by the blue stone.

Riddle's smile was smug as he lifted the sword into his right hand, hefting it to test its weight. "You did good, my little Heir." He swung it a few times, making slices in the air before stopping. "Conjuring the sheath shall do well enough."

Harry nodded, concentrating his magic to create a sheath out of thin air. It was black, but blue when the light hit it a certain way. Riddle took it with a murmured thanks, expertly sheathing the sword and tying it to his side.

"Try to get some rest," said Riddle, patting Harry on the shoulder with affection before heading toward the exit. Harry watched him go, before retreating to his room to read his friends' letters.

Harry woke to Riddle's husky voice and a gentle nudging to his shoulder. He had fallen asleep while reading Severus' letter, the afternoon heat and comfortable bed lulling him to sleep.

"Hi," he said, clearing his sleep-affected voice a second afterward. "How was your meeting?"

"It went quite well," said Riddle. Harry blinked as he registered his Intended's appearance, the moonlight doing its part to illuminate the older man. Silky red cloth was draped over his shoulders, doing little to protect his modesty and showing off his midriff. He was wearing skin tight black shorts, with red accents to further accentuate the outfit.

"What are you wearing?" he blurted out.

Riddle looked amused, "It's a ceremonial outfit, Harry. Now, do get up. We don't have much time."

Harry obeyed, pausing to splash his face with water to both wake himself up further and to cool down the hot flush on his cheeks. Riddle looked *good* and it was utterly unfair to treat him to such a delicious sight after he had just woken up.

Riddle was impatient, tapping his foot and frowning, but didn't do much to hasten Harry. "No shoes," he murmured. "Better to have a direct connection to Magic."

Riddle pulled on the hood as they left the tent's opening, the cloth resting lightly on his brown locks and doing nothing to deter anyone from seeing his handsome face. They walked for a few minutes through the colony, many centaurs following behind them as soon as they had passed. They also seemed to have weaved the same red cloth into their appearances; some had a ribbon in their mane, others had tied it to their tail, and some even had it resting on their backs.

They got to an open clearing before long, the entire population of the centaurs' colony behind them. The werewolves were waiting near the outskirts of the clearing, many jumping to attention as soon as they noticed their appearance. The glade was covered with soft moss, and there was a small waterfall and a lake near the end. The moonlight lit up the whole clearing, only adding to the otherworldly feel.

Riddle turned to face him, a silky piece of red cloth in his hands. He reached forward without a word, his nimble fingers starting to undo the buttons of Harry's shirt. Harry didn't pull away, even though his heart was beating erratically. He let Riddle push the shirt off of his shoulders, and didn't move as Riddle draped the red cloth over him as if it was a sash.

Riddle's smile was pleased, and then he turned toward the center of the clearing again. A centaur was kneeling, his palms outstretched in front of him. He was holding a long staff, and the world was silent when Riddle walked up to him, bowing deeply once, before taking the staff into his own hands.

The shimmery feel of Riddle's magic was suddenly enveloping the whole clearing, and Harry's breath stuttered as he felt the magic caress him softly once before dissipating back into the open air. He realized then that Riddle had broken the wards that kept others from knowing his magic and subsequently how powerful he was and it had rushed forward in its joy of being free.

It was intoxicating, and the level of its strength only increased as Riddle pounded the earth with the staff seven times. The centaurs stood on one side of Riddle, the werewolves on the other, with Harry standing in between the two entities, only a couple of feet behind his Intended.

Riddle's voice cut through the summer air, its familiarity gone and replaced with an ethereal feel. His voice had an echo to it, and his already bright red eyes seemed to glow even more intense in the moonlight. He was *singing* in Latin instead of chanting, and the difference seemed to only intensify the level of the magic around them.

Harry watched, fascinated, as the werewolves dropped to their knees, their heads bowed and hands interlocked with each other as Riddle continued to weave a spell into the air. It seemed to go on for an eternity before it cut off as abruptly as it started.

The magic stayed, but Riddle stopped singing. Harry easily caught Riddle as the older man swayed on his feet, obviously tired out by what he had just done.

"Thanks," murmured Riddle, before clearing his throat and leaning slightly on Harry for balance. "The ceremony's done, just need to let the wolves take it in before we can leave."

Harry nodded, enjoying the feel of Riddle pressed up against him, but also slightly worried that Riddle needed him to keep on his feet. A silence descended upon them, and Harry used the momentary lull in action to watch the werewolves in front of them. They had looked tired when they had arrived at the centaur's colony, but they now wore expressions of bliss and seemed relaxed on the forest floor. It made his heart swell to know that his Intended had given so much just to ease their pain.

"Why?" he asked, softly.

"Hm?" hummed Riddle, blinking open his eyes tiredly. "Why what, Harry?"

"You don't even like the werewolves," he whispered, careful not to let his words carry over to the werewolves. "You think they're abominations."

Riddle nodded in agreement as he spoke, not denying either one of his accusations.

"Then why?" he asked when Riddle didn't seem as if he was going to answer. "Why go through so much trouble to help them?"

Riddle's eyes were sharp as he trained them on Harry after his question, "Because someone reminded me that we don't have to do this alone."

Harry stopped breathing for a second at Riddle's words. "You listened to me?" He had been pestering Riddle for months about letting others experience Magic firsthand, to see if they, too, would join the cause of fighting against the Muggles for the betterment of the world itself. Riddle hadn't seemed too interested in his observations when he made them, preferring to make quips about his soft disposition not being suited for war. But this was proof that Riddle had listened, that being Riddle's soul bound meant something *more*.

Riddle huffed once, "Hardly. I'm just trying to make alliances, Harry, nothing more."

Harry couldn't help the content smile that spread across his face, not letting Riddle's words faze him in the slightest. "Do you want to sleep for a bit?"

Riddle blinked slowly at his words, before sighing heavily. "If you don't mind."

Harry was just about to Conjure a bed up for his Intended, when Riddle stopped him. Riddle pulled him over to a tree, manhandling Harry down until both of their backs was resting against it. Riddle dozed off immediately, his head lightly resting on Harry's shoulder.

He knew Riddle was being so open and tactile only because he was feeling vulnerable because of his lack of magic. But *still*, it felt nice to know that Riddle trusted him enough to fall asleep in his presence.

Time seemed to pass in a blur, the feel of magic still doing its part to mess with Harry's nerves. The wolves had gotten up eventually, and the Centaur had dragged out a feast of roasted meat and a multitude of smoked vegetables. They were dancing, celebrating, and Harry smiled as he watched them. He was hungry, but he was loathe to move while Riddle was still sleeping on him.

The boy with dull green eyes from earlier approached him, a plate of steaming meat in his hands. "Here," he whispered, and Harry took it gratefully, even while watching the werewolf warily.

"Thank you," he said, politely.

A small smile crossed the boy's tired face. "He's yours, isn't he?"

Harry almost jumped at the boy's words, but stopped himself in time to keep from waking Riddle.

The smile grew bigger and the boy tapped his nose with his pointer finger, "Don't worry, he's asleep. I've got a werewolf's senses."

"Uh," he stalled for time, unsure of why the wolf was talking to him at all. Even though the boy had promised Riddle was still soundly sleeping, Harry cast a wandless spell to ensure that Riddle's sleep would stay undisturbed by any noise, weaving a barrier around the older man's ears so any words would remain unheard.

"My mark disappeared the week I was turned. You should tell him before it's too late."

"I can't," he replied, immediately. "I'm only sixteen."

The werewolf tilted his head in confusion, "Age doesn't matter. What are you really worried about?"

"I'm worried he isn't mine," he offered truthfully. "That I'll tell him and his mark will say something completely different. That even though he has a mark on *me*, I don't have a mark on him."

"There are other ways of leaving a mark, you know," the werewolf responded after a long pause, sounding wise beyond his years. Harry didn't know how to respond, so they lapsed into a long silence before the werewolf spoke up again, "I was supposed to go to Hogwarts in the same year as you."

"Why didn't you?"

"Werewolf, remember?"

"But you only turn once a month, it's not exactly dangerous, is it?"

He stared at Harry with searching eyes for a moment, his mouth upturned into a wry smile. "I was angry and bitter for a long time. He," he paused to gesture at Riddle who was still snoozing on his shoulder, "convinced Dumbledore to reject my application. Heard he even called me an abomination and that I belong in the wilderness and *not* in a classroom."

"I'm sorry," said Harry, sadly, and was surprised to see the werewolf just throw his head back in laughter.

"Don't be. It was better for me to be here, to be in a pack and understand the dynamics that way. We're not wizards, and it was time for me to stop pretending like I was. I belong here. Besides, he more than made up for it with tonight."

"He did?"

The werewolf nodded, "I'm not sure how much he told you about us. But if you'll like to know?"

"He hasn't told me much of anything, really."

The boy smiled at his words, settling himself down and getting comfortable. "I'm Remus Lupin, by the way."

Harry nodded, "I'm hoping you still remember my name?"

"Kinda hard to forget, mate," he chuckled, gesturing toward Riddle to indicate what he meant. Harry rolled his eyes, but smiled, because Riddle *had* been ridiculous. "Anyway, werewolves were born from a dark curse gone wrong. I don't know much of the specifics because the Elders don't like to talk about it, but long story short, it happened because one of our ancestors tried to remove their soul mark. After that, he morphed into a wolf. Magic did what she could, but all she could do was keep the curse at bay by linking our transformation to the moon's cycles. That's why it's so important that our Lord did what he did. Every time we transform, the curse threatens to overwhelm us a little bit more. The centaurs do what they can, but they can't access

Magic's power like our Lord can. Their rituals can only do so much and the werewolves have been slowly becoming weaker and weaker."

"Then the other werewolves?"

Remus looked grim, "It's not a pretty picture, to say the least. They don't even have the option of the centaurs' rituals to soothe the pain. When they transform, they go mad."

"Mad?"

"They lose their ability to think properly. Like a mad animal. If I went to Hogwarts, I fear the same thing may have happened to me. You can even say I owe our Lord my life, in a way."

"He's pretty special, isn't he?"

Remus made a face, "You're proper gone for him, aren't you?"

Harry flushed, about to protest when Remus just chuckled softly and shook his head.

"Don't apologize," he smiled, but it seemed more sad than happy, "soul mates are a wonderful thing. It's such a marvel to think that someone out there was *born* for you."

"Your Intended's still out there, Remus. They have to be. Just because you lost your soul mark doesn't mean they aren't still meant for you."

Remus looked startled at his words, "You're a good guy, Harry."

"Soul marks are just identifiers, right? So that doesn't mean you can't still find them."

"You're seeing Magic tomorrow, aren't you?" When Harry nodded, Remus continued, "I know it's probably a long shot, but can you ask her about it? Ask if there's a chance that there's still someone out there for me?"

"Course," he agreed easily, and at Remus' winning smile, held out his hand. It was a peace offering for the information Remus had given so easily, and Remus shook it firmly, his smile only growing wider. After all, before their conversation, Harry had been terrified of getting near a werewolf.

But Remus was nothing like what he thought a werewolf should be like, and he voiced his thought out loud. Remus wasn't offended though, and it was on good terms that he departed, intent on catching up with the rest of his pack.

The moon was high in the air when Riddle finally stirred, and Harry hastily removed the barrier from around Riddle's ears.

Riddle blearily blinked up at him, before slowly lifting his head from Harry's shoulder, tilting it this way and that to remove the soreness of sleeping in such an odd position for so long. "Did anything happen while I was asleep?"

Harry shook his head, "Nothing important."

Riddle aimed a suspicious look at Harry, but didn't voice his opinion, instead getting to his feet and stretching. He pulled his hood back on and picked the staff back up, making his way toward the center of the clearing again. Immediately, the festivities stopped, and Harry watched with fascination as the leader of the werewolf pack bowed deeply to Riddle. Riddle looked amused, but gracious at the same time, and although he didn't bow back, he did incline his head slightly. Harry figured he could call that progress.

It wasn't long after Riddle mingled with the centaurs and the wolves that the ceremony was wrapped up with a quick song from Riddle to dissipate the magic. The werewolf pack departed first and Harry waved cheerily at Remus when they made eye contact. Riddle noticed, and although he watched the exchange with sharp eyes, didn't say anything about it. They made their way back to the colony with the centaurs, and the moon was still shining bright when they finally made it back to their tent.

Riddle's smile was cheeky as he opened the tent flap for Harry, and although Harry raised an eyebrow, he didn't elaborate, simply pushing Harry lightly into the tent. "Get some rest, Harry. I'll wake you in the morning."

"Are you not going to sleep?" Harry asked, curious.

"Already did, didn't I? Go to sleep, Harry." He didn't wait for a reply, closing the tent flap as soon as Harry was all the way in.

Harry frowned, but didn't feel up for an argument, and made his way to his temporary bedroom.

They arrived early in the day, when the sun was just rising and the air still chilly. Riddle cast the warming charm as soon as they landed and Harry pulled away from the Dark Lord's side with a murmured thanks.

It was only a short fifteen minute walk to the temple. Riddle stopped him as soon as they got close, retrieving his wand and cutting a hole through the extensive wards around the temple. Harry watched attentively, but even with his vast knowledge had trouble recognizing most of the spells used.

"The centaurs did teach you the proper way to greet her, I presume?" questioned Riddle as the last of the privacy spells fell away. As soon as they stepped through, the privacy wards straightened back to attention, causing Harry to shiver at the sheer power it exerted.

Harry nodded, causing a small smile to appear on Riddle's face.

"Good. It's going to be hectic enough without having to teach you the proper greetings."

"Hectic, sir?"

"Well, I certainly didn't take you here just to see the temple, Harry. You'll be meeting Magic, herself."

"But how?"

Riddle's smile was secretive and Harry jumped when he felt Riddle place a hand on the small of his back, guiding him toward the entrance of the temple. "You'll see, Harry," he said in a low voice.

The temple wasn't as run down as it was in the vision Riddle had projected just a few months ago. The stones were polished clean and the vines that had been growing on them had vanished. The air was charged with magic, and when they finally entered the temple, it grew to an almost unbearable state. He choked on it, but Riddle tugged him forward anyway until they were standing in front of a large statue.

The entity portrayed in it had long, flowing hair and robes that barely covered her up. Her face was stern, but her hands looked gentle in the position she held them in. She looked otherworldly and Harry had no doubts that this was Magic.

Riddle knelt in front of the altar, subsequently pulling Harry down so that they were next to each other. "Your hand, Harry," he murmured and Harry obliged so that Riddle could hold both of their hands above the statue's base. The feel of Riddle's hand in his felt *right* and it was all he could do to concentrate his thoughts on anything else.

Riddle's voice was soft, but enchanting, and it almost lulled him to sleep. It went on for a good fifteen minutes, before Riddle was wandlessly Conjuring a dagger. It appeared above their conjoined hands and it elicited a gasp of surprise from Harry when it swung down and sliced both of their wrists.

It was a shallow cut, but blood still bubbled profusely from both wounds and the red, thick liquid spilled out onto the statue. The blood disappeared as fast as it landed and just as Harry was starting to feel queasy, Riddle spelled both cuts close.

Riddle was just handing Harry a blood-replenishing potion when tinkling laughter filled the air. Harry jumped in surprise, but Riddle didn't falter in his swallowing of his own potion.

"Drink it, Harry," the Dark Lord commanded, and Harry obeyed, gulping past the awful taste of the potion. Immediately, his light headedness disappeared and when he blinked his eyes open an ethereal looking being had draped herself all over Riddle.

Riddle looked annoyed and stiff in her embrace, and it was only thanks to that that Harry was able to stifle the pang of jealousy that hit him. That and it was most likely Magic that had appeared. Her skin was wispy to say at best, and she had thin white hair that fell over her shoulders and down to her waist. Robes made out of the same red material they were wearing last night covered her up. She looked mostly human, but had an ethereal glow, hinting that she wasn't all that she appeared.

When she noticed Harry was watching her, she carefully detached herself from Riddle, yet stayed floating a couple feet above the ground as she stared intently at him. There was a hint of a smile on her face and then she was suddenly next to him, kissing him softly on the cheek. "You brought him to me," she said.

Riddle looked uncomfortable, and she laughed again, obviously delighted. Harry watched her warily; he hadn't ever imagined Magic would be like this, and he wasn't sure how to react. "Hi, Harry," she said, her smile still brilliant, "I've been waiting forever to see you."

"You have?"

She nodded earnestly, her bright eyes almost painful with the light they shone with. "I'm guessing Tom hasn't told you much, has he? Did he make me out to seem like a scary deity?"

He met eyes with Riddle at her words, and he was sure his panic was easily seen because Riddle huffed a scoff and reached forward to pull her away from him. She let him pull her, her smile mischievous as she tilted her head back to look at Riddle. "You did, didn't you? I bet you're keeping poor little Harry in the dark."

"You promised you wouldn't be like this," said Riddle.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Tom," she singsonged, pressing one hand to Riddle's left one. It glowed brightly for a second and then Riddle was letting go with a startled hiss. In a few seconds, she was next to Harry again and she took his hands into hers.

"I'm thinking about giving you a gift, Harry. You'll let him stay here with me, wouldn't you?"

"Alone?" asked Riddle, sounding wary. "How long do you have?"

She hummed, releasing one of Harry's hands to draw a circle into the air, leaving trails of gold in her wake. It flared once brightly before disappearing. "A few more minutes or so, I think. Nice of you to finally share the Magic I gave you, Tom. When was the last time you visited me?"

"It was only a few days ago, you spoiled brat."

She made an offended noise, but her smile was still there. "How dare you, Mr. Tom Riddle. I want you out."

Riddle didn't look amused, but when she raised her hand with a thinly veiled threat, he sighed. It was fascinating to see; Harry never could've imagined that someone could *boss* his Intended around and succeed. "Don't tell him anything," he commanded, and she just laughed and shrugged at his anger.

"Don't push it, Tom," she said in reply, and Riddle huffed.

Harry jumped slightly when he noticed Riddle was heading toward him and watched with wide eyes when Riddle placed a hand on his shoulder. "You'll be alright, Harry?"

"Are you worried about me?" he asked, baffled, and was startled to see Riddle's expression turn sour. He looked petulant, and it was *weird* to see, but oddly adorable as well.

He huffed once, "I don't trust her," he mumbled underneath his breath. "I'll just be outside, alright? If she tries anything, don't hesitate to call me."

"Like you can do anything," called Magic and Riddle turned to glare hotly at her.

"Leave my boy alone," he said, turning Harry a bright red.

"Your boy?" teased Magic, but Riddle just patted Harry with affection on the head one last time before leaving the Temple.

Magic's smile was serene as she lazily raised both of her hands, making the door glow an intense blue before settling down into its neutral color once again. The strength of the magic made him shiver and he was reminded once again that he wasn't in an ordinary witch's presence no matter how ditzy she acted.

She seemed more serious as she turned back to look at him, this time her eyes glowing bright yellow. Without speaking a word, she pressed her right thumb against the middle of his forehead, the digit glowing the same bright blue as before and sending shivers down his body. The magic danced across his skin for a few minutes before sinking into him, disappearing as fast as it appeared.

She let loose a soft breath as soon as the magic disappeared, and her smile was pleased. "Hello, Harry. Your gift will appear when you're in danger and only then."

"Thank you," he answered, a bit meekly. He wanted to ask more, but she looked as if she was done talking about it.

Her smile grew and she settled herself down gracefully into a comfortable position. When she gestured for him to do the same, he dutifully obeyed even while his limbs were still shaking.

"You must have some questions for me, Harry. Ask away. It's the least I can do since I saddled you with Tom all those years ago."

His heart skipped a beat as he realized she *knew*. She *knew* he was Riddle's and there was no reason she shouldn't. After all, she was the one who put them together. "You know then," he said and she just threw her head back and laughed at his response.

"Of *course* I know, you silly boy."

"Well," he said, his cheeks tinged red, "Not much are known about soul bounds."

"You mean not much is known about *me*," she pointed out sensibly, and Harry ducked his head down in embarrassment. He was out of his depth with her and he felt as if she was dancing circles around him.

"Yes," he agreed after a long pause, and her wry smile prompted him to continue. "I met someone earlier this week. Remus Lupin."

She blinked blankly at first and then a few seconds later heaved a soft sigh. "He's a werewolf."

"His soul mark disappeared the first week he was turned."

She hummed thoughtfully, gesturing for him to continue even as her brows furrowed together in concentration.

"How can that happen? Does that mean his soul bound is dead? Is *he* dead? Can you do anything for him?"

"You sure have a lot of faith in me," remarked Magic, casually, but her eyes were sad. Harry stifled his retort, waiting patiently for her to continue. "You know better than most, Harry. How my power was stripped away by Merlin's death and continually drained by the Muggles. It

hasn't been easy. I was asleep until Tom found me, actually. And even now, I'm only truly awake when he lends me his blood."

"Why?" he asked, curiously, and she regarded him solemnly for a few seconds before nodding thoughtfully to herself.

"Tom won't be telling you, will he?" she questioned, almost as if asking herself, and Harry knew that she didn't want an answer. "He's stubborn, really. I knew that when I chose him."

"Chose? I thought you weren't awake until he came by the Temple."

"It was Merlin's idea for soul marks. You must know that soul mates can alter destiny. That soul mates are more powerful when they are together."

Harry caught himself from making a frustrated sound; Magic wasn't answering his questions at *all*. "So he wanted to make things easier for us? *That's* why you gave everyone matching soul marks?"

She nodded, a wistful look in her eyes. "They were powerful together. Merlin and Arthur. It was far too late when they realized that they were meant to be. Merlin never wanted anyone to go through the pain he went through."

"Then why? Why would you ever make soul marks that *don't* match?"

She startled at his words, her large yellow eyes blinking widely at him. "Oh, Harry," she said, after a while, leaning forward to tug him into a comfortable hug. She was disappearing, he realized with a start, her words drifting off into the air and her arms becoming less corporeal. She noticed, too, he was sure, and her smile was sad, but loving. "Why would you ever think I'll be so cruel?" she whispered, and the implications of her words hit him *hard* and it was all he could do not to protest. Because how could she be so blatant and bold about the one fact that had been holding him back for all these years? Because if Riddle was *his*, if they were meant to be...

She brought him out of his whirling thoughts with a soft giggle, leaning forward and pressing a chaste kiss on his cheek. "Sixteen years and you still doubt it? Tom is yours just as much as you are *his*."

She disappeared with another tinkle of laughter, and he was left there, thoughts whirling and his hand pressed to his cheek.

A/N: Really no excuse for how late this is...but at least it's like 9k words long! I hope you guys enjoyed even if it was a bit different haha if you guys can't tell, I think I like fantasy too much. (Also, as always, Merlin = BBC Merlin! If you haven't watched it yet, you should, because King Arthur and Merlin are meant to be hehe). And the archery scene drew inspiration from Princess Diaries 2 aha. Someone asked how many chapters this will be, and honestly, I have no clue. I have a tentative outline, and it's looking like it'll be at least ten more chapters with what I have planned. There's going to be at least four chapters till the big confession and at least like six dealing with the War. And if any of my explanations confused you, because I probably reached a lot this chapter, feel free to tell me. I'm writing this on my own without anyone

rereading it (but thank you Spatzi for briefly looking at my outline xD) before I post so...any plot holes/grammar mistakes you find, please do tell haha.

Next chapter will be slowing down a lot! It'll be the start of the seventh year, and without giving anything away, I need some help finding a Hufflepuff and a Ravenclaw of this time. Been searching the wiki, but can only come up with Amelia Bones with Hufflepuff, which is okay, and Quirrel for Ravenclaw, which is kinda weird haha. Would you guys be okay with them or should I make my own characters?

Update schedule's going to be a little wonky, I'm graduating in a month so I'm quite busy. And as always, thank you SO much for the overwhelming kudos/comments! I love you all, and we're 40k words in, so THANK YOU so much for taking the time to read my fantasy! :)

Edit: 5/30/2015: After much deliberation with some lovely people, I've decided to go back and edit Harry into being into his seventh year because of problems with age differences later on. Hope you guys don't mind!

The Beginning of the Tournament

Chapter Summary

Starts out with Dumbledore's POV and adds some insight into Dumbledore's reasons for fighting against Tom.

"Would you like a lemon drop?"

Riddle scowled, but politely shook his head no, clasping his hands together and resting them on his knees. Albus just nodded amicably at his refusal, setting down the bowl of lemon drops back down onto his desk.

"Now what brings you here, my boy?"

"Please don't call me that," Tom said, his voice tight.

Albus just smiled at Tom's abrasive manner, used to it after knowing the Professor for so long. He never regretted hiring Tom as one of Hogwarts' professors even *if* Tom was currently the one thing standing between him and world peace. After all, Tom was one of his best, and every year he churned out brilliant students that exceeded all expectations. And yearly surveys told Albus just how much the students adored Tom. Thinking about it all made him a tad sentimental.

"You've grown so much, Tom. It seems like just yesterday you were sitting here in my office asking for a teaching position."

"Don't play the fool, Dumbledore. We both know why I'm here."

Albus sighed at Tom's harsh words, "What is wrong with an old man trying to catch up with his favorite student?"

"Your *least* favorite student, you mean," Riddle stated dryly as soon as he stopped talking, and Albus frowned.

"You've always had a special place in my heart, Tom. Even when you've strayed from your true path."

"My true path? And what exactly do you mean by that?"

"You could've done so many things with your magic," said Albus, sadly. "You had so much ambition, yet you let hatred twist you so."

"It's like you don't hear a word coming out of my mouth," said Riddle, exasperated. "I came here for one reason only. I want Hogwarts."

Albus' persona shifted immediately; gone was the friendly old grandfather and in its place sat the wizened leader of the Light, his eyes sharp and his mouth in a stern line. "Hogwarts, my boy?"

Riddle made a frustrated sound, but after a moment, composed himself. "The Founder's Tournament. It's been in the works since this summer. Surely you've heard of it."

"You want to pit the twins against each other," said Albus, quietly. "I should've known when I saw you take poor Harry under your wing. I let it be because I had hopes he would change you for the better."

"You would risk one of your own just in hopes he could change me?"

"For the Greater Good," replied Albus immediately, and Riddle let out a soft sigh.

"How I hate that saying," Riddle said quietly under his breath. "And you're wrong, Dumbledore, *he has* changed me for the better. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him."

"Yet you continue to follow this silly notion that the Dark is right and the Light is wrong."

"Even the wrong side has its reasons, Dumbledore."

"And what if your reasons are wrong, my boy?"

"And what if *yours* are? If you would only listen."

"I've heard it all before, Tom. It's not the pretty picture you believe it to be."

"You don't know *anything*," hissed Riddle.

"I know more than you think I do. I've been alive much longer than you and have suffered through one Dark Lord already. I can only hope that you're not so far gone that I cannot save you."

"You cannot *save* me," said Riddle, disgusted. He curled his lip in distaste before letting out a calming breath and continuing in a calmer voice. "I propose a bet on the outcome. If Harry wins, then you relinquish Hogwarts to me."

"That hardly seems fair," remarked Albus lightly. "Hogwarts is already mine."

"Then name your price."

"You give up on your War," said Albus immediately.

"You ask for a lot," murmured Riddle.

"Hogwarts has been my home for centuries now, my boy. You ask me to relinquish control over to you, and if this *does* come to War, Hogwarts will be a central chess piece. These are my terms, and I will not budge."

Riddle sat in silence for only a moment before nodding. "I accept your terms."

Dumbledore's eyebrows rose immediately, and he furrowed his brows, "You truly trust Harry to risk the War you have been working toward for years? A mere seventeen year old boy?"

"You are trusting one, as well," said Riddle in response. "And Harry can do it, I have no doubt."

There was a long silence before Albus suddenly smiled, his eyes twinkling once again. "Do think over it, my boy. I'll send for you as soon as we work out the finer details, and we'll take an Unbreakable Vow."

Riddle nodded, standing up from the chair and bowing slightly to the older man. He departed immediately, the door closing behind him with a soft thud.

Albus sat in silence for a few minutes after Riddle had left, rolling around a stray Lemon Drop between his pointer finger and thumb as he thought back to the events that had just occurred.

He never would've thought that Tom would fall for his soul bound, that he would risk leaving himself *vulnerable* like this because he had so much blind faith in his Intended.

He had hopes, of course, when he had first instructed the Potters to cast Harry away, and had felt the faint inklings of joy when he heard that Riddle had invited Harry to his secret sessions. And as the years went on and the two of them got closer and closer, Dumbledore only dared to let himself hope when he was in his darkest of times.

And to think, the end was near.

All he had to do now was to have a little chat with one seventeen year old boy...

"Harry, darling," said Dorea Black, "can you pass the eggs, please?"

He nodded, setting down his fork and waving his hand to use his magic to float the plate over to his adoptive mother.

It landed neatly in front of her, and Dorea's eyebrows were high on her face. "You use magic so frequently, Harry."

Harry gave a small shrug. "I've been using it since I was seven. It's become second-nature."

"So easily, as well," Dorea went on praising him, a small smile on her face. She was dressed in an expensive silk gown, but her jewels were missing and her hair fell in soft curls around her face.

It had been weird to return to the Black residence after spending so much time with Riddle and the centaurs. It wasn't exactly *painful* to spend time with his new adoptive parents, but it certainly wasn't comfortable being in their presence compared to how at ease he felt with Riddle. After the adoption ceremony, Harry had returned to Hogwarts almost immediately, and it was only through infrequent letters that he kept in contact with the Blacks. And when summer hit, he had immediately departed from Hogwarts to Malfoy Manor to learn more about politics from Abraxas. After a month spent attending a multitude of charity events as well as balls hosted by high ranking individuals with the Malfoys, he had finally gotten some time off to spend with Severus.

Prince Manor wasn't as large as Malfoy Manor, but it was comfy and cozy and he spent two weeks there goofing off with his best friend. After a long period of having each day full of an insane schedule courtesy of his Intended, it had been nice to wake up without having to set an alarm. By the end of the two weeks, the two of them had quickly gotten bored of the laidback lifestyle and had spent the rest of Harry's time in the potions lab.

Riddle had appeared in Prince Manor when his time was up, whisking Harry off to Hogwarts and into the centaur's colony. It had been a nice change of pace from Severus' place, but after the intense events at the end, Harry had been glad to make his way back to Black Manor.

Dorea had greeted him with a hug, but other than that, both Charlus and Dorea were busy with Dorea's new role as head of the Black family. They left Harry on his own most of the time, and besides meal times, Harry rarely saw them. And Harry was okay with that. Despite the fact that the two of them had adopted him, Harry hadn't actually *needed* parents. He was already seventeen and he knew he didn't need to be coddled any longer. Besides, he was just as busy as they were with the obligations Riddle had placed on him.

"The Dark Lord has taught you well," said Dorea, and she looked uncomfortable as she shifted in her seat to face Harry. "He's much older than you."

"Yes, he is," he said, puzzled.

She grimaced, but a quick glance at her husband seemed to calm her nerves. "We just want to make sure that everything's consensual."

"What!?" he squeaked out, a red tint already appearing on his cheeks.

"You're seventeen now, and well, knowing Charlus' brother, I'm sure that they haven't exactly given you the Talk."

"The Talk," Harry repeated slowly. They couldn't possibly be...

"And Hogwarts," Dorea pressed determinedly on, "hasn't exactly changed their curriculum to ensure that students are well-informed. So Charlus and I have decided to rectify that."

Harry was sure he was staring at them in horror, but both of his adoptive parents were refusing to meet his eyes.

"When two people like each other a lot," started Dorea, awkwardly.

"It's not mutual," he cut in immediately, and his words were enough to shock Dorea out of her next words.

"I could've sworn," she muttered and Harry shook his head in reply.

"He still doesn't know, so there won't be any *things* going on that I need to be warned about."

"Surely," interjected Charlus, speaking up for the first time since breakfast had started, "it will still be necessary knowledge to possess."

"I already know everything I need to know," he said quietly. Dorea looked like she was about to say something again, and Harry sent her a pleading look. He wasn't above begging to get them to just *stop*, but luckily he didn't have to. A house-elf popped in with a message that both Severus and Lucius had arrived, and Harry received it with great relief.

"Thanks for the meal," he said, politely, and although Dorea and Charlus did make nods of acknowledgement at his words and his departure, they stayed silent, embarrassed.

Severus stood when he entered, dressed in his usual dark robes despite the sweltering weather outside. Lucius was dressed a bit more casually; he was dressed in tight trousers and a fancy button-down.

"Hey," said Harry, smiling, and laughed when Severus tugged him forward into a hard embrace. "Did you guys miss me?" he teased when Severus pulled away.

Lucius, who still hadn't gotten up from his comfortable position in Harry's favorite armchair, scoffed, "Hardly, Black. My father, on the other hand..."

Harry grinned at the reference to the fact that him and Lucius' father got along quite well, and just leaned forward to ruffle Lucius' perfect locks. "Don't be jealous, now, Lucy, it's rather unbecoming."

"You sound like the Dark Lord," Lucius scowled, and Harry shrugged, his grin brilliant despite Lucius' harsh words. He missed them even though they had talked frequently through letters; they *were* his best friends after all.

"How were the centaurs?" asked Severus, curiously, sitting back down onto his armchair. Harry followed suit before replying.

"As nice as always," he replied, "I finally got the bow part down at least. Anyway, something weird happened yesterday?"

"With the centaurs? Or with Magic?" asked Severus.

"With Magic," he said, quietly, and wasn't surprised when he saw Severus' eyes dart curiously to the left toward Lucius. Lucius still didn't know that his Intended was the Dark Lord, and while Harry *could* politely ask to talk to Severus alone, it didn't feel right to do so.

It was about time he told the truth to Lucius. Even though they hadn't gotten along in the beginning, Lucius had easily become one of his best friends as time went on. After all, it was just a few months ago that he had nearly broken down in front of Lucius and Lucius had done him the courtesy of pretending nothing had happened and had instead done everything in his power to make sure he was okay.

"Lucy," he started out hesitantly, and Lucius immediately stood at his words, an unreadable expression on his face.

"I can go," he said, softly, and although Harry searched Lucius' expression for any form of anger, all he could find was polite neutrality. He felt immediate guilt, and he moved forward

before he could help himself, placing one hand on the older pureblood's shoulder and tugging him back into his seat.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" asked Lucius. "I don't expect to know *everything*, Harry."

"Lucy, you and Sev are my best friends."

Lucius' face softened, and he uncharacteristically pulled Harry into a hug. "I know," he murmured into Harry's soft locks, "you and Sev are important to me, too."

Harry relished the hug for a few seconds before pulling away, his decision already made and cemented. "It's hard to talk about," he said as he unhooked his necklace. He shrugged off his robe and then his shirt afterward, leaving his chest bare. "The first people who saw it didn't exactly react with joy to say the least."

Lucius looked curious, and when Harry flared his magic to cancel the rune, dropped his mouth open in shock.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle," he breathed quietly. "The Dark Lord. *Our* Lord."

"I didn't know how to tell you," he said in a small voice, and was pleasantly surprised when Lucius shook his head vehemently, his white-blonde hair going everywhere in the sharp motions.

"Soul marks are private, Harry. And while I am hurt that you didn't feel like you could tell me," he paused, his grey eyes darting quick to the left where Severus was still sitting quietly, "I haven't told you mine yet, so how can I hardly expect to know yours?"

"He didn't tell me," interrupted Severus, and then he was standing, making his way toward Lucius a second after. "I found out myself, confronted Harry when he got a little bit too obvious."

Harry flushed, thinking back on that summer day three years ago when Severus had accused him of having a major crush on Riddle. There had been heated words, red cheeks, and stammering before Harry finally admitted the truth. It had felt wonderful to finally let someone else in on his secret, someone that *wouldn't* give up on him despite knowing the truth of what was on his chest. Because his parents and James had both turned their backs on him because of his mark, and it was terrifying letting anyone else in. But Severus never judged him, or looked at him with disappointment in his eyes, and had stayed there right behind him for the next three years. And it *had* been silly not to think that Lucius wouldn't have done the same for him, but Lucius had ties to the Dark Lord that Severus did not. He was the son of Riddle's right hand man; it hadn't been completely senseless to think that word could have gotten out.

"Oh," said Lucius, his eyebrows high. "I guess that *does* change things. I just wish you could've trusted me," he said, his voice soft and quiet. "I know we didn't have the greatest first meeting, but..."

"No, no, Lucy," he cut in immediately, his heart sinking at Lucius' distraught expression, "it was never about not trusting you. It's just hard to say out loud you know."

Lucius attempted a weak smile, and patted Severus' hand gratefully when the younger wizard laid a hand on his shoulder in solidarity. "No more secrets then, okay?"

"No more," Harry agreed, gratefully. He aimed a smile at his best friend, still somewhat shocked that he had been forgiven so easily. He knew that the secrets between Severus and him had worn on Lucius, and he regretted that he let it go for so long. He knew what it was like to be so excluded, and he hated that he was the one to do so to Lucius.

Lucius let loose a breath before rolling back his left sleeve. "No more secrets," he repeated quietly. On his forearm, laid a white narcissus flower, the stark yellow of it standing out against Lucius' pale skin.

Severus let out a soft gasp, and met Harry's wide eyes with his own. "Narcissa Black, then? She's only a year younger than us."

"It appeared last year, almost around the same time as Harry's adoption."

"Does she know?"

Lucius grimaced, rolling back down the sleeve before answering. "Yes. It's been bloody awkward, to be honest. We don't get along at all. Sometimes I think she's lying to me. She still hasn't shown me her mark, after all."

"Soul bonds are mutual," Harry offered up, "Magic told me a few days ago."

There was a long silence before Severus broke it. "I told you from the very beginning that our Lord was yours."

Harry blushed, waving a hand as if it'll stop Severus from talking. "We're talking about *Lucy's* soul bond right now, not *mine*."

Severus made a face that said he didn't agree with a single thing coming out of Harry's mouth over Lucius' head, but wisely stayed silent.

"No more secrets," Lucius repeated quietly, before taking a deep breath. When he exhaled, he said in a low voice, "I'm gay, but my Intended is a girl."

"Are you sure?" asked Severus, after a pause.

Lucius looked hesitant, but after another deep breath, nodded resolutely. "I like boys," he said, as if to confirm things. "It's been hard to accept that about myself, and even harder to say out loud, but I'm gay. And I know it's silly to even have a preference when Magic decides it all, but I can't help how I feel."

"It's not silly," said Harry immediately, "Magic can't *tell* you how to feel. It's a flawed system, Lucy." He thought of Sirius and the disconnect he felt with James after confessing. Of Remus and the loss of his soul mark. And of Severus, who had known since he was eleven that his Mark matched with Lily's and had still lost her to Harry's twin brother.

"I'm scared," murmured Lucius. "Father likes her and I don't want to disappoint him."

"Lucy," said Severus sternly. "Do you really think Abraxus will be disappointed? Did you think *we* would have been disappointed?"

Lucius shook his head, "No, I would never."

A slow smile crossed Severus' face and he inched closer to the blonde, snaking an arm around Lucius' waist. The contact made Lucius flinch at first, but as always, the older wizard relaxed into Severus' gentle touch. It wasn't uncommon, but the way tension bled out of Lucius told Harry that Lucius *had* been worried that revealing his sexuality would mess things up. Severus' easy intimacy was a way of assuring Lucius that Severus didn't mind one bit.

"I should have told you guys earlier," said Lucius after the silence dragged on too long.

Harry knelt, taking Lucius' hands into his own. "I didn't tell you about mine, either. Besides, no more secrets."

Lucius looked grateful at his words, and for a few moments, Harry felt extremely connected to the two of them. Because these were his two best friends and he knew they were going to be there for him forever.

That is, until Severus cocked an eyebrow at him with a mischievous smile on his face. "Don't think you're getting off so easily, Harry."

He frowned, about to protest, but Severus pressed on. "Mutual?" he asked pointedly.

Harry flushed, letting go of Lucius' hands and straightening back up. "Nothing changes, Sev."

"Really? Because you just got your confirmation that our Lord is *yours* and you don't want to do anything? You've been crushing on him since you were eleven."

"Just because it's mutual doesn't mean we're determined for happily ever after. And *you* knew Lily's mark since forever and you haven't confessed yet!"

Severus' playful expression dropped immediately, and Harry was just about to stammer out an apology when Severus shook his head sadly. "Exactly, Harry. You can't wait like I did."

"I doubt anyone's going to be confessing to the Dark Lord anytime soon," he said to lighten the mood.

Severus rolled his eyes, but the teasing smile was back on his face. "I don't know about that...have you heard of Bellatrix? And besides, there are other ways to lose someone. We *are* nearing War, you know."

"Bellatrix?" he scowled, and Severus burst into laughter at his disgruntled tone.

"She graduated Hogwarts three years ago and has been throwing herself at Riddle ever since. Rather horrifying, if I'm honest."

"You're jealous," said Lucius, and then he was also chuckling. "Little Harry's *jealous*."

"I am *not*," he protested.

"Right," responded Severus, dryly. "Sure you aren't."

"Do you really think I should confess?" he said, after their chuckles had subsided and they had sat in quiet silence for a while.

"Yes," said Severus immediately. Lucius didn't reply, instead watching their exchange with curious eyes. Harry didn't expect one; Lucius had only just learned that Harry was soul bound with Riddle after all.

"I'm scared that he'll reject me. I'm only seventeen and I really don't have much to offer him," he said, quietly.

"Nothing to offer him?" repeated Severus, aghast. "Harry, do you not see how he looks at you? He treats you as if you're his *everything*. He almost lost his negotiations with the vampires because he was worried sick over you."

Harry flushed at Severus' words, almost unable to resist the urge to bury his face into his hands. "I'm just his *Heir*, Sev. I rather doubt he even thinks I'm on an equal level as him."

"Harry," said Sev, a tad sternly, "I've been through six years of observing both *you* and *him* and trust me when I say you two are hopelessly in love."

"You can't say those kinds of things about the Dark Lord," said Lucius, sounding horrified, and Severus just sighed.

"Oh, Lucy, if only you would open your eyes and see."

Lucius scowled, looking as if he was going to argue but then thought better of it. He sighed, "It's going to take me a while to get used to the thought of Harry and the Dark Lord together."

"You have time," said Harry, a bit sullenly. "Because I'm *not* going to confess anytime soon."

"Really, Harry?" frowned Severus.

"Sev, think about it. The War's just about to start *and* I'm still his Heir. How would it look if it got out that I was Riddle's Intended?"

"I'm not asking you to tell the whole world, Harry, just *one* man. Your Intended! Our Lord has the right to know."

"And he will," he countered, "just when I know we're equals. I can't just show him my Mark and expect everything will be perfect. He's not going to suddenly fall in love with me just because I have his name on my heart."

"Of course he isn't!" argued Severus heatedly. "He *won't* because he's *already* in love with you!"

"Sev, you can't possibly know what Riddle is thinking."

"Anyone with two eyes can see it," Severus pressed on, a determined expression on his face. "He worries over you; when he heard you were attacked on Christmas he dropped everything to come see you. He buys you new clothes because the old hems are merely an inch higher than

they should be. He plans every last day of yours out in order to make sure you're improving rapidly so you're safe in the war, *and* he gave you time off because you *needed* it! He noticed you were tiring so he *ordered* you to come to my Manor."

Severus glared angrily at him, and Harry stared at him agape. He rarely saw Severus in such a passionate state, and it was shocking to see it here now. "Sev," he murmured softly when Severus simply stared at him with irritated black eyes.

"Don't you *dare* dismiss this, Harry, I'm sick and tired of you explaining all of the Dark Lord's actions away. Because you being his Heir does not excuse everything he does, and it's high time you accept that. *You* should know our Lord better than me, and yet you continue to hide behind the thought that our Lord *only* cares about ambition. You know he doesn't, yet you continue to believe he does. Is it that scary to admit that he might actually be in love with you?"

"Of course it's scary, Sev!" he burst out with, unable to keep quiet any longer. "How can I possibly accept that he's in love with *me*? My parents hated me, the whole world thinks I'm incompetent, and he only approached me because of Dumbledore! Why would he fall in love with me when he can literally have anyone he wants?"

"Harry, you can't possibly think you don't deserve him."

He hated the pity shining clear in his best friend's eyes so he turned away, focusing his gaze on his tightly clenched fists. "He's the Dark Lord, Sev."

Severus laid a hand gently on his, "Your parents were wrong, Harry. You're special, and it's not your fault your parents couldn't see that. You're extraordinarily talented and it's only a matter of time before the world knows that. And you should really know by now that Dumbledore is the *last* reason he cares for you. Magic knew what she was doing when she put you two together, and that means you *shouldn't* be scared to tell him the truth. You've already kept it from him for six years now, Harry, don't you think it's time to let *him* make a decision?"

He was shaking, and it was all he could do to stay sitting and listen to Severus' words. He felt tears prickling at the edges of his eyes as the words resonated in his heart, and it was only through biting his lower lip that he was able to hold them at bay. Because Severus' words proved that he had been watching him all this time, that maybe there *was* some truth to the facts Severus always spouted throughout the years.

That maybe, the Dark Lord *was* in love with him.

That maybe Magic *did* know what she was doing when she placed him with Riddle. That he was worth the Dark Lord, and that they *were* meant to be.

"Just think about it, okay?" Severus whispered softly when the silence stretched on for too long. "It doesn't have to be tomorrow, or even next month, just know that life is a fickle thing and you don't have forever."

"Thanks, Sev," he settled for saying.

Severus smiled warmly at him, and they were both startled by a sudden clap.

“Alright, boys, now that we’ve talked our feelings out for the day like bloody Gryffindors, I think it’s time to head out and get our supplies for the year,” said Lucius.

Severus sighed heavily, but his smile was still there as he straightened back up to face Lucius. He offered his hand to Harry as a peace offering.

Harry took Severus’ outstretched hand and followed his friends.

Riddle looked puzzled, his cup of tea held securely in his hand as he studied Harry intently.

The look was enough to ground Harry, and he dug his nails into his other hand in hopes to calm his beating heart.

He hadn't thought that he would see the Dark Lord so soon; he had expected at least a week to steel his nerves. But Riddle had appeared suddenly on the second to last day of his summer break, intent on taking Harry to Diagon Alley to get him fitted for robes and to pick up some books for more reading.

Harry had stared, aghast, at him before Riddle had sternly told him to get dressed and it had taken all of his skill to act normal around his Intended. Because for the six years he had known Riddle, he had *rarely* stammered, and yet for the duration of the day, Harry had been a right mess. He had dropped a stack of books in Flourish and Blott's and he had nearly brained Madame Malkin when she came rushing over with more tailored robes.

Riddle had watched all this with an amused air, but by the time they had made it to an eatery, had quickly become irritated. After all, the purpose of the trip was not only to get Harry materials for the trip, but to also seed the information that Harry was Riddle's Heir.

The strength of the privacy wards around them ensured their privacy from being overheard, while the curtains around them kept them safe from prying eyes.

"Do fess up, Harry," said Riddle, setting his cup of tea back down with a soft clink. "You've been a right mess. Are you worried about the tournament?"

"The tournament, sir?"

"Surely you haven't forgotten," murmured Riddle, one of his hands idly swirling sugar into his black tea with the tiny spoon provided. "You *did* give your consent."

"The Dueling competition?"

"It must have slipped my mind, then," said Riddle, not sounding remorseful at all. "Have you heard of the Founder's Tournament?"

It took Harry a while to place the name, and thanks to the memory-enhancing rune from his fifth year, he was able to actually recall the information he had read on it. "The one with four Champions from each House? Why not the Triwizard Tournament, sir? It's more well-known and would definitely gather a bigger audience if Durmstrung and Beauxbatons participate."

"To conquer the world, my little Heir, we must first conquer Britain. The first task of the Tournament will be crucial to changing public perception of you. The adoption was hardly enough to cover the stigma of being looked over as heir and later disowned. My glowing endorsement of you can only do so much if your talent is kept behind Hogwarts walls. Dumbledore would probably rather keep it that way; *his* Heir has hardly any talent to speak of to compare to yours."

Harry couldn't meet the Dark Lord's eyes, his heart beating erratically at the words spilling out of his Intended's mouth. They were oddly *nice*, and it made him automatically think of what Severus had said only a few days earlier. The thought that Riddle could actually be in love with him kept going through his mind, and he felt a bit silly for thinking of that when Riddle was still going on about their plans for the War. He felt a bit like a lovesick teenager with a crush, finding ways to be delusional about something that was probably not true.

Riddle didn't seem to notice his discomfort, pressing on even without a word of input from Harry. "The first task will be crucial. If you do well enough, the press will be invested enough to cover the rest of the Tournament. Since you'll be winning every Task and subsequently the Tournament, it will only make it easier for me to declare you as my Heir."

It was a little daunting to hear that Riddle had so much faith in him, but at the same time the words made his heart soar and it was hard for him to hold back a smile. "How will the champions be chosen, sir?"

"The Sorting Hat. It'll take a quick peek at the Professors' minds before choosing the four champions. As you know, your twin and you will both be competing in the tournament."

"Then the Sorting Hat can be influenced?" he asked.

"Of course, Harry, the Sorting Hat does have a mind on its own, but more importantly than that, almost half of the Professors have already been recruited to my side."

"Half?"

"You surely didn't think I was at Hogwarts *just* to teach children for the fun of it, did you?" asked Riddle, a smile playing on his lips and a teasing quality to his voice. "There are political upsides in being able to shape the next generation, and most of Hogwarts' professors are esteemed."

"Are you going to be choosing the champions, yourself, then, sir?"

Riddle nodded, "Hufflepuff shouldn't be a threat, but Ravenclaw may pose a more serious problem. A seventh year named Quirrel will do nicely; he's already under my control and will throw the tournament as necessary."

"Throw?"

Riddle's smirk was predatory, "The tournament is a chess game, Harry. Merely a setting for Dumbledore and me to gain or lose territory."

The metaphor stung, and in his head all he could think about was what Riddle had said all those years ago. It was a reminder that the Dark Lord merely thought him a *pawn* even *if* Severus had

said all those words just days ago. Because how else could he interpret Riddle's words? Riddle was ordering him about as if he had no choice in the matter at all.

"Is that all this is to you?" he blurted out before he could stop himself. Riddle furrowed his brows at him in confusion, his mouth pursed in a frown, and Harry forged on before he lost his nerve. "Am *I* just a pawn in your chess game, sir?"

"What's got you all worked up?" asked Riddle, after a beat of silence. He looked confused, and Harry was just about to elaborate when Riddle continued. "Don't be silly, Harry. You *are* a pawn in my chess game. Everyone is."

"Is that why you don't trust me, sir? To win on my own strength without any underhanded tricks," he countered, his tone hard and cutting even when the humiliation of what the Dark Lord was saying tinting his cheeks a light pink.

"It's not about trust, Harry," started Riddle, but Harry cut him off before he could continue.

"I thought we were equals in this, sir."

"Equals? Harry, I'm rather confused on how you started on this line of thinking. We are not equals, Harry. I'm much older than you after all, and much more experienced."

"You really don't think we're equals?" he asked, the words sharp in the pain they caused. For some reason, Severus' words had twisted in his mind, and all he can think about was his soul mark still waiting to be shown.

Riddle furrowed his brows in confusion, drawing his wand and casting a few diagnostic charms. When they came out clean, Riddle actually looked worried. "Are you alright, Harry?"

"I understand, sir, that I'm only seventeen and you are a Professor and have much left to teach me. But there comes a time when you *have* to start trusting me. You can't win this War without me, yet you continue to be so," he paused, searching for the right word to describe his feelings and then gave up on being polite, "bloody distant! Will you really feel nothing if I died?"

Riddle looked utterly lost and Harry relished in the sight. After all, not just anyone could make Riddle wear that expression. But other than the small amount of pleasure he got from that sight, he was filled with hot anger, because the fact that Riddle *still* didn't understand why he was angry was boggling. To be cast aside so flippantly as a *pawn* to Riddle and Dumbledore's chess game was such an *insult* to the feelings he held for the Dark Lord.

"Of course I'll feel something," said Riddle, after a long pause. "You're my Heir, Harry."

"Then why?" he spit out, "Why won't you ever tell me anything? Why do you continue to make plans for me without even telling me the reason why?"

"You've never complained about this before," said Riddle. "I thought you accepted that I knew best."

"It's not that, sir, it's..." he trailed off, his knuckles white because of the tight grip he had on the table. He couldn't word why he wanted so badly to be viewed as something *more* in Riddle's

eyes without telling Riddle his soul mark and the inability to do so was making him tongue-tied. "I don't want to be just a pawn to you," he said quietly.

"Would you rather be my Queen?"

Harry stared at Riddle's smirking face for a long moment, and a hot flush covered his cheeks. "You're making fun of me," he accused lowly.

"No," answered Riddle, even as his smirk persisted, "I'm being rather serious with you right now, Harry. If it'll make you feel better, you can be my Queen."

"You're missing the whole point," he said, a tad petulantly.

"I don't think I am," answered Riddle amicably. "You're behaving exactly as a normal teenager, Harry."

"You think I'm having my bout of teenage rebellion?" he asked, incredulous. "You're writing off my feelings because of my *age*?"

"Is that not what this is?" asked Riddle, tilting his head in confusion. "You're upset because you believe yourself unimportant to me. I am doing my part in reassuring you that you are very important to the War and subsequently important to me."

"You'll never think of me as an equal, will you," Harry said, after a long pause, smarting from Riddle's callous words.

"And why *should* I?" asked Riddle, his red eyes sharp. "You're *only* seventeen, Harry."

"Why won't you look past my age and see me for who I am?"

"Because your age defines you," said Riddle, sounding thrown. "You *are* only seventeen."

Harry let out a frustrated sound, standing up abruptly from the table even as he tried to hold the hot, angry tears that threatened to spill down his cheeks. It was utterly unfair; just a day ago he believed that it was finally time to tell Riddle the truth and to be met with such an impassable barrier was disheartening. Riddle believed himself to be his *father* figure; there was no room for romantic love in their relationship and Harry couldn't explain *why* there needed to be an opening without laying his heart bare. And thoughts of how Sirius was rejected kept him from being completely open. After all, why risk it all when the chances of success were so low?

"Are you running away?" asked Riddle, his expression unreadable. "I thought you've outgrown this."

"You're impossible," responded Harry. "Consider this my act of rebellion, *sir*," he hissed. And he knew he shouldn't, but he did so anyway, snapping his fingers and apparating away from the disastrous scene.

The last week had not been pleasant. Although he had stormed out on the Dark Lord, he couldn't actually *hold* a grudge against the man since they met up rather regularly because of the weekly sessions training the younger years and the tutoring sessions Riddle liked to implement.

It had been hard to act normally around the Dark Lord, and the rift caused by Riddle's callous words made Harry bitter. They rarely talked other than Riddle's attempts on teaching him, and Harry wasn't going to let it go without an apology.

It was the third day that school resumed when he was summoned to Dumbledore's office. He had debated stalling to tell Riddle, but the note had the word *urgent* underlined three times *and* he was still a bit bitter toward Riddle, so disregarding self preservation, he made his way toward the gargoyle.

After murmuring the chosen password of the day, the gargoyle swiveled out of the way, revealing a large grandiose staircase. Harry took the stairs two steps at a time, knocking once on the door situated at the top.

It swung open, revealing Dumbledore's office and the portraits of past Headmasters. He took his time in glancing over the surroundings; it was his first time actually being summoned to the Headmaster's office in all his Hogwarts years. There were trinkets that he had never seen before, even a Pensieve bowl freshly used sitting on smaller table to the side of the room. There was a barely visible perch for a bird on the upper level, obviously meant for Dumbledore's rumored phoenix familiar.

Dumbledore was waiting behind his desk, his eyes twinkling and his mouth upturned in a grandfatherly smile.

"Harry, how nice it is to see you. Would you care for a lemon drop, my boy?"

Harry eyed the yellow spheres suspiciously, mutely shaking his head as he dropped primly into the chair in front of Dumbledore's desk.

A brief look of disappointment crossed the elder man's face, but it was gone as quickly as it began. "How is your last year treating you?"

"It's been decent."

Dumbledore nodded along with his words, opening his mouth only mere moments after Harry finished speaking, "And Professor Riddle, my boy? It has come to my attention that the two of you are unnaturally close."

Harry raised his eyebrows at the question, "You know full well why that is so, sir."

Dumbledore blinked, "I wasn't aware that you knew."

"Knew that you were the person who made my parents hate me or that you had knowledge of just exactly who marks my heart?"

"I—" Dumbledore started to protest, but Harry cut him off.

"Your dislike of the Dark has passed on to my parents, Headmaster. They are close-minded enough to hate me for my Intended's deeds."

"You can hardly blame your parents' actions on me," said Dumbledore. "After all, it's thanks to my interference that you are still alive now."

The words chilled his blood. “They wanted to kill me?”

There was pity in the elder’s eyes, “What happens when a soul mark’s mate dies, Harry?”

“I never thought,” he stammered out, his mind whirling with the new information that Dumbledore had given him. Half of him wanted to believe that Dumbledore was lying in hopes to confuse him, but the Headmaster had no reason to lie to him. “You lose your magic,” said Harry, quietly. “The boon to the War would have been too great to pass up to my parents. To you, as well. Why was I left alive, then? You gave me the opportunity to switch to the Dark, to become a thorn in the Light’s side.”

“You really never thought about it?” asked Dumbledore. “Why your Father used a spell to induce sleep rather than death? Why we continued to let you learn at Hogwarts and become close to Tom? The facts don’t add up, do they?”

“You think I’m a weakness, then,” said Harry, after a minute of thinking it through. “You think that I’ll be a weak link in the Dark Lord’s armor. That *I’ll* be his downfall. But that still doesn’t make sense; without magic, he’s left without *any* defense.”

“Tell me, Harry, have you heard of Gellert Grindelwald?”

“He’s the Dark Lord before Professor Riddle, isn’t he?”

Dumbledore nodded, “Where is he now?”

“Locked up, but not dead...” he trailed off, and was rewarded when a small smile crossed Dumbledore’s face.

“You see, Harry, you are not alone in possessing a Mark of a Dark Lord.”

“You betrayed him then,” said Harry. “He couldn’t duel you, yet you went against him anyway. And then you locked him up for all of eternity rather than killing him because you wished to continue to possess magic. That’s awful, Headmaster.”

“Betrayed him? It is not betrayal when your Intended goes off the path of sanity. And it was not my choice to keep my magic; the Wizarding World needed me in the wake of what my Intended had accomplished. I could hardly take the easy way out and let us both perish.”

“Then you expect me to do the same to *my* Intended? You expect me to go against what Magic wished and...and betray him?”

“Oh, Harry, it is not *betrayal*. I saved Gellert. He was planning mass genocide of the Muggles in an attempt to save the Wizarding World. He believed himself superior, and drunk in his belief of righteousness stepped off the path of sanity.”

“You didn’t believe him,” Harry said, quietly after a long pause. “He trusted you.”

“Tom wove the same story for *you*, didn’t he? Told you that Magic was dying out and that it’s up to you to save Earth? I fell for it because at that time I was immature and naïve in my hatred of the Muggles. But when Gellert stirred up World War II in hopes to cause mass destruction,

bad things happened. The atomic bomb almost destroyed the whole *world*, Harry. Prejudice like that will ruin the Earth.”

“But Magic *is* real. The world is dying out right now.”

“It’s dying out because of one man’s prejudice.”

“You can’t possibly blame Grindelweld for that! He messed up, and yes, the Muggles reacted in a way he didn’t expect, but his intentions were in the right place.”

“You’re too far gone,” said Dumbledore, sadly. “You’ve gone Dark, haven’t you? I believed I could reason with you, but you’re just as prejudiced as he is.”

“Well,” he said, his tone scathing, “maybe you should have thought about that before you condemned me to a horrible childhood. And maybe if you just opened your eyes and saw just what Riddle and Gellert were trying to show you, you can actually *help* us instead of condemning the world.”

“You truly believe they’re telling the truth? Riddle is a master at manipulation, Harry, and you’ve fallen for it because you can’t look past the fact that he’s your Intended. But you have a responsibility *as* his Intended to stop him from destroying the World and committing genocide. Tell me, have you figured out why I haven’t killed you, yet? I’ve already gotten confirmation that you aren’t going to help the Light.”

“You’re Light,” said Harry, “you couldn’t even kill your Intended. How could you kill me?”

Dumbledore’s eyes were hard, and he drew his wand to level it at Harry’s forehead. Harry didn’t flinch, firm in his belief that his words were true.

Dumbledore didn’t lower it, and his smile was hard. “I believed better of you, Harry. Believed you could be like me.”

“Well, sorry, sir, but I rather die than betray my Intended.”

To his credit, Dumbledore didn’t flinch, instead setting his wand back down onto the desk. “Have you heard of Horcruxes, Harry?”

His intended’s voice echoed through his mind, a memory of a time long ago. He didn’t respond, and his lack of response spurred Dumbledore into continuing.

“The man you are protecting has already severed his connection to you. Six times, in fact,” said Dumbledore. “Even if you cease to exist, his magic will stay.”

“He would have told me,” he said.

“He wouldn’t have. After all, you’re nothing more than his pawn, Harry.”

This time, Harry didn’t have to fake his flinch at the words, the name stinging in remembrance of the fight he had with his Intended only a few weeks ago.

Pity was shining clearly in Dumbledore's eyes this time, and the next time he spoke it was in quieter, calmer voice. "He doesn't trust you, does he? Hasn't even told you his plans for the future? I suffered the same fate, once. Gellert believed himself the owner of me because we were Intended for each other. He believed that I had to believe in what *he* believed in simply because we possessed matching Marks. But he was wrong."

"Riddle's not like that," he said immediately, but Dumbledore pressed on as if he hadn't even spoken.

"It doesn't have to be like that, Harry. You *do* have the opportunity to break away and save many lives. After all, Tom has made an unbreakable vow to stop the War if you lose the Founder's Tournament."

When Harry did nothing more to gape openly at Dumbledore, Dumbledore continued, "Hasn't even told you that, has he?"

Even though Dumbledore was still looking at him with pity, all Harry could think about was the fact that Riddle had trusted him enough to risk the outcome of the War on him. Trusted him enough to even make an Unbreakable Vow on it. It was almost a minute before he was able to school his expression back into a neutral one, and even then, Dumbledore was still looking at him with pity.

"We grow up our whole lives dreaming about our Intended," said Dumbledore, completely missing the point, "It's a huge blow to learn that Tom isn't who you thought him to be. Please, Harry, do think about it. I'll ask you for your final answer when the time draws near."

He itched to put Dumbledore in his place, to proclaim loudly that he belonged to Riddle and that Riddle would *never* use him like Dumbledore thought he was doing, but he restrained himself because it *was* better to not antagonize Dumbledore for no reason. After all, the Headmaster was already offering him a way out, and he would be stupid not to take it.

He acknowledged Dumbledore's clear dismissal with a nod, standing up and departing from the office without a backwards glance.

He hadn't found a time to confront Riddle yet. Riddle seemed to be *avoiding* him, what with the canceled tutoring sessions and the furtive glances when he thought Harry wasn't looking. It was driving him nuts when all he wanted to do as grab Riddle and tell him that he wanted the fight to be over.

It almost made him want to corner the Dark Lord and tell him just exactly what he thought about the Unbreakable Vow, and was just making plans to do exactly that when Dumbledore stood up during dinner.

Immediately, all talk in the Great Hall ceased. Dumbledore cut an impressive presence even in his unfashionable blue robes. Even the professors stopped eating in favor of watching Dumbledore.

"Quidditch will be canceled this year," the Headmaster started out with to the groans of mostly the Gryffindor table, "and in its place the Founder's Tournament will take place. The winner will not only take the House Cup as their own, but will also be given an heirloom from their own

Founder's treasures. We have a lot of extraordinary seventh years this year and it was truly a hardship to choose just four of them to represent each House. The contestants have agreed to take part in this tournament and I hope you all will agree that they are perfect for each House. Please stand when I call your name.

For Gryffindor, James Potter.”

James stood to the roar of his House, his cheeks flushed in pride and Lily clapping happily next to him, giggling.

“For Hufflepuff, Amelia Bones.”

Harry watched as Bones stood, her robes ironed straight and her tie pristine. She wasn't smiling, but her mouth pursed into a grim, determined line. Her friends next to her all clapped politely.

“For Slytherin, Harry Black.”

There was no roar from the Slytherin table, but there was a thunderous clapping, and Harry stood with a small smile on his face.

“And finally, for Ravenclaw, Gilderoy Lockhart.”

He met Riddle's red-eyed stare, blinking his shock away and doing his best not to gape openly at his Intended. Because if Lockhart was Ravenclaw's champion then...

Riddle nodded straight at Harry, and he looked for lack of a better word, *sheepish*. His suspicions were confirmed when Riddle mouthed an apology, even while looking like he would rather be doing *anything* else instead, and he couldn't help the smile that bloomed across his face.

Maybe they *did* have a chance. It was hardly Riddle's fault that he didn't know Harry saw him romantically and would rather *die* than to think Riddle as a father figure.

His smile didn't dim, even when Severus dug his elbow in his side and asked him why he was grinning like a loon.

“It isn't everyday you get chosen as Slytherin's champion,” he said when Severus wouldn't let up.

“You wanker,” Severus hissed back, “You knew you'll be chosen. It's because of our Lord, isn't it?”

Harry just grinned, shrugging his shoulders. “I have no idea what you're talking about, Sev.”

A/N: Well, a month between updates again...I am completely sad that this has happened to me... :(sorry guys, hopefully the next update can come faster! I should really rethink my status of not starting the next chapter until the previous one is posted...Dx.

Anyway, this chapter is a HUGE thanks to lovely people who talked over the plot with me. Thank you SparklesInTheSun on ff.net, Crystia on ao3, VivvyPotter, and of course lovely Spatzi. I tried to portray Tom as a LITTLE bit more evil...in the fight scene, but Crystia hasn't read it yet xD (since she was my inspiration to try and make Tom more scary) so this chapter has the potential to be reworked but I was like I HAVEN'T UPDATED IN SO LONG so I did it anyway. xD Hopefully she doesn't mind the chapter...

Any questions are welcomed! I realize that it may be a bit confusing now since I added Dumbledore's point of view. Also...anyone who has any idea of what the tournament's tasks should be should definitely comment here because I'm definitely dying here trying to come up with believable tasks...XD.

And Lockhart was chosen thanks to this lovely comment:

From Arualiaa on AO3: You know who is a Ravenclaw and would be hilarious to have? GILDEROY LOCKHART. SERIOUSLY, READ HIS POTTERMORE ENTRY, IT'S AMAZING. He once wrote his name in giant scorching letters across the quidditch pitch, and another time he created an ENORMOUS dark mark-like projection of his own fucking face above the school grounds. He spent most of his school years coming up with new methods of cheating in exams rather than studying. He was brilliant for all the wrong reasons, just IMAGINE THE SHENANIGANS.

Thanks again for reading and for the overwhelming response!!! Please comment if you can because it's SO wonderful hearing everyone's thoughts and ideas! It really does shape this story (as shown above XD) because I love hearing what people think!

The First Task

James' back was against a sturdy tree, the leafy overhang protecting him from being seen easily. The Gryffindor was dressed warmly, with his red and gold scarf securely wrapped around his neck.

Harry watched his twin brother, and hating himself a bit for being so suspicious, drew his wand and cast several detecting charms. Even when they came back clean, he still hung back, watching his brother for a few moments longer.

A letter had arrived during breakfast only a few days after the great announcement, from an anonymous writer and a nondescript Hogwarts barn owl. Severus had snatched it from him immediately, casting diagnostic charms before handing it back to him without a single sign of remorse in his expression. Harry had just rolled his eyes, used to his friend's overprotective nature before opening it and scanning the letter.

He recognized the scrawl immediately, and cleared up his schedule in order to meet the time specified. Severus and Lucius thought him soft for forgiving his brother so easily when he told them of their plans, and had taken quite a bit of convincing to stay back in the Common Room instead of following him. But it wasn't as if he was soft for doing so; contrary to what those closest to him thought, he still hadn't actually forgiven James for turning on him so easily.

He just didn't view it with any bitterness anymore. After all, if James and he hadn't drifted apart in their first year, he would have never been able to understand the Dark side's point of view. He would have continued to hover unwanted in the Light side, and like the Sorting Hat had speculated, spent his life pretending to be someone he wasn't. He belonged to the Dark, and he didn't regret the circumstances that led him there.

He loosed a deep breath, pulling his cloak tighter around his shoulders, and made his way toward the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

James looked up when he got closer, a smile lighting up his tired face. "Thanks for coming."

Harry nodded curtly at his brother's words, "I knew it was you because of your chickenscratch."

James scowled, "It's not like yours is any better."

Harry just laughed at his brother's expression, patting him sympathetically on the arm. "Why did you want to meet?"

"It's not safe here," said James. He pulled some shimmery cloth out of his cloak, hanging it over his arm and demonstrating its use to Harry.

Harry's eyes widened, "You have an invisibility cloak?"

He looked uncomfortable as he nodded, "It's an heirloom. Passed down from our Peverell ancestry." Without asking permission, James swung the cloak over their shoulders, making their outlines invisible to the naked eye. "It won't cover us completely, but it'll be better than nothing. Do you have a place where we can talk privately?"

The centaurs wouldn't welcome James in, but the outskirts of the colony was left unvisited by most of the inhabitants of the Forbidden Forest. He nodded, mutely gesturing for his twin to follow his lead.

It didn't take long to reach the place he was thinking about. It was a glade, protected from all sides by sturdy trees and thorny bushes. It only took a murmured word and a push from his magic to provide an opening in the barrier, and it closed neatly behind them, securing them from the outside world.

He still drew his wand, weaving privacy wards that Riddle had taught him when he was only a third year. The strain drew uncomfortably on him, but it wasn't anything he couldn't handle for more than a few hours.

James watched him work with hooded eyes, his arms wrapped around his knees in the position he chose to sit in. It was only minutes before Harry finished, and then he was sitting himself down next to his twin. Being so close to the centaur colony made him feel at ease, the pure magic and air doing wonders to his frayed nerves.

"Is this about the tournament?" Harry questioned.

James nodded, still looking miserable, "I met with Dumbledore earlier."

"Let me guess, he told you about the Unbreakable Vow," he murmured, and watched as James turned to look at him, clearly shocked.

"You know then."

"No thanks to Riddle," he said, a little bit bitterly. "But yes, I know about it."

"It's a little excessive, isn't it? Putting the weight of the War on our shoulders. We're only seventeen..."

"It's not just us," Harry said, quietly. "They're going to be interfering in the Tournament, you know. They've got too much to lose to just trust us to win."

"It just doesn't make sense," said James, his eyes looking haunted. "I don't – they want *so* much, Harry. I have dueling lessons everyday and politics and..." he trailed off, the silence between them almost palpable before continuing, "I wish I never agreed to this."

"You weren't given a choice, Jamie."

James sighed, one of his hands going down into the grass and picking at the blades nervously. "I wasn't, was I? I doubt *you* were."

Harry shook his head in response, drawing a soft sigh from his twin.

"We're just their pawns, aren't they? I wish I was given a choice."

"You still have a choice. You don't have to listen to everything he says. You have an obligation to yourself to figure out which side you'll fight for."

"I'm not questioning whether I'm for the Light or the Dark," said James, sounding scandalized. "I'm Light, Harry."

"You don't even know what that means," he said, a bit more sharply than he meant to. "Has Dumbledore even taught you anything?"

James looked like he was going to angrily retort, but after a few moments passed, deflated in on himself. "No, I don't know what it means. No one ever tells me anything. It's like they're scared that if I know what you guys are fighting for I'll turn or something. Never mind the fact that they want me to fight against my own twin brother."

"Do you want me to tell you? We're near the Centaurs; actually, I can do even better and *show* you what we're fighting for." He made to stand, his heart beating excitedly at the prospect of turning his brother Dark, but James stopped him with a hand.

"I can't," he said in a small voice. "I did something stupid, Harry."

The hope that was starting to flare in his heart sputtered once before dying out completely to be replaced with cold dread. He stared at the hand held over his thigh, before bringing his green eyed gaze to meet his brother's. "Something you can't fix?"

"I was only eleven. I didn't know any better. I thought it was the right thing to do. Mother was so insistent, and I only wanted to make her happy. You know how she gets when she doesn't get her way."

"She gets irrational," murmured Harry, his thoughts drifting back to a time he rather leave forgotten, "and angry."

James nodded, "Dumbledore arrived when the snow had just started falling. I remember because I was so excited because it was the first Christmas we had with snow in a while. It was the Christmas you didn't come home. I didn't know then it was because our parents asked you not to. I was looking forward to it, you know, hoping that it'll allow us to become close again. When you didn't show, I was hurt. I was convinced that you thought it was better to have friends like Snobby Malfoy and Uptight Prince."

"Don't call them that," he said immediately, but when James' expression fell, he placed a hand on his brother's knee. "I'm sorry," he murmured, "but they're my best friends."

"I know," whispered James back, "they're good for you. I only called them that because it was what I was thinking at the time."

"I would've come back if I could've, Jaimie."

James took a shuddering breath at that, his eyelids fluttering close once, shaking, before he opened them again. "Unbreakable Vows aren't new to me. I took one that day. I've worn the bindings of one since I was eleven."

"With Dumbledore?" he prompted when James didn't continue.

"It almost seems like a dream," whispered James. "The memory is hazy, almost as if I was spelled to forget the exact wording. I just know that I can't disobey a direct order from

Dumbledore without risking my magic."

Harry couldn't stop the horrified sound leaving his mouth at the words, and James let out a humorless chuckle.

"It's not that bad, really. He's only given me an order once before, and it had to deal with the War, so I can't exactly blame him. I want to win this War as well, Harry. I don't want there to be blood, or any kind of conflict. Innocent people will get hurt and I hate that. So I can't blame Dumbledore for placing such a strict restriction on me if it'll help against that."

"We can't avoid that," he said. "When there's change, there'll always be opposition."

"See, this is why I can't be Dark," said James. "Even back then, I knew something about it just didn't sit right with me. When we fought because your Intended's a killer. Everyone has a chance for redemption."

"You're naïve," he said as gently as he could. "Sheltered because the Light can't afford to alienate you."

"Maybe," said James, not seeming to take offense to what Harry had said. "But I stand by what I said. That's why I called you out here. I need to win this tournament, Harry. Don't you see? If you lose, so *many* lives will be saved."

"It's not that simple."

"Isn't it? If you win, nothing happens besides Riddle becoming Headmaster of Hogwarts. But if I win, the War won't even happen!"

"You're so caught up on the War happening, you're not even considering there has to be a reason *why* we're willing to fight this War."

"There's never a good reason for War," said James, immediately. "Peace should always be kept."

"Just let me show you," he said after a moment of staring into James' eyes, "You'll understand why this War needs to happen."

James looked disappointed, "No. I'm not interested in the reason why, Harry."

"You're so bloody convinced you're in the right, you're not even looking at my point of view," he spit out, quickly becoming irritated. "I love you, Jamie, and you must feel something for me because you called me out here. Why won't you believe that I have a reason for believing the Dark Lord?"

"You only believe him because he's your Intended."

"Why does everyone *say* that? I have my own reasons for believing him."

James just shook his head, "There's no way I'm convincing you."

"And there's no way you'll listen to my side," countered Harry.

"I don't want to fight against you, Harry. And I don't want you to get hurt. Dumbledore has something planned, and I can't tell you, but you're going to get hurt and I don't want that."

"Dumbledore's too soft to hurt me," he said, but James just sighed.

"I'm not going to go easy on you, you know. I *need* to win this war at any costs. I just wanted to warn you, because there's definitely going to be foul play."

"I'm not going to go easy on you either, Jamie. And if you really think *I* should be scared of Dumbledore, I should remind you that the other holder of the Vow is the Dark Lord."

James didn't look daunted at all, and he clasped Harry's hand into his own, standing and pulling his twin into an upright position. "I guess this'll be the last time we'll be meeting on good terms, then."

"I guess so," he answered, sadly, and didn't protest when his twin brought him into a warm embrace. He let them stay like that for a while before gently pushing away. James wasn't crying, but he was close, his eyelashes wet with moisture.

"It doesn't always have to be like this. I'll find a way to make things better, okay?"

James looked hesitant, but he eventually nodded. Harry easily opened the barrier back up with his magic, and they walked in silence towards the exit, their minds both on what they had just discussed. "I love you," James whispered quietly into Harry's ear when they got to the edge of the Forbidden Forest. "We may be on separate sides, but you'll always be my big brother."

"Love you too, Jamie," he replied easily. They hugged each other one last time before James departed, making the long trek to the castle alone. They couldn't be seen with each other thanks to Dumbledore, so Harry slipped his hands into his pockets as he waited a few minutes to leave so it wouldn't be as suspicious.

The Unbreakable Vow complicated things. Both did, actually. He silently promised to himself to read up on the topic more when he got the chance.

Dumbledore was a meddling, old man. He knew now why Riddle was so adamant on not liking the man. He couldn't believe that his parents would have forced such a restrictive Vow on his little brother, and some parts of him didn't believe what James was saying. He wanted to trust his brother, but past years had made him weary of believing anything without first reviewing the evidence.

If he was being honest with himself, James' appeal seemed to come directly from Dumbledore's influence. He wouldn't put it past the man to try to appeal to Harry by using his twin brother, and neither did he believe that Unbreakable Vows could actually be used to be so restrictive. Things didn't add up, and he was ready to get to the bottom of things. He was tired of being left so in the dark.

Mind made up, Harry was completely shocked when he found the Dark Lord residing almost casually near the entrance to Hogwarts. He was easy to miss, sunken into the shadows as he was, but since Harry had attuned himself to Riddle's magic long ago, he noticed as soon as he got close.

There was no way Riddle wasn't here for him.

He debated for a moment turning back and finding an alternate route, but knew the idea held no merit only a second after. Even if he wanted to avoid the man, Riddle would find him if he wanted to.

Riddle regarded him with sharp red eyes as he drew closer, and Harry inwardly sighed, coming to a stop in front of the Dark Lord.

"Fancy meeting you here," he remarked.

Riddle looked annoyed, "You shouldn't be going off and meeting with the enemy without letting me know."

"The enemy? He's my twin brother," he protested, and wasn't surprised when Riddle's eyes narrowed further.

"He has a vested interest in you losing the Tournament. He's an enemy."

He was about to protest when he realized Riddle was right, and he just sighed instead. "Yeah, we established that back in the Forbidden Forest. Something about an Unbreakable Vow involving the War and you losing your mind?"

Riddle's eyebrows rose, "And how exactly did you figure that out?"

"Is it really safe to be talking about that out here?" he questioned, curious.

Riddle looked thoughtful, before nodding and placing a hand on Harry's shoulder. Before he could even blink, Riddle's magic was enveloping him and then they were suddenly in the middle of Riddle's quarters.

He gasped as soon as they landed, blinking back his dizziness as he turned to face Riddle. "You can apparate through Hogwarts' wards?"

"It comes with being Slytherin's heir," said Riddle, removing his hand from Harry's shoulder. He undid the strings to his cloak, floating the cloak over to a hook in the wall. He also spelled away Harry's cloak for him, leaving them in both of their less formal clothes.

Riddle took a seat close to the fireplace, setting the wood ablaze with just a snap of his fingers. Harry watched him, before giving up and sitting down in the armchair closest to him.

"If you just told me there was a Vow, I wouldn't have made such a fuss," Harry said eventually. "I thought it was just to discredit Dumbledore."

"Oh?" asked Riddle. "Does this mean you're done acting irrational now?"

Harry bristled at the tone, before deflating, remembering that Riddle had swallowed his pride and had ended up with Lockhart as Ravenclaw's champion and not Quirrel.

"I guess," he answered, a bit sullenly. "I'm still a little mad at you for upping the stakes so high without letting me know though."

"You'll win," said Riddle, rather flippantly. "In that, I have no doubt."

Harry stared at him for a bit, studying Riddle's features and not finding an ounce of hesitance in them. "Thanks though, for choosing Lockhart instead of Quirrel."

"You're welcome," answered Riddle, promptly, surprising Harry. He had expected Riddle to deny the accusation just a bit, but apparently Riddle didn't see the point in doing so. "I'm giving you an opportunity to prove your strength as you wanted to, Harry. However, this means you must recruit Lockhart to your side before the Tournament ends."

"You would risk so much just to make me happy?" he blurted out before he could stop himself.

"Don't be ridiculous," said Riddle, and this time his annoyed expression crossed into the realm of amusement. "I do want to test you, but Lockhart was the better choice. It just had the added benefit of calming you down."

He debated getting angry at Riddle's statement, but decided it wasn't worth it. After all, he was used to Riddle's callous ways and his ways of excusing things even to himself. "Isn't Quirrel already on your side?"

"Lockhart's a muggleborn. Chip on his shoulder, desperate to prove himself worthy of being here at Hogwarts. He wants to be praised and craves attention above all else. You should find it easy to sway him to our side. But failing that, though I will be extremely displeased if you are unable to complete this simple task, I have my followers watching Lockhart's muggle mother right now. Shall you fail, a simple kidnapping and blackmail shall suffice. He has enough muggle relatives to kill off should he try to disobey me."

Harry rolled his eyes, unable to even summon the energy to be appalled at Riddle's words. "Wouldn't Quirrel have been the easier choice, still?"

The Dark Lord hummed, looking thoughtful as he considered Harry's words. "In some ways, yes, he would have been. However, he would have hardly presented a challenge. He does possess the thirst for knowledge every Ravenclaw possesses, but he is lacking in courage, cunning, and loyalty. I would have had to spend hours coaxing the Sorting Hat into choosing Quirrel."

He blinked in surprise, "I figured the Tournament would test us on just our House's trait."

"Surely you don't think Salazar was *just* cunning," said Riddle, but his teasing smile kept Harry from becoming too embarrassed. "Every Founder was extraordinary in their own way, with one dominating trait to set them apart. But Salazar was brave, just not to the point of recklessness like Godric was. And he was loyal, but he didn't prize the loyalty above all else. Same goes for intelligence. The Founder's Tournament isn't looking for a champion that embodies just their House's trait. If it did, that champion would be entirely too one dimensional."

"But to expect a champion to possess all of them? Isn't that a bit too much?"

"The Founder's Tournament was created in order to unify the Houses. Being in the same House back then only meant you shared a mentor, and nothing more. The Founder's Tournament changed that. Suddenly, the House Cup became a big deal, and students had to work together to achieve success. Competitors also had the benefit of showing off to potential employers, setting

up their future while fighting for glory. The Tournament also had the effect of instilling respect for another House and understanding that traits other than their own were important to embrace as well."

"So, basically, in order to win, I'll have to be courageous, loyal, and intelligent?"

"In a manner of sense, yes. There will be four tasks," said Riddle. "Each one to test each defining trait. Obviously, each Task will be geared toward a single House, but it is still possible for an opposing House to win the Task."

"What were past years' Tasks like?"

"They don't change much as the years go on. There's only so many ways to test bravery," said Riddle, a smirk playing on his lips. It was no secret what his Intended thought of Gryffindor's tendency to find trouble. "I wouldn't be surprised if we're treated to another obstacle course with dangerous creatures. Gryffindor's Task will be the ideal starting one with Slytherin being the last. Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff's Tasks are rarely dangerous enough to merit any worrying."

"Are we going to be able to choose the order?"

"It'll happen sometime soon during one of the meal times. It's generally random by choice, but I do believe your wandless magic should be able to do something about that."

"Isn't that cheating, sir?"

"Are you going to be irrational again?" asked Riddle, but he didn't look too worried, instead just glancing over at Harry curiously.

Harry just grimaced, shaking his head. "Now that I know how high the stakes are, I won't put up a fuss."

There was a small pause after his words, punctuated by Riddle sitting up straighter and placing his hands on his lap in a delicate position. "You weren't wrong when you said I must trust you," said Riddle, looking uncomfortable. "It's hard learning to trust someone else, especially since I've worked alone for a long time now and hadn't encountered any problems. You mentioned that I've been too secretive. Is there anything you'll like to know?"

He blinked, only his intensive training stopping him from gaping openly at the older man. It was so out of character for Riddle to be so open and it made him wary at first.

"The Unbreakable Vow," he started hesitantly, "Why risk so much on something that's hard to predict? You've been working towards the War for such a long time now."

Relief crossed Riddle's face, and the tenseness in his shoulders seemed to seep away. "War isn't the only way to change a population's mind. I can become minister, or a public speaker even. It's just that War is the fastest way to convince people that what we are preaching is truth, and we'll need every wizard and witch working together in order to conquer the Muggles. We're already so few compared to them, inner strife will devastate us. And besides, just because I'll be bound to give up on War, doesn't mean my Heir has to."

"And Dumbledore left such a loophole?"

Riddle gave a lazy shrug, but his smirk was positively evil, "He believes I'm coercing you into being my Heir. Silly old man."

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell Riddle everything that Dumbledore had told him in his Office, but his doubt stopped him. Because what if Dumbledore was right? Riddle *was* a master of manipulation, and what if their soul bond *was* severed because Riddle made horcruxes? It wasn't as if he believed Dumbledore, but it was Riddle himself who taught him to play his cards cautiously, and if Riddle wasn't going to bring it up, neither was he.

Riddle seemed pleased at the outcome of events, and it was with a quiet snap that he called one of his personal House-Elves to him. "I believe this occasion calls for some Firewhiskey," he said, his red eyes dancing in delight, and within minutes, the wanted bottle, along with some champagne glasses, appeared on the coffee-table closest to them.

Riddle crooked one of his fingers toward the table, and it easily glided over, assisted by Riddle's magic. The bottle uncorked itself, the liquid making a clear stream to the champagne glass, filling it up until it was three quarters full.

"We didn't properly celebrate your birthday, did we?" asked Riddle, picking up one of the champagne glasses and holding it out to Harry. Harry took it with a nod of thanks, watching as the liquid inside sloshed and bubbled. "Now that you're finally seventeen, you're allowed to experience the true pleasures of the world."

"I never took you as an alcoholic, sir," said Harry.

Riddle chuckled, "There's a handy spell you can use in order to stay sober despite how much alcohol gets into your system. Rather handy in tricking gullible politicians to say the wrong things."

He couldn't help rolling his eyes, even as a fond smile appeared on his face. "I should've known."

"Though we won't be using that tonight. I'll have the immense pleasure of witnessing your first drink," said Riddle, his eyes sharp in the dim light of his office, "I've been waiting ages for you to grow up, after all."

"When you say it like that, sir, you sound rather creepy."

Riddle shrugged, not looking put out at all. "As you age, you mature. Anyway, cheers?" He held out his glass with a delicate two fingered grip, and his smile grew as Harry leaned forward and tapped his own glass against his.

Harry leaned back, downing the contents of the glass with a single gulp. He choked immediately, the fiery burning sensation from the liquid wreaking havoc to his throat. Riddle looked amused, but he leaned forward, placing a firm hand on Harry's and bringing his glass closer to him.

Harry blinked wide eyes even as he was choking back tears from the burning sensation, the feel of Riddle's hand doing nothing to calm down his fast beating heart.

Riddle drew his wand, pointing the end of it toward the glass. Water flowed from the end, and Harry tipped the glass back as soon as Riddle let go.

"Why does it burn like that?" he coughed out as soon as he set the glass back down.

"It is called Firewhiskey for a reason," teased Riddle. "I hardly expected you to down it all at once."

"You did!" he protested, and Riddle just chuckled.

"You get used to the burning." Instead of using magic, Riddle stood himself, picking up the bottle with ease and stepping over to where Harry was still sitting in his armchair. He held out his glass obediently and Riddle deftly poured some more alcohol.

This time he sipped at it, swallowing past the burning sensation and getting used to it before drinking more. After a while, the burn started to become pleasant, and when his glass ran out, Riddle took the glass away from him, floating it back to the coffee-table with his magic.

Riddle settled back down into his armchair, and there was no other word to describe his expression but fond. He had placed his elbow on the arms of the chair, resting his head on his left palm as he stared at Harry. "Did you like it?"

"I can't have anymore?" he questioned.

"Are you feeling light-headed?" countered Riddle, one elegant eyebrow raised.

"A bit," he admitted. And despite himself, he giggled at Riddle's question, as if it was actually funny. He flushed a second afterward, embarrassed, and watched as Riddle actually threw his head back and laughed.

"You're tipsy," said Riddle, a secretive smile on his face. "Which makes it the perfect time to ask you just what happened with your brother today."

"You did this on purpose," he accused, and Riddle just chuckled again.

"Please, Harry, your inebriated state is just for my amusement. I can read it out of your mind at any time, after all."

"You haven't done that in years," he protested.

"That's what you think."

He narrowed his eyes at Riddle, but when Riddle just stared back, he huffed and sat back in defeat. "He told me about the Unbreakable Vow you took with Dumbledore and apparently, he took one with Dumbledore when he was eleven."

Riddle looked more alert at his words, "Eleven? That's very young."

"He can't disobey one of Dumbledore's direct orders without losing his magic. Is that even possible?"

"I'll have to know the exact wording," murmured Riddle, looking deep in thought. "Unbreakable Vows aren't exactly common, but yes, it does sound like it'll be possible."

"How are they broken, sir?"

"Once they are fulfilled, usually. But there is another way. I'm sure you can guess even in the state you are in."

"I'm not even that drunk," he scowled. "I'm guessing it has to do with death."

"Correct," said Riddle, straightening up and smiling a predatory grin at Harry. "To save your twin, you'll have to finally commit murder."

Harry wasn't even fazed, liquid courage allowing him to just roll his eyes at his Intended. "I doubt it'll come to that. And besides, don't you hate him enough to kill him yourself?"

"I'm charitable enough to let you take the glory," said Riddle.

"Right," he said, dryly. "Because killing someone is glorious to you."

Riddle shrugged, neither denying or confirming it, but Harry knew that Riddle did enjoy killing. They lapsed into a comfortable silence, broken by Riddle's sudden clap. "If that's all, Harry, it's getting rather late. You can take the bottle back with you. Enjoy it with Prince and Malfoy. Nothing breeds camaraderie more than Firewhiskey."

Harry aimed a suspicious look at his Lord, but stood anyway, bowing shortly before accepting the floating bottle into his hands. He left with a murmured good-bye, leaving the familiar space in a few long strides.

The day of the Task was dark and dismal. Grey clouds covered up the sun's rays, leaving Hogwarts' grounds looking gloomy. Harry had barely been able to swallow any food, his nerves making it hard to eat and it was only thanks to Severus' stern talking to that he was able to force down some eggs and bacon.

Lucius had arrived after breakfast, showcasing his support by wearing his old Slytherin scarf. He had been too busy to visit earlier, even when Harry had sent him a letter freaking out about the Tournament, so it had been with immense relief Harry had drawn his older friend into a tight hug.

"You'll do fine," Lucius had said, a smile on his face. "You've been practicing for weeks now, and besides, you're more Gryffindor than you think."

"Are you insulting me," he had hissed, but had just rolled his eyes fondly when a smirk overtook his friend's face. Narcissa had arrived a few minutes after their talk, and had taken Lucius away with her hand on his arm. They made quite the striking couple, even if Lucius was still up on the air about how he felt about her, and the sight of them together had somehow calmed his nerves.

It seemed like only minutes before he entered a huge tent located on the Quidditch Pitch, for once the size outside actually matching the inside. James nodded at him, a grim tilt to his smile, and Harry resisted the urge to go over and talk to him, instead cutting his gaze over to where

Lockhart was standing. Lockhart wouldn't meet his eyes, and Bones had an unapproachable aura around her. Even as stern as she was acting, she couldn't hide the apprehension in her eyes, and the way she kept bouncing on her heels gave her away.

The four Champions stewed in silence, and the roar of the crowd was almost oppressive in how loud it was. Before long, Dumbledore came to greet them.

"The Task is simple," he said. "There is a course set, full of traps and dangerous Magical Creatures, and your goal is to collect as many banners as possible in the time allotted. Each obstacle will be set on triggering your fear, so it is important to remain brave at all times. Although banners will count for points, the judge panel will be rewarding the majority of them based off your performance in the Task. Try your best, but remember, safety comes first."

He waited until they all confirmed they understood the rules. Harry wasn't surprised to find none of the contestants seemed surprised; after all, Dumbledore would hardly send in James without any prior knowledge and he doubted James would hold back information about the Tasks in hopes of a level playing field.

"So," said Dumbledore brightly, "who wants to go first?"

James took one look at Harry before stepping forward. "I will," he said, grimly.

Dumbledore's smile grew, "Spoken like a true Gryffindor. Come here, my boy." James obeyed, and Dumbledore placed a hand on his shoulder, leading him out.

Time passed slowly, even though it couldn't be more than fifteen minutes when the crowd's cheers subsided and Dumbledore opened the tent's flaps again. He looked pleased, which meant James must have done somewhat well, and when Amelia stood and took her place under Dumbledore's arm, Harry let loose a slow sound of relief.

His nerves still hadn't unbundled when he found himself standing in front of the large doors. They were grand and intricately carved, but he only briefly glanced at it, his eyes quickly cutting to the crowd. He couldn't pick out any faces, but he knew his friends were there, and the thought calmed him somewhat.

Dumbledore was quiet next to him, and his hand felt like a heavy weight on his shoulder. He didn't need any words of comfort from the older man, especially since he knew it was in Dumbledore's best interest that he failed the task.

The door swung open with a bang of red sparks from Dumbledore's wand, the announcer's words almost a blur in his ears. He strode in with his wand outstretched; the Task was time-based, but he knew better than to run in recklessly. Anything could be hiding behind corners, after all.

The door shut with a loud thud, and he was suddenly enveloped in darkness. He knew logically he wasn't in a separate room; the crowd and judges had to be able to see in, after all, but the loss of sight made him tense up. He easily concentrated his magic, swirling his hand in two quick circles in order to create two glowing balls of light. They emanated a soft green light, and the balls followed him as he continued to walk further into the darkness.

The hem of a robe was the first thing he saw in the light, and he immediately raised his wand, waiting for the first challenge. When it turned, he stiffened, because he would recognize those cold, brown eyes anywhere. His father stood in front of him, the lights casting eerie shadows upon the man's face.

He knew there was no way his father could be there; the man was still in a coma, kept safely within Potter manor with top healers watching over him. But some part of him still quivered in fear from the man's cold eyes, his memory of the only time he truly felt fear freezing his limbs in place.

"You're a disgrace," spat his father. He stalked closer, and although Harry fell back a few steps, his father continued to steadily advance. "I should've never had you. You've been a thorn in our sides since the very beginning," he continued, his face drawn in a truly hideous depiction of disgust.

Harry froze, letting the words wash over him, and only watched in horror as his father rose his wand, pointing it at his chest like he did the last time they had met. The spell came agonizingly slow, but there was no shield coming this time.

The sight of the sickly colored spell startled him out of his thoughts, and it was enough for him to gather up his energy and cast a shield charm. The spell dissipated as soon as it touched the shield, and he knew immediately what it was.

"How mundane," he muttered under his breath, and spoke up a little louder, "Riddikulus."

The image of his father transformed to his father wearing a pink tutu, dancing on his tiptoes in proper pink ballerina shoes. Harry gaped at it for a while, only moving when a green and silver banner fell on top of him, disappearing the second his hand made contact.

He closed his eyes, breathing out slowly to the count of three, before opening it back to the hilarious sight in front of him. He made sure to laugh in order to disarm the boggart, letting the sight of it disappearing calm his nerves and get him back on track. He had wasted precious time, and he would have to make up for it in the coming challenges.

He let the glowing balls lead him, and he picked up his pace when he saw a small door outlined in the soft light. He didn't waste time opening it normally; instead he waved a hand as he walked over, blasting it open as soon as he was near. Bright light shined through, and he was immediately on the defensive, his wand brandished in front of him as if it was a shield.

When nothing happened, he cautiously walked through, and let out a small laugh when he saw what awaited him. The area was full of trees, but the most notable thing in the small enclosed area was the large body of water that took up most of the grassy floor.

He didn't waste time, using his wand to weave a Bubble-head charm around his head. The shimmery quality of it would impede his eyesight, but the glowing balls would be able to rectify that slight with ease. He shrugged off his dueling robes and hesitated when he got to the button-down that he had on underneath, acutely aware that all of his schoolmates and professors (including his lovely Intended) were watching him. The extra clothing would hinder him though, and the fear of coming second in the Task was enough to spur him into removing the shirt,

leaving his chest bare. He was sure his cheeks were aflame, but he did his best to ignore the wiggling thought in the back of his mind that everyone was watching him.

He cast a couple of charms to make his swim a little bit more enjoyable, concentrating harder when he got to the Warming charm. He didn't want to freeze to death inside of the lake, after all. He dove into the body of water gracefully, breaking the surface first with his hands before using strong kicks to get deeper to the bottom of the lake. He knew that the lake couldn't be too deep because they *were* still located in the Quidditch Pitch, but the tournament planners surely outdid themselves because magic gave the illusion that the lake continued on forever.

The banner had to be located near the bottom of the lake so he continued to swim downward, trying his best to keep calm despite the way light continued to diminish as he got deeper and deeper. When he caught sight of the green and silver, he grinned, speeding up and almost ramming headfirst into the Merman in front of him.

He gasped in shock, using a spell to quickly propel himself backward and place some distance inbetween them. The Merman looked amused, his yellow eyes crinkled at the edges and his broken teeth bared in what looked like a smile.

The Merman still hoisted his spear up in front of him, the sharp blade making Harry's heart jump when it pressed closer.

But when he looked up, the Merman didn't look hostile; his eyes were glowing with recognition and it was with a start that Harry realized that the Merman *knew* him. He knew that he was Riddle's heir and it was obvious that he wasn't going to attack unless it was to defend himself.

He swallowed nervously, holding his wand in front of him for protection, before casting a spell, quickly propelling him downward before the Merman could react. He was touching the green and silver banner a second later, the force of his movement driving his hand deep into the sea floor.

There was a bright flash, and then he was blinking in bright sunlight, taking in deep breaths of fresh air. A transportation charm must have been weaved into the banner he picked up.

He only took a few moments' break before stepping forward cautiously, eyes darting from left to right in order to ensure he wouldn't be caught off guard. He was high up this time, the wind blowing furiously and messing up his artfully styled locks. There was a narrow pathway of rocks ahead of him; any wrong movement while he crossed would result in his death. He easily ran straight across, his magic ensuring he wouldn't fall. When he got to the other side, he tapped the banner hanging there before proceeding into the dark cave. The walls started to move inward as soon as he reached the next banner, so he Conjured up a sturdy stick the size of the room, placing it in the middle and stopping any movement. With a small smirk, he ducked under the stick and placed his hand on the banner, only wincing slightly when it transported him into another clearing.

He startled when he heard a disembodied voice speak, clearly telling him that he had fifteen minutes left and that he had collected four banners. "No time to waste then," he muttered to himself, before turning to face the next challenge.

He almost dropped in his wand in shock, because there was a dragon staring straight at him, its tail curled around a bundle of banners. Its scales were black in color, and its back sported a variety of spikes. The dragon's yellow eyes didn't waver from where it was staring, even when Harry started to cautiously approach it.

He didn't have any clue what kind of dragon it was, but he knew the basic strategy of going about facing a dragon. A dragon's skin was highly resistant to any type of magic, ruling out most skills in his repertoire. The Conjunctivitis Curse was supposedly helpful in most cases, but he figured if he took the dragon's eyesight away, she would be even more loathe to move and he didn't fancy climbing over her to get to the bundle of banners. With the way his luck was going, this would be the one time the banner *didn't* escort him to a different place and the dragon would make quick work of him.

He had to get it to move away from the banners somehow.

He paused and thought about it for a while, before settling on a course of action.

Harry concentrated his magic, placing his left palm on his right shoulder. It had been Riddle's idea in the beginning of the year, and Harry had agreed without a second thought, excited to see the ritual needed in action. It was another rune, designed to act as a storage place within his own body. It only drained a bit of magic, and it would fix the problem of not being able to carry his centaur bow everywhere.

During the first week back at school, he had visited the Centaurs, only to be presented with an intricately carved bow. It had been Synes' finest work, and carved within the wood was a myriad of different symbols of things to come. A lightning bolt rested in the very middle, surrounded by two crowns, and then an artistic representation of vines curling to make up the two ends. It was absolutely beautiful, and better yet, the magic within the bow was finely tuned to react to only his touch.

He grimaced as he pulled the bow out, holding it tightly in his hands as he turned to the trees next to him. Usually he wouldn't need arrows since the bow was tuned to him and could shoot his magic instead of wood, but since the reason he was using the bow was to pierce the dragon's skin he would have to find an alternative to his own magic. He easily transfigured the bark from the trees into sharp arrows, not bothering to Conjure up feathers because his magic would ensure that the arrows would fly true.

The dragon hadn't moved in the time it took him to prepare, and only watched as Harry fitted the makeshift arrows into his bow. He didn't bother coating the arrow with any spell yet; he first wanted to irritate the dragon in order to get it to move from its position.

The arrow hit the dragon right in between the eyes, bouncing off harmlessly but causing the dragon to startle and rear its head back, its yellow eyes now regarding Harry a bit more seriously.

"Come on now," he whispered, and let another arrow fly, this time hitting near its softer part under its neck.

The dragon looked irritated now and made to get up, the ground shaking under its weight.

He let another one fly, but this time the dragon snapped it out of the air, breaking it in half and spitting it back out. He flinched at the sight, but stood his ground as the dragon started to approach him. Once it got past the banners, it roared, a jet of flame coming out toward him. He barely dodged it, dropping into a roll and nearly breaking his bow in an attempt to get out of the way.

The dragon continued to advance fast, and Harry hastily started to coat the arrow with the properties of a Stunning spell. He hoped he was guessing right and that it was only the dragon's skin that was resistant magic and that deep within, the stunner's effect would be increased. He made the arrow's tip as sharp as possible this time, needing it to go inside of the dragon for his idea to work.

Just as he was about to let go, the dragon beat its wings, the wind nearly toppling him over. He had to use a bit of his magic to stick his feet to the floor, and nearly staggered once again because his magic reserves were running dangerously low. He was tired, what with the constant Challenges, and it was with a deep breath that he was able to calm himself down and aim his bow once again. The dragon flew above him and then landed behind him, roaring once again and nearly taking Harry out with a swipe of its spiky tail.

It narrowly missed, and Harry pulled his arm back and let go, the arrow sinking deep into the dragon. The dragon's yellow eyes widened, and its movements became sluggish. It roared once, now extremely angry, and Harry hastily fit three more arrows with the same properties, using more magic to ensure they'll hit the mark. They sank under the dragon's wings, prompting another loud and angry roar from it.

The disembodied voice rang out again, "One minute."

His eyes widened, and he was already twisting his body around, knowing he couldn't waste more time on downing the dragon. He used the last of his magic to enhance his legs, taking long strides toward the circle of banners still lying there. He heard the dragon flapping its wings and knew it would be upon him soon, but the banners were more important than his own safety.

It seemed to take forever to reach the banners; the distance that had been easily crossed by the dragon earlier was a lot longer than he thought it was and he was almost out of breath when he got to his destination.

The voice started to count down from ten, and Harry dove, sliding on the dirty ground and prompting a wince from him because he was still shirtless. He made it though, slapping the banners with his right hand and twisting almost immediately to face the dragon, which was fast approaching, the stunner's effects already wearing off.

Just like he predicted, he wasn't transported anywhere, and he watched, panting, as the dragon flew closer and closer, and just as it opened its jaw to shoot fire, the voice finished counting down.

Nothing happened however, and the fire came hurtling downward toward Harry. He winced, knowing it *probably* wouldn't kill him, but it would *hurt*, but his magic was drained and there was no way he would be able to get out of the way in time. He contemplated putting the bow in front of him, but he didn't want to let the centaur's gift burn, so he shielded it underneath his body while throwing an arm in front of his face in hopes that it'll alleviate some of the damage.

He felt extreme heat, but no pain, and he blinked open his green eyes to Riddle standing in front of him, the fire split in two paths around the barrier Riddle had created.

Riddle spun when the dragon's fire stopped, a fond smile on his face as he knelt, snaking an arm around his waist and easily lifting his smaller figure until they were both standing. Harry flushed at the feel of Riddle's warm hand on his naked skin, and flinched when Riddle's magic enveloped them, bringing him along in a side-along apparition.

The roar of the crowd was almost oppressive after not hearing it for so long, and he smiled weakly up at the spectators, lifting one hand to wave happily at where his friends were sitting in the front row.

He shivered when he felt the cold winter air of the Quidditch Pitch and was promptly shocked when he felt Riddle step away from him and a second later, undo his cloak and deposit it on his shoulders.

"Good job, Harry," said Riddle, softly, his fingers working to do the clasp around Harry's neck. Harry watched his fingers with wide eyes, and then lifted it to Riddle's warm red ones, letting a smile cross his face at the sight. "However, what were you thinking?" Riddle said, voice low. "Running for the banners and turning your back on a very angry dragon? You could've died."

"But I didn't," he felt high enough on adrenaline to say. "And I got the banners! Did I win?"

Riddle gave him a flat stare, looking highly unamused. "Is that what's really important right now?"

"Of course?" he said, turning it into a question when Riddle's red eyes narrowed dangerously. "I mean," he hastily continued, "You were with me the whole time, right? Or else you wouldn't have been able to get there so fast."

Riddle nodded slowly, "It's only common sense to have a fully trained wizard follow, especially when the Task was as dangerous as this one."

"Yeah," said Harry, smiling. "At least you didn't have to intervene before time was up, right? Or else I wouldn't have gotten the banners."

Riddle looked incredulous, "You wanted me to watch you burn so you could win?"

"Erm," he immediately started to protest, but a polite cough interrupted him.

Dumbledore was standing there, his eyes twinkling and a wide smile on his face.

"Congratulations, Harry. You were the only one to best the dragon. Would you mind waiting to the side to see the judges' marks?"

Riddle narrowed his eyes at Dumbledore, but didn't say anything, instead stalking past him without even backwards glance to see if Harry was following.

"Harry," said Dumbledore when the Dark Lord was a sufficient distance away. "Have you thought about what I said?"

He blinked, tearing his gaze away from where he had been watching Riddle walk away to land on Dumbledore. Dumbledore's smile was still there, but his eyes were hard. He was obviously displeased with the outcome of the Task, and that brought a smile to his face. And then he remembered James and his cheerful mood vanished. "No," he said simply. "Good day, Headmaster."

Dumbledore didn't call out after him, and Harry felt safe enough to walk away from the older man.

The judges were seated in chairs with high backs on a platform that was on level with the crowd but set apart enough that they were easy enough to spot. None of the Hogwarts faculty was allowed to be a judge for fear of being biased, so the judges were a mix of high ranking Hogwarts alumni in wizard society, one for each House. To further perpetuate the idea that judging was unbiased, a spell was used in order to ensure that the judges would speak only objectively. It was a spell that was used in the courtroom and had been highly adapted to suit the Tournament.

As such, Harry was apprehensive as he stood there in front of them. It wasn't as if he wanted to rely on Riddle to pave the way for him, but since the stakes were so high, some part of him *wanted* to have the upper hand. But a larger part of him craved a fair Tournament, since that would be the only way he could prove to his Intended that they were actually equals.

The host, a young man who apparently was a big deal in Quidditch since he hosted a bunch of their matches, stood on the platform with the judges, his fiery red hair blowing in the wind as he talked animatedly, his voice amplified by a *Sonorous*. "As we know from the earlier judging, banners will count for one point each. The Slytherin contestant, also known as Harry Black, was the only one to complete the Gryffindor Task, collecting all eight banners. The rest of the points will come from the four judges, bringing the maximum amount of points to forty eight."

The first judge was a woman, the Hufflepuff, and although she looked stern, she actually gave a slight smile as she shot her number high into the sky from the tip of her wand. Harry's heart jumped into his throat when he saw the number, smiling widely at the judge. It was a ten.

"Congratulations," she spoke. "I'm highly looking forward to the rest of the Tasks to see if you'll complete them with as much ease as you did this one."

Harry inclined his head in thanks, and after the applause settled, turned his gaze to the man sitting next to her. He was the Gryffindor alumni, and he had a huge smile on his face. He was older, with glasses and a reclining hairline, and his expression didn't change as he repeated the spell.

"I took off two points," said the judge, "only because you risked your life running for the banners instead of ensuring the dragon was down."

The judge next to him snorted; he was young with streaks of red in his hair and had high aristocratic cheekbones. He couldn't be much older than Harry. "Wouldn't you say it's because of that he's the sure winner of the Task? After all, only an idiotic Gryffindor would risk his life to ensure victory."

The second judge frowned at his words, looking insulted. "Excuse me, Rosier, you're letting your bias show."

"We cast the spell, remember?" said Evan Rosier, rolling his eyes, even as a smirk played on his lips. "Anyway," he paused, shooting the number ten into the air. "Black deserves full points."

"I agree with Rosier," said the last judge, also known as the Minister for Magic, Harold Minchum. He was known to be a hard-liner, a stern Minister that stuck to the rules foremost. He was a Ravenclaw to the bone. "Black did the best, and should be rewarded for it." He shot the number ten into the sky,

"Wow," said the host, drawing out the word, "Black ends up with forty-six points, the highest amongst our four contestants."

At the end of his words, there was a loud cheer from the spectators, and the host couldn't keep a smile from showing up on his face. "And that concludes Gryffindor's Task! Thanks for coming, everyone!"

Harry turned his attention to the board behind the judges. James was behind him, with forty points. Lockhart was second with thirty-eight, and Bones had thirty-seven.

"First place," said Riddle proudly, patting him softly on the shoulder to get his attention. Harry smiled up at his Intended, about to say something when he heard footsteps fast approaching. He let out a grunt in surprise when arms wrapped up around him, the owner of them squealing in happiness. Riddle actually chuckled, inclined his head, and departed without another word.

"You did so good!" said Regulus, finally withdrawing his arms.

Severus, only a few steps behind Regulus, scoffed when Harry turned around, his mouth upturned. "I, on the other hand, would like to know why you acted like such a bloody Gryffindor. Risking your life for a *game*."

Harry laughed, tugging Severus forward so he could sling his arm around his shoulders. "Aw, were you worried, Sev?"

"Get off me," hissed Severus, but he made no attempt to move away. He must have worried Severus more than the Slytherin was letting on.

"Celebration tonight!" said the seventh-year prefect who had come to join their little circle. "Already got permission from Riddle as long as we keep it somewhat quiet."

Harry smiled, nodding to show he agreed, and laughed gleefully when other Slytherins came by to congratulate him.

He was first in the running, beating his twin brother at his *own* Task, and his Intended had saved his life.

What a day to be alive.

A/N: I understand that some people are frustrated with the lack of a confession scene! And I realized that I may have messed up by outlining it not to happen till after the tournament...but please don't be too frustrated! I have a really good thing planned for them, and it's only a few more chapters until the confession happens, so please be patient! I'm really having a blast writing this, and I really don't want to speed through the main parts just so they could be together :(just know that they're meant to be, and just because I'm writing these parts now doesn't mean they won't be in love later on.

Huge thanks to MTKiseki on ao3 for the wonderful, wonderful ideas on the tournament!

And always, thank you SOOO much for reading through this. I know it's a lot of words, so it makes me happy people will actually read it since it's all headcanon on my fantasy so...thank you again and again! :) (next update will probably be in a month or so since each chapter is SO long ugh xD) would people like shorter chapters and faster updates or long chapters and slower updates?? because each chapter is 10k+ and im wondering if I should change it back to 5k xD.

The Second and Third Task

Chapter Notes

Warning: There's some kissing coming up! I realized I don't have to dither for so long because legal age in Harry Potter world is 17 so... :p just a warning!

Harry buried his face into his hands, his eyesight blurry because of how long he had been cooped up inside of the library. It was nearing midnight, but Champions had the explicit approval to stay inside the library as long as they wanted, even if Madam Pince had already left.

He normally wouldn't have sacrificed sleep to continue researching because he knew how unhealthy that was. But he also knew that he didn't have time to waste.

Because he had failed Ravenclaw's Task.

He hadn't expected to. It wasn't supposed to be difficult. He had hardly worried about it until the actual Task happened.

He woke up on the day of the Task, head fuzzy and magicked, to Riddle straddling him in bed, and Riddle's long fingers weaving themselves through his hair, tugging him closer to bring their lips together.

He had been overwhelmed enough to let the older man do so, enjoying their chaste kiss for about a minute before pushing away.

Some part of his mind knew that something was wrong, but the Confused part of his mind wanted to believe it was truth. So even though he knew something was off, he ignored it, continuing to enjoy the domestic life he had with Riddle.

It was a tricky Task. Ravenclaws valued factual evidence over everything else; when faced with everything they wanted, the jarring discrepancies of the world should be enough to jolt them out of it.

And it *had*. He had overthrown the Confundus Charm as soon as he saw Riddle transfigure a piece of wood into an apple, eating the fruit delicately with small bites. He only raised an eyebrow when Harry cried out in alarm. Because in the real world, it wasn't acceptable to transfigure or conjure up food because after the spells' effects ran out, it changed back to its original state. Which meant that Riddle would have bitten up pieces of wood inside of him.

Riddle only stared blankly at him as he explained, and just patted him softly on the arm and asked if he was alright after he finished talking. Harry caught on then, and as the time passed, he caught onto other strange occurrences. Facts that didn't add up with the laws of magic.

But he ignored them, because he was too caught up playing house with Riddle to actually find a way out. There was no War happening, no feud with his twin, no nosy guardians or friends; it was just the two of them, in a house Riddle bought for them. It was domestic, really, and Harry had no intention of leaving it.

When he was finally jolted out of the Task when the time limit ran out, he blinked fuzzy eyes open to the sight of the four judges, sitting calmly in front of him.

He had flushed, knowing he had failed, but more worried about the fact that they had seen his innermost desire. Of course, they hadn't been able to; it would have invaded his privacy after all. But he had *failed* because he hadn't found a way out; he had stayed inside while the other three Champions had easily bested the Task.

Fortunately, they still awarded points for other things, and because Harry *had* noticed the discrepancies, he was given a point for each one he noticed. He hadn't missed any, and it was only thanks to that he was still in the running to be first. Lockhart had gotten out in less than fifteen minutes, leaving him in first place. Harry was second, thanks to the massive lead he had from Gryffindor's Task. His brother was only a point behind him; Bones was tied with James.

So, overall, it wasn't *that* bad, but he was still pretty distraught over the whole thing. Because he had *failed*, and he couldn't live with that. Because everything was riding on him, and he would rather die than let his Intended down.

Which was why he was still studying in the library even though everyone else had already gone to sleep.

It was all in preparation for Hufflepuff's Task. The Task was different from the other two Tasks in that it took place over a month instead of a single day. Hufflepuffs were known for their hard work after all. Champions were each given a designated spot on the Quidditch Pitch, heavily warded so that only the Champion and their Head of the House could enter without consequences. Champions were expected to build up a fortress that could withstand any assault, and it was an open enough threat that Harry was left reeling on what to build.

There were so many different types of defense he could work toward. He had already designed the wards and runes he would put in place over the duration of the month, but other than that, he was at a loss. Because he wasn't sure which building material to go with to build a fortress and what shape to go with, and he was still skeptical on relying on *just* magic as a defense. It was screwing with him, the open interpretation of the Task; he had been so casual about Ravenclaw's and that was what made him fail last time.

And to top it all off, he was still having dreams about Riddle's lips on his. It wasn't something that was easily forgotten, and it had surprised him somewhat how fiercely he *wanted* the illusion to be true. To live in a world without a War, to live in a world where his brother and his Intended could actually get along...it was all too good to be actually real. But he still wanted it. He wanted Riddle's kisses; he had always dreamt about them, but it had always only been imagination. After the Task, it had become something *real*, something *tangible*, and it was all he could do to focus on Hufflepuff's Task.

He let out a frustrated noise in the deserted library, digging his nails into his palm in order to bring himself back to focus. He couldn't afford to waste anymore time.

There was a quiet cough, startling him out of his frantic speed-reading.

"Black?" asked a male voice, and Harry resisted the urge to groan, not wanting to give up time for research to talk to someone else.

"Yes?" he said, rather curtly, and finally looked up from the text in front of him. Lockhart stood in front of him, a few books cradled in his arms, and a hesitant smile on his face.

"Can I sit with you?"

Harry blinked, giving a little shake of his head in order to wake himself up further. "I don't know if that's a good idea," he ended up saying, and scowled when Lockhart sat down anyway, using one of his hands to gently push one of Harry's textbooks to the side.

"Nonsense," said Lockhart, "It's been long overdue, anyway."

"What's been?" he said, warily, after eyeing the book in front of him with wistfulness. He had been on the cusp of something, he was certain. If only he had a few more minutes alone...

"Alliances, of course. After Hufflepuff's Task is Slytherin's and that Task has never really changed throughout the years."

"A battle royale," he offered up freely, because he had an inkling of why Lockhart was there. "You want my help."

"Basically," said Lockhart. "It *is* your Task, after all."

"And?" he prompted, tilting his head to the side in a way he knew brought out the color in his green eyes.

Lockhart looked confused, "Well, I'm not going to partner with Potter. I think we all know how ill-equipped he will be to deal with Slytherin's Task. He's the most Gryffindor of them all."

"True," he conceded, even though he hated anyone talking bad of his little brother. "But no one put you up to this? You're coming to me because you wanted to?"

Lockhart gave a casual shrug, "No? I mean, yes? I'm not sure what you're asking, mate."

He paused, mind whirling. He was almost certain that Riddle put the Ravenclaw up to this. After his dismal performance in Ravenclaw's Task and Lockhart subsequently becoming first, there was no way that Riddle hadn't threatened the poor boy. But Lockhart's eyes looked honest, and there was more confusion in his features than anything else. And if Riddle did approach him, it would be easier to ask Riddle himself than to cause a scene with Lockhart.

"Okay," he said, quietly. "I guess we'll make a pretty good team."

Lockhart beamed, "That's the spirit." He stood abruptly, holding his hand out for Harry to shake. Harry obliged, and ended up smiling back. "Now, it's almost midnight, and I'm sure we can continue this tomorrow. See you later, Black."

He was off before Harry could get in another word, and he let out a soft sigh when he realized that Lockhart had left his books on the table. He waved a hand, his magic enveloping the books and floating them up into the air. Just when he was about to send them off to the shelves, one of the titles caught his eye.

He sent the other books to their rightful places, staring at the remaining book's title.

A brief history of Herbology.

He blinked, wondering just why Lockhart would be looking into *plants* as a defense over everything else. When he had to worry about things like what building material to use and whatnot. He scoffed, wondering just what he had gotten himself into by allying with someone he didn't know at all, when his magic gave out because he was distracted, dropping the book onto the table.

It opened up to a gruesome depiction of what looked like a human baby with roots as hair. Mandrakes.

He grimaced at the sight, but when he caught the word 'fatal' in its description, he paused, scanning the text more thoroughly.

He couldn't use the mature version obviously, because it could end up killing people, but the younger version simply rendered people unconscious.

Reinvigorated, Harry started to flip through the rest of the pages, excitedly making notes of the plants that seemed dangerous, but not fatal. There were multiple plants with venom that would paralyze any predator unfortunate enough to get close and there were even some plants that could be modified to deal with different types of magic.

He couldn't help the brilliant smile that spread across his face, and he grabbed his notebook, his quill making loud scratching sounds as he designed what he wanted his fortress to look like.

That night, when he went to sleep, the frantic nervousness that had encompassed his heart since his failure at Ravenclaw's Task had disappeared.

He was spreading dragon dung on the soil surrounding his Venomous Tentacula when he felt his Intended's magic.

He blinked, sitting back on his haunches to glance over at the entrance. His fortress was more like a greenhouse than anything else; it was clear in order to let the sunlight in for the plants he was raising. He wasn't worried about the glass breaking or the material being unable to withstand magical attacks because with the plants he was growing, the chances of a magical attack actually *reaching* the fortress was close to zero.

The Venomous Tentacula in front of him was extremely dangerous. He had a store of the antidote for the bite in case one of the judges got bitten while testing his fortress. He didn't want anyone to die after all. The plant was notorious for its strong defense; it used its vines to keep predators away and also had the ability to fire spiky spore-like balls from their mouths at their targets.

Devil's snare, the plant that could constrict or strangle anything that touched it, was hidden underneath the ground leading to the fortress. The most common defense to the plant was either light or fire, so he had a rune there that would capture any signs of fire the moment it was lighted. The other way was to relax so that the snare would stop constriction, but the offender would fall into the pit he designed *anyway*, so the defense was practically foolproof.

Mandrakes littered the front of the seemingly harmless greenhouse. At any sign of disturbance, they would be pulled out magically, exposing them to fresh air and startling screams out of them, rendering anyone who heard them unconscious.

It hadn't been easy or cheap to collect the plants he wanted. It had cost a lot to buy different kinds of plants and try to breed them to create a plant more suited for his needs. He was lucky that Riddle had authorized him usage of his Gringotts account for the tournament. He had to speed the plants' growing process along, and it was only by coating them generously with most of his magic to get them to grow and interact. But the customized plants were only one part of his defense; he was only experimenting to get extra points, most of his defense was already covered by existing plants.

He needed plants that could soak up magic; plants that could somehow drain the magic out of anyone it touched. It had taken him the better part of the month to finally breed it. It was a cross between a plant that drained people's magic when near them and a plant that had the tendency to cling to victims without the victims knowing.

It would be useful for the war as well, and he was delighted with the outcome. He had one of the vines wrapped around his wrist right now, letting the plant drain his magic to grow and for him to test its efficiency.

"Sir?" he called out, because it passed a few minutes and his Intended's magic still wasn't moving.

He felt Riddle's magic flare brightly for a few seconds, and then Riddle stalked in, looking irritated.

Harry jumped to his feet at Riddle's expression, making his way over to his Intended who was standing near the entrance, brooding. "What happened?"

"Your mandrakes," said Riddle, and that was explanation enough.

Harry couldn't stop the bubble of laughter that filtered out of him at Riddle's petulant look, unable to stifle it even when Riddle cut him a dangerous look. It was just the *image* of it that was setting him off, the crying babies surrounding the Dark Lord and threatening to render him unconscious. The thought of babies being the ones to defeat the Dark Lord was simply a hilarious one to contemplate. However, the mandrakes were still young, so their effects were weak, simply an annoyance rather than an actual threat. "Don't like babies, sir?" he asked when his laughter settled.

"They're hardly babies, Harry," scowled Riddle, crossing his arms in annoyance. "Can't they tell friend from foe?"

"They're plants," said Harry, dryly. "Underground. I'm sure they don't know what's going on at all times of their short life."

Riddle narrowed his eyes at Harry, and Harry laughed again at his Intended's expression, reaching out to pat Riddle's cheek with affection. He paused when his hand was halfway there, realizing what he was doing was extremely out of character and extremely *strange*. He withdrew his hand quickly, sure that his cheeks were slightly heated, and brushed past Riddle to get to the outside of the greenhouse where his mandrakes were waiting.

His time in Ravenclaw's Task was still messing with him. He saw Riddle and he saw a partner, a partner that he had been with all his life and loved him just as fiercely as he loved him. It was difficult to reconcile the two, especially since he still didn't want to believe it was a fantasy.

He put all thoughts of that out of his head though, using his magic to spell the Mandrakes back into the safety of their holes. He stayed out a second later, saturating the Mandrakes with his magic and using generous spell castings of *Herbivicus* to speed the growing along.

When he went back into the greenhouse, Riddle was studying the plant that Harry had just bred, his brows furrowed in concentration. When Harry sidled up to him, Riddle glanced over at him, looking thoughtful. "I don't recognize this plant."

Harry smiled, reaching out and taking one of his Intended's hand into his own. Riddle blinked, but didn't pull away, letting Harry bring his hand closer to plant and watching curiously as the plant's vine shot out, curling around Riddle's wrist.

Riddle let out a sound of wonder, "It's taking my magic."

Harry beamed, "It was quite difficult to breed, sir, but imagine the possibilities."

"Does it have to be stationary to do this?"

Harry shook his head, pulling Riddle's hand back until the vine detached itself from the main plant. He lifted his other wrist, showing the vine on it to Riddle. "I'm planning on placing it on the judges when they first start to test the fortress. When they're taking down the wards and everything. After all, they're definitely going to have a Ward-Breaker with them when they test the fortress, but an Herbology-specialist is highly unlikely."

Riddle nodded at his words, his eyes still trained on the vine wrapped around his wrist. "Simply brilliant, Harry," he breathed, softly.

"Thank you, sir," he said, graciously, before continuing. "The magical drain is slow, right now, but I'm hoping that as I breed it with more plants it'll speed up the process. There's another plant I was thinking of, one that amplifies magical effects to a degree, that I want to try."

"And how much is that one?" asked Riddle.

Harry gave a sheepish smile, "It won't make *that* much of a dent in your Gringotts account?"

Riddle gave a long sigh, but he sounded more fond than anything else, the sigh hardly doing anything to Harry's nerves. Harry just smiled at the sound, and blushed furiously when Riddle murmured, "Fine, fine. What's mine is yours, after all."

"What?" he asked, sure he was bright red. "What do you mean by that?"

"You're my Heir," said Riddle, automatically, and he looked like he was going to continue when he trailed off, their eyes meeting as Riddle furrowed his brows in confusion. Harry willed his blush to go away, but he was sure it didn't work when Riddle just looked more and more baffled.

"You've been off since Ravenclaw's Task," said Riddle, quietly, as if he dared to speak any louder Harry would spook. "Is something the matter, Harry?"

Harry shook his head, "Of course not, sir, it's just the pressure. I failed the second task."

Riddle's eyebrows rose, "You're still second. You hardly failed it."

"But I couldn't leave the illusion, sir. It's embarrassing."

"The illusion," started Riddle, slowly, "had something to do with me, didn't it? It'll explain why you've been so nervous around me."

"I haven't been nervous!" he protested.

"Harry, you nearly killed one of your students when I dropped in unannounced last Tuesday."

"That wasn't my fault," he started to protest, but Riddle cut him off.

"You spilled your goblet all over Prince when I said good morning during breakfast just the other morning."

"You startled me," he said, weakly, but he knew his protests were falling on deaf ears.

"And you nearly touched my face a few minutes ago. Are you going to tell me or am I going to have to read it out of your mind again?" Riddle's tone was light, but his eyes were anything but, and his mouth was in a determined line. Riddle wasn't going to take anything but the truth as an answer.

"You said you wouldn't do that anymore." Riddle just tilted his head at his answer, staying silent, and Harry knew he had to come up with something fast. "I'm seventeen," he started, and Riddle nodded.

"Yes, Harry, I believe we established that many times already."

Harry couldn't help the glare he sent toward his Intended, and Riddle had the decency to look sheepish. "I'm seventeen and I've never been kissed."

Riddle startled, his eyes growing wide. "*That's* the thing bothering you?" He seemed pleased though, if the smile that was growing on his face was anything to go by.

"Are you ever going to let me finish?" he asked, exasperated.

"No, because you're being foolish," said Riddle. He leaned forward, tapping Harry's necklace where it was outlined underneath his shirt. "You have an Intended, Harry, surely you don't have to be worrying about love when you're *only* seventeen."

"It's not like I know for sure I'm going to find them!" he protested, even though his Intended was standing right in front of him. "It's just, I'm a teenager, and I have hormones and," he lowered

his voice, his eyes going downward to look at his feet rather than at Riddle's face, "you're just very attractive, sir."

There was a profound silence after his words, and when Harry looked back up, Riddle looked thrown. His eyes were wide and his mouth pursed open in slight shock. "But that's all," he hurriedly assured Riddle, "I mean, I may have fantasized about us kissing and all, but it's only ever been that. It's not like I'm in love with you or anything."

At the end of his words, he covered his face with his hands; he didn't want to see Riddle's expression change, didn't want to see disgust coat his Intended's expression.

He startled when he felt a gentle touch on his hands, and he obediently lowered them, and blinked again in shock when he saw how close Riddle was to him. "Sir?" he breathed out, and Riddle's expression looked fond.

"I'm still your Professor," said Riddle. "And I'm older than you. I surely shouldn't be encouraging all of this."

"All of *this*?" he asked, heart beating erratically.

"Your little crush on me," said Riddle, looking like the cat who had just gotten the cream. "Or have I misinterpreted your words?"

"I don't have a crush on you. You're completely wrong, sir," he said, a tad petulantly, but Riddle just chuckled, obviously not believing a word he said.

"And *surely* your Intended wouldn't mind if you got some experience first, right?" he paused, chuckling, a sly smirk on his face at his words. Riddle paused, looking as if he was waiting for Harry to say something, but when Harry stayed silent, just shrugged and pressed even closer. "I would very much like to kiss you right now, Harry, if that's alright."

Instead of answering, Harry moved forward first, pressing a chaste kiss on Riddle's lips. He felt as if his heart was going to burst at the contact, just the knowledge that right now he was *kissing* Riddle was enough to make him feel as if he was flying, as if nothing could hurt him. Riddle responded immediately, kissing him back and biting gently at his lower lip, letting out a sound of triumph when Harry's mouth parted in shock. Riddle pressed his tongue in, mapping the areas of Harry's mouth with ease and sending sparks of pleasure through Harry's spine as the kiss deepened and continued.

It felt like forever before Riddle was pulling away, and Harry opened his eyes to the sound of his Intended chuckling softly. "You look like a right mess," said Riddle, smirking, and Harry blushed, using his hands to smooth out the wrinkles in his shirt in an attempt to look less disheveled.

"No thanks to you, sir," he retorted with.

"I think it's time you stop calling me sir when we're alone," said Riddle, thoughtfully. "After all, we did just kiss."

He blinked, "Then what would I call you?"

Riddle took a step forward until they were in each other's personal spaces again, his head tilting forward until his lips were ghosting against Harry's.

"Call me Tom," he whispered, and then he was kissing Harry for the second time.

"You alright there?" asked Lockhart, flipping a page in the large text in front of him. He didn't seem to be really waiting for an answer though, his eyes scanning the text instead of looking over at Harry.

Harry blinked up from where he was casually reading up on different types of wards, "Why wouldn't I be?"

"You haven't turned a page for the past ten minutes," Lockhart pointed out.

"Oh," said Harry. He had been caught up thinking about *Tom*, and he had already finished his fortress days ago. He was only really in the library to research some more on wards just in case he missed something. Lockhart had joined him after Madam Pince had left, as he had been doing for the past week or so, and Harry had gotten used to his presence.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Lockhart, patiently. "I've been told that I'm a good listener."

"You?" he asked, a bit baffled.

"That's rude," said Lockhart, but he didn't seem offended. "Contrary to popular belief, I'm not the social peacock everyone seems to think I am."

"But," he started to protest, and Lockhart sighed.

"Okay, I admit, I may be a bit louder than normal people. But hey, that's part of my charm."

"Charm, right," he said, dryly.

Lockhart didn't seem to notice his tone, just looking up from his text and beaming sunnily at Harry. "So, who's the lucky girl?"

"What?"

"I'll recognize that look anywhere. You're in love."

"I'm not," he protested, but when Lockhart just sent him a knowing smile, he gave a soft sigh. "I really don't want to talk about it."

"Who else are you going to talk about it to? Prince? Sorry to say, but I doubt he'll be much help."

He scowled, but inside, he was thinking about Lockhart's offer. Because the thing is, despite how knowledgeable he was in some matters, he was completely lost when it come to matters of the heart. And Lockhart was right, Severus wouldn't be much help if he told him about the newest development in Riddle and his relationship. He would simply claim it was true love and

that they were meant to be, and that information was *completely* useless to him. Because it wasn't true, no matter how much he wanted it to be.

"You won't talk to anyone about it, right?"

Lockhart grinned, "That's my boy."

"I'm not your boy," he scowled, and Lockhart just grinned back at him.

"You're awfully uptight, Black. Do you want me to swear on my magic or something?"

"Nothing *that* drastic," he said.

"Good, because I think even *that* would have been too much for you. Slytherins, I swear."

Harry rolled his eyes, wiggling his fingers and casting a privacy charm around them. Lockhart stiffened, probably feeling the foreign magic settling around them. "There's someone. He's older, and it's not like a conventional relationship really. It's kinda weird? I mean, he kissed me the other night, but it's more like a lesson than anything else? Because I've never kissed anyone before."

"Calm down," said Lockhart, but he was smiling, reaching out to pat Harry on the shoulder. "It's okay, I'm not going to judge you, though I am somewhat surprised you're still a virgin."

Harry flushed, his cheeks heated, "What? Why?"

"You're kinda the talk of the school," said Lockhart, but there was no ill intent behind his words. "All the girls and boys want you."

"You're not, uhm, a virgin?"

Lockhart threw his head back and laughed, and because the library was deserted no one came to scold them. "Merlin! You're seventeen, aren't you? Of course I'm not a virgin."

"Oh," said Harry, feeling completely out of his depth. "Then you found your Intended?"

"You can lay with other people who's not meant to be yours," said Lockhart. "It's not as if it's frowned upon, you know. And besides, my Mark's gone." At Harry's shocked look, he continued. "It's not exactly a secret, so I don't mind telling you. Just woke up one day and it was gone. No one knows why, and my magic's still intact, so it's not like my Intended died. But enough about me, we're talking about you."

He wanted to ask, but Lockhart's expression was guarded so he thought better about it. He took the subject change for what it was, figuring if Lockhart could be so candid with him, he could afford to do the same. "We've known each other for a while, and I've always thought he was really handsome. So when he kissed me, I kinda rolled with it?" It was a little off the mark since he really did like Riddle, but he didn't want to give too many of his secrets away.

"Oh," said Lockhart, sounding as if he figured something out. "Oh," he repeated, looking somewhat surprised. "You really don't have to worry about it. He likes you back. And may I say, I always thought you were straight. Never really pinned you as queer."

"What?" he blinked, and then shook his head. "I don't think you know who I'm talking about."

Lockhart nodded, "'Course I don't. You don't have to affirm anything, Black. But don't worry, he's experienced. He'll take good care of you."

"Er, I *really* doubt we're thinking of the same person."

"It's okay," said Lockhart, miming zipping his mouth shut. "I won't tell a soul. We're good friends, you know."

Harry sighed, "Who are you thinking about?"

"Slytherin, just graduated, long blonde hair? We had an affair last year, you know. The things that boy can do with his tongue," he paused, winking rather salaciously at Harry, "I don't think you have to be worried at all."

"You're really off the mark," said Harry, but Lockhart just smiled genially at him.

"If you need tips, you just have to ask. That's what a friends-with-benefits thing is, after all."

Harry sighed, wondering why he thought Lockhart would be any help at all. Though he *was* a little surprised that Lucius and Lockhart had a thing, he was more annoyed at the fact that Lockhart thought the two of them were together. "Friends-with-benefits?"

"You *do* know about sex, right?"

"Of course," he scowled. "I'm not *that* innocent."

"Could've fooled me," said Lockhart, and when Harry glared at him, simply held up his hands up in surrender. "Okay, okay, don't be too mad. It's just a relationship with benefits you know. Like sexually without any feelings getting in the way."

"And," he paused, still feeling completely out of his depth, "what if I want feelings *to* get in the way?"

"Then just talk to him. You're both adults, you know. Don't have to keep tiptoeing around each other."

"But what if he doesn't like me back? What if it ruins everything?"

"In my experience, if you have feelings for him and continue to fool around with him like this, it's going to hurt more in the long run. But if you think you don't have a chance and you think you can take it, then why not roll with it? I mean, you clearly need the experience, and sometimes feelings result when you continue to sleep with each other."

"And this happened to you before?"

Lockhart paused, and for a second looked wistful, before nodding. "Yeah," he said, quietly. "Yeah, it did."

"I'm sorry," said Harry, and Lockhart just shook his head.

"Nah, don't be. It was a long time ago. Anyway, if you need any *real* advice," he waggled his eyebrows at Harry, "don't hesitate to ask. Big brother Gilderoy here will teach you all you need to know."

"Right," he said, dryly, rolling his eyes and dismissing the privacy charm with a wave of his hand.

There were six people testing his fortress. There were the four judges, all known respectively for their skill in magic, one Ward-Breaker as he had guessed, and one Healer, who could hopefully help them out of any tricky situations.

He wished them luck, letting them know cheekily that he had antidotes for them in case they needed it. The Gryffindor glared at him, obviously still feeling some House Rivalry from his earlier years, but Evan Rosier threw his head back and laughed, patting him companionably on the shoulder as the six of them got ready to take down his fortress. Harold, the Minister, awkwardly let him know how nice of it was him to ensure no one would take permanent harm, while the Hufflepuff judge rolled her eyes, mouthing to Harry, "I'm sorry for this awkward one." Harry stifled his laughter, sharing a secret smile with the Hufflepuff judge, before moving aside to let them in.

He wasn't going to follow them, but magic allowed the Tournament makers to project a image into the air, broadcasted from down below. He was supposed to sit near the fortress just in case something went horribly wrong, which he was somewhat bitter about because he wanted to sit with his friends to calm his nerves, but he figured they were somewhat correct in their way of thinking.

He sat there, watching the screen while biting his lips nervously.

All six of them had their wands out, dismantling his wards with ease thanks to the young Ward-Breaker with them. He didn't mind though, because unbeknownst to them, his creation was attaching itself to their ankles. He couldn't see it because the image wasn't focusing on it, but he believed in his plans and knew they would do what he wanted them to do.

Once they were in, they proceeded slowly, and he grinned when he saw the Hufflepuff, the one who took charge and was leading the procession, shriek and disappear underground. The Healer behind her stopped immediately, but a long blue vine caught her ankle anyway, dragging her down. Rosier, who was third, cast a complicated charm, sealing the hole and preventing the Devil's Snare from taking any more victims.

Harry scowled, knowing that if he failed the Task, it would be because of Rosier. Rosier was already rearranging the procession, making them surround the Ward-Breaker in an attempt to keep her safe. It made sense though, especially since they didn't know if there were any Wards left.

They continued, now more cautious. They had let down their guard when they had taken down his Wards; Harry had purposely made them with horrible spellwork, knowing they would scoff and look down on him. He had made the weak point easy to find and easy to dismantle so they wouldn't notice the vines wrapping around them.

They triggered the Mandrakes next, and the Minister dropped like a stone, only held up by the Gryffindor as the Ward-Breaker and Rosier cast a strong silencing charm. Because they were silenced, Rosier and the Ward-Breaker made quick work of the Mandrakes, forcing them back into their holes. They dithered over the Minister for a while, casting a series of spells to make him wake up. The Minister stirred, but before they could continue, Harry's Venomous Tentacula attacked, one of its spiky balls hitting the Ward-Breaker directly in the back. She flew, landing directly on the Minister, and Rosier spun, his cloak fanning out as he brandished his wand in front of him.

He cast Diffindo, cutting the approaching arm in half, and the Gryffindor followed suit, casting the same spell on a different part of the plant. Harry winced as he saw his plant get decimated, but couldn't help a slow smirk when his other one attacked, wrapping itself around the Gryffindor and getting a nasty bite off.

Rosier froze, his face full of horror, before he reacted quickly, slicing the offending plant in half before hurrying over to the downed Gryffindor. And promptly startled when a protected potion vial floated down toward him, set in place by one of Harry's more complicated spells. Rosier nodded in thanks, before pouring the vial down his fellow judge's throat.

The Gryffindor didn't stir, but Rosier stood anyway, knowing he had to continue with the Task. He looked determined and grim, approaching the door of the fortress with small steps. If any of the testers reached the inside of the fortress, then the Champion forfeited points.

He bit his lip worriedly, watching as Rosier ran straight into his last defense, a complicated Ward that would impede his forward path with an invisible wall. It wasn't unbreakable though, so Harry crossed his fingers, hoping that his plant had enough time to work.

Rosier was just about to do the last flick of his wrist, when he paused, his eyes wide in disbelief. He flicked his wrist, but nothing happened, and Rosier stood there in shock.

He placed his hands on the invisible wall, and when he realized there was no way to get through it without magic, threw his head back and laughed gleefully. "Simply brilliant," he said as he motioned the tournament planners to come get him and the rest of the downed testers. "I have no more magic left," he said out loud for the audience's sake, and it only felt like a few moments later before he was approaching Harry.

"How?" he questioned.

He knew he wouldn't be able to keep his creation a secret, so he didn't hesitate much to tap his own ankle to prompt Rosier to glance down with wide eyes. Rosier lifted his trousers, gaping at the small yellow vine that was wrapped securely around his ankle. "It drains magic?"

Harry nodded, "Bred it myself."

Rosier let out a low whistle, "You have my vote, Black."

He ambled away, still grinning madly, and Harry just shook his head at the sight, even as his own smile occupied his face.

The judges looked worse for wear when they were seated at the judges platform. To make it fair, they tested one fortress a day; the order had been decided by their ranking and the amount

of time had been adjusted by letting Lockhart know about the fortress a day before Harry did. That way all Champions had an equal thirty days to create their fortress.

Rosier was still grinning, but the Gryffindor looked murderous, the angry gash on his neck serving as a reminder of the reason why. "Oh lighten up," said the Hufflepuff. "It's not like you were touched by slimy blue vines."

"Excuse me?" said the Gryffindor. "Do you see this?" he motioned at his neck, and she just laughed in response.

"I didn't get to see much," said the Hufflepuff judge, "but after viewing the memory, it's quite obvious you were ingenious in the building of your fortress. However, you limited yourself by not making it dangerous enough, so it's an eight for me." She shot the number into the air.

"Not dangerous enough?" said the Gryffindor, sounding scandalized. "Just for that," he paused, shooting the number ten into the air. "I nearly died," he said, "so against my better judgment, full points from me."

"I don't think anyone needs an explanation from me," said Rosier, lazily flicking his wand and spelling the number ten.

The Minister for Magic still looked groggy, and his speech was slurred. "The fortress itself wasn't built to withstand assault, and I think it was dangerous to leave the defense to solely plants. If we had one more person, we would have gotten through." He shot the number nine into the air.

He wasn't sure what to make of his final score, especially since the other Champions' scores wouldn't be released until after Bones' fortress was tested. But when the Host let out a whoop of joy, he smiled.

Even if he wasn't first place, Slytherin's Task was next, and there was no way he was going to lose that one.

A/N: As always, thanks so much for all the wonderful comments! It really makes me so happy, and inspires me like no other :p. I'm 5k into the next one, so expect that to come by either next Monday or Friday.

Also, if you think Riddle is a little OOC because he kissed Harry, please wait! I'll explain everything in the next next chapter :) After the last Task is done (next chapter) we'll be moving onto the Confession scene, then the beginning of the War, and then a time skip to age Harry a bit more, to the end of the War and then the fight with the Muggles! Also, it'll be just kissing until Harry is older. i've thought long and hard about it and anything sexually explicit will be uploaded in a different story to keep this story's rating low ^^.

Love you all, and thank you so so much for all the comments! I feel like I'm writing a fantasy book and I'm still amazed that you guys are all willing to read this! :D

The Last Task

Chapter Summary

Italicized means speaking Parseltongue! and, don't know if I emphasized before, but I don't like adding the sss's that some people do ^^ so let's just pretend that I did and that they are hissing!

Harry Black Revealed to be Tom Riddle's Heir

By Rita Skeeter

Even if you haven't been keeping up with Hogwarts news, you should at least know who Harry Black is. The scandal that happened just two years ago was unheard of. To recap, James Potter, Black's younger twin, was chosen as Heir to the Potter family when they were both just eleven, a scandalous decision since Black is a few minutes older than Potter. Black was sorted into Slytherin just a couple of months later, which was a horror to the staunchly Light family. In a matter of suspicious circumstances, Black was disowned from the Potter family in his fifth year, leaving the father in a coma.

However, despite all these circumstances against him, Harry Black was chosen as one of the champions in Hogwarts' Founder Tournament. Since then, he has been blowing the competition out of the water. He glided easily through Gryffindor's Task, even getting past a dragon, and showed his creative side during Hufflepuff's Task when he utilized a series of different magical plants to create the strongest fortress out there (even creating a new species of plants that officials have already approached him about).

But just when you thought the wizard couldn't get any more amazing, Harry Black is apparently Tom Riddle's Heir as well as becoming Heir to the Black family after being adopted by Dorea Black and Charlus Potter. Quite strange considering his parents decided to pass him over as Heir.

Tom Riddle is head of Slytherin in Hogwarts, but he's also been a widely-known presence in the wizarding world ever since he graduated from Hogwarts. He was revealed to be the Heir of Slytherin when he was still in school, and since then he's not been far from the spotlight. Riddle is the Defense against Dark Arts Professor and for the past years, has never had a student fail either their OWLS or NEWTs under his teaching. Many students and alumni consider Riddle to be their favorite professor. Beyond shaping our younger generation, Riddle has also submitted a fair number of journals to the top political magazines and to Potions committees worldwide. There are rumors that Dumbledore is considering Riddle for the position of Headmaster when he retires.

Black, just like Riddle, has come from unfortunate circumstances, and yet has risen despite the hardships. Besting his peers in every subject and now competing in the famous Founder's Tournament, Harry has proven himself again and again with his extraordinary magical strength

and his quick thinking. Riddle's love life is left unknown; so we can only be glad that he has finally chosen an Heir.

"Love life?" snickered Harry, setting the Daily Prophet down in front of him. "I'm surprised you let them print that."

Tom sipped at his tea, staring at Harry over the rim of his mug. When he placed it down, he had an amused smile on his face. "And do tell, why are you so surprised, Harry?"

"Well, it just seems embarrassing, that's all," he said, after a short pause.

"Nothing to be embarrassed about," said Tom. "Are *you* embarrassed by the lack of your own love life?"

Harry huffed, a pink tint on his cheeks. "I thought we agreed to never talk about that again."

Tom chuckled, looking amused, before changing the subject. "I invited Bellatrix Black over. She's my right hand, after all, and a perfect candidate to tutor you in dueling. You'll need the extra practice in Slytherin's Task."

"Have you gotten more information about the Task?"

Tom scowled, his small smile slipping off of his face at his question. "My contacts have been suspiciously silent on this end. They claim it's because Slytherin's Task is overwhelmingly the same, which is *true* to some extent, but the lack of info is worrisome. Dumbledore has been calm throughout the whole Tournament, so it's obvious he has something planned for this one."

"But it's a Task geared for Slytherin, right? Doesn't that mean James will have a hard time?"

Tom shot him a pointed look, "*You* got first in Gryffindor's Task. It doesn't mean much that it's meant for Slytherins. Especially since the Task is so difficult. The four of you will be dropped off in an enclosed space, filled with who knows what. There may be Magical Creatures and there'll definitely be no means of survival unless you make it. Which is another thing to study," he waved a hand, a book floating from one of Tom's bookshelves and landing in front of him. "It'll teach you what's safe to eat and what's not. It tests resourcefulness after all, and you can't win or replenish magic if your body is malnourished."

"You wanted this Task to be last. Doesn't that still mean I have an advantage?"

Tom hummed, "There are things to consider, of course. First, there's the fact that the Task doesn't have a set time limit. There won't be anyone monitoring what's happening inside, but we'll have a way to measure if you're unconscious or not. The Task is only over when there's three down and one left. You'll be the one left," his tone brooking no room for argument. "This lack of monitoring means you can pull out the big stuff. No need to hold back in an attempt to withhold information. Use any means necessary to either ally with the other champions or to destroy them. But this also means it's the easiest Task for Dumbledore to interfere with."

"It sounds dangerous," he said, quietly, since Tom seemed to be lost in thought.

Tom's eyes focused back on him at his words and his next words were even more firm than they were before. "If you're in danger, you send up the red sparks. The Task is important to win, but if you get hurt, the War is over anyway."

Harry gaped in shock at Tom's insistence, his heart warm at the sight of his Intended's palpable worry.

"Harry," insisted Tom, and he nodded.

"Okay," he said, and Tom's eyes narrowed.

"Say it."

"I promise, I'll be careful."

Tom nodded, curtly, before a small smile crossed his face. "I believe there is only one more lesson I wanted to teach you. Come here."

He didn't even have time to protest, Tom's grip insistent as he pulled Harry onto his lap. Harry was sure his face was on fire.

"Hickeys," said Tom, smiling. "It'll be your good luck charm for the Tournament."

"What?" he yelped, but Tom was already pressing on.

"It can't be anywhere visible, because visible hickeys are incredibly tacky. But," he waved a hand, his magic easily unbuttoning his shirt to the third button. Tom's hands were incredibly soft as he slowly pulled down the side of his shirt, leaving his left shoulder bare.

Tom lowered his mouth slowly, and Harry let out a small whimper as he felt his Intended's mouth latch onto the skin just above his hidden soul mark. It seemed like it was forever that Tom sucked hard, the pain mixing with the pleasure and the light headiness that accompanied Tom's action.

When Tom pulled away, he looked extremely satisfied. He concentrated his magic at the tip of his finger, swirling it in circles as he commanded it to button up Harry's shirt again.

He dropped a kiss onto Harry's lips before pulling away. Harry was sure he looked dazed and he nearly stumbled when Tom pushed him back toward his own chair.

"Now that that's settled, it's about time we meet Bellatrix." Tom stood, grabbing Harry's cloak and depositing it gently around his shoulders.

Harry let the Dark Lord lead him, the hickey still burning on his chest.

He only felt groggy for a split second before he fully woke up, blinking wide green eyes open and glancing around. He was in a dim place, with only a sliver of light in front of him to mark the exit. He shook his head once to steel his nerves, before cautiously making his way toward the light.

When he emerged, it was into a place full of nature; it was full of towering trees, fluffy grass, and a trodden shoddily made path winding through the gaps between the trees. He knew where he was immediately and a smile crossed his face. He was in the Forbidden Forest. It wasn't a part of the forest that he visited often, but Synes and the centaurs had took him there before so there were some things that were familiar to him.

He tilted his head, listening for the sound of running river instead of using magic to locate it . He wanted to reserve his magic especially since the Task had the potential to run long. Slytherin's Task *was* like a battle royale, but it also tested resourcefulness along with cunning. He could set out on a rampage to find the other champions, but it was simpler to let them take out each other before even attempting to fight. And to survive long out in the wilderness, he had to first find some food.

He heard the river before long, and he paused halfway through his journey, picking a berry bush carefully clean. He recognized the berries, and they were safe to eat. When he got to the river, he washed them clean, popping some of them in his mouth and grimacing almost immediately. They were sour, but they were acceptable sustenance so he dutifully ate a few more.

He was just finishing Conjuring up a water holder when he heard a branch snap. He immediately tensed, sending out a few tendrils of magic to figure out who was near.

"Bones," he murmured softly, straightening up and storing the makeshift water holder to his side. He didn't waste any time, heading toward the source without a hint of worry. Amelia Bones was a strong witch, but she was no match for him, especially in the Forbidden Forest.

He stopped running after a while; she had used a spell to speed up and if she wanted to run away, he would let her. He didn't want to waste magic on her and he didn't want to risk running blindly after someone who posed no threat to him.

Lockhart was supposed to be on his side, so he didn't have to worry much about the Ravenclaw either. He was most worried about James. A year under Dumbledore's intense tutelage combined with the teachings of other members of Dumbledore's little order meant that James was probably pretty strong now. *And* James had warned him before the First Task that Dumbledore had something planned and since nothing had happened during the last three, it was most likely the old man had something planned for Slytherin's.

And plus, James *was* his little brother. He had to have some skill.

He stiffened and a second later, threw himself to the side, hitting the ground hard but dodging the red stunner from behind him. He lay there for a second, panting and trying his best to gain his breath back, before forcing himself to get back on his knees, twisting to face where the magic had come from.

He couldn't sense their magic signature, and the foliage was too dense in the place he had run blindly into. He cursed his lack of foresight, his green eyes darting from left to right in an attempt to catch anything out of place.

"Jaimie?" he asked out loud, but only silence answered him. He cast *Protego* immediately, feeling magic in the air, and watched as another red stunner bounced off the invisible wall.

"Only cowards fight unseen," he taunted in an attempt to draw his assailant out into the open.

There was light laughter, and a man, in bright blue robes stepped out. "Hello, Harry Black," he said, in a light tone, a nasty sneer distorting his handsome face. "Alastor Moody, at your service."

"You're an auror," he said, quietly. "Why are you here?"

"Certainly not to protect you," he retorted. "You're a disgrace."

"Not something I haven't heard before from your kind of people," he said, his tone casual even as he was quickly scanning his surroundings for an escape. He wasn't dim enough to think he could take on Moody; Moody had graduated five years ago and had spent those years under Auror training. He was rumored to be ruthless and proficient in magic, taking down multiple criminals in his short years as an Auror. "Are you here because of Dumbledore?"

"Why don't you just surrender? Lose the tournament. Imagine how many lives you can save if you just swallow your pride. You're from a Light family, why turn Dark?"

"The family you're talking about isn't my family," he said. "And besides that, if word gets out that Dumbledore messed with the Tournament..."

"And how would that happen?" said Moody, his smile beatific. "We're alone out here, and the tournament planners were gullible enough to leave most of the Task up to Dumbledore."

"Pensive memories," he offered up, and paused when Moody just gleefully laughed.

"You're not going to be able to offer up memories for much longer," he said.

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

Moody looked contemplative for a moment, before shrugging, holding up a bracelet with runes carved into it. "You see this, Black? If this gets on you, your Magic will be bound forever. It's an ancient heirloom, used to take care of troublesome pureblood heirs, and there's no known way to get rid of it. Forget even giving proof, you won't be sane without your Magic."

"You Light people are all the same," he sneered. "You pretend to be righteous, supposedly risking everything to stop Tom from starting War and saving the "World". You want to be the good people, but you find ways that are worse than death. Cutting off people's links to magic, putting innocents into comas, the lot of you are pathetic."

Moody's eyes narrowed, and a second later, a loud crack was heard, Moody disappearing from Harry's sight and appearing a second later right next to him. The older man grabbed his hand, and he panicked, flaring his magic just like he did all those years ago in Tom's office, blinding the Auror with an overpowered lumos. Moody stumbled back, shielding his eyes with both hands.

Harry ran without a backwards glance, looking for familiar signs around him. His only hope was to find the Centaur's colony and hope that they were still in there and could help him. He couldn't take Moody on his own.

In his panic, he didn't even notice the other magical signature, running straightfirst into a bewildered Lockhart.

"Harry?" gasped the Ravenclaw champion. He snapped to attention immediately after sighting Harry's flushed face, "Bones or Potter? If it's Bones, we fight. Potter, we run."

"Run from Jaimie?"

"I ran into him earlier," said Lockhart, and Harry glanced up at him, noticing the bleeding gash in Lockhart's forehead. "He's a lot more powerful than we thought he would be."

The sound of footsteps reached his ears, and he grabbed Lockhart's hand, dragging the wizard with him into a run. "Potter then," said Lockhart, inbetween pants, but he dutifully followed Harry's lead, running steadily next to him.

"No," he said, slightly winded. "Dumbledore cheated. Moody's here."

"Alastor Moody?" asked Lockhart. "Merlin," he cursed. "Do you have a plan?"

"You'll help?" he asked. "He's not after *you*."

"He probably is," said Lockhart. "Why take out one Champion when he can take out the rest? And of course, I'll help. Merlin, Harry."

Harry flushed, before pulling Lockhart to the side, casting a few spells to mask their magical signature. "Can you stay here? I'll bait him, and you can Stun him while he's distracted. And well, if he gets to me before then, just stay hidden, okay? I'll need your help if he wins."

He didn't waste time explaining, stepping out from the warded area. He heard the footsteps fast approaching, so he readied himself, holding his wand out in front of him.

Moody looked irritated when he came into view, but it quickly formed into a smile when he caught sight of Harry. "Tired of running like a little baby, Black?"

"Figured we could duel," said Harry, doing his best to act casual. "You couldn't possibly be as good as you think you are."

"You're going to regret that," said Moody, and Harry rolled to the side immediately, the tree behind him singed from the force of Moody's *bombarda*.

He glanced at the smoking hole, gulping once in fear before steeling his nerves, tilting his head when he straightened to look at Moody again. "That all you can do?"

Moody's eyes narrowed, and Harry focused his magic, enhancing his own *bombarda* with powerful wandless magic, making it more like a wave than a single focus spell. It lowered the damage of it, but it also made it harder to dodge. He spoke the latin word under his breath, and watched as it hit Moody head on.

Moody winced, but quickly stuck his feet to the ground, his back hitting the tree behind him with a loud crack. "Oh, you're going to pay for that."

Moody immediately went on the offensive, sending a series of stunners and blasting spells toward Harry, mixing in a few sickly colored hexes. Harry dodged as best as he could, casting shield spells when he knew his speed wasn't enough.

Moody snarled in triumph when one of the hexes caught Harry's arm, setting the sleeve of his cloak on fire. He yelped, and his focus was temporarily disrupted as he used magic to put it out, ducking behind one of the trees for cover.

The brutal assault continued for a while, Moody's laughter ringing throughout the clearing. Harry threw his own offensive spells back when he could, but there was no sign that Moody was tiring at all. He deflected all of Harry's hexes with ease, his laughter only growing more and more shrill as it became more and more obvious who had the upper hand.

Then he heard soft chanting, and when he dared to duck his head out, swirls of blue were around the Auror, the feel of magic invading the small clearing. He was about to curse when Moody suddenly slumped over, falling onto his front with a small thud.

"You okay there?" asked Lockhart, stepping out from where he had been hidden.

Harry nodded, making his way over to both his friend and the collapsed Moody. He knelt when he was sure Moody was unconscious, taking the bracelet into his hand and holding it up to his face. He still wasn't very good at reading runes, but he tried his best to memorize it, wanting to look it up later when the Task ended.

He looked up to thank Lockhart when the boy's eyes widened, his mouth open to shout a warning. It was the last thing he saw before he felt the Stunner hit him in the back.

"Good, you're awake," said a female voice, and Harry felt soft hands running themselves through his hair.

He startled, going to grab the offender's hand when he paused, realizing how sluggish he felt. Something was off. He coughed violently, and the girl hurriedly pressed his water bottle to his lips. The cool liquid did wonder to his frayed nerves, and he sat up with the help of the girl next to him.

When he finally focused past the ringing in his head, he nodded in thanks. "Bones," he said, in gratitude, and she just smiled weakly back. "What happened?"

"The stunner hit you pretty hard," she said, "and well, the Auror put something on you?"

He grimaced, knowing what he would see if he looked down. The bracelet felt heavy against his wrist, and he wanted to forget it was there. "Why did you help me?"

She paused, looking abashed. "I couldn't help you when they were attacking you. I'm not stupid, I know I'm no match for trained Aurors."

"I'm not going to blame you for not helping," said Harry, slowly, even though he knew he was in no position to antagonize her. "We're against each other. You could've just left me here and I would've lost."

"It's not guilt," she said immediately. "I know the smart thing to do was to walk away. But it's cheating. It's not fair that Lockhart and you will lose because the Tournament's compromised."

He stared blankly at her for a few seconds, mind whirling at the fact that the poor witch in front of him had no idea about the political ramifications behind the Tournament. That she actually thought that it was a friendly school competition was...sad. Tom and him had looked down on Hufflepuff so greatly that they hadn't even tried to get to Bones. They had assumed she would be on Potter's side because Hufflepuffs were generally considered Light, and to know that the Light side had also erred so badly on this was galling.

"In fact," she continued, blissfully unaware of the fact that Harry was kicking himself for being so naive, "it's not fair that the Task is going on at all. We could send up red sparks right now so they could come get us. After all," she paused, glancing downward at the bracelet, "you don't have magic anymore."

He stiffened, and she hastened to apologize. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have - "

"You don't have to apologize," he said, truthfully. "I'm not all too worried about it. Tom will find a way to remove it."

"Tom?" she questioned, and her eyes widened a bit. "Oh, you mean Professor Riddle?"

He nodded, not even realizing why she would be so surprised until he replayed the words back in his head. He had called Riddle *Tom*. He wasn't going to dwell on it though, simply nodding his head.

"That's brilliant, Harry. I was worried you'll be so scared...I mean, I can't even imagine not being able to access my magic. And that makes it all the more important that we expose Dumbledore's scheme right now. I know the guy said you can't give memories, but *I* can."

"No," he said immediately, shaking his head to drive the point home. "If we send up red sparks, then that means James will win."

"Only temporarily," she said, "as soon as we show that Dumbledore cheated..."

"It's not that simple," he said, worrying his lower lip with his upper teeth. "The Unbreakable Vow will be fulfilled and Tom won't be able to start the War."

"Okay," she said, after a short pause, "I'm afraid you lost me. You'll have to explain it from the beginning."

He only hesitated for a few seconds, before launching into an explanation. He couldn't afford to keep secrets right now; he had to win Bones to his side if he wanted to have any chance of winning the Task.

She looked bewildered during his explanation, but after he fell silent, she looked thoughtful. "I won't ask you to surrender again, but it's a little difficult to believe everything. But then again, Moody was *just* here when it was promised to be just us four and the Forest, so... And besides that, no matter how weak you are right now without your Magic, there's no reason for me to take both you and Lockhart out. James is stronger than me and I won't be able to defeat him on my own. And disregarding that," there was fire in her steely brown eyes, "he doesn't deserve to win if he's cheating."

He smiled weakly, "Yeah, I don't think I'll be much help right now."

She hummed, placing a hand on his arm, and tilting her head. "I'm not so sure. I can still feel magic coming from you."

He concentrated, and blinked slowly in shock. He could feel his magic thrumming just underneath his skin. "Maybe the bracelet didn't work?" he said, but he paused, because he still felt *off*. It didn't make any sense.

"Maybe try a spell?"

He nodded, and instead of attempting wandless magic, he gripped his wand tightly in his hand. He attempted a simple *lumos*, but no bright tip shone from the wand. His heart fell.

"It must only restrict your usage of magic," said Bones.

"What happens when I run out of magic though? Does that mean I won't be able to replenish my reserves?"

She sighed, "I'm not sure, either. Maybe we should wake the Ravenclaw up and hope he can help? I mean, if you're okay with that. We can always leave him out; he won't wake without our help."

He only hesitated for a short second, shaking his head and thinking about how Lockhart had promised to help him with Moody. "We'll need his help."

Lockhart startled awake with a push from Bones' magic, sitting up immediately and glancing around his surroundings. "Harry? Amelia?"

Bones smiled, crouching down and settling herself down quite primly next to him. Harry followed suit; their discussion could take long and there was no reason not to sit and reserve energy.

They caught him up to speed after only a few minutes, and Lockhart was silent for a few minutes after, his eyes roaming over Harry and his wand moving fast as he cast a series of diagnostic charms. "The good thing is that you're not physically hurt," he said, "And it seems like your runes are still working. So anything latent should work. The bad news is...I have no bloody clue how to get rid of it. I can't even remember ever reading about things like this."

"It's okay," said Harry, before Lockhart could give himself a panic attack. "Tom can help, but we need to finish the Task first. I can't let James win."

"So a temporary truce then," said Bones. "We all work together to take out James. The despicable Gryffindor shouldn't be allowed to win."

Lockhart was pensive, "You know about the Vow, don't you? What happens if either Amelia or I win?"

"I'm guessing as long as I have more points than James, it should be okay. I can't ask either of you guys to forfeit for me; I have no magic, and it's enough that the two of you are willing to help me take out James."

"I spent seven years at Hogwarts," started Lockhart, quietly, his hands twisting together in his lap. "Trying to overcome the Muggleborn stigma and learn how to fit in. I've only ever wanted recognition, and you gave me that, Harry. I wouldn't mind letting you get first."

"I couldn't -" he protested, but Bones just rolled her eyes.

"You're crazy, Gilderoy. I'm not giving up that easily."

Lockhart shrugged, "You're underestimating Harry. Even without magic, I'm sure he'll find a way. And besides, it won't be all out of good will, right? If the War does happen, I want to be your right-hand man okay?"

"Severus will fight you on that," he said, but he smiled anyway.

"As long as it's a fair fight," grinned Lockhart.

"Boys," scoffed Bones, but she was smiling too. "Then after we take out James, I guess it's between me and Lockhart. I won't be going easy on you, you know."

"Let's just concentrate on taking out James, first, okay?" teased Lockhart. He sobered up after Bones slugged him playfully in the shoulder, turning to glance at Harry again. "Your storage rune is still intact. Do you think you can get your bow? It'll be better than nothing."

He frowned, placing his hand over the rune, concentrating hard. He gave up after a few seconds, shaking his head. "I don't think it'll work. I can't use any magic."

"It's keyed to you, right?"

Harry nodded, and promptly yelped when Lockhart took his hand and used his wand to cut a shallow wound into the palm of his left hand. Blood ran freely, and Lockhart waited for it to pool before placing his hand palm down on top of Harry's. When it was coated with liberal amounts of blood, he placed his hand onto Harry's rune.

He shuddered as he felt Lockhart draw out the bow; the feel of foreign magic assessing his body was *weird*. After the events of the First Task, Tom had felt it necessary to add in physical arrows as well, just in case creating magic arrows will be too big of a strain on his magic reserves. After all, sometimes wizards were susceptible to physical threats even if it was only because of the shock factor.

He felt better already after holding his bow in his hand. He felt less vulnerable, and he thanked Lockhart profusely, glad that the Ravenclaw spent so much time in the library.

"You're acting like I knew it was going to work," laughed Lockhart, waving his gratitude away. "It was just a guess."

He glared, "That was really dangerous!"

"What isn't?" shrugged Lockhart, and Harry gave up on scolding the Ravenclaw; after all, the idea did work with no ill circumstances. Lockhart closed up Harry's wound with a simple *Episkey* before spelling water to wash off the blood on his hand.

"Do you have any other runes?" asked Amelia.

He shook his head, wracking his head for any other way to fight without using his magic.

"Languages," he said, slowly, his mind whirling. "If I could say talk to snakes, it should work, right?"

"Are there any snakes here?" asked Lockhart even as Bones yelped in shock.

"I hate snakes," she muttered under her breath. "Do you really think there's snakes in here?"

"It's the Forbidden *Forest*," said Lockhart. "Of course there's snakes here."

She pouted, "Do we really have to find them? How much help can they be anyway?"

"Let's find out," murmured Lockhart. He raised his wand, aiming it away from them and said clearly, "*Serpensortia*."

A green snake flew out of the tip of his wand, landing a few feet away from them. Amelia squealed in horror when the snake raised its head, flickering its pink tongue out at them. "Can it see us?" she asked in horror.

Both boys ignored her, Harry stating rather dryly, "A garden snake, really?"

Lockhart grinned, "I'm rather dismal at the removal spell I'm afraid. Didn't want to Conjure up anything *really* dangerous until we're sure you can control it."

Bones scowled, "I can get rid of it just fine."

Harry chuckled at her response, patting her on the arm to comfort her before stumbling to his feet and walking towards the snake.

It swiveled when he got close, and he knelt, not afraid since the snake wasn't poisonous.

"Hello," he said in parseltongue.

The snake just stared at him since it couldn't blink, "*A speaker*," it hissed in surprise. "*What am I doing here?*"

"*My friend made you*," he said honestly.

"*Why?*"

"*To see if you can help us. Can you tell if any other snakes are nearby?*"

It regarded him seriously for a few seconds before turning away and hissing, "*Follow me*."

Harry gestured to the other two to follow before doing so himself, watching as the snake flickered its tongue a few times and slithered away, probably checking the ground for telltale signs. It stopped after a few minutes, turning to face Harry. "*I will wait here*," it hissed. "*It is just further ahead*."

He nodded his thanks, hesitantly reaching out and patting the snake on the head as thanks. "You guys might want to wait here," he said, "The snake seems worried for some reason. I'm not exactly sure how dangerous it's going to be."

"And how are you going to be safe without magic?" asked Lockhart. "No thanks, I'll just follow along."

"If he goes, I go," said Bones, shrugging. "I don't want to be alone if Potter finds me."

He thought about arguing for only a split second, before sighing and telling them to tread lightly. When they got past the thick bushes, he called out a greeting in parseltongue.

There were sounds of surprise throughout the clearing, and Bones let out a yelp when a number of snakes slithered out into the open. They were brightly colored, all obviously magical, and he caught the word 'speaker' in a number of their hisses.

He fought down the weird urge to blush since he was under such scrutiny from the snakes and knelt so he was more on their level. "*Who is the leader here?*"

"*Snakes don't have leaders,*" offered up a snake with bright red patterns. Venom dripped from its fangs, and it stared unwaveringly up at him.

"*We do as we please,*" said another. "*We're only here because we heard there is a speaker here.*"

"*But if you are asking who we all listen to,*" said a snake, thoughtfully. It turned to flicker its tongue to the left, toward a large snake with blue diagonal patterns all over its back. A small pair of wings rested on its back and when it opened its mouth in greeting, Harry sighted clear blue venom.

"*You're Tom's,*" he said, in shock.

It tilted its head at him, "*I belong to no one, boy. Yet I did not know you were a Speaker like him. You did not greet me in the human's nest.*"

It felt like so long ago, even though it had been just a year since he had learned the magicless ritual. "*It is a secret, me being a speaker. I did not want Tom to know.*"

It nodded sagely despite the fact that Harry was sure the snake didn't really understand his motivation behind keeping it a secret. "*Why did you call us here?*"

"*I need your help against an enemy. I cannot defeat him on my own.*"

"*And why should we help you? My brethren can die without any reward.*"

"*I'm Tom's Intended,*" he said, softly, "*what is his is mine. I can offer you anything.*"

"*We want more prey. And more room to hunt. And,*" it paused, flickering its tongue a few times, "*we will help you not because you belong to Tom, but because you belong to Magic. When it is time, you must tell Her to repay us.*"

He gaped at the huge snake, and didn't move when the snake slithered up his arm and draped itself around his neck. He nearly staggered under its weight, and only murmured a startled thank you when Lockhart cast a Lightning charm.

"Guess it worked then?" asked Lockhart, grinning cheekily.

He nodded absently, watching in shock as the other snakes seemed to confer with each other. *"Is there anyone with venom that paralyzes?"*

The huge snake on his shoulders looked at him, before hissing out instructions to the large amount of snakes. Bones was deathly still next to him, her eyes wide, and her hands trembling.

He held out one of his arrows, and the snake that had come forward at the winged snake's request bit the hard wood, leaving trails of bright yellow venom. It did it without complaint for a few more arrows, and Harry stored the arrows in his quiver with care.

They left the clearing after everything was sorted.

"Our next plan of action is to find Potter," said Bones, eyeing the huge snake on Harry's shoulder with thinly veiled fear. "It listens to you, right?"

Harry just smiled weakly, "As well as any other snake would, I guess."

She narrowed her eyes, noticing the deflection for what it was, but didn't press. "I rather not have the Task continue on much longer. I know Slytherin's Task is supposed to test resourcefulness as well as cunning, but I really don't want to scavenge for food if I can help it. It's three versus one, and there's no way Potter can take us all along with all these snakes."

"He has an invisibility cloak," said Harry. "He can be anywhere, especially if he learns to hide his magical signature."

"Snakes can sense heat, can't they?" asked Lockhart.

"Oh," said Harry. "You're a genius." He switched to Parseltongue, hissing questions to the snake draped around his shoulders, and felt chills down his spine as the snake confirmed there was something near them.

"Get down!" he said immediately, but he wasn't fast enough, because a sickly colored spell hit Lockhart directly in the back.

Bones was there immediately, casting a series of charms on Lockhart to both lighten his weight and to stop his fall. She shouldered him on her back, her eyes wide and worried, and she cast a shield charm toward the direction the spell had come from.

"He's here," he hissed to her, "He was hiding near us the whole time."

"Do you think you can distract him?" she asked, worriedly. "Gilderoy's down, and I don't have any idea what kind of spell hit him."

"I can try," he said. "But if he's been here the whole time, he'll know I have no magic."

"Just run if it gets really bad," she whispered back, "I just need to concentrate on finding out what hit Gilderoy and if I could revive him. If you have to run, send out a signal, okay? I can run with Gilderoy, but it might be better for now if I focus on reviving him and then us three will take him on."

"Okay," he said, "But work fast okay? I'm sure the snakes can help protect me, but Lockhart said Jaimie was stronger than we thought he'll be."

"You two are twins," she said, patting him on the arm, and Harry nodded, grimly. "I'm sure he'll want to talk to you. Try to buy time."

"Good luck," Harry said, and he walked out into the open, past Bones' shield charm. The winged snake on his shoulders didn't tense, so he was sure there wasn't any magic coming toward him.

"Jaimie?" he called. "I know you're still out there." There was no reason for James to run. He had the upper advantage after all with Lockhart down, Bones distracted, and him magicless.

True to his speculation, James stepped out, his arm invisible underneath his shimmery cloak. He had a grim expression on even though he was in the advantage, and he stared at Harry, both of the twins regarding each other without a word.

"Jaimie," he started, but James shook his head.

"No, Harry, I don't want you to get hurt. You should have just given up."

"Then you know," he said. He lifted his left hand to show the heavy bracelet still there, shaking his wrist and making it move from side to side. "My access to my magic is cut off."

James nodded, tense, his mouth pursed into a thin line. "Give up, Harry. Please, I don't want to hurt you."

"You knew about this," he accused. "You knew when you said Dumbledore had something planned."

James stared at him in horror, shaking his head. "I knew he had something planned, but I didn't know it would rob you of your magic forever. Please, Harry, you have to believe me."

"There might not be a way to get this off," he hissed angrily, not believing a word his younger twin said. "I could live my whole life as a Squib, and it would be because of *you*."

James flinched at his words, shame coloring his eyes. "Please, Harry, I didn't know!"

"Did Dumbledore put you up to this, Jaimie? Did he give you an order you couldn't disobey?"

James stayed silent, his hand clutching his wand so tight that his knuckles were white.

"Does the Unbreakable Vow really exist, James?" he asked after a long while of silence.

James head snapped up from where he had been staring at the ground in shame, his head nodding frantically. "Of course it does, Harry! I wouldn't lie about that."

"Or did you just want me to feel sorry for you?" he asked, even though it was hurting him inside to be so cruel to his brother. He was just so angry, the feeling of being unable to access his magic was grating on him, and the fear of it being forever was starting to press on him. He had to believe Tom would be able to remove it.

"Harry, you're my big brother," pleaded James. "Please believe me."

"Yet I would never do to you what you've done to me," he said, quietly, the anger drained out of him at the sight of his brother's distress. "James, why can't you see how horrible the Light is? Your Father almost put me in a coma to get me out of the war, and now the Light has taken my magic away. How can you support them?"

"*Our* Father, Harry," said James, quietly.

"Jaimie," he trailed off, biting his lip and placing his hand on the winged snake's scales in an attempt to calm himself. "I will never consider that man my Father. And I don't think," he paused, swallowing in an attempt to stop the prickling at the edges of his eyes. "I can't consider you as my brother anymore, Jaimie. You've hurt me too much."

James' eyes were wide, "Harry!"

"If you really didn't know about it, then you'll forfeit right now."

"I can't," said James, immediately.

"You sacrificed me for the Light, and yet I've never done the same. You claim to be so scared of *Tom* yet he's never done a thing to you!"

"I *can't*," repeated James, "Because Dumbledore gave me an order. I can't disobey him; I'll lose my magic, Harry."

"You've already lost me," said Harry. "And you'll lose your Intended as well, if you continue to be so close-minded about this. He's already been through so much, and yet he's been saddled with you."

"My Intended?" said James, eyes wide. "Harry, my Intended is Lily!"

He knew he shouldn't but he threw his head back and laughed. He already felt light-headed and dizzy; he figured Moody wasn't lying when he said he would go insane without his magic. "Is that what you really think? You think *Forever* and *Against All Odds* go together, Jaimie? I'll tell you a little secret, someone else here has the soul mark of *& Always*, and it sure isn't you."

James' eyes flashed angrily and he snarled. "You're lying."

"Nope," he said, cheerfully, popping the 'p' in the word. "Maybe you should actually try to *learn* before following someone so blindly."

James growled, holding his wand out in front of him. "You think you're so much better than me, don't you, Harry? You think you're so much better than me that even *without* magic you can defeat me. Dumbledore chose me because I'm strong, but the Dark Lord only chose *you* because you're my twin! He doesn't care about you at all and you're too naive to see it!"

He flinched at James' words, the anger in them cutting deep. It only took him a second to shake it off though, the memory of Tom's lips against his too recent to even consider Tom thinking him of a pawn anymore. "You're wrong, James," he said.

"Am I? Well, let me show you just how much *better* I am than you. *Stupefy!*"

Harry immediately started to throw himself to the ground, but the red spell was far too fast to dodge since James had been so close to him. He cursed how stupid he had been; he had gotten so caught up in his emotional fight with James that he hadn't even noticed how close his brother had gotten.

Before he could panic any further, the snake on his shoulders lunged forward, its mouth outstretched wide before biting down on the spell. The spell disappeared into the snakes' mouth, and James gaped at him in shock.

The snake flickered its tongue out, obviously pleased. "*It has been a while since I've eaten Magic,*" hissed the snake.

"*Thank you,*" he replied, shakily, letting the snake slither off of him. "*I didn't know you can do that.*"

"*There is much you don't know about me,*" the snake hissed back. "*This is the human you want us to take out? He looks scrawny.*"

"*He's a lot stronger than he looks,*" he warned.

The snake didn't heed his warning, simply hissing to the other snakes its plan of attack.

"This is your plan?" asked James. "You think just because your pet snake can swallow my magic you can win? Do you think so little of me? I'm not the weak little wizard I was when I was eleven. I'm no longer in *your* shadow."

To prove his point, he lifted his wand, shouting a few Latin words out. Harry watched in horror as James started a complicated Transfiguration spell, ending with a fully formed lion. It roared as soon as James finished, and James had a tight smile on his face. "How fitting, isn't it, big brother? A lion against a snake, just as how it always should be."

"*That is not fortunate,*" hissed the snake. "*You must run. We cannot protect you and fight the lion at the same time. We are just lucky that the human has not caught on to the other snakes or else we may be in trouble.*"

"*You'll keep yourself safe?*" he asked, hating that the snake was right. He couldn't stay; he had to run.

"*You'll keep your promise?*" the snake deflected. "*Magic owes us for this. Tell her to repay us when you next see her.*"

After it finished speaking, the lion started to charge at them. The snake simply used its wings to dodge it, before lunging forward and wrapping its thick body around the lion's neck. It started to constrict, and while it did, it hissed out a series of instructions to the other snakes. Immediately,

another one slithered out of the woodwork, sinking its fangs into the lion's flank. Many others accompanied them.

"*What are you doing?*" hissed the snake. "*Run!*"

He closed his eyes, and hating himself for this, he turned to run, ducking behind one of the trees as soon as he got close enough. He turned though, watching James as he stared in horror at the scene in front of him all the while deflecting snakes with well-timed *Protegos*. He was cursing, and he then started another Transfiguration spell, probably to create another lion.

He knew he should run, but he couldn't leave the snakes without helping them some more. He lifted his bow, his hands shaking as he fitted one of the arrows with venom on it. Just as James was finishing the last flick, he released the shaft. The arrow flew, the yellow venom glinting, and James caught sight of it, aborting his spell and casting another one to stop the arrow. He hardened his skin, preventing the arrow from sinking into his flesh. He let out a sigh of relief, but the venom acted fast and he dropped his wand in shock, his arm falling to his side uselessly.

"Harry," growled James. "Stop letting others fight for you!"

James bent, picking up his wand with his left hand. and aimed a shaky blasting curse right at him.

Harry yelped in shock, barely dodging the tree as it started to collapse from the force of James' spell. He couldn't stay any longer. He cupped his hands around his mouth, making an amplified cawing sound in order to warn Lockhart and Bones.

He took one last glance at the chaos that was the battlefield before running.

He felt pathetic.

He hadn't cried yet, but he felt overwhelmingly numb. He hadn't been thinking when he asked the snakes to help him. He had only thought about winning the Task when he had asked for their help. He didn't think that he would lead them straight to their deaths.

He wasn't sure if James would hold back from killing them. He knew that his twin had every right to do so if they threatened his life, and he knew they would. He hoped that most of them ran instead of fighting James. After all, he had already gotten away.

And he had left Lockhart and Bones behind. Forget being a team, he was a coward just like James had said. He could've stayed, he *should've* stayed and waited to see if Bones had succeeded in reviving Lockhart.

He heaved a sigh, sinking to the ground with his back against a sturdy tree trunk. He left his legs straight out, his hands resting on his lap, and tilted his head upward to face the leafy canopy above him. He stared unseeingly upward, his mind whirling and tears getting dangerously close to falling.

He couldn't win the Task. They wouldn't be able to start a War, and the Earth will slowly come to a demise. Magic would slowly lose her strength and there wouldn't be a world left to live in.

Forget the domestic life with Tom; he would be lucky if the Muggles didn't overrun them in a few years with the way things was going.

He knew Tom didn't care much if they won or lost; Tom had said so himself earlier in that day. But he *wanted* to win. He didn't want to disappoint his Intended.

It wasn't the end of the world, but he still felt like he had already let everyone down.

He heaved a sigh, feeling lost and overwhelmingly bereft, when he promptly yelped. Because when he had looked down at his lap, he had realized his hands were growing a bright intense blue.

"What?" he questioned out loud, his eyes wide as he lifted his hands up to his face. He recognized this blue; it was the same hue of magic that Magic had imbued him with. "The gift," he murmured in shock. "Now if only she had taught me how to use it..."

He couldn't believe that it was able to still reach him with the bracelet still intact, and he turned his hands this way and that, marveling at the way it shone brightly. It cut through the dim lighting of the Forest, and it seemed to be drawn to his left.

He figured it was better than nothing, and he let the blue lead him past more trees, an intense waterfall, and into another clearing. There was a huge tree, the width of the tree trunk over seven feet. It rested past a path of rocks in the middle of a shallow lake. The leaves were plentiful and bright green, signaling its healthy state. It must have been growing there for a long time.

He followed his instincts, crossing the path and kneeling at the base of the tree. He rested on his knees, wondering just why Magic had led him here. Was it a sign of worship?

He didn't know how long he waited; he wanted for a sign but nothing showed up. Instead there were sounds of fighting in the distance, and if he concentrated, he was sure that he had just heard Bones' scream.

He wondered if he should run, but decided against it. If Bones and Lockhart were defeated, then there was no reason to hide from James. And besides, he thought he deserved it since he hadn't even bothered to help the other Champions. Never mind the fact that he had no magic.

So it was only when he heard footsteps behind him did he turn around.

James stood there, his cloak in tatters, leaving him in just his ripped t-shirt and broken trousers. There were a litter of bleeding wounds on his bare arms, deep fang marks on his wrist, and he was still favoring his right arm. The venom had worn off, but his movements were still jerky.

He looked tired, mostly, even with all the injuries. He heaved a sigh and canceled his Point-me charm. "Bones and Lockhart have been defeated," he said, the words ringing clear in the deathly silent clearing. "There's nowhere to run, Harry."

Harry stared at him before slowly rising to his feet, not even bothering to raise his wand. It would be useless with the bracelet anyway.

"It's over," said James. "I'm sorry," and he lifted his wand, shooting a Stunner straight at him.

He stumbled back, barely dodging it and in his haste, tripped over a root. He yelped, his hands flailing in an attempt to catch himself. Both of his hands pressed against the tree trunk.

Immediately, his whole body was enveloped in the same intense blue as his hands. Magic surged through him, burning his veins and setting his blood on fire. He screamed out in pain, the magic overwhelming his defenses with ease and concentrating directly on the bracelet on his left wrist.

It broke into two, falling off his wrist and into the lake, sinking directly to the bottom.

The fire didn't stop, and he could barely contain the magic within himself. His wand dropped to the ground, burnt to cinders by the powerful magic running through him and into the wand. He felt tears running down his cheeks at the sensation, wondering just what Magic had done to him, when the pain suddenly stopped.

He blinked, lifting his head to stare directly at his brother, who looked baffled and horrified at the same time. He felt magic thrumming through his veins, and he threw his head back and laughed gleefully. Magic had given him *his* magic back. He didn't know how, and he didn't know where the magic came from, but it was *there* and it was *his*.

Yet it was foreign, and even though he flicked his hand, it didn't register. The magic felt like his, but it wasn't. It felt ancient and old, and spoke of sacrificial times, and he was at a loss of what to do with it.

There was magic forming in his hand, all of it drawn to a point. He shivered as he felt the Magic running through him, and when he looked down there was an actual lightning bolt formed, the magic crackling with sounds and the heat intense. He stared down at it, then up at James, and even though he knew it was dangerous, the Magic compelled him and he threw it. It arced gracefully in the air, and James, still staring in shock, hastily put up a shield charm.

It hit the center of the charm, and broke through it easily, hitting James directly in the chest and knocking him unconscious.

The magic fled as soon as it hit, and he fell to his knees, the breath taken out of him. He gaped, because the ground underneath him had been fluffy, rich green grass just a few moments ago. But now it was dead, the blades of grass turned to dust.

It couldn't be...

He turned his head, and in horror, noticed that the tree was now just a corpse of what it had used to be. The leaves had turned brown and the tree was withered. When he looked a little further, the clear stream had now turned murky, overrunning the path of rocks which had now broken into pieces.

He had taken the magic of the clearing.

But he didn't have time to worry about that.

He staggered to his feet, crossing the path and nearly slipping into the water a few times. When he finally got there, he threw himself over his brother. He checked James' pulse, and it was faint, but it was there, and he heaved a sigh of relief.

His brother was fine.

He had won the Task.

"Thank you for coming all this way."

The older woman huffed, turning her nose up at the dismal conditions of the room. It was to be expected. The reason she had come was unsavory, after all. Not just anyone would agree to meet on her terms.

"It's so nice to finally to meet you," simpered the woman in front of her. "Now, please sit. And tell me everything so the world can finally know the truth."

A/N: Is this considered a cliffhanger? xD. You guys already knew confession is coming next chapter, so this is just a glimpse on how it's going to happen? ;) You guys are all brilliant, so I'm sure you guys guessed it already. To make this less painful, I absolutely PROMISE to update this friday! I already got confession scene written, just gotta add in the other content before I can upload it. Even if I didn't finish the other parts, I promise to at least upload the confession (only like 4k of words I think? so it'll be a short chapter) but yes, you only have to suffer in pain till friday? muahaha xD.

Kk, now onto the more important stuff. Magic's gift. It was only supposed to be used in dire times because as shown, it's extremely painful and hard to control. But it also wrecked Harry's magical networks, so next chapter we're going to see how Harry deals with 1. no more wand cuz it got burned up 2. the bracelet has lasting effects and so to get rid of it, the magic reworked Harry's networks so he's going to have to learn to use magic differently. also, i couldn't work in the explanation, but Magic gave it to Harry because the difference between muggles and wizards is well, the ability to use magic, so she never wanted Harry to be in that position, rather giving him the magic of the land than having him powerless. (edit: to people worried, it won't be forever like this)

Also, I couldn't find a way to expand on it, but Slytherin's task is private because it tests cunning. there's going to be backstabbing and allying but even then alliances have to be broken in order to get first place. so they can use any information necessary or any means and no one wants to broadcast that to the whole world.

Anyway, let me know what you think? Thanks again for such the wonderful response, and please don't hate James too much! He's under a lot of pressure, since 1. the unbreakable vow and 2. the pressure from parents since Harry was disowned. he has a lot on his shoulders and he doesn't have the security of a wonderful Intended like the Dark Lord to help him. Instead he has manipulative Dumbledore. I know he was rather unlikable in this chapter, but please he's only doing his best with what he's got. But if you want to hate him go ahead xD, maybe one day I'll be able to redeem him in future chapters. (at least I hope! I'll certainly try :p)

The Confession

Chapter Summary

It's finally here guys!!! Hope you guys enjoy and love you all lots.

Chapter Notes

Starts with Amelia Bones' POV

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

Chapter 13: The Confession

Gilderoy was still out. Harry was in the hospital wing.

She was the only one who could take down Dumbledore so she had to be brave.

She didn't mind, really. Gilderoy was hit hard, first by the nasty spell Potter had fired at their backs and then secondly, when he was dueling Potter at the end. He had dove in front of a spell meant for her, so she couldn't begrudge him for not being there with her. And Black...he had defied all odds and somehow won against Potter even with his magic bound. Apparently, he had fried his magical channels though, and Madam Pomfrey was still in a panic on how to fix it.

So she approached Professor Riddle. He was one of her favorite professors after all, and she knew Harry was his Heir.

When he emerged from the Pensive, he looked furious. His hand was trembling slightly, and his red eyes were dangerously narrowed. She stayed as he Firecalled Abraxus Malfoy, both men talking in clipped tones and hushed words. When he stepped through, she curtsied as was the custom, and he bowed and kissed the back of her hand.

The Aurors came next. The two of them viewed the Pensive inside Riddle's office, emerging with pale faces and horrified expressions. One of them departed immediately, presumably to question Moody, and the other stayed to talk details with Riddle.

They couldn't make an arrest on Dumbledore immediately. He was Chief Warlock after all, and there would be a public riot if it got out that Dumbledore interfered with the Founder's Tournament. He had friends everywhere, after all, friends that would never believe the worst of Dumbledore. Their proof was shoddy at best; Moody could've been working on his own. Moody's reputation preceded him. He was known for doing shady things to catch criminals.

The most they could do was suspend Dumbledore from his duties until a Trial could take place. It could take years to file, especially since most of the Wizengamot was on Dumbledore's side.

Amelia was furious, but Riddle had calmed, the trembling in his arms gone and his expression thoughtful. But it wasn't right that Dumbledore could get away with this, even if he *did* have reach in almost all of the social circles.

Riddle had looked amused at her outburst before thanking the Auror for coming on such short notice. The Auror left after promising to come back with Dumbledore's suspension.

He came back in less than an hour, after Malfoy had finished talking to the other eleven governors of Hogwarts. He dropped off the official document before heading back through the fireplace.

The three of them made their way to Dumbledore's office, after Riddle had assured her that it was fine if she came along.

Dumbledore was sitting in his chair, the Portraits spelled blank and the lights dim. She hadn't been in there before, so while Riddle and Malfoy explained Dumbledore's suspension, she took her time examining his walls. There was a multitude of books on the walls, and a double staircase leading to an elevated platform. It was designed beautifully, and she marveled at the beauty of it for a while.

She was startled out of her close examination of one of the books when Riddle suddenly raised his voice. "Treat Hogwarts *well*?" snarled the normally calm Professor. "Do you think this is happening because of *your* choice?"

Dumbledore didn't seem fazed by Riddle's question, simply laying one hand over the other calmly and staring back at the enraged Professor. "You seem to believe I had it out for you," said Dumbledore. "You've always been one of my precious students, Tom."

"Precious?" asked Riddle, his voice dangerously quiet. "You sent me back to that godforsaken place every summer even though you *knew* a war was going on. You wanted me to die!"

"Of course not," said Dumbledore. "I would never wish ill will upon you, my boy."

"Don't call me that," was Riddle's tight response. "Regardless, Hogwarts is no longer yours. Harry has won the Tournament even *with* your cheating ways. I *will* end you for that, by the way."

"You care that much about him?" asked Dumbledore, his eyebrows high on his face.

Riddle didn't seem inclined to answer his question, instead pressing on. "The Unbreakable Vow was very ambiguous, wasn't it? The suspension means you *will* name me as Headmaster in your stead, but the Vow states that Hogwarts will become mine. I certainly didn't mean naming me as Headmaster."

There was a predatory smirk on Riddle's face and this time Dumbledore didn't seem as calm. His hands were shaking and his brows were furrowed as he reviewed the Vow again in his head.

When he didn't speak, Riddle spoke again, this time his voice light and amused. "I want the deed, Dumbledore. You can take your time with it; I'll even give you time to go over the Vow with your people to ensure that what I'm saying isn't a lie. But remember, the Vow *will* take your magic if you refuse me this."

"Please," said Dumbledore, sounding a tad desperate, "Why make the children suffer, Tom? You have no need of Hogwarts."

Riddle didn't seem inclined to answer, so Dumbledore tried again. "The deed belongs to the Four Founders. Why would you need Hogwarts?"

"That is none of your business," said Riddle, "But do remember this, I *am* Heir to Slytherin."

"Is this a childhood dream?" asked Dumbledore. "Is that why you feel the need to ruin so many children's safe havens?"

"Hogwarts was *my* home," said Riddle, so quiet that Amelia had to strain to hear. "You ruined it for me, Dumbledore, but I will never do the same to any of the students in Hogwarts."

Dumbledore sat there in shock, his calm demeanor all but obliterated in a few sentences from Riddle. Riddle didn't wait for Dumbledore to catch his bearings, instead speaking again. "I tire of this conversation. You are suspended from all duties until further review can be made. Bones, here, has kindly provided a Pensive of Moody attacking my Heir, and it won't be long before we can find further proof. As such, there will be a Trial. You will be contacted with the date when it is settled."

"A trial?" asked Dumbledore. "You really think that'll work?"

"It certainly won't hurt to try. You think you are untouchable, but no one is. The public is a fickle thing, Dumbledore, and you'll figure out that defeating one Dark Lord isn't enough to ensure you can defeat another."

Amelia gave a little gasp that she couldn't stop, and Riddle's red eyes darted over to hers. He didn't look too worried that he revealed himself though, simply arching an elegant eyebrow over at her before returning attention back to Dumbledore. "The Aurors will come escort you off the premises in two hours so you have time to remove personal items from my new office." He paused to stare intently at the lemon drops to further drive his point home before gesturing to both Malfoy and Amelia. Malfoy dropped off the official document on Dumbledore's desk before opening the door for Riddle.

When they were only a few steps away from the office and nearly to the top of the spiral staircase, Riddle turned to Malfoy. He didn't say any words, but Malfoy took one glance at him before realizing something was up. He simply went down the stairs without a backwards glance and when Amelia turned to follow, Riddle held out a hand.

"You've been a rather excellent student of mine," started out Riddle, and she blushed at his kind words.

"You're my favorite professor, sir," she answered with. Riddle had a small smile on his face, and she couldn't help admiring his features. Even though Riddle was older, he was simply very attractive with his sharp cheekbones and startling red eyes.

"Which makes it a shame that I'll have to alter your memory a bit. You've done so well with coming forward with your memory that I'll hate to reward you with this. But it has to be done."

She watched in horror as her Professor drew his wand, and she stammered out the first thing that popped up in her head. "Please, sir, is there any way I can change your mind?"

He paused, spinning his wand between his fingertips in a controlled manner as his calculating red eyes focused on her. "You did help my Heir in the Tournament. Why? You come from a predominately Light family."

"It's against my morals, sir, to let people get away with breaking the law."

"The Dark hardly contains law-abiding citizens," scoffed Riddle. "You'll have to do better to convince me to leave you with your memory intact."

"I don't want to be left behind again, sir. I want to know that Dumbledore is a horrible person with his own agenda and that there *is* something going on behind the scenes. And I want to be a part of it. I helped Black during the tournament, and I can help him for the upcoming War."

"He told you about that, then?" asked Riddle, his eyebrows raised.

She nodded, her mind dancing back to the day of the Task when Black had told her the truth in hurried whispers. About how the Tournament was just a disguise for something more and that there was more than what met the eye.

"I'll trust my Heir," said Riddle, thoughtfully. "You are exceptionally bright for a Hufflepuff, and we can make good use of you. Provided you swear on your magic to keep quiet about all of this. Harry may be trusting, but I am anything but. You can help spread rumors about Dumbledore's interference, and they'll believe you because you are known for never lying. But if you betray me, well," he said lightly, a smile on his face, "Do remember what you just learned. I *am* a Dark Lord, and I don't practice mercy, even on young female students."

She would remember the smirk on Riddle's face for the rest of her life.

But she wouldn't back down. The world was changing, and she wasn't going to remain ignorant in the face of it.

So with a deep breath, she swore on her magic, and set out to do what her heart wanted. And that was vengeance on a man who she had once thought was great.

It was midnight, and he couldn't fall asleep.

He wasn't in pain since Madam Promfrey had seen to that, but there wasn't much else she could do to help.

When he had first woken up after the Task, he had been confused. After he had been retrieved from the Forbidden Forest and proclaimed as winner of the Founder's Tournament, he had been faced with a visibly worried Tom. The next thing he knew Tom had put him promptly to sleep and he had woken up three days later under Madam Promfrey's worried bustling. His friends weren't there and he was confused until Madam Pomfrey sat down to explain details to him.

She had never seen anything like it before, and she was baffled on how to fix him. The intense blue magic had worked havoc on his systems, and when Bones had come in to tell her about the bracelet, she had become even more confused.

The bracelet had broken his access to his magic, and the blue magic had worked hard to revoke the effect of the bracelet. But to do so, it had fried his magical networks, making it so the bracelet was useless. The bracelet had been easy enough to break then, but unfortunately, she had no clue how to turn his magical networks back to normal. Magic had rewritten his relationship to magic to not only break the bracelet, but also to allow him to access the magic around him easier.

Essentially, for now, he was stuck using the magic around him. His innate magic was still there, but it remained under the surface, unusable without access to a wand, and his wand was burnt to cinders. He knew everything would be fixed once he got a proper wand, but he was still in *mourning*. He had loved his wand because it had connected him to Tom, and he was being a brat by refusing Tom's offer to take him to Diagon Alley. He still had magic, just not the kind he was used to.

It was these thoughts that occupied him so greatly that he didn't even notice the soft sound of footsteps sounding through the nearly deserted hospital wing. When rustling happened, he flinched, his hand already raised as if he could actually defend himself.

"Put your hand down," said a voice that he knew extremely well, and Harry obliged, knowing there was no way he was going to win this particular battle.

"Jamie," he whispered. "Haven't you done enough?"

James removed the Invisibility Cloak that had been draped over him, becoming visible in the dim lighting of the hospital wing. He looked contrite, but Harry knew better than to believe anything from his brother anymore.

"What do you want?" he asked, his tone cutting and acerbic.

James flinched, shame coloring his cheeks. "I didn't know it would take your magic away for the rest of your life, Harry. It was only supposed to be for the Task."

Anger filled him, and even though he was exhausted, he sat up on one elbow, glaring daggers at his brother. "And how is that supposed to make it any better? It was supposed to be a fair fight. Were you that terrified of losing to me?"

"You don't understand, Harry," whispered James, his eyes pleading. "There was so much pressure on me to win that I couldn't lose."

"I had pressure too," he replied, calmly, "and yet I was willing to do it on my own merits. I didn't need Tom's help and neither did you need Dumbledore's."

There was a long silence before James sighed softly, "I didn't come here to fight about this."

"Then why did you come? You certainly didn't think I'll forgive you when I *still* can't perform magic thanks to your idiocy."

James flinched again, but pressed on determinedly. "You don't have to forgive me, but I hate myself every day for what I've done. I lost you, and I know it was my own fault. I can't blame anyone else like I always do." When Harry didn't respond, James clutched tighter onto his Invisibility Cloak, his knuckles white with the intense grip he had on it. "Here," he said, thrusting the Cloak toward him. "It should be yours."

The fight fled out of him at the sight of James' distraught look, and it took every ounce of his being not to comfort James. James would always be his little brother and elicit that protective urge in him, but he had to stop because it wasn't healthy anymore. The fact that they were on two different sides of a War that was about to blow up was all too easy to see and remember, and it was that knowledge that kept him from reaching out again. Because forgiveness wasn't forthcoming, and Harry didn't say a word as he took the Cloak from James.

"You're the eldest," said James, trying his best to sound casual. "It should have been yours from the beginning. And...I don't want to have such an unfair advantage anymore. It isn't right that it's mine. And I'm giving it to you before Dumbledore can order me not to." At the end of his words, he looked up at Harry, his brown eyes almost daring Harry to pick a fight over the Vow's validity.

But Harry stayed silent, and the James' shoulders relaxed and his expression was tired, but honest. "Of course I can't expect you to forgive me in exchange for the Cloak. But I want to know. Who is my Intended?"

"You already know, don't you?" Harry asked, gently, and James' expression cycled through disbelief, fear, and then calm resignation.

"Then Lily really isn't mine?"

"When has she ever been?" asked Harry, his mind on Severus and the stark black of his mark.

"He kissed me," said James. "And I knew he was mine. But I pushed him away because I just couldn't be with someone from a Dark family, Harry. Sirius is my best friend, and the Light allowed it, but only *because* he seemed to be breaking away from them. And then you got named Heir, and Sirius has only had praise for the Black family after that. You changed him."

"No," he responded after a pause, "You've just never seen Sirius for who he really was. James, you're so scared of what people will think of you that you've never gone after something you really want. Even if Sirius is leaning for the Dark, he'll follow you to the Light simply to be with you. And I can't believe I'm saying this, but I'm okay with that. You need him and he needs you. Don't throw away your one chance of happiness for a War that you're not even sure you want to fight."

James closed his eyes, looking to close to tears and Harry watched as his brother's hand trembled. He reached out before he could stop himself, grabbing his brother's hand and enveloping it between his two hands. James' eyes flew wide open at the contact, and he stared at their interlocked hands for a while, before letting out a sigh.

"I'm messed up, aren't I?"

"No," said Harry, "It's not entirely your fault. You're stuck in the wrong place, and I wish I could've done more to help."

"You?" asked James, sounding appalled. "I should have done more to help *you*."

Harry gave James a sad smile, shaking his head. "I let them manipulate you. I didn't protect you as I should have."

For a second, it looked like James was going to argue. But he looked defeated, a single tear rolling down his cheeks. "I'm a laughingstock, Harry. Everyone knows Dumbledore cheated. After graduation, the next time we meet, it'll be as enemies."

"The War's starting, isn't it? Sev told me. Tom already got declared as Headmaster, and Dumbledore's probably in a right panic."

James nodded slowly, as if unsure of how much information he should let slip. "He's not in the right mind, Harry. I'm scared. I don't want to fight a War."

"Then I'll help you," said Harry, immediately. "I'll always help you, Jamie."

James shook his head, "I can't drag you into this again, Harry. It's my battle to fight. And we're enemies, now, which means you shouldn't feel obligated to help."

"At least talk to Sirius," said Harry. "Please. If only for his sake. He's in so much pain, James, and he's one of my best friends. You have to help him."

James looked conflicted for a second, before nodding. "Before we leave, then. Dumbledore's planning to find recruits from other wizarding countries and I'll be going with him."

"I won't tell Tom," he said, and was surprised to find he actually meant it. Because honestly, Tom probably already knew, and he wanted to assure James who looked startled that he let that slip out of his mouth.

"Thank you, Harry," said James, sincerely. He patted the Cloak once, a sentimental expression warring on his face, before he steeled his expression. "Keep the Cloak, Harry. I love you, even if I don't deserve to anymore."

And Harry wanted to refuse, because he could see the hesitation in his twin's face, but he didn't. And James was already walking away, not even waiting for a response. Because in his mind, there would be no way Harry could still love James, because James had taken away his magic. And that thought was enough to block the words from coming out of his mouth, and by the time he worked up the nerve to say it, James was gone.

He closed his eyes hard in order to stop the tears from falling. Softly, he whispered, "I love you, too, Jamie." But the words fell into silence, left unheard by the one person who needed to hear it most.

Life wasn't easy without a wand.

Luckily, Severus and Lockhart were there for him every step of the way. They got along, rather surprisingly, since they were of two different houses; they liked to exchange notes on rather esoteric stuff and talk about Lucius when they were feeling particularly cranky. It was nice; their

mindless chatter was a distraction from the sluggish way he felt every time he so much as moved.

Other than that, after Slytherin's Task and him being crowned as Champion of the Founder's Tournament, there wasn't much else going on in Hogwarts. They already completed their N.E.W.T's, and now they were just waiting till graduation.

Rumors circulated throughout the castle about Dumbledore's interference in the Task and when Tom became Headmaster after Dumbledore's suspension, the rumors only gained in strength. Amelia Bones, who had pulled him aside and congratulated him as soon as she could, only continued to help spread them, intent on making Dumbledore pay for cheating. He figured he would need to figure out a way to repay her continued loyalty soon, even if he knew she was only doing so because it grated on her own moral compass.

James wasn't lying when he said the rest of the student body was mad at him. In a surprise twist of events, suddenly Gryffindors were the most hated House. Everyone suspected Dumbledore of cheating, and after word got out that Harry had lost his wand and his control over magic because of Dumbledore's plotting, they became fiercely protective of him. Even without magic and angry Gryffindors trailing after him, he didn't feel very vulnerable with the rest of Hogwarts trailing after him.

The only downside of the whole thing besides the loss of his magic was that Tom was entirely too busy for him. Tom had to deal with restructuring Hogwarts' classes to fit his agenda, dealing with Dumbledore's upcoming trial, *and* finishing up the negotiation with the vampires. He couldn't begrudge Tom; after all, he knew just how important the next few months would be. Even now, they were still dealing with the press of Harry's new reputation. The victory ceremony had been covered worldwide; Tom was sure that most of the foreign countries knew his name now. They also knew his tragic backstory and knew how much he struggled to get to where he was. They couldn't let the fame go to waste when they could use it to sway so many peoples' minds.

They had to continue to cultivate his image as a charming young man, hopefully enough to propel him to becoming Minister for Magic *or* at least a man that people would be willing to follow. He had enough contacts from the wandless magic lessons, and when Harry had convinced Tom to allow him to start teaching students from other Houses, his contacts had grown even more. The countless balls and small parties thrown by the Malfoys over the summer only ensured that the contacts would also grow in the political world. Now that he had Tom's name to throw around as his own since the Heirship had been revealed, it would be even easier to convince people to listen to him.

So all in all, things were going rather splendidly. They got Hogwarts, Dumbledore was losing more influence by the second, and he *won* the Founder's Tournament.

So it took him a long moment to process the headline on the paper in front of him. He had been settling down for a nice, easy breakfast before classes when the owls had swooped in, dropping their precious cargo on sleepy students. He had barely reacted enough to catch the paper, Severus scowling when his own nearly whacked him on the head. "The Daily Prophet never delivers news on a Tuesday," he had snarled, and had promptly fallen silent.

Because the headline was about *Harry*.

Harry Black's Mark Revealed!

"Harry," said Severus.

There was already shocked whispers forming around them, and Harry couldn't breathe for a long moment. He was hyperventilating, but he couldn't stop himself because the world *knew*.

Tom didn't even know yet.

"Did he?" he gasped out between shallow breaths. "Is he here?"

"Yes," said Severus, understanding him even with his broken words, and pure panic flooded him.

He glanced up from the paper, knowing his Intended would be seated at the table with the other Professors, and met furious red eyes. Tom was staring straight at him, his mouth pursed and his hand nearly tearing the paper in front of him with the white knuckled grip he had on it. Even this far away, Harry could tell that his Intended was very, very angry. Once Tom realized Harry was looking at him, he mouthed the words, 'We need to talk.'

He stumbled out of his seat, the paper still clutched tightly in his hand, and nearly tripped over his own feet. He was shaking, and he knew Severus was already getting up to chase after him, but he *couldn't* deal with this.

Even knowing that he had to one day let Tom know the truth wasn't enough to prepare him for the fact that Tom *knew*.

He ran, even though he knew Severus could easily catch up to him with magic. He knew he shouldn't be alone with his whirling thoughts, but he *wanted* to be alone. And after such a shock like this, he didn't think it was wrong to ensure that he wouldn't have to face Severus.

So as soon as he could, he ducked around a corner, taking James' Invisibility Cloak out and throwing it over himself. Severus sped past him, his long black robes flowing around him as he cut a sharp corner. The footsteps faded after a minute and he let out a soft sigh of relief.

It didn't take him long to get where he wanted to go. Even distraught and desperate, his first place of comfort was his Intended's quarters. He slipped past whispering students, intent on ignoring their words, and found himself in front of Riddle's door.

He would have to concentrate in order to succeed. He closed his eyes, reaching out and placing his hand on the door. It was easy enough to take the magic of Tom's wards into himself with the way Magic had rewired him, and to slip it back in place once he got inside. At first, the intense blue magic had just continued to elude him with how it worked, but after practice, he had gotten adept at just handling the magic instead of taking it for his own.

His head was a mess, so when his first thought was to seek comfort in Tom's bed, he followed it. Tom already knew Harry belonged to him, so it shouldn't matter if he found Harry in his bed. And besides, he was distraught, and unhappy, and he wasn't above taking any means of comfort he could find.

He sprawled onto Tom's bed, depositing the invisibility cloak and his outer robes onto the floor before getting comfortable.

He wasn't going to run, even if he wanted to. He had already lied enough to Tom; it was time he told his Intended the whole truth, and he was going to wait here until Tom got there.

So he lost himself in the Daily Prophet's words, the sharp, cruel words that had ruined everything.

"You little minx," was what woke Harry hours later. He startled awake, momentary confusion alighting his senses as he stared up at Tom. It settled in a few moments later, and he remembered why he had fallen asleep in Tom's bed.

"Tom," he whispered, and Tom frowned.

"I was looking for you all day and of *course*, you would be hiding in my quarters the whole time."

"I'm not going to go anywhere when I can't even perform a simple *lumos*," he pointed out, and Tom's eyes softened.

"Show me your Mark, Harry."

He struggled to sit up, ruining the pristine way the bed underneath him was made up as he laid his back up against the wall. Tom didn't move, simply watching him with calculating red eyes.

And even though showing Tom was the reason he was there, he shook his head. Because he was *terrified* still, terrified to hear Tom's reply.

Tom didn't seem fazed though, just letting out a soft breathy sigh as he sat down on the bed next to Harry. "Let me see it, Harry."

They sit in silence after Tom's words, and Harry struggled to find a way to word what he was feeling. Because he was a mess, and even hours after the event happened wasn't enough to collect his thoughts.

"I can't," he offered up truthfully, even as his mind continued to struggle to find the right words. "I thought I could. I lived my whole life knowing I had to one day let you know the truth. But I can't. I just *can't*, Tom. I'm terrified. Even though you already know the truth, it terrifies me to say the words out loud."

"You don't have to be scared, Harry," said Tom, after a beat of silence. "And you don't have to say a word. Just *show* me they weren't lying."

He closed his eyes, and after a shaky inhale, opened them to the sight of his Intended. Tom's eyes were still soft and warm, and he looked *worried*.

"You'll have to do it," he said, quietly.

Tom's smile was quick and brilliant, disappearing as fast as it came. He didn't use magic, instead undoing Harry's shirt with nimble fingers. When his chest was completely bare and his necklace was out in the open, Tom trailed trembling fingers up his chest to the charm.

And Harry realized then, that *Tom* was just as terrified as him. That Tom had been looking for his Intended even longer than he had been and that Tom had been nothing but brutally honest with him. His face burned with shame, and he wasn't surprised when a single tear escaped his eyes, rolling down his right cheek.

Tom paused before reaching up with his other hand to wipe away the tears gathering underneath his lashes. "You don't have to be so afraid," said Tom. "I won't blame you if it's not true."

And Harry knew that Tom was lying. Because Tom had been truthful with him that fateful night a year ago, when he had taught him about Magic and a ritual that would end up changing his life.

And that gave him the strength to look up at Tom and whisper, "It's true, Tom."

Tom gave a shaky exhale, but his grip was tight on the charm as he flared his magic.

Tom's eyes were wide as Harry's Mark slowly appeared on his heart, and he dropped a hand to run across it reverently. "She gave you my name," he said, softly and full of wonder.

"You've marked me since I was seven," he said, just as quietly, and watched as happiness bloomed across his Intended's face.

"Oh Harry," breathed Tom, drawing closer and closer until Harry had nowhere else to go. "How could you ever think I wouldn't want you to be mine?"

And he paused, a slight smirk on his face as he stared down at Harry. Then he tilted Harry's head upward, and drew him in for a kiss.

"It's a muggle drink," said Tom, "but I had a penchant for it when I was younger. Enough so that it still calms me down even now. It was a treat back then, rare enough that I was able to associate it with only good things."

He trailed off as he handed a mug to Harry, waving his hand to float his own mug in the air as he got back onto his bed. Harry tentatively took a sip, blinking in surprise when sweetness overloaded his taste buds.

"It's sweet," he said in wonder.

Tom's smile was just as sweet as the drink, but it was covered up when he took his own sip. "It's called hot chocolate," he explained. "Do you like it?"

Harry nodded, firmly holding onto his mug as he shifted to move closer to his Intended. The movement wasn't lost on Tom, and the older wizard reached out an arm and wrapped it around his shoulders so that they were pressed side to side. Tom lazily snapped his fingers, setting the fireplace ablaze and sending the crackling sounds of burning wood throughout the room. Even

though it was summer, it was still cold inside of Tom's quarters, and Harry was loathe to button his shirt up. Now that Tom knew, it felt right to leave his Mark out in the open.

"I knew I was different even before my soul mark formed," said Tom, quietly. He waved a hand, and in front of the blazing fire, an orphanage formed, floating in its dismal conditions. He continued to play around with the illusion, and Harry blinked when an eleven-year old Tom appeared. Dumbledore was there, and Harry let out a soft exclamation of shock when Dumbledore set the wardrobe on fire.

"That's when I found out I was a wizard," said Tom. "I had so many hopes and dreams for Hogwarts. I knew I was different, and I was bullied for it. So when I was told I was going to a school with people *similar* to me, it gave me hope. Unfortunately, my last name was Riddle, and the Slytherins assumed right away that I was a Muggleborn."

Harry wiggled his hand into Tom's, wanting a way to give his Intended comfort. Tom interlocked their fingers, his thumb softly smoothing over the back of his hand. "I was bullied my first day there. The first few months were awful. I was only eleven, Harry. I found solace in the books, and that's when I realized that I didn't have to be bullied here. I had power, even if it was only through helping other students through schoolwork. It wasn't long before the bullying stopped."

Harry stayed silent, his mind whirling at the thought of how much uncertainty his Intended had faced. He couldn't imagine going through his first year without either Severus or Lucy, and even when he had been sorted into Slytherin, he had still had Jamie. And even though his parents hated him, he still had their financial backing and name.

"I almost didn't go back for my second year. But it was obvious that the orphanage was much worse. World War II was going on then, and even though the Blitz didn't start until the summer of my second year, it was still hell there."

"The Blitz?" he questioned when Tom fell silent.

Tom let out a humorless chuckle, "It was a war between Muggles, Harry. Even though my orphanage had nothing to do with the conflict, Germany bombed us anyway."

"How?"

Tom looked baffled for a second, before using his free hand to card long fingers through Harry's locks. The motion calmed him, and he relaxed into Tom's side, letting his Intended find a way to word his next sentence. "I haven't taught you much about the Muggle world, yet, have I?"

"I know the basics," he said. "You made me take that Muggle studies class."

Tom hummed thoughtfully, "Did the class cover airplanes?"

"The things that Muggles use to fly?"

"That's not quite right," said Tom, "but you're not wrong either. They used those and threw very dangerous devices that exploded on contact down onto unsuspecting civilians. Like multiple blasting curses centered in one location."

"That's awful," he said. "Why would anyone do that?"

Tom sighed, "It's how Muggles conduct war, Harry. It's disgusting, really. We had to hide in bunkers to stay safe."

"And you didn't have your magic to keep you safe."

Tom nodded, his expression tight. He relaxed after a few moments of Harry nuzzling into him, and he let out a soft breath. "Hogwarts fell in love with me. I was many of the Professors' favorite and my classmates followed my every order. I found some friends, as you know with Abraxus, but I was mostly isolated. When I was found out to be the Heir of Slytherin in my fifth year, the isolation became even more stifling. Every summer when I had to return to the godforsaken orphanage, I felt suffocated. I was so powerful in Hogwarts, but in the orphanage I was a victim. It was quite the strange shift every summer, and it took a lot out of me to stay sane.

"It was then that I started to wonder more about my soul mark. I had hidden it as soon as I found out what it meant, and never thought much more about it. Back then, I used to think love just made you weak. That if I found my soul mate, it would just hinder my plans for the future. But as the isolation grew, the desire to find my soul mate grew exponentially. I used to think that I was just like the silly girls in my year, the girls that would wander lovesick through the halls and asking everyone what their Mark said. Gossip like that never interested me, even *if* I did pay special attention to those I thought my Mark meant.

"But after a while, I realized, I didn't *have* to live my life thinking like this. I was going to become the Dark Lord, after all, I didn't have to think I was weak for wanting someone to understand me. I became obsessed with the idea of finding you. I wanted someone to help me on this quest I discovered on my own. You see, it was Dumbledore who kept on sending me back to that orphanage, and I hated him for it. He *hated* the Dark, since Grindelwald was just rising at the time and he had history with the man. I was curious about the dichotomy, especially since many of my Housemates practiced Dark magic. Dumbledore claimed that Dark Magic ruined the soul forever, and that Dark Magic was the only type of magic that harmed others. He thought it was black and white, and that he could claim that wizards were separated by their usage of magic.

"But as we discussed before, *nothing* is that simple. Dumbledore still doesn't understand this concept: that without darkness, there *is* no light. He doesn't understand that Dark Magic is essential, because in reality, there is no clear dichotomy. It is simply a label, and it is the intent behind a spell that truly makes a wizard reprehensible. When I graduated from Hogwarts and subsequently met Magic, I learned even more how damaging this dichotomy could be for the future. We're so few in number that squabbling with each other will makes us easy pickings for the Muggles."

"Um," Harry stalled for time when he realized Tom was expecting an answer. He stared up into curious red eyes, and bit his lower lip worriedly, searching his mind for a way to respond. "Can I just be honest here?"

"That's the idea," said Tom, chuckling. "No more secrets."

"I'm listening and it's really interesting, but I can't stop wondering what your Mark is."

Tom paused, staring at him in bafflement for a bit, before full out laughing, his body shaking as he did. Harry felt every shake, and he flushed at his Intended's obvious amusement. "Hey," he complained, jabbing his pointer finger into Tom's side, "I've been wondering what could possibly describe me since I was seven!"

"At least you get a trait," said Tom, still breathless from his laughter, "All I get is my name. Magic certainly gave *you* the easy one."

"Tom," he complained when his Intended didn't seem like he was going to do anything but sit and laugh. Tom moved away from him, disentangling their limbs and shifting so they were sitting face to face. Tom picked up his wand, waving it in complicated circles and little flicks of his wrists before passing it in front of his left cheek.

The Mark seemed to appear all at once, the charm melting under the force of Tom's magic.

Green Eyes in the same italic cursive as the one above his heart was written into his Intended's left cheek in the same hue of green as his eyes.

He didn't know what to say, so he didn't worry about that. Instead, he lifted a shaky hand, pressing his fingertips against Tom's Mark. One word was above the other, making the Mark into two lines. Tom's eyes were intense, and the red of it stood out against the startling green on his cheek. It painted a beautiful picture; without the mark, Tom was still stunning, but with it, he looked otherworldly.

And it helped that he knew those words that Marked Tom were *his*.

Tom continued to stare at him, before slowly turning his head so that Harry's hand was forced to switch positions. He now had his palm cupping Tom's cheek, his hand in direct contact with Tom's Mark, and the sight of Tom still staring straight back at him with a secretive smile was almost too much to bear.

He dropped his hand, a slight flush on his cheeks.

There was a long moment before Harry broke it. "It's the same color as my eyes."

Tom nodded, looking pleased. "It's nice to finally know for sure."

"You suspected then," Harry said.

"Of course," said Tom. "I suspect every green-eyed person I meet, even *if* that person is an impudent brat."

"Hey, I was only eleven," he protested. "You can't hold me accountable for that first meeting. And *you* started it with all your illegal stuff."

Tom grinned, shifting so that they were no longer face-to-face and instead pressed up right against each other. "You were almost as proficient in magic as I was at your age. Wandless apparation? It was almost unheard of."

"It could've just been accidental magic," he pointed out.

Tom let out a long-suffering sigh. "You do realize that incident occurred years ago, and I know by now that you were extremely adept at wandless magic at that age?"

"Erm," he said, blushing, and Tom grinned.

"So why are you arguing, hm? Trying to be difficult?"

"You're purposely avoiding the question," he pointed out, and Tom laughed.

"Right, because it was *me* who started us on this tangent. Anyway, you were only eleven back then, and even *if* people call me the Dark Lord, there's no way I would've initiated anything at that age."

"But Marks mean age differences don't matter."

"Yes," said Tom, "but it's still *wrong* until you're legal. I was terrified of corrupting you, and the fear was only amplified when I realized I would be your Professor."

"When did you know for sure then?"

"I never really knew for sure," said Tom after a beat. "But I had my suspicions. After all, Magic sent me to Hogwarts to apply for a teaching position and there was the fact that your parents gave James Potter the heirship despite you being more proficient at magic than your own brother. And of course, your eyes were the same color as my Mark. And you weren't terrified of me, even though I was much older and much more experienced at magic than you were. As time went on, the clues only became more obvious. Prince is a good friend of yours, but the smug looks I would catch on his face made things extremely clear. I wanted to demand the truth, Harry, but I told myself to wait. If you were truly my Intended, then we would share immortality, and that in itself, means we won't be pressed for time."

"It wasn't easy. I had been searching for my Intended for so long that all I wanted was for the both of us to be honest. But you grew up like you were *made* for me, Harry, and while some would say it was because I tailored your growth, I would argue against them, because overall, I *let* you choose the way you grew, and the choice you made were the ones I would have made. You see, Magic wasn't wrong when she Marked us to belong to each other, and it was only through belief of that was I able to hold back. That was until you told me of Ravenclaw's Task. I was just so pleased to hear that you weren't interested in anyone else, and that you were interested in *me* that I actually gave up on my plans for once and just kissed you. It only escalated from there."

"I wanted to wait until after graduation because then I wouldn't be your Professor anymore, but well, what's done is done. I wouldn't change it even if I could."

"Me either," said Harry, after Tom stayed silent in favor of interlocking their hands again. "I don't know if I ever would have worked up the courage to tell you myself. Even when Magic told me that your Mark matched mine," here Tom made a little sound of disbelief, "I couldn't work up the courage to tell you. I was scared that you didn't feel the same."

Tom blinked, recognition visible in his eyes. "That's when you were acting irrational."

"Hey," he protested, but Tom just pressed on.

"I wasn't joking when I said you could be my Queen," said Tom, with a teasing smile.

"I don't want to be your Queen," he retorted with, but even when he was pretending to be irritated, he couldn't stop smiling.

"You already are, though," Tom said, and even though he was obviously teasing, the words still sent a rush down his spine.

Instead of responding with words, Harry just tugged Tom forward until they were kissing chastely again. It didn't last long, and Tom just smirked when they pulled away.

They sat in silence for a while, cuddled together, before Tom spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. "After graduation, will you come with me to see Magic? She owes us since her little 'gift' resulted in your loss of magic."

"I'll follow you anywhere, really," he responded truthfully.

"Sap," scoffed Tom, and Harry laughed before drawing Tom in for another kiss.

Commission of the confession scene by blop (<https://blopoooo.tumblr.com/>)



Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, here it is, guys! I struggled a lot about debating whether to post this or not, because well, stories after confessions are kinda hard to write? Idek, i just hope you guys will continue reading even though they are now together ^^ because there's so much that still needs to happen! James/Sirius, Lily/Severus needs to get resolved and now there's the drama with Gilderoy/Lucy that will be addressed next chapter. I also struggled because I hope this confession scene was all you guys hoped for? I hope I didn't make Tom too nice or sappy or anything just :(I'm really worried about this chapter so I hope you guys enjoy.

Next chapter is end of Hogwarts arc! :) Right now, it looks like the outline is favoring two confession scenes (guess which couples ? :P) and then the beginning of Harry getting a new wand and figuring out how to deal with Magic~ Then it's recruiting.

Also, about Dumbledore. I've read a lot of interesting fics on political and law stuff like that, but my knowledge is basically rudimentary so I won't be dwelling on that much. Dumbledore will get what's coming to him though, don't worry about that!

And Tom was angry not at Harry when he first saw the article, but furious at the fact that the Daily Prophet would go behind his back and print something like that. And the woman from the end of the last chapter is Mrs. Potter ^^ she was the one to out Harry's Mark and the repercussions of that will also be covered.

Graduation

Chapter Notes

A/N: Tom is much too sappy for his own good. So prepare for OOCness but let's just judge him by how he is in this verse okay? (I may have realized I made Tom much too nice xD)

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

Harry stirred, jostling Tom and bringing them both to consciousness.

Tom let out a soft groan at the motion, languidly waving his fingers and spelling the curtains on his windows tightly shut to cut off the harsh stream of sunlight.

"Morning," whispered Harry, and couldn't help but giggle when Tom furrowed his eyebrows, looking like a disgruntled cat.

"Morning, you little minx," said Tom back, his voice husky with sleep. "Ready for graduation?"

"As ready as I could ever be," he answered, honestly, climbing off the bed and squatting to grab the cloaks that he left on the ground last night. He nimbly disentangled the Invisibility Cloak from his outer robe before straightening back up, depositing both onto Tom's chair.

Tom was now resting his head on his palm, his red eyes watching his every move. He hadn't bothered to place the charm back in place last night and his Mark was still glowing bright green. It was intense, and it made sense why Tom had covered it up. If he didn't, it was the first thing anyone would see when they looked at him.

Tom seemed to catch on, a slow smile starting to form on his face. "Like what you see?"

He flushed, even though he knew Tom was talking about his Mark. "Are you going to cover it up again?"

Tom hummed, looking thoughtful, "It's up to you, really. Now that the world knows, it won't change much if I don't."

Harry made his way back to Tom, sitting back down on the soft bed and reaching out to brush his fingertips against Tom's mark. Tom didn't flinch away, even when Harry trailed his hand up to card his fingers into Tom's hair. "What are we going to do about the Daily Prophet? They went against you to print that article, didn't they?"

"Yes, and they will suffer for it." Tom paused, looking hesitant before reaching upward and circling his hand around Harry's wrist. He pulled his hand down slowly, interlocking their hands and staring up at Harry. "Your mother gave them the info, Harry."

The article had mentioned her name multiple times, even giving insight into Harry's childhood, so he wasn't surprised that she was the one they got the information from. After all, only a

select few knew what his Mark said, and an even fewer amount would ever act on that information.

"She will pay," said Tom, when Harry stayed silent. "I trust you have no objections?"

Harry only hesitated for a second before he nodded. "No objections." She was no longer his mother and James was no longer his brother. He didn't belong to the Potter family anymore, and besides, his mother attacked first. It wasn't his fault that she didn't know better than to anger a Dark Lord.

Tom's smile was predatory, "Don't you wish to know why she did so?"

Harry shrugged, "I can guess at the motivations. I won the Tournament and made her precious James look bad, so she probably wanted to take me down a notch. And the fastest way to do so is to discredit our relationship."

"She wants the world to think I knew since the very beginning. To diminish your accomplishments and make it seem like I chose you just because you're my Intended. We both know that won't work," said Tom. "The public likes romance, and likes it even more when soul marks match, so as soon as I give an interview, the damage will be dealt with."

There was a brief lull in their conversation as Harry contemplated Tom's words. "I don't think I mind, really," he said, truthfully. "Now that I know you're up for having me, it makes it hard for me to dislike the reason why I finally confessed."

Tom scowled, "Just because the outcome was good doesn't mean they don't deserve to be punished. And why *were* you so scared? I hardly think I was that successful in hiding my affection for you."

He was sure he was red, and he ducked his head, turning to hide his face from Tom. His Intended gave a soft chuckle, snaking an arm around his waist and tugging him so he was flush against Tom. "I mean, you're the Dark Lord," he mumbled out when it seemed like Tom's chuckles weren't going to stop anytime soon. "It's a little hard to accept that you would want *me*."

"You're utterly ridiculous," said Tom, but he sounded more amused than exasperated. "Why wouldn't I want you?" To prove his point, Tom pressed a sound kiss against the top of his ear, eliciting a startled gasp from Harry. "You're young, handsome, and very intelligent. After all, you *are* graduating today."

Tom slipped away from him, sitting up and waving a hand to summon the outer robes Harry had left on Tom's chair, transfiguring it as soon as it got closer. As a test of their abilities, graduating students had to transfigure their normal robes into the graduation attire. It wasn't hard, and it was mostly for tradition than an actual test. But since Harry's magic was still acting up, he didn't protest on letting Tom do it, even though he could probably manage the tricky transfiguration spell even without a wand.

Tom pulled him up into a sitting position, depositing the robes around Harry's shoulders when he was upright. "Thanks," he murmured as Tom tied the robes in place, and obediently tilted his head to the side to catch one of Tom's kisses.

"I have a gift for you," was Tom's response when he drew away, "but you don't get to see it until the party tonight."

"Oh," he said, a pleasant feeling uncurling at the bottom of his belly. "I thought we weren't going to do the Courting thing."

Tom looked pleased, "Why wouldn't we? Just because we've known each other for a while doesn't mean I'm not allowed to spoil you."

He flushed, the heat starting in his cheeks and heading down, and he was forced to look away from Tom's face. "You're acting awfully strange, Tom."

"Am I?" asked the Dark Lord, sounding amused. He stepped away, moving to his wardrobe to pull out the customary robes for Professors during graduation. It was a deep dark green with silver thread holding the seams together and it looked great against Tom's complexion. Even though Tom had been named Headmaster after Dumbledore's oust, Tom had wanted to remain Head of the House for the rest of the year before switching positions. As such, Minerva McGonagall would be acting as their Headmaster for their graduation before Tom took over next year.

"Very," he said, and watched as the Dark Lord paused in his fastening of the robes to tilt his head at him.

"Am I being too nice?" he asked. "I can be mean if you want."

"That's hardly what I meant," he pointed out, and Tom grinned. "It's just when I got this," he paused to gesture at the Mark still visible on his chest, "I never imagined that you would ever be kind. Let alone our feelings actually end up mutual."

Tom chuckled, closing the wardrobe door and walking back over to Harry. "You are lucky you are more endearing than infuriating. Is there anything else you'll like to ask?" He settled down next to Harry, his heat a warm presence against his shoulder.

Harry hummed, enjoying the warmth as he laced his fingers with Tom's longer ones. Tom didn't pull away and let him, and he marveled at that single action, running his pointer finger lightly against the back of Tom's hand. "Promise you won't be mad?"

"I can hardly promise that," said Tom, sounding amused.

He chuckled, taking Tom's teasing tone for what it was and pressed on anyway. "Remember when you told me about Horcruxes? Well, Dumbledore *may* have mentioned that he thinks you made them."

Tom's breath hitched and his tone lowered, "Harry. Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"There was never really a good time to tell you," he protested.

Tom heaved a long-winding sigh before deeply breathing a few times, obviously trying to calm himself. "You're utterly infuriating, Harry."

"You don't mean that," he said immediately, and was rewarded with a slightly irritated look. "Hey, I'm still alive because Dumbledore thought that! He thinks that since you made them, killing me won't rid you of your magic."

Tom relented and he used his other hand to ruffle the top of Harry's head. "I'll forgive you just because this information is game-changing," he murmured, "and because I'm in a rather good mood after finding out you're mine."

Harry's cheeks pinked immediately at his statement, "How can you say things like that?"

Tom shrugged, moving his hand and laying it back down at his side. "Just imagine the things we can do now that Dumbledore thinks I've made horcruxes. We can plant fake horcruxes and make him travel the world to find them. We can give them so many hints to steer them the wrong way."

"You already have something planned," he murmured, delighted at the way Tom's eyes were bright and unfocused.

"Yes," affirmed Tom, a slight smile on his face. The smile slipped away before soon though, only to be replaced with a stern frown marring his face.

"Don't think you won't be punished, however," said Tom, his voice low and dangerous. "I will find a worthy punishment for you and you will take it like a good little boy."

"A good little boy," he repeated, in slight wonder, and flushed when Tom's lips curved in a salacious smirk.

"You'll be one for me, won't you?" asked Tom, his voice dripping with seduction.

"I," he started to stammer, and Tom chuckled, turning to press him down onto the bed. His heart was beating too fast for his liking, but he didn't have any time to calm himself down because then Tom was kissing him.

The kisses were lazy, but still as wonderful as ever, and it felt like forever before Tom was letting up. He had a satisfied smile on his face as he drew away, standing and straightening himself up by running long fingers through his hair.

"It's about time we get going," said Tom.

Harry felt lightheaded but he nodded anyway, standing and letting Tom fix his appearance with magic.

With one last peck on Tom's lips, he departed to go get ready for graduation.

Gilderoy gave a soft sigh, removing his graduation robes and clambering onto the elevated platform. It was his favorite spot in Hogwarts to sit and read; the window allowed him to gauge what time it was outside and it was wide enough that he could lose himself staring at either the stars or the clouds when his eyes got tired.

Lucius and he had spent a lot of time here, and he still had fond memories of it. When he closed his eyes, he could still see the pink dusting the haughty Slytherin's cheeks when they kissed for the first time.

The book in his lap lay unforgotten as he continued to watch the proceedings going on outside. The Hogwarts faculty was setting up the boats that they had used their first year to cross the Great Lake. It was supposed to be symbolic. The boats that had first taken them to Hogwarts were now the ones to send them away. Professor McGonagall was transfiguring pieces of cloth to different House colors, laying them almost reverently across the bow of the boat. Professor Spout was adding to the decorations by adding different kinds of beautiful flowers amongst the sashes McGonagall was creating. The other Professors were setting up the seats for the students' family members, using magic to make the setting almost ethereal. Headmaster Riddle was nowhere to be seen.

"Lockhart?"

He spun, recognizing the voice.

Lucius Malfoy stood in front of him, his expression stoic and his posture stiff. He was dressed in fancy dress robes, his green and silver tie standing out amongst the dark black of his robes. His hair was immaculate as always, and Gilderoy took a few moments to admire the sharpness of his past lover's cheekbones.

It hurt to see him, but he mustered up his courage, trying his best to act casual. "Hey you," he said, giving a weak smile. "Why are you at Hogwarts so early? The ceremony doesn't start until noon."

There was a slight quirk to his lips as the Slytherin answered, "For you, actually."

"Me?"

"As you must know, something big is planned for the future. And with your involvement in the Tournament, it looks like you and I are going to have to be seeing each other more often."

"And you want to know if that's going to be a problem." His heart sank, and he had to look away, not wanting to continue looking at Lucius.

"Basically," said Lucius. "If we meet in public, I don't want anyone knowing that we knew each other intimately."

Anger coursed through him and he whipped his head back fast to glare angrily at the blonde. "Is it because I'm not pure-blood? Not good enough to be seen in your presence? And maybe," he sneered, "you should've came earlier, because Harry already knows."

Lucius' face rapidly paled, "You told him?"

And maybe it was the anger, but his senses fled and he snarled, "It's part of the reason why I helped him, after all." The moment the words left his mouth he knew he messed up, and he flinched, praying Lucius didn't catch on.

Lucius stared at him with his mouth agape, "Excuse me? You helped Harry because of me?"

He stayed quiet for a while, his mind going through scenarios to see how best to respond to the baffled pure-blood in front of him. Lucius didn't seem in a hurry though, crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes at him. He let out a soft sigh, his voice quiet, "I know he's important to you. And I was under the misconception at the time that Harry and you were together."

"What?" asked Lucius, his eyes wide and genuine in shock. "But Harry's..."

"With Headmaster Riddle," he finished with a wry smile. "But he came to me for advice and was vague enough that I thought it was you. It helped to think that you broke up with me to be with him."

"Broke up?" repeated Lucius, still looking shell-shocked. "But we weren't together."

He just shrugged, closing his eyes and turning away from Lucius in order to keep from showing too much emotion. "Doesn't mean I didn't feel anything when we stopped seeing each other."

There was a long silence before Lucius uttered a small dismayed sound. Gilderoy almost flinched in surprise when Lucius reached out to ghost his fingertips against his shoulder, and he turned to stare into wide eyes. "Then you liked me. It wasn't just a fling for you, was it?"

"Yes. I still like you, Lucius, even if it *was* just a fling to you," he admitted, in a quiet voice, and watched with wonder as Lucius' whole expression transformed.

Lucius' defenses seemed to fall, and he just stared at Gilderoy for a long while. "I gave you all of my firsts, Lockhart. How could you think it was just a fling for *me*?"

He stared at Lucius for a long moment, gaping wide as he registered the words. "You didn't even seem affected that day! You didn't even have the decency to meet my eyes!"

"Of course I didn't," snapped Lucius, looking irritated. "I was in love with you!" He shut his mouth immediately after the outburst, a flush making its way onto his cheeks as he stared in horror at Gilderoy. "I really didn't mean to say that," he said, quietly, when the moments dragged on.

Gilderoy couldn't help reaching out a hand to lay on Malfoys' trembling ones, wanting to calm the Slytherin even if his own emotions were still in turmoil. Lucius went deathly still under his touch, and only let out a shaky breath when he started to stroke the back of Lucius' hand with a thumb.

"Then why?" he prompted. "Why did you leave?"

"I've always struggled to accept that I like boys," he said, quietly. "I didn't want to choose to like boys and only be disappointed if my soul mate is a girl. But ever since I've known you, you've been so...so bloody *flamboyant*."

"Hey," he said immediately, even though there was a small quirk to Lucius' lips. "I object to the use of that word."

"You *are*," said Lucius. "And I admired you for it. And you were so open about not possessing a Mark and liking *boys* that I couldn't stop wondering what if *I* was that brave. And you gave me an opportunity to try, and I took it. And ever since then, I've been falling."

Lucius looked up defiantly after he finished speaking, his chin tilted in that haughty way that he loved so much. He couldn't even begin to process Lucius' words, his heart pounding a mile a minute at the way Lucius' eyes were trained on him.

And then Lucius deflated, his shoulders falling down as his expression changed. "Of course, that's when my soul mark appeared."

"Oh," he said, feeling as if the wind had been knocked out of him. "It's not mine, is it?"

"I would've told you," said Lucius, sensibly, but he just looked sad. "I wish it was, but..." he trailed off, lifting his robe and showing off the narcissus flower that looked painted on. "Narcissa Black. She's my Intended."

"But you don't love her," he said, slowly.

"I could," protested Lucius, immediately, and then he sighed. "I know I could. But my heart already belongs to someone else."

And Lucius' gaze was telling when it cut back to him, and he knew just who the Slytherin's heart belonged to. So without a word, he tugged Lucius forward until he could wrap his arms around the shorter boy.

It sent a rush of adrenaline through him at the contact and he pressed forward harder, trying his best to immerse himself into Lucius once again. Because it had been forever since they had even talked and it was the first time that they were actually physically touching each other in a long time.

When they broke apart, Lucius' eyes were bright with unshed tears. He took Lockhart's hand into his, tugging it down until he could pull it flush against his chest, right where his heart rested. Gilderoy let out a shaky exhale as he felt the tell-tale quick beats of Lucius' heart. "Can you feel it?" asked Lucius, and when he nodded, Lucius closed his eyes, biting down hard on his bottom lip. "How could this be wrong when it feels so right? How could Magic intend me for *her* when I'm already so in love with you?"

"It was just a game for me in the beginning," he whispered when Lucius fell quiet. "I never thought that I could fall so in love. I promised myself that I wouldn't think about love because my Mark had disappeared. How could I love anyone? Anyone I love would be Intended for someone else, and I would be destined for heartbreak. But I fell for you, anyway. I couldn't help myself, what with your haughty way of talking and the way you looked down on me."

Lucius' smile was fleeting, and a single tear rolled down his cheek. "I can't tell if you just insulted me or told me you were in love with me."

That startled laughter out of him. "Obviously the latter, you silly Slytherin."

"Rude," retorted Lucius, but he was smiling.

They stared at each for a while before he spoke. "So what does this mean for us? Do you still want me to pretend like we don't even know each other?"

Lucius looked nervous, "It's a bit complicated. My father really believes in soul marks."

"You mean the whole world does," said Gilderoy, bitterly.

"Which makes it a bit complicated," said Lucius. "My father will never approve of us."

"I know how much that means to you." And he did. Lucius craved his father's approval and it was apparent in almost everything he did.

"There is one upside. Narcissa does know of my affection for you."

"You told her?"

"She could tell minutes after revealing her soul mark to me. I may have done some unmanly things."

He grinned, but at the thought of Narcissa seeing Lucius cry made it slip away just as fast as it came. "You belong to her, though."

"Hey," said Lucius, "who says Magic actually knows what's best for us? This whole soul mark business is flawed in itself. How can Magic know that *we're* not actually meant for each other and that Narcissa is just an unfortunate mistake?"

The insult to Narcissa took a while to register, but when it did, he felt as if he came back to his senses. This wasn't him. He wasn't a homewrecker. He let go of Lucius' hand, scooting back and putting some distance between them. "This isn't right, Lucius."

"What happened?" asked Lucius, his eyes darting down to look at their now separated hands. "You were fine with it just a second ago."

"I'm normally okay with most things. Free spirit and all that," he said, shaking his head and feeling as if he was going to cry. "But I'm not a cheater."

"We're not cheating!" protested Lucius. "Narcissa gave us her approval."

He trembled at Lucius' words, his heart feeling as if it was breaking into two. "My Mark is gone and I'm not destined for love. But *you* are, Lucius. I'm not going to ruin that."

"But I'm not in love with Narcissa!"

"But you could be," he said, sadly. "If I wasn't around, then you could love her. There's a reason there's soul marks and there's a reason that I don't have one. And I refuse to be a part of this, no matter how much I love you."

"So that's it then," said Lucius, and he wiped furiously at his own eyes. "Just because *Magic*," he spit the word out like a curse, "thinks we're not meant to be, we'll never know if we were."

Gilderoy didn't know how to respond, so he didn't. He felt the same ache as Lucius, after all; he *wanted* to try. He wanted to hold Lucius again, to feel him within his arms and share snarky banter whenever they liked. But it came at a price, and he refused to be selfish enough to ruin Narcissa's chance at love. Because what did it say when your own Intended fell in love with someone else?

He had already come to terms with the fact that his soul mark was gone and that he may never be with someone. But Narcissa didn't have to feel the pain that he had to. She had Lucius, and while he may resent her for it in years to come, the fact remained that Magic thought they belonged together. And how could he say that he had more knowledge than Magic in this matter?

"You're a coward," seethed Lucius, but he sounded more hurt than angry. "I don't ever want to see you again."

Lockhart watched as Lucius fled, and he felt his own tears fall as watched, blurring his vision until Lucius was just a speck of black as he vanished around the corner.

Sirius was giggling behind him and when James turned to face him, the older boy was using his wand to repair the huge gash in his robes. It sewed itself back together perfectly and Sirius' eyes were bright when they looked up at him.

James swallowed heavily at the sight, allowing himself for the first time to quietly enjoy the intense handsomeness of Sirius' features without any guilt creeping up on him.

Sirius quirked an eyebrow at him, "Something the matter, Potter?"

James rolled his eyes, "And what could possibly be bringing me down on our graduation day?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders, his wand dancing on the tip of his fingertips as he led the way down the winding pathway. "Well, I dunno," said Sirius, rather casually, "You all but dragged me down to our secret headquarters without even an explanation so I'm guessing *something's* up."

The gash in Sirius' robes was caused earlier by the Whomping Willow, a magical tree that was violent enough to attack any nearby passerby. It had been planted to disguise a secret entrance from Hogwarts to Hogsmeade, and it was Dumbledore who had shown it to James all those years ago. Sirius and him had used it rather frequently in the beginning, but after James had gotten with Lily, those visits had toned down.

It was only fitting that James confessed to Sirius down here. After all, it was down here that James had first noticed his growing attraction to the handsome playboy. The dim lighting had done little to disguise Sirius' striking features, but it wasn't Sirius' looks that helped him realize just how deep his feelings had run for the boy. It was the ease of which they talked and the way James' secrets were never his own because the pure-blood had an uncanny way of getting him to talk about things he wanted to keep secret.

Sirius turned rather suddenly, and James smothered a yelp as he nearly crashed into the shorter boy. "Sirius?"

Sirius looked uncharacteristically grim, all traces of laughter missing as he stared up at James. He was fidgeting, shifting his stance from left to right leg, and he was biting his lip in an obvious sign of nervousness.

James watched him, his heart beating fast as he racked his mind for a reason for Sirius to look so hesitant.

"I heard about Lils," said Sirius, his voice low and James made an aborted movement, causing the wizard's black eyes to dart down briefly. "It wasn't exactly a well-kept secret," he said, wryly, when James couldn't work up the nerve to say anything.

"Who told you?"

Sirius rolled his shoulders, looking uncomfortable even in the dim lighting of the passageway. "Doesn't matter who, really." He looked away, his eyes bright with emotion, before heaving a little sigh. "I thought I was your best friend. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was hurting," he said, immediately, because even though James had known Sirius was *his*, he still cared for Lily more than he thought was possible. Dumbledore had pushed the two of them together, and James hadn't protested when he found out about the elderly wizard's manipulations. Because when he had found out about his feelings for Sirius, he had been in a right panic. He couldn't be like his twin; he couldn't possibly have the soul mark of a wizard from a Dark family. He hadn't wanted to disappoint his parents, and that panic had made him confess to Lily long before he was ready.

He knew better now, though. He knew things weren't so black and white, and possessing a soul mark of a wizard born to a Dark family wasn't the end of the world.

Sirius' eyes softened and he nudged his hand against James, his smile warm and welcoming. "Hey, I'm not blaming you, alright? I just wanted to let you know I'm here for you. It's not good for you to keep it all to yourself."

"I know," he said immediately, "but you haven't been exactly upfront with all your secrets, either, have you? Do you still like me?"

Sirius stiffened and James flinched, knowing he screwed up.

"I didn't mean to ask that," he said feebly, but Sirius' expression had already changed. The wizard had his eyes screwed shut, as if not seeing James could make this conversation go away.

"I don't quite understand," whispered Sirius, softly. "I thought we had a mutual agreement to never talk about it."

"It's been a year and a half," James said, hesitantly when Sirius didn't seem as if he was going to do anything else but stand there. "So I get it if you don't anymore."

Sirius let out a scoff at his words, opening his eyes to stare in disbelief at James. "You really think one year and a half is enough to get me to stop? I've liked you even before I knew what that actually meant."

A hot flush spread itself across his cheeks and he had to look away from Sirius' earnest eyes. "You still do, then?"

"Of course, you bloody prat," sighed Sirius. "But I get it, you like girls, so..."

"Why does that matter?" he asked and watched as Sirius blinked large black eyes at him.

"Because I'm a boy," said Sirius.

"But soul marks makes all of that irrelevant," he pointed out, watching as Sirius stared at him with wide black eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Sirius, his voice trembling.

James paused, knowing that he had screwed up again.

Sirius pressed on, "Do you know something about my Mark, James?"

James shook his head immediately, and stopped when he saw Sirius narrow his eyes suspiciously. He couldn't lie. Not to Sirius who could pick out any lie he made without any problem. He let out a soft shaky breath before nodding his head, and watched as the fight left Sirius' eyes. The wizard slumped bonelessly against the rocky wall behind him a second later.

"Of all the days I thought you would confront me," muttered Sirius, his eyes closed and his fists clenched almost painfully tight, "I didn't think it would be today."

"It is our graduation," James couldn't help but to point out.

"Which doesn't really explain anything," said Sirius, his voice low and his tone dark. "Never tickle a sleeping dragon and all that. We could've went our separate ways and never talked about this."

"You wanted us to pretend as if Magic didn't intend us to be together?"

Sirius opened his eyes at that, his back straightening and his mouth half open in shock. "Then your Mark describes *me*?"

James flushed, shifting nervously from one foot to the other as Sirius continued to stare at him in open shock. "I think so? I mean, it *could*. It's bloody vague, to be honest."

"Can I see it?"

He only hesitated for a second before removing his cloak, leaving him in a thin white t-shirt and brown slacks. He rolled up the right sleeve of his shirt, leaving his arm bare. He didn't move to take off his charmed necklace though, instead spending his time studying Sirius.

Sirius looked like he wasn't breathing; he was tense and his eyes were fixated on the spot where he knew the soul Mark lay. Seven years and unintentional slip-ups had given him that information. "Hey," he said, startling a small flinch out of Sirius, "it'll be okay."

Sirius stared up at him, obviously impatient, and James obliged, flaring his magic to burn off the charm engraved on the silver necklace. The words he knew so well came into existence, the black of the words standing out against his tanned skin.

Sirius was already ghosting his fingertips above it, murmuring the words under his breath in an almost reverent tone. "Against all odds, James?" he asked after a minute of the words sinking in. "Do you really think it means me?"

"Why wouldn't it?" asked James, his voice just as low. "The odds are certainly against us, what with you being born a Black. Your family hates mine."

"That's certainly true," chuckled Sirius, and he withdrew his trembling hand. James almost stopped him by grabbing his hand and putting it back where it belonged when he realized what Sirius was doing.

Sirius had his wand in hand, the tip of it swirling in circles next to the top of his neck. James watched with abated breath as he felt the magic in the air shift, and he let out a gasp when the Mark finally came into view.

It was the Potter crest.

For a split second, he felt an intense, burning jealousy at the thought that Sirius could belong to *Harry* and then he remembered that Harry was very much the Dark Lord's and the feeling passed almost immediately to be replaced with relief.

Sirius was *his*.

That was enough to spur him into action and he was on Sirius, immediately. He pressed close to the shorter wizard, using his height to crowd Sirius against the wall.

Sirius didn't even bother to resist, just tilting his head up to stare up at James. James let a smile cross his face as his eyes dipped briefly to alight upon Sirius' very visible Mark. "Your mark is my crest," he said, his tone serious, and that startled a bark of a laugh out of Sirius.

"Yes, it is," said Sirius, looking amused. "Which means I probably *do* belong to you."

"You're bloody mine," he snarled, and he was tugging Sirius forward into a searing kiss. Sirius laughed into the kiss, but it was promptly cut off as James took advantage of that to slip his tongue into his mouth. The mood shifted almost immediately as soon as James deepened the kiss, and one of Sirius' hands made his way to James' shoulder, holding tight as if it was his lifeline.

When he finally drew away, Sirius' black eyes were unfocused and his lips bruised and bitten.

The sight blew away the rest of his resolve and he leaned down again, capturing Sirius' lips for the second time.

Sirius huffed another sound of laughter into his mouth, but tilted his head accordingly to better accommodate him.

James knew they had so much to talk about. Starting with the glaring fact that they were still on opposite sides of the war and ending with the fact that James really did not know how to be with a boy. But Sirius was here, pliant and willing under his touch, so he gave up his common sense for a little while and surrendered to his instincts.

Harry discreetly scratched at the skin under his collar, unhappy with the stiff fabric that his Intended had dressed him in. It looked nice, sure, but it was uncomfortable and chafed at the neck whenever he shifted.

The older man in front of him continued to talk facts at him, as if Harry could actually follow the long convoluted topic the man had chosen. He nodded accordingly, but his mind started to wander as the Unspeakable started to delve into more and more esoteric topics.

He was sure his eyes were glazing over when Severus finally noticed his plight. Severus abandoned his side by Regulus, coming up and greeting the man with his name and a probably insincere compliment. He was pulling Harry away as soon as he made the necessary excuse, leading him to a more secluded place of the Malfoy Manor.

"What's got you so happy?" he wondered as Severus actually had a smile on his face as they walked.

Severus grinned, his teeth actually showing as he turned to tilt his head back at Harry. "I haven't told you my plans for the summer, have I?"

"Aren't you going to apprentice under that famous potions master? I thought we already celebrated that."

Severus nodded, his smile not diminishing at all, but he pressed closer to Harry, his voice almost a whisper when he spoke next. "Lily came to me the other day. All her plans for after school were made with Potter, you see, so when they broke up, she was naturally at a loss for what to do next. So I suggested she come with me."

"To Paris?" asked Harry, his eyebrows raised high. "To study *potions*? I thought Lily was failing that subject."

"Lily? Failing?" questioned Severus, his eyes wide. "How did you ever get that idea?"

"The two of you had so many sessions after class, what else was I to think?"

"You could've just asked," laughed Severus, his shock forgotten in the face of his joy. "She's rather brilliant at it, maybe even better than you."

He scowled, "I rather doubt that."

Severus patted his arm to console him, but his usual dour attitude was missing. "We've been researching about werewolves, lately. It was Lil's idea, but I think we're on to something."

Harry blinked, thinking about Remus, and he hummed. "I know a werewolf if you ever need any info. Just keep me updated?"

"Of course I will," said Severus, his eyes softening. "It's going to be weird not being able to see you every day."

"It'll only be for a few years," he pointed out, "then the War will start."

Severus nodded, his expression now serious. Before he could say anything else, they reached their destination.

"Hey," said Lucius, smiling up at them from where he was sitting in a comfy armchair. The rest of the graduated students, who were mostly Slytherins, were gathered around Lucius, with varying types of drinks held in their hand as they conversed. "Did you get lost on your way here or did you decide to be late for the first time in your life?"

Harry rolled his eyes, but perched himself on the arm of Lucius' chair, using his right arm to grab at Lucius' drink. Lucius snorted before relinquishing the glass, watching with bright silver eyes as Harry downed the rest of the older wizard's firewhiskey.

"You do know there's plenty to go around," said Lucius, sounding just a second away from laughing. "No need to take mine."

"You mean you didn't have that drink just for me?" he asked, and laughed when Lucius' eyes narrowed.

"You little brat," he hissed, but the smile on his face gave him away.

They trailed off into another conversation after the tension diffused, the other students joining in and talking about what they had planned after Hogwarts.

Lucius pulled him to the side after a while, his expression serious. "Did something happen with Black over there?" He tilted his head to the side to indicate what he meant, and Harry followed the motion.

He hadn't even noticed Sirius. The wizard was brooding in the corner, seated in an elaborate chair with both his arms crossed and his gaze focused somewhere far away. He was far enough away from the gathering of graduated students to avoid conversation, but close enough that he could come join in if he desired.

Sirius was upset.

Harry had a sinking suspicion that it was because of his twin. He sighed before redirecting his attention back to Lucius. "I can guess what happened," he said. "I'll go talk to him."

"Please do," said Lucius. "He's rather ruining the atmosphere of the party. I told my parents we shouldn't have invited any Gryffindors."

Harry rolled his eyes, knowing the older Slytherin wasn't serious. Lucius didn't dislike Sirius despite his numerous jabs at the Gryffindor; Sirius came from a pure-blood family and that was enough for Lucius.

When he got close enough to Sirius, he spoke, "Excited for Auror training?"

Sirius glanced up, "Harry."

"Hello," he said, cordially, "What's got you so down?"

"It's nothing, really," said Sirius, even though his voice was hoarse from what Harry strongly suspected was crying.

"Not enough spirits?" he teased, holding out his champagne glass with a two-finger grip and offering it up to Sirius.

That prompted a small upturning of his lips, but Sirius didn't take the glass. He glanced briefly around the two of them before frowning up at Harry. "Did you tell him?"

There was no context, but Harry knew immediately what Sirius was talking about. "Yes." There was no reason to fluff his words, because it *had* been him who had betrayed Sirius' trust.

Sirius didn't look angry though, and he just let out a soft breath, leaning back against the back of his chair. "Well, that solves one mystery."

"Did he confront you? Don't tell me Jamie was silly enough to do it today..."

Sirius snorted at that, "Yes, well, we never did say Jamie was the smart one, did we?" This time, Sirius didn't hesitate when Harry offered the glass, taking it into his hands and sipping rather morosely at it.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

There was a short silence before Sirius responded, "Not really. But for you, well, maybe."

"You're not mad at me then?"

"I'm furious, really. But it would've happened sooner or later, and well, it's not like it turned out bad because you told him. I mean, well, it's mutual."

"Mutual? Then why are you upset?"

"Well, it's not as if we can actually be together. He's the figurehead of the Light and maybe, a few years ago, I would've abandoned everything to follow him, but it's different now."

"Sirius," Harry interjected, his heart aching at the sight of Sirius' unnaturally bright eyes, "Forget the War."

"You're our Lord's Intended and you're telling me to forget the War?" asked Sirius, sounding a tad stunned.

"Look," said Harry, squatting so he could look Sirius in the eye. "Magic Intended you for James. There has to be a reason. And your beliefs did align with the Light in the beginning, and I don't want you to beat yourself up over this."

"You're being silly, Harry. It's different now. I can't willingly fight for the Light when I've already decided I'm for the Dark. And you're my friend, and I can't just abandon my little brother to this. And my family would lose so much face if I actually went to the Light."

"But James is your Intended," he protested.

Sirius stared at him, "Did you want me to go to the Light side? Are you getting sick of me, Harry?"

He flushed, "It's not that! It's just I want Jamie to be happy, you know. And before that, I want *you* to be happy."

"Oh Merlin," said Sirius, "Is this because you just found your Intended so you want us all to be happy?"

"It's not like that!" he protested, but Sirius was already laughing. He didn't mind the laughter being at his expense if he could cheer Sirius up a little.

"Right," said Sirius. "I did hear from Prince that you didn't return to your quarters last night."

"What?" he squeaked out, hating how it felt like the tables had turned in a matter of seconds. "I, what, I can't believe Severus told you that!"

Sirius' eyes twinkled, "I have my ways."

"You mean you annoyed Severus to the point in which he just told you to get you to leave him alone."

Sirius opened his mouth to retort, but snapped his mouth shut a second later. He set his glass on the side of his chair before rising and bowing deeply.

Harry tilted his head back to glance at the newcomer, knowing immediately who it was.

Tom stood there, looking resplendent in his expensive robes. As per most formal occasions, Tom's hair fell in curls, giving him a more approachable look. He inclined his head graciously at Sirius' bow, before holding his arm out.

Harry took it with a small smile, allowing the Dark Lord to use the handhold to pull him closer to his side. Now that their soul marks were known to the public, little intimate touches like these weren't out of the question.

"Black," said Tom, acknowledging the pure-blood. "Congratulations on graduating."

"Thank you, sir. And thank you again for getting me into the Auror program."

Tom shrugged, "It was no problem. The skills will serve you far longer than just the program, after all."

It was thinly veiled threat. Aurors, like Moody, were known to heavily lean toward the Light. They hunted people who used Dark Magic, and the Dark wanted to make usage of Dark Magic legal. Tom had allowed Sirius to go into the Auror program, but only under the assumption that Sirius would use his newly acquired skills to serve the Dark during the War.

Sirius noticed the threat for what it is, bowing his head in subservience to Tom. "Of course, sir."

"May I borrow Harry for a bit?"

Sirius nodded, looking bewildered at the question, and Tom swept Harry away.

"You're neglecting your guests," said Harry as Tom led him toward Abraxus' study.

"My guests?" asked Tom. "Wouldn't you say they're Abraxus' guests?"

"Are you suggesting you didn't plan this party?" he asked, and laughed when Tom adopted an annoyed expression. As they got to a more secluded place, Harry pressed even closer to the taller wizard, smiling up at Tom until his annoyed expression melted away. "I had fun, Tom. Thanks for planning this for me."

"For you?" he scoffed. "It was to make connections, nothing more."

Harry rolled his eyes, but didn't press his. Intended, following docilely until Tom was dismantling the wards around the study. They were in after a few minutes and Tom deposited Harry into one of the chairs before walking over to Abraxus' cabinets to find wine.

"Are we going to drink him out of his expensive liquor?" asked Harry as Tom used magic to pour the liquid into tall champagne glasses.

"Abraxus will understand," said Tom, floating one of the glasses over to Harry before taking his own seat.

"Will he?" questioned Harry, amused, but fell silent when Tom pulled out a thin box. "Is that?"

"Your Courting gift," said Tom. He didn't elaborate, instead deciding to open the box and reveal the content within.

He let out a soft sound of wonder when he laid eyes upon it, reaching out and taking the box within his own hands. The chain was silver and thin, the centerpiece of the necklace being a locket inlaid with green jewels in the shape of a S. "Is it your picture inside?" he teased, but his fingers were trembling when he lifted the locket out of its confines.

Tom, after years of knowing him, didn't even bother to deign his question with a proper answer, "It's Slytherin's Locket. It was only returned to me a few years ago, since another witch had illegal possession over it. Since it belongs to my family, it's only natural that the authorities returned it to me."

"It's beautiful," he murmured. "A proper first Courting gift."

"It'll clash horribly with your necklace, however."

Harry blinked, "You did this on purpose."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Tom, but his smile gave him away.

Harry sighed, reaching upward and undoing the clasp of his necklace. The silver necklace that he had worn for so long now rested on his palm and it was with only a slight tinge of wistfulness that he let it drop onto the coffee table in front of him. "People are still not going to see my Mark, you know."

"It's the thought that matters," said Tom. "Everyone already knows your Mark, so why hide it?"

"Are you going to hide yours?"

Tom hummed, "Do *you* want people to know?"

"No," he said. "Let them wonder." Harry punctuated his words by putting the locket around his neck. "Does it do anything else besides looking pretty?"

"I placed a Dark curse on it," said Tom, looking satisfied with himself. "If opened, it should serve as a distraction. The only downside is that Dumbledore will suspect it to be a Horcrux."

He may come after you."

"It's only fitting that you give me a supposed Horcrux for your first Gift," said Harry, grinning. "At least Dumbledore will see it that way."

"He'll seek you out, but since you'll be with me, he won't come after us until he finds the rest."

"The rest?"

"Dumbledore thinks I have an obsession with the number seven."

"Thinks?" he interrupted, failing to stifle his laughter. "You do!"

"I do not," scowled Tom, his eyes flashing.

"You have seven armchairs," he started to list out. "You bought me seven new robes for Christmas. You even have six extra back-up wands!"

Tom scoffed, but it was easy to see he was embarrassed. "*Anyway*," the Dark Lord said, his tone dangerous. "I have decided to place them in warded areas around the world and slowly leak the location to Dumbledore to serve as distractions. It'll buy us time and distract Dumbledore from actively coming after us. We'll use the time bought to seed in more policies and laws that are kinder to Dark Magic. And to fix your magic."

"How are you going to place them if you're going to be with me?"

"Lucius and Lockhart will be helping me."

"Lockhart? So you *did* do something!"

Tom raised an eyebrow, not looking remorseful at all. "He was helpful, was he not?"

"Of course he was," he said. "I just never knew why he decided to make an alliance with me."

"I'm confident he would have come to you on his own. I just sped up the process a bit."

"What did you give him? Or did you end up blackmailing him?"

"Remember how I told you how he was a Muggleborn who had something to prove? All he wanted was to study under me when he graduated Hogwarts. He's quite interested in politics. Of course, my plans for him changed when you told him about the War. He's a much more useful pawn now."

"He *is* my friend," he pointed out. "Please don't get him killed."

Tom shrugged, "I can't promise that."

"Tom," he scowled, and Tom relented, looking mulish.

"If Dumbledore catches him, he won't suspect him of working for me. So he is relatively safe."

"I guess that's all I can ask for," said Harry, making a mental note to place some protections on Lockhart when he saw him next. He would have to sacrifice some of the ambient magic around him, but he had found that magic that dealt with other people came easier to him now. He strongly suspected that Magic had reworked him to be more like Her, and the thought was quite troubling. "Moving on, do you think Magic will be able to fix me?"

"Without a doubt," said Tom, his tone dark. "If she isn't able to, I'll figure out a way, regardless. Besides, your magic is completely fine with a wand and if you weren't being so stubborn, your magic would be back to normal already."

He pouted, "But that wand connected me to you."

Tom sighed, gesturing to the Mark on Harry's chest. "Is that not sufficient?"

"Fine," he sighed. "But we see Magic first. Maybe she can fix me so I don't have to use a wand. Merlin knows I barely used it even *when* my magic channels were normal."

"We leave tomorrow," reminded Tom. "Do you want to see any of your friends before we retire for the night?"

"No," he said, after a moment of thought. "Lucy and Sev would have seen me leaving with you, so they won't be worried."

"Good," said Tom. "Then come here, Harry."

Harry obeyed without an ounce of hesitation.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Omg...you guys wouldn't BELIEVE the trouble I had writing this! I'm so appalled it took me so long to get this out, so I'm really sorry about this! Someone told me that my dialogue is unnatural and I realized it really is so I like second guessed every single part of dialogue for a long while before I was like screw it, I'll get better at it eventually lol xD so I'm sorry if there are some parts of it that are weird! I like try to view dialogue in real life the same way and I just can't reconcile it so I was like I give up, there is a reason this is writing XD. One day I will get better at it!

Anyway, sorry for quite the boring chapter @@ so dialogue based which is probably why I had so much trouble with it aha. Next chapter should be more exciting! It'll start with them meeting Magic and focusing on fixing Harry's magic + getting a new wand. Then we'll probably see Gilderoy and Lockhart working on placing the horcruxes, possibly see James + Frank and Alice longbottom working with Dumbledore to find some / learning more about the history of the Dark Lord as well as the aftermath of what happened with James and Sirius (which was basically Sirius telling James he won't abandon the Dark for him), Then we'll go into recruiting some of the more tricky magical creatures (vampires mostly) + planning to finally introduce Harry having his first time with Tom there. After much debate, I decided I'm not going to write smut in this story because I only like reading smut

in stories that are PwP so I don't want to break up my story by adding smut (since I usually scroll past it when I'm reading chaptered stories). But! I'll be posting the smut on a different account which I'll link here (also so my boyfriend can't find my smut works easily...xD) which will be written later.

As always, thanks so much for the wonderful feedback. It really does encourage me to write faster and it really really warms my heart so much! :) Please do let me know what you think ! Any words are fine, it's just such a joy to read words from you guys <3.

New Wands

Chapter Notes

erm, there's a description of a dragon getting killed but it isn't graphic at least I don't think it is? anyway, enjoy!

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

"You used my gift," were Magic's first words to him when she appeared. She was dressed exactly as she had been the first time he met her, but this time her form seemed more corporeal and there was a healthy flush in her cheeks.

"Yes," cut in Tom before Harry could answer. "And it burned up his wand and changed the way his magic works. So if you could kindly take it back..."

She shot an annoyed glance over at Tom, crossing her arms in front of her in a clear defiant gesture. "It doesn't work that way."

"Then why did you give it to him in the first place if you knew it was going to do *this*?"

"Obviously I was hoping he wouldn't have to use it," she retorted, but she sighed a second after, her hostile demeanor melting away. She brought a hand up to Tom's cheek, patting it softly where the Mark lay. "Your Mark is out in the open. I take it Harry knows then?"

"You told him the last time he came here anyway," accused Tom.

She tilted her head, her girlish charm from last time finally emerging from her shell. "Well, you were being stubborn. I just wanted to give Harry some hope." She glanced over at Harry, her smile kind. "I told you he's yours."

Harry smiled helplessly back and she took his hands into hers, closing her eyes and humming softly. When she opened them back up, they were glowing an intense bright blue and she interlocked their fingers. She stepped away when the glow faded, her look curious. "It worked surprisingly well."

"You planned this," started Tom, darkly, but she held up a hand to silence him.

"Tom," she warned, and in her voice it was easy to see the reminder that she still was a deity and she was the reason they all had magic. "Harry," she continued, her voice softer, "I am truly sorry that you suffered pain at my gift. However, you are stronger because of it."

He didn't want to seem ungrateful, so he just nodded, doing his best to keep his expression neutral. Because how was his magic better this way? He couldn't even use any of his wandless magic without draining the magic from around him.

"I can tell you're confused," said Magic, giggling. "It's alright, Harry, you can be honest with me, I won't be mad."

"I don't want to drain the magic around me," he said, truthfully, and she nodded at his answer.

"And you won't have to, sweetie," she said, her tone cajoling. "The wand I will make for you will be able to draw out your innate magic." She paused to tap the center of his chest with her pointer finger, "It's still in there, you know. It's just further in and needs a little bit of help to get out."

He let out a sigh of relief at her words, "Thank you."

"Wands come in pairs," she said, her gaze locking onto Tom. "Let me see your wand, Tom."

Tom acquiesced, handing it over to her. She blinked, "It's yew. With Fawkes' tail feathers as a core? And if I recall, Harry's was holly with a matching core, correct?" When Harry nodded, she tilted her head, obviously thinking. "How very curious. Yew wands are known to lean toward the Dark, while holly wands are more geared toward protection."

"I'm a bit more Light than Tom," said Harry, and Tom just shrugged, not denying the words because it was true.

"But you're turning more Dark every day," said Magic, her words making a shiver crawl up Harry's spine. "Which isn't a bad thing, Harry. You're grey."

"Grey?"

"Yes, your magic is suited for both. You can cast both kinds of spell with equal amounts of ease and difficulty. Like me," she said, sounding intrigued. "And Merlin."

"What does that mean?" cut in Tom, sounding suspicious. "You know something you're not telling us."

"Don't be silly, Tom," said Magic, a flash of annoyance crossing over her features. "A girl has to keep some secrets, you know."

Tom looked like he wanted to protest, but at Magic's quirking of her eyebrow, he fell silent again, annoyance written all across his features.

"It's quite a blessing that your wand burned up," said Magic, callously, and didn't apologize when Harry flinched at her words. "It would've stopped working for you eventually. You're very different from when you first started Hogwarts."

Harry didn't protest that part because it was true. When he had first gotten his wand, he had hated Tom. He had sworn to himself to have nothing to do with the Dark Lord, to spend his years at Hogwarts as nondescript as possible. Of course, Tom had obliterated that option as soon as he got to the school, and he had changed accordingly to the trials and knowledge Tom had given him.

"The wood is easy," said Magic. "The trees outside are saturated with my magic after growing so close to the temple. The core is more complicated. Since I'll be granting Harry with a new

wand, I propose we do away with yours as well."

Tom snatched his wand back from her as soon as she said that, away from where she had been idly playing with it between her hands. She giggled, "Oh silly Tom, I wouldn't have burned it up right away."

"You're absolutely infuriating," snarled Tom.

She shrugged, not bothered at all but Tom's hostility. "Anyway, a dragon's heartstring is the most powerful core for those who practice Dark magic. And for you, Harry, since you are an anomaly, I propose a mixture of a quarter of Tom's core and a unicorn hair. Unicorn hair is known to be the reserved for those pure of heart and will cater to the protective side of your magic."

"Is that possible?" questioned Harry. "I've never heard of a combination like that before."

"Wands are a manmade creation," said Magic, "but I've been around long enough to know the basics of it. And I have a lot more power to work with than normal wandmakers. It'll be fine."

"You have no clue if you can do it, do you," said Tom, dryly, and Magic just laughed at his jab, obviously out of pure enjoyment.

"Well, there's a first time for everything," she said brightly.

"Okay," said Tom, "and that is precisely why we are getting rid of my wand *after* you make us new ones."

"That's fair," said Magic, magnanimously. "Now the core. Wands bend to their owners' will and will have to actually respect you to work at their most efficient."

"Are you suggesting our wands are sentient?" scoffed Tom.

"The best wands are," said Magic. "Have you never heard of the Elder Wand?"

"That's a children's tale," said Harry.

Tom looked uncomfortable, "Actually, Dumbledore is in possession of the wand. The Cloak your brother gave you is rumored to be one of them also. And the ring is sitting in my vault."

There was a long silence before Harry sighed, "And you wonder why I don't tell you everything."

"It never came up!" protested Tom. "It's just a rumor, after all."

"It has some merit to it," said Magic. "How do you think I granted you immortality?"

Tom stared at Magic in thinly disguised horror, "You mean Death exists?"

Magic grinned, patting him on his cheek, "Oh darling, I forgot how obsessed you were with immortality. You would have lost your mind if I hadn't found you."

"I wasn't obsessed," scowled Tom.

"Right," said Harry, unable to resist. "Just like how you aren't obsessed with the number seven."

Magic made a sound of excitement, "He does that to you, too? For some odd reason, he always makes sure to end the ritual to summon me by adding seven last drops of blood when it really isn't necessary."

"Why didn't you tell me that earlier? I would've stopped if I knew," snarled Tom, obviously embarrassed and trying his best to hide it.

"I thought it was cute," said Magic. "I'm sorry to break it to you, but seven is not the most magical number. It's actually the number three."

"Like the Deathly Hallows," said Tom.

Magic nodded. "Your kind don't have the right idea of what Death actually is, but you won't be getting any more information about it from me. Just know that the Deathly Hallows do have powers that other artifacts do not."

"Which is why you want to give us a new wand," said Harry, slowly. "You want us to be able to match Dumbledore."

"Bingo," said Magic, smiling. "I definitely can't create something on the same caliber as the Elder Wand, but your new wands combined should have the potential to defeat it. However, I know you have quite the grudge against Dumbledore, but Dumbledore is not the biggest enemy."

"The Muggles are," said Harry, and Magic nodded.

"We'll have to figure out our best course of action after we've finished making the wands. Getting my powers back is first priority, but after that, we need to decide what to do with the Muggles. It *is* a race against time. I've been watching them since the very beginning, and they already have a way to make the Earth inhabitable. They haven't done it yet, because they actually do have some semblance of sense, but time can only tell what they are planning."

"The atomic bomb," explained Tom when Harry sent him a questioning glance. "Just one of them can decimate a part of Earth and make it so full of radiation that no living forms can survive there."

Magic sighed, "Which is why we can't waste time. A war can start up any time between the Muggles and I fear the next war can be the last. I need worshippers fast. Some of my power has already come back thanks to Tom, but it's still not enough. We need to deal with Dumbledore as fast as possible."

"So a dragon heartstring and unicorn hair," clarified Harry.

"Oh," said Magic, "we got completely off point there, didn't we? A wand's core works best when it submits to you. Which means I want you to find live ingredients."

"Are you asking us to slay a dragon?" asked Tom.

"Without magic, preferably," she said, a sly smile on her face. "If I recall, Harry did make you Excalibur."

"What?" asked Harry. "When?"

"Remember when you were with the Centaurs," said Tom, sounding resigned. "Magic gave me the stone Merlin had reduced the sword to years ago and told me to make you end the spell. Which you did."

"The blue jewel."

"Yes," said Tom, before fixing his gaze back on Magic. "And where will you propose we find a dragon that we will be able to kill?"

She shrugged, "You're the one living in this time, Tom. I'm sure you'll be resourceful enough to find one."

Tom scowled, but wisely didn't say anything else. Harry spoke instead, "And the unicorn?"

"A flock of them reside in the Forbidden Forest," said Magic. "If you ask them nicely, I'm sure they'll let you have one, Harry."

"But not Tom," said Harry, grinning, and Tom turned the force of his glare over to Harry.

"The two of you are teaming up on me," he said, dryly.

"Who else would?" questioned Magic. "I do watch over you two, you know, and everyone is much too scared of Tom to speak up. It's good for you, darling, to get some of that ego knocked out of you every now and then."

Tom looked infuriated, so Harry grabbed his Intended's hand in an attempt to calm him.

"Alright, alright," said Harry, "I think it's time we head out now. We'll summon you again soon?"

"This isn't over," warned Tom, ignoring the way Harry pinched at the soft side of Tom's elbow.

"You worry too much, Harry," said Magic, her grin infectious. "We're just playing. I'm not offended at all. See you later, darling," she said, blowing a kiss toward Tom and disappearing with a soft gust of wind.

Tom sighed, "I hate dealing with her sometimes."

"You don't mean that," said Harry.

"I really do," said Tom, his voice louder than normal because he knew Magic could still hear them. A tinkling of laughter answered him, and although Tom scowled, his smile after was fond.

They tried the Romanian Dragon Sanctuary first.

It had been tricky to explain what they wanted, and even more so when the dragon keepers realized that they wanted a dragon's heartstring. It had taken a while, but eventually they found a solution.

Killing a dragon from their sanctuary was not going to happen, but one of the dragons that the sanctuary had been scheduled to deal with had been sentenced to death. It had killed too many people and had threatened the statute of secrecy multiple times and the Chinese Minister for Magic wanted its head.

The dragon was a Chinese Fireball, known for its mushroom-shaped flames and its lion-like appearance. It wasn't the most dangerous dragon they could face, but it had a fond diet for humans, which was exemplified by the way Chinese muggles from the village nearby went constantly missing.

They had finally located the dragon's nest when the two of them had gotten there, and it had taken a lot more cajoling and a few bribes to get the dragon keepers to allow them to take the first hit at the dragon.

It was lucky that Tom had allies everywhere; Evan Rosier had been called and he had talked to dragon keepers for an hour before the proposal was accepted. Evan Rosier had been their liaison with the sanctuary for the tournament, which explained why the First Task had ended with a dragon.

They set the expedition for a week later, and spent that week preparing for the battle. They needed the dragon to submit to Tom, which was why Magic had suggested Tom to not use magic. Dragons didn't respect those who used magic, but Tom would have to still use some to augment his fighting style and keep him safe. They kept the spells limited to a small barrier to keep him safe from the dragon's fire and one that would help Tom keep up with the dragon's speed.

The next step was to find fireproof armor, and they enlisted Magic's help on making it safe enough to withstand a dragon's fire. She had blessed it with her trademark blue magic, before cooing at Tom for how handsome he looked in it.

When the day finally arrived, Harry and Tom apparated to the quaint village located just a few miles away from the dragon's nest. The dragon keepers met them there, all similarly dressed to be able to deal with the dragon if things got out of hand.

The dragon wasn't happy to see them.

They had wanted to try to reason with the dragon beforehand, but the dragon didn't look reasonable, snapping its jaws aggressively when Tom stood in front of it.

Tom was barely able to deflect the first swipe of its claw with Excalibur, the clang reverberating loudly in the cave. The Dark Lord scowled, jumping back and slicing the air a few times in order to get the soreness out of his arm from the brutal hit.

Tom didn't have much time to recollect himself, forced to dodge the dragon's swipes again. The cave was relatively small, limiting the dragon's movement and making flight impossible. They continued like that for a while, a few stray hits nicking Tom's face and making him bleed.

Tom raised his hand in the signal they planned, and Harry nodded, drawing his Intended's wand out of his robe. They had planned this to get the pesky dragon keepers out of the way; they couldn't be trusted to stay back and let them deal with the dragon.

As discreetly as possible, he whispered the latin needed for the *Bombarda* spell, hitting the rocks above the entrance to the cave and causing a landslide. He made sure to time it when the dragon had turned to lunge at Tom, its tail hitting the top of the cave's entrance. It wouldn't have been enough to cause the rocks to fall, but he was betting that the others wouldn't have noticed.

He activated the runes a second after, almost dropping the wand from the exertion that it demanded from him. It was heavier than expected, but he would be easily able to hold the dragon in place with it. The two of them had snuck in a day earlier to place the runes down in the needed locations when they were sure that the dragon was busy out raiding.

"Good job, Harry," said Tom. He casually slung the sword over his shoulder, walking over to Harry and pulling him snug to his side by the waist. As the dragon watched, Tom drew Harry into a deep kiss.

Harry pushed away after a while, "Still holding the spell up, remember?"

"You have the magical reserves to keep it up for a while."

"Dragon Keepers? Outside?" he reminded his Intended, and Tom just smirked back at him, pulling away and then tugging Harry over to where the dragon was.

"*Hello*," hissed Tom in parseltongue.

The dragons' yellow eyes widened and Tom smirked at the sight.

"*You understand me, correct?*" It had been a gamble on their part. They hadn't been sure if the dragon would understand parseltongue since every species was different in their own way. The Chinese Fireball was more closely related to snakes than the other species, but it didn't guarantee that they would be able to negotiate with the dragon.

When the dragon blinked to show it understood, Tom continued. "*I've come to give you a choice. You will die today, but whether it be for a cause or not, it is your choice.*"

"*You are but a mere human*," the dragon growled after Tom had finished speaking. "*I will not fall to a puny human like you.*"

"*Puny, really*," scoffed Tom. "*If you haven't noticed, I could kill you right now if I wanted to.*" To prove his point, he stabbed Excalibur down into the dragon's right foot, eliciting a loud cry of anger from the bound dragon.

"*If it wasn't for your magic*," growled the dragon.

Tom cut it off, "*And that is exactly why I am I proposing what I am. You see, I need your heart for my new wand, and unfortunately that means I must kill you.*"

"*Then what are you waiting for?*" asked the dragon, sounding resigned.

"*Even after death, you can live on in my wand. You'll be my partner, of sorts.*"

"*What sorcery are you proposing, wizard?*" snarled the dragon. "*To mess with life and death, that is not your right.*"

"Even as diminished as She is, your kind must know Magic."

"She?" asked the dragon, obviously startled, and Tom smiled at its confusion, letting go of Excalibur and reaching for Harry.

Harry didn't need to be told what to do; he held up his hands and called forth the magic She had put in him long ago. The dragon reared its head back at the sight of Harry's hands glowing bright blue, its growling enhanced in the small cave.

"How is this possible? Contained in a mere human like you?"

"We're not just humans," retorted Harry. "We're wizards. And you don't stand a chance against our magic, so I'll prefer it if you stop insulting us now."

The dragon looked like it was at a loss at what to say, so Tom stepped in. *"Magic needs worshippers to build her power back up. And I need a powerful wand to help Her."*

"And how do I factor in?"

"I need you to respect me. To fight by my side as I command you."

"I will never respect you as long as you continue to hide behind your magic," snarled the dragon.

Tom smirked, leaning over and easily pulling Excalibur out of the dragon, holding it up so the dragon could see it. *"Do you recognize this blade, dragon?"*

"Excalibur," it breathed, *"How do you wield it?"*

"I will fight you one on one with just Excalibur. No magic besides the necessary enhancements that make the fight fair," said Tom.

The dragon stayed silent for a long while, obviously mulling over the fact that Tom had Excalibur in his hand. Excalibur could only be wielded by those it found worthy and it proved that Tom was going to be a huge factor in the upcoming events of the world. Add in the fact that Harry had Her magic in him, it was obvious to the dragon now that the two of them were important.

"There is no reason to refuse," said Tom. *"If you do, I'll simply kill you right here on the spot. If we fight and you win, then you can go on your merry way."*

"And your partner won't try to stop me? If he views your death right in front of his eyes, will he not want for revenge?"

"I'll bind him," said Tom, ignoring the way Harry made a sound of protest. *"Do we have a deal, dragon?"*

"Yes," said the dragon, baring its teeth.

"Hey," said Harry, "Are you really going to bind me, Tom? Isn't this dangerous?"

"Do you not trust me?" asked Tom, and after one last sideways glance at the dragon, turned to face Harry fully. His voice was soft and he brought one of his hands up to lovingly caress at Harry's cheek. "I won't lose, Harry. We've come too far for me to lose to an overgrown reptile."

"I rather think you're underestimating it," murmured Harry. "At least take your wand back?"

"I won't need it," said Tom, a cocky smirk on his face. "Don't you remember? As long as I wield Excalibur with courage, there is no way I'll lose."

"Putting so much faith in a fairytale," he complained, and Tom threw his head back and laughed at his petulant tone.

"Not just a fairytale, sweetheart," said Tom. He leaned over and kissed Harry's forehead, and Harry tried his best not to blush too noticeably at Tom's endearment.

"If you die on me," he warned, his voice low, "I will not only hunt this dragon down, but I'll follow you to the afterlife myself to kick your pretty arse for being so stupid."

Tom choked back a laugh, and instead of responding, waved his hand to spell Harry to the wall. Harry scowled at the restraints, but didn't make a verbal protest. Tom grinned, pressing one last kiss to the tip of Harry's nose, before turning to face the dragon.

"*Ready?*" asked Tom.

The dragon roared as a response, and Tom cocked his hand over at Harry. Harry canceled the spell with just a simple thought, and then the dragon and Tom were circling in the small enclosed space.

"*Are you ready to die?*" growled the dragon, and without waiting for a response, it lunged at Tom.

Tom had enhanced his muscles with magic, so it was easy for the Dark Lord to jump over the dragon's lunging mouth. The dragon's jaws snapped down on nothing, and Tom used the momentary opening to slash a cut into the dragon's right shoulder. It was shallow at best, but a trickle of blood started to run down the red scales.

The dragon roared in anger, and in its anger, it spun, its tail nearly catching Tom in its fast speed. Tom ducked backwards, the tail sailing harmlessly over him. He spun into a standing position almost immediately, and used his momentum to swing Excalibur down onto the tail, slicing it completely off.

The tail fell limply onto the floor, and the dragon turned almost insanely fast, and since Tom was out of position, was able to swipe one of its claws directly toward him. Tom only had enough time to catch the blunt of the swipe with his sword, and the force of the hit threw him backward. Harry flinched when he heard the resulting sound of Tom hitting the cave wall.

When the dust from the hit cleared, Tom was seen coughing into his hand, blood staining the front of his now ruined white shirt. His hair was in disarray and a shallow cut from a stray rock was bleeding profusely from the top of his head.

"I commend you," said the dragon, *"thinking you can win against me without magic. You have sliced my tail off, but that will grow back in a manner of days."*

"It's not over yet," hissed Tom. This time, it was Tom who attacked first, running forward and neatly dodging the slow bite that the dragon had aimed for. He got another shallow cut in on the dragon's belly, but was forced to retreat when the dragon reared back and started to breathe fire.

The heat was almost unbearable, but the charms that the two of them had in place helped them withstand it.

"You can't breathe fire forever," taunted Tom, and the dragon stopped with a snap of its jaws, crawling low to the ground to look Tom in the eye.

"I don't need fire to beat you," snarled the dragon, and this time when it lunged, it was able to neatly flatten Tom to the ground.

Harry gasped, but the two of them had no time to look over at him. Even held down to the ground, Tom didn't look worried; instead his trademark smirk was still prominent on his face.

The dragon growled at the sight, *"Good-bye, little wizard."*

"Tom!" Harry called out in worry, but his worry wasn't needed because Tom was already throwing Excalibur, the tip of it going straight from the bottom of the dragon's jaw to the top, instantly killing it.

Harry waited a minute to ensure that the dragon was actually dead before using Magic's gift to suck away at Tom's magic, dispelling the restraints and dropping him to the floor. He was rushing over to Tom's side a minute later, using Tom's wand to blast the dragon's claw off of him.

"You got caught on purpose, didn't you?" asked Harry, shouldering Tom's weight so he could help the older wizard sit up.

Tom nodded, wincing when Harry jarred him particularly hard. The dragon had broken his ribs when it had flattened him. "Only way to get it to let its guard down."

"You could've died!" he hissed.

Tom grinned, "Were you worried?"

"Of course I was," he sighed, "you're lucky I love you enough to forgive you for that."

He pinked immediately, and Tom noticed, his smile turning fond and his eyes soft. "You love me?"

"Well," he said as casually as he could, "Magic put us together so it's not *that* surprising."

"Just because you're my Intended doesn't mean you have to love me," pointed out Tom.

"Don't be silly, Tom," he said, "Don't you know Magic controls our feelings, too?"

Tom scoffed, but his smile stayed. "I love you, too."

"Can you say that again?" he got out after a beat of silence.

Tom looked amused, and he leaned forward to press a chaste kiss against Harry's lips. "I love you, too, you silly little minx," he whispered against Harry's lips.

When the dragon keepers finally got through the landslide Harry created, they found the two covered in blood next to a downed dragon, kissing as if nothing else mattered.

Madam Pomfrey hadn't been happy when she caught sight of Tom, placing her hands on her hips and sending her best disapproving glare to the beat-up Dark Lord.

It didn't take long to fix him up, though. Most of his wounds were shallow and his ribs were easy enough to put back into place with Madam Pomfrey's expertise.

Harry spent the night curled up next to Tom on the small hospital bed, loathe to part from his Intended after they had shared their first 'I love you's'. Madam Pomfrey caught them in the morning, but instead of scolding them, she just shook her head and sent them on their way. Although not after scolding Tom for not taking better care of himself.

Tom bore the scolding with good grace, used to it after years of knowing the motherly woman. They visited the Headmaster's office next, grabbing Tom's spare set of robes and spending an hour or so eating the breakfast the House-elves sent up.

When they were fed and good to go, Harry sent along his patronus to the Centaurs to announce their arrival. Things had been tense since the last Task, what with Harry's draining of the most magical place in the Forbidden Forest. Luckily, Synes had vouched for Harry, and after they viewed the blue magic on Harry's hands when he activated his ability to mess with ambient magic, they had forgiven him. They knew what the blue magic meant, and they knew that Magic thought it was necessary for him to be able to do what he did.

It also helped that Tom had bought them a few things they had been coveting for a while, but Harry tried his best not to dwell on how much money he had cost his Intended.

The Centaurs met them on the outskirts of the Forest and after exchanging a few terse greetings, led them to the clearing that the unicorns frequented the most. They departed after guiding them because the unicorns were best found with less people around.

They were in the same clearing that they had used for the ritual for the werewolves just a year ago and it was just as magical and beautiful as it was back then. The stream in the back was still clear, and the small waterfall caught the sunlight just right to shine. The grass was soft and plentiful, and the trees reached up high, giving them an overhang and casting shadows all across the clearing.

"You were beautiful that day, you know," said Harry, sitting down next to Tom after seeing the centaurs off.

Tom was already laying on his back, and when Harry spoke, turned a bit so he could look up at him. "Which day?"

"When you did that ritual for the werewolves? I think I fell a little bit more in love with you that day, to be honest."

"Are you going to keep on saying that now that we've already said it?"

"What's wrong with that?" asked Harry, and he got onto his stomach so he could whisper into his Intended's ear, doing his best to stifle his giggles. "I love you," he repeated a few times until Tom made a disgruntled noise, using his hand to swat at Harry.

"You're going to wear it out, you silly minx."

"Are you saying you won't love me anymore if I keep on saying it?" he asked, doing his best to sound scandalized.

Tom rolled his eyes, "You're being utterly ridiculous, and you know it."

"Fine," he huffed, but he acquiesced, turning so that he could lay his head down on his Intended's stomach. Tom didn't protest, and after a minute, started to card his long fingers through his hair. Harry made a pleased sound, and after a while of the soothing motions, started to doze off.

"You know," he said, half awake, "I've only heard you sing that day. It was so beautiful."

Tom laughed, and Harry felt the vibrations as Tom quieted down. "Are you asking me to sing for you?"

"Pretty please?" he murmured, tilting his head up to use the full force of his green eyes on his Intended.

Tom rolled his eyes, "Just this once."

Tom's voice was just as beautiful as it was back then; it was husky with a timbre that was unique. He sang in Latin, and although it wasn't a spell, it felt as if Tom was weaving one in the air above them. Harry sat there with abated breath as Tom continued to sing softly.

Tom cut himself off abruptly after a few minutes and when Harry glanced upward, Tom gestured subtly to the unicorns that were staring at them from the shadows behind the trees. There were four of them, three adults and one smaller foal, all pure white as depicted in the textbooks.

Harry stood slowly, but Tom didn't bother to move, knowing that his soul was sullied to the point that the unicorns wouldn't let him near them. After all, Tom had killed before, and the deed of that was enough to warn the unicorns away from him.

He approached them cautiously, and as soon as he got close, the largest unicorn tossed its mane at him before walking forward and laying its head on his shoulder.

He held his breath and held still, and only moved when the other adult unicorn nudged his hand with its snout.

He didn't know how much time passed before he felt safe enough to ask them. "Is it alright if I take a hair from your mane?"

The two adults near him didn't look as if they understood him, and when he tried to take one, the foal from behind rammed him softly, stopping his motion and confusing him. In all the stories they had read about this, none had written about the unicorns refusing. After all, he had already done the hard part; if the unicorns let you get close, most likely they would let you take a hair.

The adult that had touched him earlier was staring him directly in the eyes when he looked back up, and shook its head three times. And then it turned, departing from the scene, its tail swishing back and forth as the other unicorns followed it.

He was utterly confused, and he was just about to ask Tom about it, when he turned and caught sight of what was happening.

The last adult unicorn was leaning over Tom, her snout playfully nudging at the crook of Tom's neck. Tom was holding himself absolutely still, a look of pure panic on his face. The unicorn snorted, and Tom broke out of his trance, using one hand to pet the unicorn's long neck hesitantly.

When Harry got closer, the unicorn glanced up at him before trotting over, presenting her mane to Harry by folding her front legs. "Thank you," Harry murmured, and he took a single shining hair from the unicorn's mane.

However, the unicorn didn't depart, her eyes shining bright when she looked at Harry.

And then she knelt completely, her horn finding its way into Harry's hands. Harry trembled, unsure of what was happening, and then a bright flash happened, blinding the two wizards and drawing a startled cry from Harry.

When he was able to blink the lasting spots out of his eyes, the unicorn was gone. But the horn was still there in his hands, as real as ever.

"She gave you her horn?" asked Magic, her eyes wide.

Harry nodded, holding the horn out to Magic. She took it, turning it over in her hands, a contemplative expression on her face.

"The Centaurs must have told her," she said, quietly. "Why else would she have decided to give up her life for this?"

"She died?" asked Harry, in horror.

"A unicorn dies without a horn," she explained. "But she knew what she was doing, Harry, don't fret. She wants to live on in your wand."

"You keep on saying our wands are sentient," said Harry. "But what exactly does that mean?"

"Tom had the right idea when he fought Naga. Naga may have lost his life, but he will be able to still sense things as Tom's wand. He will be a partner, just as Tom had promised."

"So the Elder wand is similar?"

"Yes and no," said Magic. "The Elder wand only follows those it respects, but it was not a living being before that. It is essentially the wand itself. The wands I will create for you two will be able to summon the spirits of both Naga and Evania when needed. That is why I needed you to collect live ingredients."

Before Harry could respond, Tom returned, a stack of wood in his arms. "I took them from two different trees as you requested," he said, passing a sizeable amount over to Magic. "Also," he continued a bit smugly, "Harry's unicorn *did* approach me."

Magic's eyes widened, "You? But you're not pure."

Tom's eyes narrowed but he didn't rise to the bait. "Yes, she approached me right before she offered her horn to Harry."

Magic looked thoughtful, "That changes things. I'm not sure how Evania could approach you. You have killed before, have you not?"

Tom nodded, "Many times. Most without regret."

"Like your father," said Magic.

Harry blinked, "You killed your father?"

"In 1943," said Tom, looking uncomfortable. "It was in my sixth year."

Harry hummed, but sent a look at Tom to let him know that this discussion wasn't over. It wasn't the right time to ask for more information since Magic was still in front of them.

"And when was the last time you killed someone?"

"1971," said Tom.

"But that was when," murmured Harry.

"When you started school, yes," said Tom. "Things slowed down once I became more invested in teaching. With the wandless lessons and the private tutoring I had in store for you, I had to let my followers take up most of the dirty work."

Harry couldn't help the smile that spread across his face at that, and didn't even blush when Magic started cooing.

"The two of you are so cute," she said, smiling brightly. "Anyway, the decline in killing must be why Evania was able to approach you. Just like how you are turning Harry more Dark, he is turning you more Light."

Tom scowled at that, obviously hating the prospect, and Magic laughed. "Oh cheer up, darling, you know yourself that there's no difference between being Light and Dark."

"Can we just get to the wand making," asked Tom, his tone tired.

Magic giggled, jumping down from the base of her statue where she had been sitting. She handed the horn back to Harry, "We can't use it for the wand, but it should come in handy when

times get bad. You should shrink it and wear it around your neck."

He nodded, pocketing the horn. He handed her the dragon heartstring and unicorn hair and she took it, placing it on the table in front of her and gestured for Tom to do the same.

Her hands glowed a bright blue as she picked up the first wood and within seconds, it was shrinking into a more acceptable form. It was an exact replica of Tom's old wand. There were two pieces of it, obviously split apart so that the core can easily be inserted. The other wand she shaped was the exact same as Harry's old one as well.

"Here's where it gets tricky," she said, holding up the dragon heartstring. She had already cut a sliver off for Harry's wand. "Most wandmakers here will simply insert the core into the wand in hopes that it will get along with the wood. But we want to amplify the magical power so I'll actually bind Naga's spirit to the core. Tom?"

Tom nodded, holding his hand out and handing her a ritual dagger with his free hand. She took the dagger, using the sharp end to slice a shallow cut in the middle of Tom's palm. His blood flowed freely from the wound, splashing onto the wood and the dragon heartstring. The blue magic surrounded the two objects, and a surge of magical power filled the room, stifling the air and making it hard to breathe.

A vision of Naga appeared behind Magic, the dragon's wings almost spanning the whole of the temple. The dragon blew one mushroom-shaped flame toward them, but the fire held no heat and promised no pain. When it cleared, the dragon bent its head, submitting to Tom. When the spirit disappeared, the wand beneath Magic's hand was complete and whole.

She didn't hand it to Tom, however, instead turning and holding her hand out for Harry's. When Tom didn't reach out for the new wand, Harry simply held his wrist out to her, and she cut a similar cut for him.

When the blood splashed, Magic fused the heartstring and the unicorn hair together, making it an overall grey color. Harry stared at it with wide eyes, but the core was soon completely covered by his blood. This time, he was ready for the magic in the room, and he calmly nodded up at Evania. She knelt just as she had in the clearing just a day ago, and then she was gone.

Magic looked paler and her outline was fading. "Goodness," she murmured, "that took a lot more out of me than I thought it would."

"Will you get in trouble with Death? You brought them back, didn't you?" asked Tom.

"What He doesn't know won't hurt him," she said sensibly. "Now, I used up all the magic you two have given me, so I think it's time I take a little rest. I'm sure the two of you are smart enough to figure out your wands by yourself. Oh, and before I forget, check out the books in the back. I may have found a solution to our problems."

Without waiting for any confirmation, she faded away.

"And why couldn't she have just told us the solution," grumbled Tom. "Instead of making us research."

"She was fading away," pointed out Harry, flipping one of the pages of the ancient book in front of him. He was using his wand to flip the pages instead of his hands, worried that he would somehow ruin the delicate books. He had a strong suspicion that they dated back to Merlin's time. "Why have you been so hostile toward her anyway?"

"I don't trust her," said Tom, flatly. "She gave you a gift to strip you of your normal magic. She's planning something, and I don't know what."

"You're being paranoid," said Harry, fondly. "Magic's on our side. She'll let us know if she's planning anything big."

"She's a deity, Harry. She sees our lives as expendable and that worries me."

"Expendable? Didn't she make you immortal?"

Tom looked worried for once, and that made Harry pause. "Yes, but to what degree? I've only ever died once by her hand, so I don't know how immortal I am. And beyond that, *you* can die, and..." Tom trailed off, his jaw clenched tight.

"Are you worried about *me*?"

"Of course I am," snapped Tom, his embarrassment at feeling too much making him defensive. "I just found you, how can I lose you so fast?"

Harry was sure he looked stupid, his mouth gaping and his eyes wide, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't even think of a word to say, so when Tom reached out to close his mouth, he didn't resist.

"I wouldn't know what to do with myself," murmured Tom. "I've been alone for so long, I don't know how I would continue."

"Is it because I'll be gone or because your magic will be, too?" he asked, cheekily, in an attempt to diffuse the tension that had suddenly seeped into the room.

Tom rolled his eyes, "Stop trying to brush this off, Harry. I'm trying to be serious here."

Harry flushed at Tom's words, his eyes threatening to tear up at the expression on his Intended's face. His heart was beating so fast he could barely breathe, and when Tom lovingly brushed a lock of his hair off his cheek, he brought a shaky hand up to Tom's neck, pulling so that he could pull his Intended in for a kiss.

When they broke apart, Harry's voice was soft. "I know it scares you; Magic told me just how scared you were of Death before she found you. But you don't have to be so afraid, Tom. I'll be with you, and you have to believe that you'll be strong enough to protect me. And you have to trust that I'm strong enough to protect myself. I'm not a little kid anymore, after all. I'm your equal, your Intended, and it's time you realize that."

"I know," said Tom, immediately. "I know you can take care of yourself, but that doesn't mean I still can't worry."

Harry grinned, "And that's okay. But don't let it consume you, alright?"

Tom sounded resigned, but the palpable worry that had been there earlier had abated. "Fine, but no more talking to Magic by yourself, alright? She's different from us and she doesn't think the same way we do."

"Okay, okay," he obliged, "Whatever you say, love."

Tom blinked at the new endearment, but didn't remark on it, simply sending Harry a wry look and sitting back down to research.

Chapter End Notes

Hi hi, thanks for all the kind words as always! Because of you guys, I've finally felt that I can be fluffier so here it is! Tom being waaaay too fluffy ^^.

I've decided that this story might be a bit shorter than I thought it might be, so I think there's about ten to twenty chapters left (which is a lot I guess xD). so the plan : two more chapters setting up recruiting allies and getting ready for what happens after the war, then a short time skip, three chapters about the actual war, and then maybe six for what happens after.

also, I started a new fic that I'm really excited about! It's called An Unlikely Guardian and this time, Tom is in Harry's timeline through time travel and he's Harry's age, which I'm rather excited about :) Please check it out if you like my work! ^^, of course this fic comes first, but if I ever get writer's block, i'll probably write that one hehe.

Moody's Trial

Chapter Notes

Oh god, I'm so sorry for the huge wait inbetween chapters.. can't believe it's been about three months :(. Been really busy, but hope you guys enjoy!

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

A vampire met them at the door, his cheekbones sharp in the dying light. "Pleasure to see you, Tom," he greeted. "I was under the assumption I would not be seeing you until a year had passed."

Tom paused in where he was taking off his outer robes, turning to stare at the tall vampire. "It has been a year, Sanguini," he said, flatly.

Sanguini took two long, slow blinks, tilting his head at Tom. "Is that so," the vampire seemed to say more to himself than the two of them. " Strangely enough, the days blur together when nothing seems to change."

"I'm sure it does," said Tom, looking amused. He turned to help Harry step past the warded doorway, one arm snug and secure around his smaller waist.

"Who is that, dear?" asked a female voice.

"It's Tom, Carmilla," called Sanguini. "And a smaller wizard."

There was a thud, and then running footsteps. The vampire that appeared in the doorway had long black curls that reached up to her waist and she was dressed in an expensive red dress that complemented her curves. "Tom, my dear," she called, holding out her hand until Tom stepped forward to kiss it. When he moved away, she turned her intense gaze to Harry, her mouth slightly parted in shock.

"You must be Harry," she said. "I had the pleasure of reading the article, and by the way you're holding Harry..." she trailed off, her gaze speculative. Then a full smile bloomed across her face, "How wonderful. It's mutual, isn't it? Oh, do away with your silly glamour, you know how I hate those kinds of stuff."

Tom sighed, using his new wand to dispel the glamour that hid his soul mark. The intense green glowed in the dim lighting of the room, bringing out the color in Tom's eyes.

"Oh, it really is the color of Harry's eyes," said Carmilla, her smile infectious. "That is simply darling, isn't it, Sanguini?"

Sanguini didn't look pleased to be included in the conversation, but luckily Carmilla didn't notice the lack of enthusiasm in his 'Yes, my lady.'

"Now what did you come for? More negotiations?"

"I've come to ask another favor," said Tom. "I need to ask for information on Avalon."

Carmilla's whole demeanor shifted; even her stance became more hostile than the friendly one it had been before. "Where did you learn about Avalon?"

"You know who gave me my immortality, Carmilla," said Tom.

Carmilla's muscles relaxed and she heaved a soft sigh. "Magic. What could she possibly want you to learn about our old place?"

"You came from Avalon?" Tom couldn't hide the surprise in his voice.

Carmilla frowned, her gaze on the window behind them. "It is too late to get into this. You need sleep."

"We're fine," Tom started to protest, but Carmilla's eyes narrowed, cutting Tom off.

"I need time to talk to the elders about this, Tom. We can't just offer up information freely to anyone. No matter who they are."

Tom looked annoyed, but he nodded graciously at her explanation.

"Sanguini, take them to the bedroom in the West Wing."

"We can stay in my usual quarters," interrupted Tom.

Carmilla smiled, her sharp teeth flashing briefly. "Don't be silly, Tom. Harry is here with you. How can I not show him perfect hospitality? Special preparations just for the two of you."

Tom looked wary, "Knowing you that could mean anything."

She huffed, "You'll appreciate it, don't you worry. Have either of you eaten yet?" When Tom shook her head, her smile grew. "My house-elves can work up quite a feast. Any food preferences you'll like me to tell them?"

"Harry likes treacle tart," offered up Tom, and Harry blinked in surprise.

"How do you know that?"

"You always eat it," said Tom, dryly. "I doubt anyone in Hogwarts doesn't know your favorite treat."

Carmilla was grinning when they turned her attention back to her, "Oh, young love. I'll see you two in the morning, then."

She departed with a swish of her dress back in the direction that she came from.

Sanguini gave an almost inaudible sigh, turning and gesturing for them to follow him. They were just turning a dark corner when Sanguini made a startled noise, quickly stepping back to avoid running into the newcomer.

He was dressed in dark robes, with close-cropped brown hair and fashionable glasses perched on his nose. "Sanguini," said the man, "goodness, you scared me."

"Eldred," greeted Sanguini, and for the first time since they got there, there were some signs of life in the vampire. "What are you doing here?"

"I was going to the kitchens," explained Eldred, his small hands gesturing as he talked. "Would you care to join me?"

"We have guests," Sanguini said in lieu of an answer, stepping back so that Tom and Harry could be seen.

Eldred's eyes widened and he bowed immediately, "Tom Riddle and Harry Black. What a pleasure it is to meet you two."

"Eldred Worpel, correct?" asked Tom, holding his hand out for the shorter man to shake. "I've read your book. How long have you been living with the vampires now?"

"Ever since I graduated Hogwarts ten years ago," explained Eldred. "Sanguini was kind enough to take me in."

"Ah," said Tom, a knowing glint in his eyes. "I see. You're one of the only wizards the vampires will make contact with."

Eldred preened happily, "Well, yes, I am quite lucky in that regard. My book was my gift of thanks to them. The public's knowledge of vampires is wholly lacking, and I hoped to rectify that with my writing."

"And you've succeeded," said Tom. "I've been hearing only good things about them ever since your book has come out."

"Oh, that is such a relief to hear," said Eldred. There was silence before the older man perked up again, "I heard about the two of you from the Daily Prophet. I was wondering if a biography would interest the two of you?"

Harry caught Tom's eye at that, and Tom snorted softly at the stricken expression on his face. "I don't think Harry would like that," said Tom, "he's rather shy when it comes to things like this. But perhaps we can discuss a compromise at a later date?"

"Of course, of course," said Eldred, bobbing his head up and down with a smile on his face. "How long will the two of you be staying here for?"

"At least a week," said Tom. "Perhaps you may join us for dinner tomorrow night."

"That'll be ideal," the wizard agreed. "But I won't keep the two of you any longer. Sanguini, will you be joining me for dinner tonight?"

Sanguini inclined his head, and the smile on Eldred's face grew. He departed with a few polite words, supposedly in the direction of the kitchen.

It wasn't long before they reached their destination. The door in front of them was elaborate, with intricate carvings, and was comprised of two doors put together. Sanguini pushed them open, stepping to the side to hold it open for them.

Harry's breath caught when he was able to see in; the posh luxury of it wasn't something he hadn't seen before, but the long windows portrayed a romantic scene of a beach at night. The moon was high in the air and the waves hit the sand with a soft sound.

"It's magic," explained Sanguini. "If you would like another scene, simply press this device here. If you two need anything, please don't hesitate to call a house-elf. Dinner will be up shortly."

"Thank you," murmured Tom. "I'm sorry Carmilla delegated you to showing us to our room."

Sanguini shrugged, "I don't mind. It's a little more interesting than standing around all day. I shall see you tomorrow, Tom."

They stood in silence after the vampire left, eventually stepping past the doorway and into the room. "Why did you apologize to him?" asked Harry. "Is he important?"

"Sanguini is actually one of the leaders of the vampires," explained Tom, looking amused. "Carmilla likes to boss him around, and he's too easy going to object."

"Oh," said Harry, thinking back on what had happened earlier. He had assumed Sanguini was a butler of sorts with the way Carmilla demanded things of him, and it was a little appalling to learn that they were on equal positions of power. "Are they married?"

Tom chuckled, "No. It's actually a little funny if you think about it. Sanguini actually has had crush on Eldred since he met him."

"The wizard?"

Tom nodded, "It's not going to go anywhere since Eldred isn't immortal and is steadily getting older, but Sanguini can't help having a soft spot for him. It's the reason why Eldred's been allowed to stay for so long. Vampires aren't very social creatures, after all."

Tom let Harry digest his words for a while, the two of them standing in silence, before gently nudging Harry toward the center of the room.

"Are those rose petals?" questioned Harry, and he dissolved in a peal of giggles. "Oh Merlin, Carmilla really went all out."

Tom sighed, waving a hand and using magic to collect all the rose petals and settle them in a corner. "She thinks I'm a prude."

"A prude? Why?"

"I haven't had sex since before I met Magic."

Harry was sure his face was bright red. "Then she thinks that we're going to?" He made a gesture, and Tom actually threw his head back and laughed, obviously delighted at Harry's lack

of composure.

"I told her long ago that there was no reason to have sex with someone other than my Intended. Which she took us an okay to start sending pretty boys and girls up to my place every time I stayed over. Of course, I rejected them all. They weren't you."

"Tom," he said, but Tom continued before he could say anything else.

"So naturally, now that we're finally together, she thinks I'll be spending all night ravishing you."

Harry was reminded again just how much older his Intended was and how much more experience Tom had compared to him. He buried his face into his hands, his cheeks hot and his hands trembling. "Tom," he complained, and Tom chuckled, pulling him close into a soft hug.

"It's your choice, Harry."

"I don't know if I'm ready," he answered, truthfully. He wanted to have his first time with Tom, already, but he was scared. He didn't know the first thing about sex, and he knew Tom would teach him, but it was still daunting.

"Hey," said Tom, his voice soft. He felt gentle hands touch his, drawing his hands down and away from his face. Tom was smiling at him, "I waited years for you, okay, Harry? I don't mind waiting longer until you're ready."

"Really?" he couldn't help but to ask.

"Of course," said Tom. "I'm hardly with you just for that. There's so many other parts of our relationship I already cherish."

Harry's response was cut off when steaming, hot food appeared on their table. There was a mountain of treacle tarts next to the whole roasted chicken. Harry snorted at the sight, even as his eyes teared at the sight of it. Because it was only a short while ago that Tom had proved that he knew what treat was Harry's favorite.

That cemented his decision, and before Tom could make his way toward the food, he curled a hand into the top of Tom's robe.

Tom stopped immediately, his eyes curious. "Something the matter, Harry?"

"Well, let's not let Carmilla's effort go to waste then," Harry said, and then crashed his lips against Tom's.

Tom stumbled back from the force of the kiss, his hands going to steady Harry. When they broke away, Tom was laughing, his red eyes dancing in delight. "What's got you so worked up?"

"You knew treacle treat was my favorite," he explained, gently tugging Tom toward the huge bed in the center of the room. Tom let himself be led and even humored Harry when he pushed Tom down on top of it. He straddled Tom, blushing furiously when Tom started laughing again.

"Is that all?" asked Tom, smirking. "Your favorite color is blue, you like to prank Severus when no one's watching, and you seem to have quite the fixation for my dueling robes."

He gaped, "You weren't supposed to know about that!"

"Did anyone ever tell you that staring at someone with your mouth open isn't exactly the right way to go about hiding that?"

"Can you just forget that ever happened?"

Tom was laughing outright now, so the only way Harry could get the older man to stop was to kiss him. Tom kissed him fiercely back, and when they finally pulled away, he had a smug smirk on his face. "I also know," whispered Tom, "just how much you like it when I do this."

He placed his lips onto Harry's neck, sucking hard and sending a shock of pleasure down Harry's spine. When he pulled away, there was a red mark visible where his lips were just moments prior.

"Aren't *you* the one who likes marking me?" asked Harry, amused.

"I don't have any idea what you're talking about," retorted Tom.

Harry rolled his eyes good-naturedly, before latching his own lips onto Tom's pulse, leaving a matching hickey on his Intended's neck.

Tom endured it with good humor before maneuvering them so Harry was laying on his back. "I'm going to ravish you," whispered Tom. "Until your mind is full of nothing but pleasure."

"Well then," he said as calmly as he could manage with an attractive Dark Lord looming over him with a seductive smirk on his face, "What's stopping you, love?"

Tom paused, staring down at him for a split second to let him know just how much his snark was unappreciated, before proceeding to do exactly what he had promised he would.

The food lay forgotten on the table, steaming as two soul mates learned everything there was to know about each other's bodies.

"So," said Carmilla, a devilish smirk on her face as she passed the eggs over to Harry, "did you have a good time last night?"

Harry nearly dropped the plate at the question, his cheeks flaming red as he immediately focused his eyesight on anything other than Carmilla. His thoughts went to what happened last night, what led to only a resurging of overwhelming love for his Intended.

"I believe they did," said Sanguini. "Heard it all the way from the kitchens."

"Aren't the kitchens three floors away?" questioned Tom, his voice steady.

"Vampiric hearing, remember?" said Carmilla, sounding smug. "I've been waiting years to hear those sounds coming from your room."

"Really, Carmilla," said Tom, dryly. "Don't you have other things to focus on in your life?"

"Nope," said the vampire lady cheerfully. "Just you and your delicious Intended over there. Look at that color on his cheeks. And oh! Is that a *hickey*?"

Harry covered the red mark immediately with his hand, his eyes darting over to Tom's. Tom looked smug, but his expression completely changed when Harry narrowed his eyes.

"Did you talk to the elders about Avalon?" Tom cut in smoothly in an attempt to change the subject.

Carmilla obviously noticed what he was doing, but she graciously allowed it. "Yes. However, before we part with any information, the elders and us will like to know why you do not ask Magic herself."

There was a pause as Tom thought about just what information he was allowed to share. Hesitantly, he opened his mouth, "Magic is still weak. Even with my blood, I can only summon her for minutes at a time. She can only part information by giving us books, but books can only teach us so much. There isn't much written down about Avalon."

"Does she know you came here for help?"

"She encouraged me to come to the vampires," said Tom. "She thinks everyone magical should unite together in order to defeat the Muggles."

Carmilla scoffed, "Just as she encouraged Merlin to unite Albion."

Tom blinked, confused at the sudden hostility, but nodded anyway. "Yes, Merlin was also her doing."

"Avalon is where we are from," spoke up Sanguini. Carmilla's eyes narrowed at the interruption, but she allowed him to keep speaking. "The Land of Eternal Youth."

"Magic is the last of her kind," continued Carmilla. "Even back in Avalon, she was our leader. We left Avalon not by choice, and it was Magic's decision to warp the fate of Earth. At that time, Earth was a place without magic and would have continued to be so if Magic hadn't decided to start sharing her magic with the Muggles. You see, Magic needed worshippers and she decided the fastest way to do so was to share her magic as an incentive. This caused widespread panic back then, witch hunts and people burning at the stake for her decision. Even now, wizards like you scramble to hide your magic from the Muggles.

"Magic gave most of her power to Merlin in an attempt to stop the discrimination against magic. It didn't work, and the only solution was to separate the two worlds. That is when Merlin built Hogwarts. Unfortunately, Magic didn't realize just how broken up Merlin was after Arthur's death. She could've granted him immortality, but he refused. As Merlin's last wish, she created soul marks in an attempt to ensure that no one would ever suffer the same pain as Merlin."

"Why keep all of this hidden?" spoke up Harry. "If we just told the other wizards about this, then maybe we wouldn't even need to have a War."

Tom stiffened next to him, but Sanguini answered him without a pause. "Magic views this as her mistake. She thought it would lead to her powers growing, but instead it only diminished

them and closed off her access to the Gates."

"And what exactly are these Gates?" asked Tom, his voice tight.

"The Gates of Avalon," murmured Carmilla, her tone reverent. "It's only a distant dream now, but it led to our home. However, in present times, it is just a lake."

"She wants us to go back, doesn't she?" said Harry. "That's why she's been so insistent that we get her worshippers fast. She needs to find a way to open back up the Gates."

"It's complicated," said Sanguini. "There are sacrifices that must be made in order to open the gates. I do not know if you will be willing to pay them."

"Whatever they are, they must be a better solution than to fight the Muggles. They outnumber us, and we already have to suffer through one War," said Harry. "It's not a bad idea to at least explore the idea, right?" He directed his question toward Tom, and Tom hummed, reaching under the table and interlocking their hands together.

"It worries me that Magic is being so evasive about this topic," said Tom. "There must be a reason why she hasn't told this herself, and it may be because these sacrifices are unacceptable. Until we know them, Avalon may be out of the question."

"It's a nice dream," said Harry, a bit wistfully. "I know you don't like the Muggles, love, but it's different for me. I haven't even met a Muggle yet. I rather not commit mass genocide if we don't have to."

Tom's face darkened at the memory of his time in the orphanage, but he didn't reject Harry's words. He stayed silent, stroking the back of Harry's hand with his thumb. It was because Tom didn't seem angry that he felt safe enough to keep on going on the potentially dangerous topic. "Of course, I rather them than us, but going by Carmilla's story, the Muggles were here first. Maybe Magic did change us enough that we belong on Avalon."

"You don't know the first thing about Avalon," said Tom, sounding amused.

"I know it's magical," he protested.

Sanguini nodded, "Yes, Avalon is a place of magic. Here, death is rampant amongst all living creatures. There, death is a rare occurrence. That is why it is called the Land of Eternal Youth."

"It was so wonderful," said Carmilla. "Everyone had magic and we had festivals every day. There was always something beautiful happening on Avalon. And there wasn't any discrimination either. That's what I hate most about Earth. There is so much fear for the different."

"Then why leave?" asked Tom.

Carmilla's face fell, and she sighed deeply. "I cannot tell you that part. The elders insisted. Magic will have to explain that to you herself."

There was a heavy silence in the air before Sanguini spoke again. "The elders did finally give us some leeway, however. We accept your proposal from earlier, Tom Riddle. Provided you grant

us a favor, of course."

Tom's face brightened. "You'll fight on our side, then?"

"That was never a question, Tom," laughed Carmilla, and a brief look of outrage alighted upon Tom's features. "Oh, lighten up," she giggled, "you know we would have always come to help you if you needed it."

Harry couldn't help grinning at her jovial manner, and he tightened his grip around Tom's hand, his heart big and warm because of the fact that Tom was actually *liked* here. It shouldn't have been surprising since almost everyone who didn't have a vested interest in the Light had some form of admiration for Tom, but he was used to allies begrudgingly going along with Tom's plans. But Carmilla seemed to actually like Tom as a person, enough to even joke around with him, and it made him happy to see.

"I did *not* know that," said Tom, rather petulantly, and Sanguini interrupted before Carmilla could speak up again.

"It was always a matter of how much we would help you. With the addition of Harry, we feel that perhaps this isn't quite such a hopeless case as we thought it would be."

Tom frowned, but didn't protest, and that prompted Sanguini to continue talking. "With your recent acquisition of Hogwarts, I'll like to ask you to take on Eldred as a professor."

"And what would he teach?" asked Tom.

"History of Magic. It's about time that we educate the younger generation about who Magic truly is, correct?"

"It'll be controversial," dithered Tom. Harry knew his Intended liked the idea; after all, they had discussed before on what to do with Hogwarts and it had been both of their ideas to rehaul the whole system. But Eldred was connected with the vampires, and he was going to have to teach material that wasn't widely accepted.

"You have hold over the Board of Governors, do you not?" asked Sanguini. It was easy to tell that he was not going to budge on this favor.

Tom sighed, "It is the public I am worried about."

"Then why not become Minister?" asked Carmilla. "You have the prestige, Tom. The money. The time."

"Time is the last thing we have," said Tom, but it was obvious to the others that Tom was being difficult on purpose.

"You only have to take over Britain for now," said Carmilla. "Our goal is to get enough worshippers to heighten Magic's power so she can appear to others. They will recognize her magic as long as they are exposed to it. After that, Magic can do the rest."

"And the fastest way to do so is to become Minister," said Harry. "Tom, it's not a bad idea. It certainly won't take that long either; the election's in a couple of years."

"We'll have to deal with Dumbledore, first," said Tom, after he spent a few moments mulling it over. "I can't imagine he'll let us anywhere near the position if he's still Supreme Mugwump."

Harry tapped his fingers on the wooden table in front of him, "Well, Moody's trial is coming up. He'll lose some of his influence there. And maybe we can slowly leak information that Hogwarts now belongs to you."

There was a moment of silence as they all processed his words, and then Tom let out a sigh. "Alright, alright, it's a good idea. *However*, we will discuss this after Moody's trial. There is no reason to plan things on a mere possibility."

Harry exchanged amused glances with Carmilla, but both of them wisely kept silent in favor of teasing Tom. It was nice to convince Tom to do something his way, and he liked the idea of Tom being Minister. It would be certainly faster than convincing people just by utilizing Hogwarts.

Sanguini steered the topic back to planning out Hogwarts' new classes, and that topic engrossed them enough until dinner.

"It was awful," said Amelia Bones. She was seated on a large chair in the middle of the courtroom, her delicate hands placed nervously on her lap. Her brown hair fell in curls onto her shoulders and she was dressed in a smart looking outfit.

Gilderoy was seated on the side, another witness they would interview later. Madam Pomfrey sat next to him, her expression stormy.

Harry pressed closer to his Intended's side, hoping to draw comfort from the fact that Tom was next to him. He hadn't been forced to come to the trial because the authorities thought it cruel to ask him to relive his memories of the Last Task. In wizarding society, it was viewed especially traumatizing to lose one's magic, so it made sense that they were more lenient on him.

"I didn't see the second person," Amelia continued. "But I highly suspect he was an Auror as well."

"And he placed the bracelet on Black?" asked Harold Minchum, the Minister for Magic and one of the former judges for the Founder's Tournament.

"Yes, sir," said Amelia. "I was able to get a closer glimpse when Harry woke. His magic was bound and he was unable to use any of it."

Harold nodded his head, before standing from where he was seated. A woman in red, one of the Wizengamot, joined him, and another man, presumably the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, followed closely. The three of them stood around the pensive that held Amelia's memories and dipped their heads altogether in order to view it.

When they resurfaced, they headed back to their seats.

"The memory is not tampered with," said the woman. "And the memory speaks truth of what Bones has said."

There was murmuring along the court as they processed the information. Harold signaled for attention by raising his hand, and the courtroom fell silent immediately. "I will like to call Alastor Moody for questioning."

There was commotion as the Aurors brought Moody in. He was handcuffed and was led to the chair Amelia had already vacated and sat down harshly.

"Alastor Moody, will you willingly submit to questioning under Veritaserum?"

Tom stiffened by his side, startling Harry, when Moody gave verbal assent.

Moody's eyes were unfocussed as he swallowed the required three drops, only becoming more unclear as the potion started to work.

"That conniving old fool," hissed Tom under his breath. "Moody's been Obliviated."

"Won't they know?"

"The Ministry is incompetent. And Dumbledore's strength is overwhelming. The chances they will notice are rather low."

Tom's words were proven right when Harold paused to reread what Moody had said the day of the Last Task. "You said that day that the tournament planners left everything up to Dumbledore which was the reason you were able to interfere with the Task. Yet, now, you are saying Dumbledore had nothing to do with it?"

Moody nodded, causing Harold to narrow his eyes.

"They can't accuse Dumbledore without any proof," said Severus lowly, who was sitting on his left. "Moody's known to be insane, even to those that are Light."

"At least they have enough evidence to convict Moody," said Lucius.

Harold tried his best, but the Obliviation held strong. Moody stuck stubbornly to the fact that Dumbledore had nothing to do with his interference in the tournament, and obliviation charms were only known to break under the duress of physical torture. Along with the lack of evidence in the questioning was also the fact the truth serum wasn't one hundred percent foolproof. If Moody knew Occlumency, he could have a resistance to the potion's effect.

"We will like to call up one more witness," said Harold, sounding exasperated. "James Potter, please make your way up here."

Sirius, who was sitting a few rows in front of them, stiffened and turned slightly, catching Harry's gaze. Harry shrugged to show that he had no idea his twin was going to be called up, and Sirius nodded back before turning to face the front.

"You are Dumbledore's Heir," said Harold. "And a former competitor of the Founder's Tournament. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary before the Last Task?"

James was obviously hesitant to speak, his upper teeth worrying his lower lip. His eyes darted this way and that, first a quick glance at Dumbledore before landing on Sirius. His gaze stayed there for a few seconds before he caught eyes with Harry. He took a deep breath before looking away and speaking, "Yes."

There was a gasp amongst the people in the courtroom, and Dumbledore looked like he was barely able to control his outrage. James pointedly did not look at him, keeping his gaze on the Minister.

"What do you mean by that, James? Are you suggesting that Albus had something to do with this?"

James looked down at his hands for a long few seconds before suddenly standing, drawing something out of his robe. It was a thin vial full of a silver liquid.

The courtroom was silent as Harold approached James; it was apparent to everyone in the room that the liquid was a pensive memory. There was no way Dumbledore could get out of this if the memory was damning.

Dumbledore seemed to come to the same conclusion, and he was already narrowing his eyes, probably intent on getting rid of the evidence before it could make its way to the bowl. Harry didn't blame him because if there was real physical evidence that Dumbledore had interfered with the tournament he could lose everything. Conspiring to take away someone's magic and getting caught ensured that the perpetrator would face the some punishment.

"Harold," started Dumbledore, "You couldn't possibly think I had something to do with this. Introducing new evidence without any prompting just isn't done. You, as one of our more successful Ministers, should know that."

Harold turned to face Dumbledore, the silver vial held protectively in his hands. "There is no harm in seeing what the memory holds. Besides, it is James' choice to offer his memories."

Dumbledore looked at a loss, not expecting his honeyed words to fail. "James is just a boy," he continued. "He doesn't know the proper protocol. My boy, reconsider your actions."

James flinched at Dumbledore's words, his magic already reacting to Dumbledore's vow. "Minister," he started through gritted teeth. He bit his lip hard, trying his best to resist the hold Dumbledore had over him. The vow won out though, and with a dismayed shake of his head, James held out his hand. "The memory is of something not important. Please, may I have it back?"

Harold looked conflicted, obviously catching on to how something fishy was going on. James had offered the vial with every intent of letting everyone in the room see it. There was no reason to renegade on the offer. "Are you sure?" asked the Minister.

James nodded quickly, even as his eyes darted to the side where Dumbledore sat. Then he glanced over to where Sirius sat, his eyes pleading and his mouth barely able to open as he mouthed the word, "Help."

Sirius was standing immediately, unwinding his scarf and making his way down the steps. His soul mark lay on display, marking him as James'. When Sirius got to James, he leaned over,

unbuttoning James' shirt until his Mark was also visible.

"We're soul mates," explained Sirius. "And James would very much like for you to view the memory, Minster. As you can probably tell, he's been spelled against his will."

James nodded to show that he agreed, winding one of his hands with Sirius'. The one loophole that Dumbledore's strict hold over James was that Dumbledore had to actually give commands for James to obey. Anything that wasn't covered in his one demand was fair game. As James' soul mate, Sirius had the legal right to make decisions on James' behalf.

Harold let out a soft sigh of relief; even though he knew Dumbledore was up to something, he wasn't allowed to call him out on it in front of so many people and during a trial. "I accept your words, Sirius Black," he said and then there was a loud gasp sounding throughout the room.

Dumbledore had drawn his wand, firing off a quick disarming curse in an attempt to get rid of the evidence. Harold's hands were occupied, ensuring that he would have no way to defend against the curse if it reached him.

Tom was already moving, casting a Protego a split second before he force-apparated himself to the front of Harold.

"Tom," said Dumbledore, his voice tight. There was no way out of this except to run, and Tom had no intentions of letting him get away.

"Time to face the consequences of your actions, Dumbledore," Tom said calmly. "How fitting that it would come about because of your Heir."

A brief look of outrage crossed Dumbledore's face, but it was smoothed over a second later. "James is just a confused boy. There will be no blaming him. James, come to me."

"I don't think so," snarled Tom. "You can't run from the law, Dumbledore."

"You may have won today," said Dumbledore, "But the people *will* know the truth eventually."

"What truth?" asked Tom, sounding exasperated. "You hold such a grudge against me when I have done nothing to you."

"You were my responsibility from the very beginning," continued Dumbledore, his voice sad. "And I have failed you. I let you become spelled by the very lies that held poor Grindelwald. I can do nothing more here."

James slipped past Tom during Dumbledore's speech, his head bowed and his hands shaking, ending up behind Dumbledore. That seemed to be all Dumbledore was waiting for, and after grabbing hard onto James' shoulder, he raised his wand. There was a bright light, then a huge surge of magic, bursting apart the wards and sending paper flying.

When it settled, Dumbledore was gone.

Panic ensued in the courtroom, people turning to whisper loudly to each other and Aurors apparating away with loud cracks to try and track Dumbledore. Him running made him guilty

and a fugitive. Harry doubted they would find him; Dumbledore was crafty and resourceful. The chances were high that he would have planned for this outcome.

But it didn't matter because Dumbledore was right. They had won for now.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, not going to lie, but the reason this chapter took so long was because I just could not write the courtroom scene :(! So please, go easy on me. I was like, I gotta just do it so I can move on... Next chapter will be time skip and then finally some super good action. ALSO, pls, I cannot write smut in this story for some reason (another reason this took so long Dx) so I just gave up...haha. Please let me know if you enjoyed! Your guys' comments are how I get inspiration and even if I don't reply, I read every single word you guys write and it helps me a TON. like a ton :D so lemme know if you have any ideas for what should happen next~

The Ambush

Approximately Three Years Later (Late 1981)

Harry slumped against the tree behind him, panting heavily in an effort to regain his breath. His head was spinning and his magic was still there, but it seemed to be almost impossible to reach. Though it didn't matter because he barely used his own magic anymore. He closed his eyes in an effort to help regain some balance and didn't move when he felt soft hands touch his cheek.

"Oh sweetie," murmured Magic, "You've done so well."

"Thanks," he said, instinctively, and opened his eyes to a smiling Magic floating above him. Three years of spreading the word of Magic and she had grown startling lengths. She could now keep her form for hours at a time with very little blood from either Tom or Harry. Her Magic had increased dramatically from the amount of worshippers that they gained from either use of Hogwarts or their own political allies. The increase of power worried Tom, but Harry only saw it as a boon. It wouldn't be long before Dumbledore attacked, after all.

Dumbledore hadn't made a fuss after escaping from the Courtroom three years ago. He knew he had no more power after he ran from the law and that knowledge kept Dumbledore from making any grand stands against them. Ruining his political prowess meant Dumbledore had to keep to being behind the scenes to do anything, and that limited his effectiveness greatly. They kept him busy by slowly leaking out information about Tom's "horcruxes." With the use of Harry's twin brother and the two Longbottoms, Dumbledore had been able to destroy five of them. It was amusing the lengths they would go to destroy one, and both Tom and Harry knew it wouldn't be long before Dumbledore went after Harry for the perceived last one: Tom's first Courting gift from three years ago.

Dumbledore didn't stand a chance against them, though. Tom had just become Minister for Magic, and Harry had spent long hours training Magic's gift with Magic herself. The final stand in Dumbledore's eyes would only further serve their purpose. It would weaken the Light's stand even more, and hopefully bring over those staunchly Light to consider the prospect that Magic was real.

And as soon as they got those, Magic will be corporeal enough to help them conquer the rest of the wizarding world. Which would give them enough power to open the gates of Avalon.

So things were going quite swell, putting Harry in an exuberant mood. When he finally regained his breath, he waved his fingers, casting a breeze and straightening up his outfit and his hair. Magic watched him with amusement dancing in her eyes, and let out a small giggle when Harry started to stretch, causing his shirt to ride up, revealing a tanned, toned stomach.

He rolled his eyes even as he smiled back up at her, tsking when she waggled her eyebrows. "This is only for Tom's eyes," he reprimanded, and she appropriately groaned.

"Not even for your favorite goddess?" she asked, floating back down to the ground where they were both the same height.

"Back off, you hag," said a new voice, and contrary to the words, Magic brightened immediately. "You know that sight only belongs to the Dark Lord."

"Severus!" she said, with obvious delight in her features.

Severus rolled his eyes when she floated over to him and paused to press a kiss to the Potion Master's cheek. Severus scowled, but let her do as she wished before turning his attention to Harry.

"Eldred's bringing the seventh years around in a few minutes or so. We got delayed because Eldred wanted to go over the proper protocol for greetings again."

Harry grinned, "I don't know why he worries so much. It's not like Magic really cares."

Magic pouted, "Hey, don't you go sully my reputation to new worshipers. They won't follow me if they don't think I'm scary."

"You can't really believe that," says Harry, amused. "I mean, I'm hardly scared of you."

She huffed, crossing her arms, and she looked as if she was about to argue when the sound of footsteps sounded through the clearing. She yelped, waving her pointer finger in anger at Harry one last time, before disappearing into thin air.

Severus and him exchanged an amused glance before turning to face the group of seventh years. They were a mix of the houses, though there was only one Gryffindor this time. That was something they had to work on, though Harry had no clue how to go through with it. Sirius was the only one who had any ties to the House and he was too busy helping Tom with other matters to help them with this.

"Hello," he greeted, and he smiled warmly when they all greeted him back by name, obviously recognizing him as their Headmaster's Intended. He had wanted to be more involved in the process, but he had been busy training under Magic and helping Tom with international politics to spend much time at Hogwarts. He only had enough time to spare to direct the ritual that indicted wizards and witches as worshippers of Magic, allowing them the ability to see her. They had only performed the ritual for Hogwarts students a few times, but the ritual had been used rather extensively to help their followers to believe in Magic more easily. Magical creatures were a different case - centaurs, werewolves, and vampires were able to see her without the ritual and Harry had been special; after all, she had infused him with her Magic long ago.

They all had a long red cloth wound along their left wrist, linking them to Magic. He nodded at Eldred before reaching for the magic thick in the air around them, materializing Magic's ritual dagger. The students didn't react with surprise; they had been well versed on how the ritual was supposed to go.

They bowed to him, all sinking to their feet to hold up their arms with red cloth on them and he took time to painstakingly ensure that the cut from the sharp dagger was relatively painless. After cutting theirs, he focused on his, cutting his a bit deeper to make his blood run faster. The red cloth stained with their blood fluttered to the ground after being cut, mixing with both the earth and a few droplets of Harry's blood.

"Offer up your magic," he said, and one by one they did as he said. It was a bit more difficult than what most wizards were used to; most wizards didn't know how to use magic without a purpose or an incantation, and Magic's ritual needed them to understand the way Old Magic worked. They needed to know the basics of how magic used to be all about balance and the magic around them and not focus on the magic within them. After all, to truly understand who Magic was and how she had come to give them her powers, they had to understand just what her Magic meant.

They had to push out their magic and coat the cloth with it, and to truly believe that Magic had power over them. When each new worshipper offered up their magic, it was a sign of a respect to show that they understood what Magic had given them long ago.

When the last girl finished with a soft sigh of relief, intense magic filled the clearing, oppressing the seventh years into bowing their heads and nearly prostrating themselves in the clear power it held. Blue magical power lined the back of the trees and the air turned a stormy grey.

Severus looked uncomfortable, sinking to his knees after only a moment of resisting. Eldred had already sank into the worshipping position, clearly trying to set an example for his students. Only Harry stayed standing, albeit slightly leaning against the tree behind him, because although he had spent long periods of time with Her magic, the overwhelming strength She was exhibiting now was something he was not used to.

She appeared in a burst of blue magic and the sky returned to normal. The magic remained for only a split second more before it dropped to a more bearable level, allowing the seventh years to reorient themselves. She was dressed differently, her thin white hair was now braided and wound around her head and instead of the modest clothes she usually appeared in now, she was back to wearing her ceremonial clothes that barely covered her essentials.

"I thank you," she said, her voice more stern and the peppiness missing. Harry would never get used to a serious Magic, but he knew it was necessary to keep up appearances. "And I shall reward you for giving back the Magic that was once mine."

She didn't want for a response, instead lifting her hands and infusing them with her bright blue magic. It only lasted for a minute or so, and when it faded away, so did she.

Harry helped one of the seventh years up, passing them a warm smile when the witch stumbled a bit when she was on her feet. She looked shaken, but when Harry smiled, she had nodded back in acknowledgement. It was obvious that she had believed Eldred when he said Magic was real, but seeing it and feeling Her magic must still be shocking.

It wasn't long before Eldred was herding them back toward the castle, and soon it was just Severus and him.

"Sometimes," spoke up Severus, "I feel like we're a cult or something."

Harry snorted, practicing his blue magic by taking the magic leftover in the air to gently push the red clothes into a pile. "It's not like we're pushing them to change their lifestyles or something. Just believing in Magic is enough honestly."

Severus had a wry smile, taking out his wand and summoning the pile of red clothes into his hand. "She acts normal, but she's actually pretty scary. You should be careful."

"Ugh," he said, wrinkling his nose in distaste, "Don't you start being like Tom, too. I get enough of that from him."

"She's not your friend," he said. "Even if she acts human, she's *not*."

"I know she's not," he responded easily. "I'm well aware that she's the one who gave us Magic and all. But I spent the last three years training with her Sev. She's not the enemy."

Severus stared at him in silence for a few seconds before heaving a soft sigh. "Okay," he said, though he still looked worried. "Just be careful, okay?"

"I always am," he said. "And even if I'm not, I'm pretty sure Tom is careful enough for the both of us."

Severus rolled his eyes at that before gesturing for Harry to follow him back to Hogwarts. "Speaking of my Lord, he wants to see you," Severus spoke up when they cleared the Forest.

"Oh," he said, pleasure curling in his belly just at the thought of Tom.

"Don't look so pleased," groused Severus. "The two of you are ridiculous."

He blushed, knowing very well how his features always softened at the thought of his Intended. Instead of responding to Severus because he knew Severus would just respond with more teasing, he spun on the spot and apparated directly into Tom's office.

Tom had his chair turned, and even though Harry knew his love would have sensed his presence, he stalked up to it anyway, his footsteps silenced with magic.

Before Tom could react, he straddled his Intended, knowing from previous experience that the chair could take both of their weights easily.

Tom chuckled at the action, before placing his hands on Harry's hips. Harry shivered at the feel of Tom's hands on him, and a smirk started to slowly form on Tom's lips.

"Hello," said Tom. "The ritual went well?"

"Went perfect," he said. "Magic's happy at least. More rituals mean more power for her."

Tom frowned, "I'm still worried about how much power she's gotten."

"Don't be," he waved off his Intended's worries with a casual air. "We *want* her to be more powerful. It's what we're working for anyway."

Tom frowned, but his hands were busy, dancing up and down Harry's sides. Harry grinned at the action; he loved it when Tom was handsy with him. "And how's the new Minister for Magic feeling?"

"Awfully busy," answered Tom truthfully. "I've already put in a plan for Bellatrix to be Headmaster for the next year. I doubt I could keep up with both the school and the position."

Harry hummed thoughtfully at the idea. He didn't have any ill feelings toward Bellatrix; she had trained him for the tournament and she had backed off Tom as soon as she knew Tom belonged

to him. And she treated him well and was a powerful witch. "Not a bad choice," he said, and Tom chuckled.

"Glad to know you approve, my little minx," he said. Harry didn't even flush at the words, instead pressing even closer to his Intended. He knew Tom felt him hardening up. "Are you worked up because I didn't have time for you in the morning?"

He knew he was being petulant but he pouted anyway. "You could've. We have time-turners for a reason you know."

"I'm not going to mess with the fabric of time just to get you off in the morning, Harry," said Tom, and Harry snorted at that.

"You used it yesterday," he said, and Tom grinned.

"Mm, well that was yesterday. Today was a different matter. Wanted you *all* worked up for me." This time he didn't want for an answer and instead tugged Harry into a kiss. Harry moaned into it, letting Tom sneak his tongue into his mouth, and submitted to Tom when the older wizard started to dominate him.

They snogged for a decent period of time before Tom pulled away, smirking up into Harry's glazed eyes and bruised lips. Tom lovingly tucked a stray hair behind Harry's ear, "I have some good news."

"Can't it wait?" Harry teased, leaning forward to get at Tom's lips. Tom held him firmly back, tsking even as amusement shone from his eyes.

"It has to do with Nurmengard," he offered up, and Harry paused in his attempts to get out of Tom's hold, all thoughts of trying to get Tom to a bed vanishing.

"You found it," he said, and laughed happily when Tom affirmed his suspicions. They had been looking for Grindelwald's magical prison ever since Dumbledore had ran away. Dumbledore had added a series of magical protections to it that Grindelwald had not; all making it nearly impossible to track. Since they couldn't find Dumbledore, Grindelwald, his supposed Intended, would be a nice substitute. Sure, Dumbledore could've lied to Harry, but the chances were slight enough that they had been willing to put in hours to find Grindelwald.

"Grindelwald built it next to Germany, but Dumbledore somehow moved it to an unplotable location in America. I *believe* I narrowed it down, but we can check it out after the party tonight."

Harry grinned, "Let's check it out tomorrow. Not to tell all my secrets, but I *may* have a little surprise planned for the afterparty. Let's just say that I think that the new Minister for Magic deserves a special treat, don't you agree?"

Tom's eyes darkened with lust at his words, and Harry submitted instantly when Tom drew him into a heated kiss. He had it coming, really, and he didn't protest when Tom apparated them directly to their bedroom.

"Well," said Lucius, "That's the last of them."

Amelia hummed in agreement, waving her wand to finalize the last spell into place. She huffed a small breath as the magic left her and then heaved a longer sigh of relief before turning to face Lucius.

She caught sight of Gilderoy staring wistfully at Lucius behind him, and it took all her willpower not to roll her eyes. Honestly, three years and the poor boy still wasn't over Lucius. She really didn't know what her best friend saw in him. Not that she disliked Lucius; after three years of planning and placing their Lord's fake horcruxes, the blonde had gotten a special place in her heart. But *still*, Lockhart could do better, especially since Lucius had proposed to Narcissa just a couple of weeks ago.

"I guess it's over then," she said.

"Thank Merlin," said Lockhart, brightening up at her words. "I was getting sick of visiting damp caves and secluded forests. Really, I pity the poor bloke who has to go looking for them."

"You shouldn't," huffed Lucius. "That poor bloke is James Potter, and I hope he has the worst time trying to get our Horcruxes."

"Right," said Lockhart, agreeing instantly and reigniting Amelia's urge to roll her eyes. Lockhart *really* needed to get over his crush.

The vines in front of them were pulled to the side and Remus Lupin entered the clearing. He looked amused at their antics, but chose not to comment on them. "If everything's in order, I believe it's time to head out."

They cleaned up quickly, disposing of any magical traces around the hiding place. Lupin and some of the younger werewolves helped lead them safely past the maze of a forest, dodging dangerous magical creatures and getting them out in a span of an hour. Without the werewolves, it would be almost impossible to find the Horcrux.

Sirius Black and his younger brother were waiting near the edge of the forest for them. Sirius was dressed in a well-tailored battle robe and his time in Auror training had only sculpted his handsome face even more finely. He had grown as well, nearly towering over his shorter, more feminine brother. Regulus had grown out his hair, ending it in a short ponytail that reached the small of his back. The two brothers had grown close in the three years; without James, Sirius had been lonely and had reached out to this brother. Regulus had decided to undertake Auror training under Sirius' influence and when he graduated, Sirius would start to teach him the core basics of becoming an Auror.

Sirius never finished his training however; as soon as he got proficient enough in dueling he had become one of the Dark Lord's guard. He would never be as powerful as the Dark Lord or Harry, but he was still formidable in his own right. Instead of having Sirius act as his own bodyguard, the Dark Lord preferred to send Sirius to protect other important people.

"Everything go well?" asked Sirius.

Amelia nodded and promptly giggled when Regulus stomped hard on Sirius' left foot. Sirius must have been glaring heavily at Lupin again.

"Would you stop it?" hissed Regulus. "We weren't allowed to follow and everything obviously went well."

Sirius sighed, looking as if he was going to argue again when Regulus cut him off. "Not another word, Sirius."

Amelia grinned at their antics, used to the way they bantered after being protected by them so often. Sirius went quiet when Lupin walked up to them, the werewolf giving them pieces of fruit as a peace offering. They descended into a talk of strategy and tactics, which gave Amelia enough time to drag Regulus away. The two of them didn't notice their departure; neither did Lucius and Gilderoy who were busy packing up their campsite with magic.

Amelia nudged her friend's shoulder when they were sufficiently far away, whispering, "So what was that all about?"

Regulus groaned, "It's nothing really, just Sirius being a prat about not being able to follow you three into the forest. Lupin insisted that the werewolves would be enough protection, but Sirius worries anyway."

"That makes sense," she said, "Since if something happened to Lucius, I'm pretty sure Harry would be pretty upset."

"He would've been worried about you, too," pointed out Regulus, and Amelia blushed prettily.

"I guess," she said, and smiled when Regulus sighed at her. "I'm sorry, it's just weird to think that I'm close with our Lord's Intended."

"You two were in the same year," he said. "And Harry cares about everyone you know. He has a big heart like that."

"They couldn't be more different," she agreed with what Regulus was saying underneath his words. She would follow their Lord to the end of the earth and time, but it went without saying that their Lord didn't view their lives in the same way. They were expendable to him; they were just pawns on a chess board to him. And even though she knew that, she didn't mind, because Harry balanced their Lord out. They needed their Lord to be calculating and ruthless like that, and Harry made sure that they weren't too hurt by whatever plan his Intended had come up with. It was a good system and it made for loyal followers.

"So yeah," said Regulus, "things have been rather unsettling lately. There's been more and more rumors about Dumbledore ever since our Lord has been running for Minister. And now that he's actually went and won, we're worried Dumbledore's going to do something. And they have five horcruxes now. If Dumbledore really believes that there's only seven..."

"He's going to go after Harry," she finished for him. She bit her lip worriedly, "Should we say something?"

"They already know," said Regulus. "The two of them don't need us to warn them of anything. I'm sure they've been planning for this from the very beginning."

She hummed thoughtfully before sighing and wrapping her arms around herself, suddenly feeling the cold air more than ever. It was in the dead of winter after all, and her warming charm

must have just worn out. She knew she didn't have to worry about Harry, he obviously could take care of himself after all. But she couldn't stop how she felt. Ever since seeing Harry magicless in the tournament, her protective instincts for the boy had never disappeared.

A cloak was deposited on her shoulders, and she stared up at Regulus with thinly disguised shock. "I could just recast the warming charm," she protested, and Regulus shook his head.

"It's okay," he said, "It looked like you need a little cheering up."

She smiled, wrapping the cloak a bit tighter around herself and relishing in the warmth that had come from the younger wizard next to her. "Thanks," she murmured and smiled wider when Regulus waved off her thanks.

"You don't need to worry too much about him, Amelia. Our Lord's got him."

"I hope you're right, Regulus," she said, frowning, and when Regulus elbowed her lightly for disrespecting their Lord, she giggled softly, but the feeling of worry didn't fade.

It had been three years of peace, and for some reason, her gut was telling her that it wasn't going to last.

Gilderoy was sick of living in tents. It wasn't as if the place wasn't spacious and comfortable, but there was something about sleeping in his own bed he missed.

Three years of being on hyperalert for any change in his environment alerted him to the presence outside. He blinked, wondering just why he would be getting a visit before a hand drew back the tent's flap and Lupin walked in hesitantly.

"Hello," the werewolf greeted, and Gilderoy mirrored his response, only his manners keeping him from wondering out loud why Lupin was there. "We set out at first light tomorrow," said Lupin and it was obvious to Gilderoy that the werewolf was uncomfortable and trying to make small talk. He would humor him though, if only because he had nothing else to do and because while Lupin wasn't a close friend of his, three years of knowing the wolf had taught him that the man was nice if nothing else.

"Yeah," he said, standing from where he had been sitting. "That should be enough time to make sure the protections hold at least. Would you like tea?"

Lupin shook his head immediately, "Oh no, you don't have to. It's alright, really."

"It's just tea," he pointed out, amused, and Lupin stammered some more denials out before he took pity on the poor wolf and started to head to the kitchen part of the tent. He used magic to speed up the process and within a few short moments he was handing Lupin a steaming mug of earl gray.

Lupin looked abashed as he took the mug from him, but his features brightened up considerably when he took a sip.

"I've known you for three years," Gilderoy said before Lupin could wonder how he knew his favorite, and Lupin just let out a soft breath of laughter at his words.

"And yours is jasmine, isn't it?"

"Mmm," he hummed in affirmation and took a sip of his own tea. "I would commend you on remembering my favorite, but with your wolf nose I'm not sure if you're just saying that because you can smell it."

Lupin looked briefly offended, "If you can know my favorite, I can certainly know yours."

"You do have a point," he conceded, and then they descended into a comfortable silence as they both sipped at their teas. "So how are you and Fenrir? Has he decided to make you the alpha yet?"

Lupin looked maudlin as he set down his mug, resting his elbows on the table. "It's not as simple as passing on an Heirship. We have to fight to the death."

"And seeing how you are in love with him, I can see how that's a problem."

Lupin sighed, "I wouldn't exactly say in love with him."

"Ouch," he said after a moment of processing Lupin's words, "That's pretty harsh."

"Well," defended Lupin, "we're not soul mates, you know. How much can you love someone if you're not meant to be?"

Gilderoy wondered if Lupin was saying the words to be cruel. It made him lose his breath for a second as he stared at the werewolf, because three years had taught him that Lupin was *nice* and he was a little confused on how he could have read him so wrong.

Because everyone knew just how much in love with Lucius he was and just how futile his little crush had ended up to be. After all, Lucius was never his to begin with.

His face must have fallen because Lupin was already stammering out an apology, his grey eyes alight with horror. "I didn't mean it like that, really."

He didn't know if Lupin's apologies made the situation even more awkward, and after a few seconds of that, he took a deep breath in order to put Lupin at ease. He wasn't known as the social peacock of their year for nothing at all. "It's fine. Don't worry about it. I knew it was stupid from the start, but hey," he paused here to shrug, "what can you do?"

Lupin stared at him with thinly disguised pity and then the wolf was shaking his head, a soft sigh loosing from his lips. "I'm sorry. Everything's coming out wrong. I didn't come here to ask you about Lucius."

He flinched at the confirmation that he *was* really obvious in his pining after the older wizard. Lupin's smile faded and he loosed a breath, sounding shaken.

"Your soul mark," he murmured, "Do you remember what it was?"

"No," he answered immediately, because even now, he never faltered from questions about his faded soul mark. "I asked Professor Flitwick to *obliviate* me when I got to Hogwarts. There was no reason to remember."

"But what if you found someone who matched what your soul mark used to say?" asked Lupin, and his voice wasn't curious, but more desperate.

"My soul mark disappeared so why should I let it rule me?" he said, a tad bitterly. "If the person who was meant for me was *gone*, then why should I live my life looking for them?"

"I didn't leave you by choice," said Lupin, his voice firm even as his hands shook on the table. Gilderoy stared at him, the words not registering and his heart beating quickly.

"What?" he asked, because Lupin couldn't possibly mean what he was trying to say.

"We were destined for each other," said Lupin, confirming what he meant earlier. "My soul mark may have disappeared, but I know it meant you."

"What was it?" he asked, a bit fearful of the response.

"It was a lock," Lupin said, "with a heart as the center. I rather suspect yours was a key."

He felt a tingle in the back of his mind at the suggestion, almost as if his memory was resisting the obliviation charm. But try as he might, he couldn't remember what his mark used to look like. "I'm sorry," he whispered, because he had thrown away the one chance Lupin had at knowing what symbol described him.

"Don't be," said Lupin. "I left you first."

"Not by choice," he retorted immediately. "You becoming a werewolf made your soul mark disappear, right?"

Lupin nodded, and after a bit of hesitation, reached forward to grab at Gilderoy's hand. Gilderoy let him, taking Lupin's hand into his, and taking comfort in the feeling that one other person in the world had felt the desolation he had felt. Of not knowing if your soul mate was still out there and if that meant you weren't destined for love.

"I was inconsolable the day it disappeared," said Lupin, quietly. "It helped that the other werewolves had gone through the same thing. Though there's never been a happy ending. That's why werewolves prefer to mate with each other. It's much easier then. We don't have to wonder if we have been changed, if becoming a werewolf meant we no longer matched the one we were born to be with."

"You knew for a while then," said Gilderoy, and Lupin's smile was sheepish.

"I suspected since I met you," he confessed. "But I didn't want to say anything because..."

"Because you didn't think it still meant anything."

"Yeah," affirmed Lupin. "But it *should*. Just because it's gone doesn't mean we still don't have a chance."

Gilderoy closed his eyes, and tightened his hold on Lupin's hand, breathing in deeply in order to calm his fast beating heart. Because he *wanted* Lupin to be right. He wanted Lupin to be his soul mate because he had been waiting for him since the very moment he learned about magic.

He remembered the wizard that had come to the door when he was only seven, to teach him about magic and more importantly what his soul mark had meant. He hadn't thought about it in forever - he had thought that the memory had been hidden behind the obliviation charm. But it hadn't been.

But...while he was happy, he wasn't because he knew he could never love Lupin the way he did Lucius. Lucius with his pratty ways and his smug smile and his infuriating ease over magic. The three years had done nothing to ease his everending crush on the pure-blood heir and even the proposal to Narcissa had barely made a dent. He knew he was pathetic, but he didn't care because he knew that Lucius loved him just as fiercely back. It was just their soul marks didn't match and that made their love useless.

Lupin may have a chance though. Maybe if he just opened his heart up again then maybe he could forget about Lucius and move on with his life. He didn't have to spend forever pining after the git because they *weren't* connected. He didn't have to promise Lupin anything, but maybe they could start slow.

"We're not close," said Gilderoy, and he hurried on when Lupin's face fell at his words. "We can start as friends, get to know each other, see if we're really still meant to be."

"Thank you," said Lupin. "I know it won't be like normal, when we fall madly in love once we know each other's soul marks."

"But," he continued, "You let Fenrir know. You can't just use me as a back up. Just because you had a fight with Fenrir doesn't mean you run to me."

Lupin looked briefly offended, "I would *never*. Look, Fenrir has known since the very beginning. We all root for each other you know. We all hope that we're able to find the one."

"That's rather depressing," he said, truthfully, and Lupin shrugged.

"We do what we have to do."

"I can't say I blame you," said Gilderoy. "I never even thought there could be a chance that you were still out there."

Lupin smiled, "But I was. And I'm here now."

"Friends," he reiterated to get the soppy look off of Lupin's face, but he couldn't guarantee that he wasn't wearing one either. Because just the idea that Lupin had been waiting for him was exhilarating and even though he knew he was still deeply besotted with Lucius, maybe Magic had been right and he had been meant for Lupin all along.

Severus stopped in his tracks, the flower, a rare potion ingredient, falling to the floor in his shock. He wasn't normally this deep in the Forest in the middle of the night, but he had wanted some fresh air and Lily had told him about the ingredient a few weeks ago and he wanted to surprise her with it for her birthday.

And now...he was glad he did because something was horribly wrong. Because just behind the crooked tree was Magic, and she hadn't turned to look at him yet but he knew she probably

already knew he was there.

His words from earlier that day rang in his head, and he knew he had to do *something* to warn Harry. Because Magic couldn't be *here* without an offering from either their Lord or Harry and he knew the both of them were still celebrating Riddle's election as Minister for Magic.

He conjured up the memory of Lily smiling at him during their first lesson after graduating and before the white doe could emerge, Magic had her fingertip on the tip of his wand.

"Ah," she said, "Severus. You shouldn't be here."

"*You* shouldn't be here," he countered.

"I shouldn't be," she conceded.

When she didn't continue, Severus glared up at her. "Then why are you here? *How* are you here without an offering?"

"Things are going to change," Magic said instead, her eyes glowing with power. He shivered at the intensity of it; whenever he had interacted with Magic before, it had always been diminished, a mere mockery of what it was now. She had been hiding her power all this time.

"But why?" he pressed. "Things are going well. We're so close."

"You may be one of my favorites," Magic warned, "But even you cannot lecture me on this, Severus. I did not come here to hear protests from you. I've come to ask a favor."

"Then you called me out here."

"No," she said, her smile wry. "It is just fortunate that you have come out here on your own."

That did make him feel a bit better, to know that she hadn't planned their encounter. That meant that the favor she needed couldn't be too pressing.

"You cannot warn Harry of this," she said. And then she leaned forward and her favor made his heart quicken and his stomach to drop because she couldn't be *serious* with what she was going to do.

"You can't," he begged, and winced promptly when Magic let him feel her displeasure.

"I'm giving you a chance to help, Severus."

He bowed his head, "And I will."

"Good," she said, and when she pressed her hands to him, he knew she was casting her Magic to ensure that he couldn't change a thing.

And then she was gone as if she was never there.

Severus only paused once on his way back to pick up the flower he had dropped earlier, and before long he was staring up at a sturdy wooden door. It flew open before he could even knock,

and then Lily was there, all worried mutterings and warm hands and soon he was being pushed into a comfy armchair.

"I have something to ask of you," he said, when Lily's warm green eyes were staring into his.

"Anything," she promised.

And even though there was nothing but dread in his heart, he asked because Magic forced him to, and his heart shattered even more at the pain in Lily's eyes as she said yes.

The night air was refreshing after the stuffy air of the party. Harry had left early to prepare his special treat for his Intended and the thought of what was coming put a spring in his step. The apparition point was a short distance away, and although he could break the wards preventing him with ease, he decided to take the walk in order to calm his nerves.

The apparation point was deserted, and he shivered once at the eerie atmosphere before spinning in place and apparating away.

Immediately, his vision went black, and he stumbled, his heartbeat speeding up at the thought that everything had gone wrong.

He nearly fell when he finally landed, blinking his green eyes rapidly in order to get the black spots out of his vision. When his vision cleared, he was in a new place, a forest with dead trees and a withered grassy floor. He felt a chill run down his spine, knowing exactly where he was.

It was here that he had received Magic's gift and had won the last Task of the Founder's Tournament. It wasn't a place full of good memories however, and subconsciously, he circled his wrist with his other hand, trying to chase away the memory of the bracelet that had taken his magic.

There was no sound to alert him to her presence, but he turned anyway because he had become so intimate to her magic that nothing could hide it from him.

Magic looked briefly surprised that he had turned so quickly, but it soon melted away. She floated closer to him, but stopped a few feet away. Her expression betrayed nothing, but Harry already knew something was wrong. Neither Tom nor he had summoned her with their blood; despite the leaps and bounds they had come in garnering worshipers for Magic, she was still unable to appear without their help.

That she was here and had brought him to a place that only held bad memories for him told Harry that something bad was about to happen.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, Harry," said Magic, just as quiet. "I wish it didn't have to be like this."

"Tom told me not to trust you," he said instead of the angry words that threatened to erupt out of him. "I never believed him."

Magic shakes her head at his words, "You should have, Harry."

"But why?" he angrily demands. "You were supposed to be on our side!"

"I *am* on your side. But Harry, Tom and you belong to *me*. It's not what you want, it's what I want," she explained, and Harry shivered at the lack of empathy in her voice. Tom had told him that Magic didn't think the way they did and he never understood why Tom had sounded so vehement when he said it.

"And what exactly is your plan?" he snarled. "Was our plan not good enough for you? Tom just became Minister for Magic!"

She looked contrite and he flinched when she brought her hand up to his cheek. Her expression broke at that; even if she *was* a deity, she acted human enough that Harry believed that his reaction to her betrayal actually hurt her. They had shared so much together during those three years that he couldn't believe that she didn't feel anything for him.

"It's just not fast enough," she said, her hand falling back down to her side. "This will help, I promise."

"What will help?" he asked. "What exactly do you have planned?"

"You won't be hurt," she said, instead of an answer. "I promise," and before he could make another protest, the water around them started to ripple.

Blue magic filled the clearing, and when Magic outstretched her hand, the clearing came back to life. The tree's leaves came back in a startling green and the rocks formed into each other, sealing up all the cracks. The water became clear once again and the moonlight was strong enough that he could clearly see what Magic was aiming for.

The bracelet glittered in the water, a mockery of aesthetics in the expensive jewels it held. Dread filled his heart. "Please," he whispered, and Magic's expression closed off with his word.

He panicked, calling on the magic She had given him long ago. His hands glowed blue for only a split second before Magic made a motion and the light shut off immediately.

Her smile was wry, "Did you really think you can use my own Magic against me?"

He knew it wouldn't work and he clenched his eyes shut, trying his best to dredge up the magic that he had once used so easily. He hadn't used his own magic for three years, a rule that Magic had insisted upon when they had started training his usage of magic that belonged to Her. He now knew why she had insisted upon it.

He stared up at her, pleading, but she didn't take pity on him. With one curt motion, the bracelet was flying toward him and he was defenseless against it. It slid on within a few seconds and he dropped to his knees in despair as it started to seal away his magic for the second time.

He thought he knew Her. Thought he could trust Her to trust *them*. But Tom was right. She was an entity and that meant She did what She thought was best.

There was a light touch on his forehead, as calming as every touch she had bestowed upon him, and he was already falling backward before she even drew her hand away. He could already feel

his consciousness fading, his vision going black, which was why he was startled to feel human arms wrap around him.

"Who?" he murmured, mind racing because that meant Magic had been able to appear to someone *else* without their help, but the voice that answered him was heavily distorted in his ears, Magic's spell hindering him from recognizing who held him.

Because he knew that voice - he knew these arms, he just didn't know from where.

"It's okay, Harry," the voice spoke, "I got you. You're safe with me."

And then he knew no more.

A/N: Hehe, I love your guys' comments so much that I purposely posted this on my birthday so I can read them throughout the day :P It was nice last year (my god, it's been more than a year that ive been writing this story...that's crazy XD). and the story's almost over! Only five (ish) chapters left. I love you guys so much, thank you for giving me inspiration and continuing to read my little story :D Also major kudos to everyone who guessed that Lupin and Lockhart were soul mates (and if you have any ideas about better soul marks for the two of them let me know, I came up with this one because Lockhart sounds like Lockheart :P...obviously i'm creative.)

Also, there's been a smutty oneshot posted. It's under the account name wetdandelions and the title is called Red Heat! It's set in the universe of this story, and it's a/b/o universe. Just comment below if you can't find it :) it's also in my gifts.

Edit: 4/23/2016: I am so busy with work and finishing the story (and for now, it looks like I won't be posting until I finish because there's a whole ton of different ways I'm taking the story that I don't want to post and get myself caught up in a plot hole) and I just wanted to clarify something. I will (when I have time) go back and make this more clear - Tom was only told by Magic that he had immortality. He never went and killed himself again to test it. So for all he knows, it's true. Also I know I was super ambiguous, but I was aiming for Harry only getting immortality by dying of old age (actually I'll go edit it now lol) not actual immortality to like death by wizards so he had to be careful on finding his soul mate before Harry went and got himself killed and thus removing Tom of magic (and in his mind, life without magic is akin to death).

Separated

Day 1

When he woke, there were bright lights in his vision. He blinked them away and immediately wished he hadn't. Dumbledore stood in front of him with James to his right. James' face was unreadable. They no longer looked alike. James had opted to grow out his hair, while Harry kept his short. There were more differences though; Harry was healthy, and James looked withdrawn, either from emotional pain or physical.

Harry couldn't believe Magic had knocked him out to send him *here*. He understood what she was going for; Dumbledore needed to be dealt with before Tom could take over Britain. They had planned to confront him when he came for the last Horcrux, hoping that Tom challenging Dumbledore to a public duel would be enough to sway the public masses. Magic was correct that their thinking was flawed and flimsy at best; Magic's way was brutal but it had the highest chance of success. After all, the public would be appalled to learn that the new Minister for Magic's Intended had been kidnapped. And if Tom played things right, they could use that advantage to sway the staunchly light to their side. Harry knew that the Light was going to be a problem, but he had never imagined taking care of it this way.

"So you kidnapped me," Harry eventually said after the silence stretched on, his voice cracking from lack of water. Madam Pomfrey, who had disappeared around the same time Dumbledore had, bustled forward from behind him and handed him a glass of water, helping him tip his head back in order to ease the water down. Ropes were tied tightly around him, though they were useless considering Magic held him hostage anyway. His access to magic was gone, just like it had been all those years before Magic had granted him Her gift.

Dumbledore looked different. There were more wrinkles on his face and his hair was straggly and his beard unkempt. He wasn't a man of power anymore and it showed. The twinkle in his eye was gone, and he looked stern and disappointed all at once.

"Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice curt. "I asked you once long ago to consider choosing the right side. Haven't you see how much pain has been caused?"

"Pain?" he scoffed, unable to keep the disbelief out of his voice. "Nothing's changed. Do you see Tom out there stirring up a war? He's just become Minister for Magic."

"With Imperius?" asked Dumbledore. "He's always been fond of the Unforgiveables."

His anger immediately disappeared and he stared at Dumbledore sadly. "Why do you insist on believing the worst of Tom?"

"I believe you know the answer to that question," said Dumbledore. "I wasted my breath explaining it to you once already. I won't be making the same mistake a second time."

"Just because Grindelwald..." he started, and Dumbledore cut him off by casting a strong *silencio*. Hot tears sprung to Harry's eyes at the feeling of Dumbledore's magic spelling his lips shut because it hadn't been long ago that he would've been able to easily shake it off with help of

his blue magic. It only reminded him again of how weak he was in the middle of enemy territory. Though he was briefly heartened by the fact that Dumbledore obviously wanted to hide the information that Grindelwald was his Intended. It told him that Dumbledore hadn't lied to him. That meant if Tom was able to break through Nurmengard's defenses, he would have a foolproof way of defeating Dumbledore.

Dumbledore shook his head, and Madam Pomfrey bowed, leaving the room quietly after sending a worried glance at Harry.

"Your first Courting gift was an heirloom from Slytherin, correct? How fitting that Tom made it into a Horcrux and allowed you to wear his soul around your neck."

Harry's heart sank; he had forgotten all about the necklace around his neck when Magic had confronted him. Since he was now a prisoner of the Light, there was nothing stopping Dumbledore from taking it and destroying it as he had the other five horcruxes.

His suspicions were confirmed when Dumbledore held up the silver locket by its chain, the momentum causing the snake-decorated charm to sway from side to side. He stared at it in undisguised horror, knowing what was going to come next.

"Would you like to see how we destroy your Intended's horcruxes, Harry? Or would you like to try your own hand at it? You don't even need magic to rid the world of these vile things."

He was shaking and he couldn't stop it despite the ropes holding him down. He knew now that the Light only needed to destroy one more fake Horcrux to decide to go after Tom. But more pressing was that with the horcruxes destroyed, they would have no more need of *him*. They would kill him to destroy Tom's magic, and he would have no way to defend himself in hostile enemy territory. He wondered again what Magic was thinking by sending him here. He only hoped that She still cared for him enough to ensure that the Light couldn't find the last Horcrux.

"Perhaps I can spare you the sight if you tell us how you got here."

"You don't know?" he blurted out, and he pressed his lips together immediately. He hadn't meant to let that slip out. That meant that the person who had taken him after Magic had rendered him defenseless wasn't on the side of the Light. Even now he could still hear the words echoing in his head. The person who took him here had clear affection in their words when they took him, even soothing in the way they cradled him into their arms. It didn't match with the fact that he was *here* now, as a prisoner of their enemy.

However, that didn't mean that the person wasn't part of the Light. He hadn't factored in that the person may be hiding the fact that they had taken Harry here in order to avoid detection from Dumbledore.

Dumbledore looked irritated when he spoke again, "That is why I am asking you, Harry. You showed up unconscious at the edge of our wards a mere hour ago."

"I don't know," he said, honestly. There was no reason to lie because his answer didn't contain much information. "I was knocked out and when I next woke up, I was here."

Dumbledore mulled over his information before striding forward and grabbing Harry's chin in a tight grip, forcefully lifting his gaze upward until the two of them locked eyes. "*Legilimens*,"

muttered Dumbledore, angrily, and then the older wizard was entering his mind.

Luckily, occlumency was a skill powered by the magic inside of him, so the bracelet did nothing to hinder his shields. Despite that, Dumbledore was a skilled and gifted wizard, and Harry knew he couldn't hold out for long. He desperately fought it, knowing that if Dumbledore found out that Magic had betrayed him, he would instantly be suspicious of why Harry was really there - despite the fact that Harry still didn't know why Magic had sent him here.

Dumbledore was getting through the last of his shields when there was a cough, interrupting the two of them. "Dumbledore," said James, "we can use Veritaserum as soon as it's done brewing. There's no reason to do this."

Dumbledore blinked, breaking the contact and letting go of Harry. "My boy," he said, a glimpse of the grandfatherly persona he had used in Hogwarts shining through. "What a great idea. In the meantime, perhaps you can call Frank and Alice here. It's about time we get rid of the sixth Horcrux."

James' expression showed nothing, and he lifted his wand, white mist coming out of the tip and forming a large dog. The dog's tail was wagging and James' facial expression softened for a split second at the sight of his Patronus before he gave the dog curt instructions to find the other two. The dog nodded before darting away as soon as James finished talking.

"It's quite disturbing when a horcrux is destroyed," mused Dumbledore out loud as they waited for Frank and Alice. "Tom's placed traps on them, after all, traps that sometimes prey on the destroyer's very soul. But these traps shouldn't have an effect on you. After all, the two of you are Intended for each other."

"But the Horcruxes, sir," started James, sounding worried, and Dumbledore made an annoyed sound.

"My boy, do not interrupt me."

James backed down immediately, bowing his head and staying silent.

"As I was saying, perhaps the innate protection is now gone. You can experience firsthand just how cruel Tom is. It won't kill you, but you'll be under an intense amount of pain. And that may be the last straw needed to finally convince you to join us."

"I would never," Harry snarled immediately. "I would *never* betray Tom."

"Oh, Harry," said Dumbledore, and Harry stared in horror as joy filled the depths of Dumbledore's cold eyes. "You simply don't have a choice. *Imperius*."

There was a gasp and through the hazy fog currently descending on him, Harry heard Dumbledore say sharply to James, "You will tell no one of this."

"Of course," said James, but it sounded as if it was through gritted teeth.

Dumbledore didn't issue his will on Harry yet, but kept the Imperius running. When a knock on the door sounded, James turned and spelled it open. Harry was never close to either Frank or Alice, but he had met them a few times and had even worked on a class project with Alice once.

After all, they had spent a good seven years going to Hogwarts together, even if they had been in different houses.

"Is he alright?" asked Alice, her hazel eyes alight with worry. "Are the ropes too tight, sir?"

"Alice," chastised Frank. "Now isn't the time."

"He's not evil, Frank," argued Alice. "Harry's just confused, that's all. We can help him."

"He's already agreed to help," said Dumbledore, his grandfatherly smile on his face. "He's seen the error of his ways. The Dark Lord's very manipulative, after all." After his words, he waved his wand, releasing the ropes and letting them fall to the ground with a soft thud. Harry stood, against his will.

"Oh, Harry," breathed Alice, her hazel eyes now shining with joy. "I knew you'll understand. Here," she paused, and Frank obediently handed her the sword of Gryffindor. She didn't even hesitate, pressing it into Harry's right hand. "All you have to do is swing down at the Horcrux. The trap shouldn't hurt you because it's your Intended's magic. You're really helping us, Harry."

If he hadn't been controlled by the Imperius, he probably would have snarled at her. But Dumbledore was already placing the courting Gift in front of him and the older wizard's magic, because of the extreme power Dumbledore wielded, did not need a verbal command to force Harry to do his will.

He only had a split second to be worried that if he *wasn't* affected that Dumbledore would catch on that the Horcruxes weren't real before he was slamming the sharp side down onto the locket. It didn't work, and he frowned, unsure if he should continue to try to slash at it.

"Perhaps we should open it," speculated James. He didn't wait for someone to reply and he leaned forward, pulling the locket open. Immediately, dark, foul magic filled the air, and voices began to escape, all promising death on the one who opened it. And then Harry was being forced to bring the Sword of Gryffindor down, and the voices rose into a sharp pitch. Alice made a sound of pain, bringing up both hands to cover her ears, and Frank immediately pushed his girlfriend behind him, his wand held out in front of him as protection. He needn't have bothered, though, because the dark magic only had one target in its mind: Harry. It went into him through both his nostrils and his mouth and the room was eerily silent when the magic was gone. And then Harry crumpled, the magic taking hold and turning his vision black.

He thought he had fainted, but a warm, comforting light lay just in reach in front of him. He wondered if this was the Horcrux's effect, to doom the destroyer to wander a barren land in their own mind. Before he could even react, blue magic was descending around him, healing the bruises from the rope and the soreness of his throat from screaming.

"I have nothing to say to you," he snapped before he even saw her, and was rewarded by his ire when Magic materialized in front of him, her hands nervously hanging in front of her.

"Harry," she said, sounding nothing like the deity she had proven to be just last night. "Please forgive me."

"No," he said, immediately, and turned his head to show that he had every intention of ignoring her. He sat down cross-legged on the barren floor, and was briefly surprised that Magic had

changed the ground underneath him to fluffy grass. He didn't thank her, still too angry to even look at her, and it seemed as if she didn't blame him because she didn't say a word about the lack of gratitude.

She didn't try again, instead heaving a soft sigh and changing topics. "I know you don't want to talk to me, but you have to stay in here for a while. The dark magic is supposed to harm you like it did to the three Horcrux Hunters. So I'm keeping you imprisoned in your own mind for a while."

He didn't show any sign he heard her, but Magic didn't seem to mind, instead settling herself down next to him. He didn't know how much time passed before Magic broke the silence again. "Do you want to know what's happening with Tom?"

He only hesitated for a split second before inclining his head toward her. "I'm still not going to forgive you," he said, and frowned when Magic just smiled back at him.

"I know," she said. "I made my peace with it when I decided to send you here. I just hope you can forgive me when this is all over. I'll keep you safe, you know. I have plans upon plans for you and they all need you to be alive for it."

"And you're not going to share these plans, are you," he said, his voice low and accusing. "You're just going to spring them on me and I won't even have a choice."

She looked briefly pained, "I do know best, Harry."

"Do you?" he challenged. "How could you know sending me here will do anything? How can you factor in everything when you don't even understand humans? You don't even understand *me*."

"I *do* understand you," she protested, but Harry pressed on, caught up in his angry tirade. He had so many pent up feelings toward her that he didn't know if he could hold any of them back.

"You *don't*! And I am...*was* the closest human to you. You drove Merlin to his death after he sacrificed everything for you. What are you going to do to me?" His voice cracked at the end and he knew he was crying. The betrayal hurt more than he thought it would; his heart was torn open and Tom wasn't here to put him back together. Instead he was surrounded by his younger brother who hated him and Dumbledore who wanted nothing more than to use him to get to his Intended.

"Harry," spoke Magic, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You only see the long term benefits," whispered Harry. "You don't see that I'm hurt. I used to be so upset at Tom because I thought I was just a pawn to him. I thought I got over that. But I still am one, aren't I? Because I'm a pawn to you."

Magic looked pained and then she shook her head firmly. "I refuse to apologize for doing what I know is best. You need rest. It's about time the dark magic will leave you."

"You're just going to run away like that?" he taunted, and immediately regretted his words because Magic's expression hardened.

"Yes," she said. And then she tapped him on his forehead and he fell, and as he did, the world broke apart and the bright light of the real world was shining down on him. He only blinked up at Alice's worried face for a few seconds before he lost consciousness.

When he woke again, there was a soft cloth tied around his left foot. The cloth connected to the one of the posts of the bed he was laying on, and was obviously reinforced with magic to ensure he wouldn't be able to escape from the room. It wasn't uncomfortable, but it reminded him of his imprisonment here and that was enough to make him grimace.

He glanced up when he heard his name being called, all thoughts of figuring a way to cut the cloth vanishing.

"Lily?"

Her red hair was brilliant despite the dim lighting of the room and the color was what he focused on in order to escape the pain of betrayal he couldn't help feeling. He still remembered that it was that color he had first noticed about her all those years ago. He just couldn't believe that she would be here with the Light again when it seemed like only a few more days Severus would confess the truth to her. He really believed that she would never come back to James Potter, especially since he had told the whole world already that his Intended was Sirius.

"How could you?" he asked, his voice low and hurt.

"Harry," she admonished, and his attention was temporarily taken away as she placed a tray in front of him. There was a treacle tart in the corner, and that was what made him pause.

"A peace offering?" he asked, gesturing to the tart, and she sighed.

"I didn't betray you, if that's what you're thinking, Harry. We may not be close friends, but Severus is my best friend. And I know you're his."

"Then why are you here?" he asked after a moment of thought. "Did they take you, too?" he asked, now alarmed.

She stared at him, and then smiled slightly. "I'm here for you, Harry. And just like you, Magic sent me here."

"To watch over me," he said.

She hummed in agreement before settling herself down on the bed next to him, bringing her knees close to her chest and wrapping her thin arms around them. "There's a potion inside of your food. It's to help your body get used to the lack of magic."

"Thank you," he murmured, picking up the fork provided to the side of the food. "I'm sorry for doubting you."

"It's okay. I would have thought the same," Lily said, quietly. "I'm just glad that I was able to get you alone before anything else happened. I didn't want you to think I betrayed you for very long. Magic just betrayed you, after all, and I would hate to add to that."

He closed his eyes at the thought of Magic, his heart beating faster just at the mere mention of her. He already felt close to tears, his emotions already in a wreck because of the lost access to magic. He had thought of Magic almost as the mother he never had, and it was ridiculous because she obviously never thought of him as her son.

"Oh Harry," said Lily. "I know you think she cares nothing for you, but if she really didn't, she wouldn't have sent me here."

"Lily, please," he said, "I don't want to think about it."

She stared at him for a bit, before pursing her lips and nodding decisively. "James will be coming soon. He doesn't know I'm here for you, and it's better that way. He's different, Harry."

He suspected ever since he had first seen him and despite the fact that James was the enemy now, his heart still gave a painful pang at the thought of James being hurt. "Is he okay?" he asked, and Lily smiled at him.

"You still care for him, don't you?" she asked, and Harry sighed, before nodding his head.

"He's always going to be special to me," he said. "He's my little brother, even if he's with Dumbledore now."

"Severus told me that He made a vow with Dumbledore."

"An open-ended one," elaborated Harry. "Dumbledore can order James to do anything and he has to listen."

Lily stared at him with wide eyes, before heaving a soft sigh. "That explains the *obliviations*."

He couldn't help the shiver that ran down his back at Lily's words. She didn't wait for him to answer, instead pressing on, her voice grim. "Last night, James obliviated himself. I never even knew that was possible."

"It shouldn't be," said Harry, a shiver running down his back. "Because then that means instead of memories..."

"He'll just have a blank memory," finished Lily. "Which keeps him safe from Dumbledore, in some ways."

Harry loosed a shaky breath, his heart breaking at the thought of James pointing his own wand at himself. To actually go through with it and erase his memories...the thought was horrifying. "I'm going to save him, Lily. I'm not going to leave him with Dumbledore when I go."

Lily smiled at him, and was cut off by a knock on the door. "That must be James," she said, her voice low, and then she stood, opening the door for his little brother.

James wasn't alone. Alice shyly tiptoed in after him, and Harry was barely able to conceal his wince when Lily pressed a chaste kiss against James' cheek. It felt wrong to him, even though he knew Lily belonged to Severus and James to Sirius.

"Hi!" said Alice, cheerfully, her brown eyes warm with affection as she settled onto the bed next to him. "I was so worried when you didn't wake up. Thanks for destroying that Horcrux, Harry. Are you feeling better now?"

He stared at her, wondering what kind of trick she was trying to pull on him. She couldn't possibly think he would turn his back on Tom that fast.

When he didn't answer, she didn't seem to take offense. She just smiled at him and continued chattering on cheerfully. "Would you like to see our little hideout, Harry? There's some people you may know from our year. And we're underground, you know, but sometimes as a special treat we get to go aboveground. The scenery is just gorgeous. There's a lake the size of the one in Hogwarts and sometimes the warm blooded mermaids visit. They're the pretty ones, you know. James told me that you liked to be in water when you were young. You can do so now if you want."

"When I was young," he repeated, frowning. "None of you guys know anything about who I am now."

Alice didn't even seem affected by his hostile tone. Instead, she actually reached out and patted his hand as if to console him. "It's alright. I know the Dark Lord had brainwashed you ever since your first lesson. You can finally grow now as a person now that you've been rescued."

"Rescued?" he repeated scathingly. He stared in horror at the short-haired girl and Alice just tilted her head to the side, her smile never disappearing.

"Because you couldn't possibly be so evil to love the Dark Lord, Harry. I know you believe he's a good guy, but he's out to prove that being Dark is *okay* and he *hates* Muggleborns like Lily and me."

"He doesn't hate Muggleborns," he said and it took all his willpower not to glance up at Lily. Because Tom couldn't hate Muggleborns; he had welcomed Lily with open arms.

"He does," says Alice, conviction strong in her voice. "Dumbledore said so."

"Dumbledore knows nothing about my Intended."

She shook her head, as if disappointed in him. "I thought after seeing the horror of his Horcrux, you would finally learn. Those are vile, corrupt things and the wizard who created them is not capable of love. He threw you away; why are you still defending him?"

Long ago, those words would have made a dent in the armor around his heart. But now, they just glanced off and he sighed, looking at her with pity. She had been so brainwashed by Dumbledore, it was actually laughable that she was claiming *Tom* had brainwashed *him*.

"Obviously, you still need some time to think about this," said Alice. She stood, smiling when she looked over at Lily and James, completely ignoring the way they were standing awkwardly next to each other. "Come on, you two lovebirds, let's let Harry stew on his own, alright?"

After they left, Harry was startled to realize that his brother hadn't said a word to him. Worry rose in his heart but unfortunately, he knew he couldn't do anything about it until he was visited

again. Because he was at the mercy of his captors, and right now, only Magic was his protector because Tom still didn't know where he was.

He didn't know if one of Tom's horcruxes had caused Alice to crack like that. In Hogwarts, he had never known her to be the crazy one; she was quiet in class and rarely stood out in school besides her relationship with the heir of one the more prestigious Light families.

"Always the Hufflepuffs," he murmured to himself, and that brought a smile to his face as he remembered Amelia. She was *crazy* when slighted and that brought a fierce ache to his heart. He had been missing Tom like crazy that he hadn't even thought about his friends.

He hoped that they weren't too worried and that Tom still had everything under control. He had no clue what would happen if it got out that the Light had kidnapped him.

But he had to believe Tom could handle everything, because Tom was well, *Tom*. When had Tom ever failed him?

Day 2

Dorea Black was a witch not to be underestimated.

She was a woman with strong opinions and fierce love for those who managed to catch her attention. She had given up the prestige of being the Head of the Black family with little regret and she had taken it back just as easily when she had decided it was in her fate to do so. She had taken one look at her soul mark and had instantly known it to mean Charlus Potter despite the fact that she was only passing acquaintances with him in her year of Hogwarts. It didn't matter that her soul mark was vague and it could mean possibly a hundred other people. She wanted it to be Charlus, and she didn't care if she was wrong. Of course, she was proven right when she confronted him a year later, only proving she was a witch who knew what she wanted.

She wasn't one to praise or hate the dark, and that made her relationship with Charlus easy. Even when Harry Potter, her little nephew, had borne the mark of a Dark Lord, she had seen nothing wrong with it despite Charlus' relatives' misgivings. She hadn't known the true extent of neglect they had pushed on Harry because they had hidden it well. They paid for Harry's tuition, bought him nice things (she would later find out it was the Dark Lord who bought Harry all those clothes and had promptly went into a period where she bought every nice thing she thought would look nice on her new son), and had never placed a word of complaint about the boy after naming James the Heir. And of course, she hadn't been in a position to see how badly Charlus' brother had messed up because they had cut down their time with Harry almost immediately after Charlus had voiced concerns about the Heirship. She had badgered Charlus, but Charlus only saw the good in his brother and nothing had come of it. She hadn't wanted to risk her marriage, so she gave it up as a lost cause and had seen nothing outwardly wrong with Harry. She would come to regret this decision later.

So when the Dark Lord had asked her to adopt his Intended, she had only hesitated for a split second before readily agreeing. Because he had opened her eyes and had shown she had been right all along about Harry.

She didn't do things half-heartedly. She threw every inch of herself into things she felt strongly about and never *ever* experienced any feelings of indecision in her life. So for the past three years, she had been there for Harry. She had never wanted children; she never thought she could find it in her heart to love anyone else besides Charlus. Charlus accepted her decision and had loved her anyway, but when they adopted Harry, he was beside himself with joy.

Dorea loved Harry with all her heart. Even though he had been practically grown up when he had come to them, he still needed love that came from a family. And she had done her best to provide that to him as much as possible. She had implemented weekly dinners, and Harry had only canceled a few times, preferring to move around the dinners rather than cancel them outright. Tom often joined them, but most of the time it was just the three of them. Harry had been wary at first, but had softened up with them over time. Harry had always wanted parents, and even *if* the Dark Lord had probably come to them for political benefits, she loved Harry all the same and she tried her best to be there for him.

And *that* was why she was currently narrowing her eyes at the Darkest wizard alive, uncaring of any ramifications that may come because of her actions. Because her Harry was *missing*.

"I'm sorry," mumbled the Dark Lord, and that was when she paused and took in Tom's appearance. He had circles under his eyes and he was pale as if he had been drawing his own blood for Dark rituals just the day prior. It was obvious that he hadn't slept a wink since Harry had gone missing and his hair was still in the same style he had spelled it the day of the party Harry had disappeared from.

And her heart broke because she realized then that she not only thought of Harry as her son, but she also considered Tom to be her son-in-law. And she couldn't blame Tom for Harry's disappearance, because Tom already blamed *himself*. She was already moving forward to draw him into a hug before she could even realize what she was doing, and by the time she clued in, she was rubbing soothing circles on the Dark Lord's back. Tom had stiffened into her embrace, but had ultimately let her, and that let her know how tired Tom was.

"I can't find him," said Tom in a small voice, and it felt so *wrong* to hear the Dark Lord sound vulnerable. She hummed to let him know she was listening and felt Tom relax in her embrace. While Tom would never implicitly trust her as he did Harry, he had gotten used to her because of the many times he saw her. And she served her purpose well, using her connections to further Harry's political prowess so he had no reason to dislike her. And more importantly, she had only glowing words to say about their relationship.

"You will," she said, her anger already gone and a fleeting memory. "You won't stop until you do. And you know he's safe. You still have magic."

Tom stiffened momentarily at her embrace before he nodded against her. "We have many enemies," said Tom. "He may be alive, but in what state?"

"Don't worry about that, Tom," she said, even as her heartbeat skyrocketed at the thought of her precious Harry being tortured. She had to believe he was okay, just hidden beyond magic that they could not access. "Focus on finding him. What have you tried so far?"

He pushed away from her finally, and he did look a bit better from their brief embrace. He must be truly out of it to let her hug him for so long and her heart ached at the thought of how much

worry Tom was going through. Even if she couldn't help Harry directly now, she still had Tom to worry about.

"Spells. Dark ones," explained Tom. "Blood magic. And when that didn't work, soul magic. Something's hiding him from me and I'm afraid it may be Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore, we can handle," she said, ignoring the way Tom frowned in disbelief. "He can't hurt Harry," she went on to explain. "He's still searching for the Horcruxes and he wouldn't dare lose the one way to rid you of your magic before he has them all."

"If he really has Harry, then the Locket is probably destroyed. Which means," he paused before turning away from Dorea, walking over to his desk and standing still next to it. He tapped his fingers on the side of the desk, probably musing over something, before he raised his wand and white mist started to come out of the tip. When the snake was fully formed, Tom kneeled so he could talk easily to it. "Tell Fenrir to double security on the woods. And tell him to send Lockhart to my office as soon as possible."

Tom turned back to her when the snake slithered away, a frown still visible on his face. "We made the hiding places easy because we wanted Dumbledore to eventually find them. But it's about time we upped the security, especially if what you said was true. Thank you, Dorea."

"You would have thought of it eventually," she tried her best to mollify the Dark Lord. "And Magic will keep him safe."

"I hope so," said Tom. His frown didn't disappear however, and that told Dorea that the Dark Lord only slightly believed that Magic could help Harry. She didn't want to press however; she knew how the Dark Lord felt about Magic.

"I didn't get a chance to congratulate you on winning Minister for Magic. Are you going to tell the public about Harry's disappearance?"

"It'll cause panic," dithered Tom. He sighed a second later, the sound weary and long. "But yes. If someone out there can find Harry, it's worth the measures we'll have to take to ensure everything is stable."

"It may not cause panic," said Dorea, thoughtfully. "If we can somehow pin Harry's kidnapping on Dumbledore, then people may not trust the Light anymore. People *like* Harry, Tom. I know you're used to doing things alone, but I'm sure all of Harry's friends and political allies will do anything to help you ensure Harry's safety."

Tom blinked at her in surprise, looking as if he had never even considered the idea. "That may be true. Or," he paused, suddenly looking distraught again, "our enemies will take this as a sign to attack. Without Harry by my side, I'm weaker."

"Breathe, Tom," said Dorea, immediately, her hands going to rest on Tom's shoulders. "I know Harry's missing, but we *know* he's fine. You still have your magic. You have to concentrate first on finding him."

Tom listened, breathing in deeply before exhaling followed with a soft sigh. "You're right. Right now, nothing matters but Harry."

“And the first step is to make an announcement to the public. The sooner, the better. And I know we have to focus on finding Harry, but you also have to remember you were just elected Minister for Magic. You have to start setting our plans into motion.”

Tom nodded, the action curt, but the determination easy to see in his eyes.

Dorea smiled, because even if she couldn't help Harry right now by herself, the Dark Lord wasn't going to let anything stand in his way of finding him. She pitied the fool that had thought it was a bright idea to take Harry away from Tom. Now the Dark Lord was on a warpath, and nothing was going to be able to stand in his way.

Day 3

Two days of ignoring Alice's attempts to play nice was *tiring*. He hoped Alice never realized just how much he loathed her and that she would continue to be nice instead of deciding to torture him to find out where the last Horcrux was. James, Lily, and Frank never did much but visits with Alice and Frank's love eyes at Alice while she was chattering on to him was utterly vile. He knew he would have to give in soon; he couldn't spend the rest of the days he was captured here in the same room.

He was just settling into his bed when Magic appeared. He frowned, because he still hadn't forgiven her enough to feel any kind of positivity upon seeing her.

"I'm sorry," she said when she noticed he was in his night attire. "But you have to help me. Tom's gone insane."

His blood ran cold and then he immediately glared up at the deity. Because after six days of avoiding him, here she was asking for *his* help as if it was guaranteed. Which it was, in a way, because he would never turn down a chance to help his love, but it was for Tom, not her. He would never think fondly of her again, not after she had doomed him to here.

"Please, Harry," Magic continued when he didn't say anything. "He's going to ruin everything."

"You mean your plan," said Harry, his voice unsympathetic. "Tom is going to ruin what you're planning because you haven't told either of us what it is."

Magic hesitated at his words, probably still unused to the open hostility in his voice. "I don't," she started to protest, and Harry cut her off with a harsh exhale.

"Is he okay? How can I help?"

She looked grateful, and he hated it enough that he growled softly. "Not for *you*. But for Tom."

Her face fell and she sighed. "I guess I deserve that." He didn't comfort her, not caring that he was being cruel and unforgiving because he wasn't ready to forgive her. He didn't know if he ever would be able to. Magic seemed to realize that he wasn't going to say anything else, so she heaved a soft sigh before continuing.

"I need you to visit Tom in your dreams," said Magic.

"Are you going to watch me until I fall asleep, then?" he asked, frowning, and Magic actually giggled at that.

"No, silly Harry," she said, reverting back to the nickname she had reserved just for him in the three years she had trained him. His heart panged at the reminder and he closed his eyes in order not to see her. "I just have to do this," finished Magic and when he felt her hand ghost above her forehead and the slight blue emanate beyond his closed eyelids, he felt himself losing consciousness. "Tom's planning on making a horcrux," Magic whispered just when he felt his consciousness about to slip away entirely. "I need you to stop him."

When he opened his eyes again, he was in the office Tom won when he became Minister for Magic. It didn't look anything like Tom had been planning to redecorate it to look like and he frowned because he knew it hadn't changed because Tom had been so worried about him. He reached out to touch the books placed on the shelf; it turned out Tom at least had enough time to move his favorite books in. And then he shivered, because while he *could* feel the spine of the books, there was an eerie quality to his skin - it was transparent and looked just like Magic's skin.

He didn't know what to think of what Magic just told him. He thought Tom had sworn off the idea of Horcruxes. But perhaps his disappearance was enough to reignite that paranoia. Not for the first time, he cursed Magic colorfully in his mind.

When he turned, his heart stopped beating for a split second because Tom was *there* right in front of him, even if his Intended's face was hidden by his long, elegant fingers, his elbows resting on the Minister's desk in front of him.

Tom didn't look good. His hair, usually immaculate and styled beautifully, looked mussed as if Tom had been repeatedly running his hands through it. His clothes were rumpled and he was wearing colors that his Tom wouldn't be caught dead in. And when Tom finally put down his hands, Harry's heart nearly stopped again because Tom's eyes were bloodshot and there were dark circles under his eyes.

He was about to rush forward when Tom scoffed angrily, his beautiful mouth pursed into a frown at the sight of Harry. "Figures," said Tom, getting angrier by the second, "she would conjure up a hallucination to punish me. All because I threw a bloody lamp at her."

"You threw a lamp at her?" he said, instead of actually saying what he wanted to, and he was surprised to see an actual smile crack on his Intended's face.

"It just bounced off her, but she deserved it. Your other self is always trying to defend the bloody hag but she's not worth it."

"I know," he said and Tom chuckled, a small smile gracing his face.

"Tell your other self that, will you?" He paused, looking confused, before a larger smile crossed his face. "Magic's not so good at punishing me, is she? She should have known better to send you, even if you're just a ghost of your real self. You never fail to get me to smile."

"Tom," he said, feeling rather touched, and Tom's smile turned fond.

"Come here?" he asked, and Harry could never deny his Intended anything so he crossed the span of the room with just a few strides. He didn't protest when Tom wrapped his arms around him and seconds later he let out a yelp as Tom tightened his hold on him. The hug felt desperate and Harry's heart broke as he imagined just what Tom was feeling without him.

The three years had tempered Tom somewhat, but Tom still worried endlessly over him. To be unable to find or help Harry must be killing him. He pulled away slightly to run a hand lovingly down Tom's cheek and Tom's smile was wry when he looked back up.

"You know your other self likes to do that," he said.

"I do," said Harry, and then he stepped forward to invade even more of Tom's personal space and tugged Tom down into a kiss. Tom stiffened and almost made to push him away before melting into it when Harry pressed his tongue even further in. It had been too long and Harry knew all of Tom's sweet spots so it wasn't long before Tom submitted to him.

"I hope he won't be mad I kissed you," said Tom when they draw away and Harry snorted, tangling his hand into his lover's hair.

"Of course I won't be," he said, amused, and watched as Tom opened his bright red eyes, squinting them a second later at Harry.

"Harry?" he asked, and Harry couldn't keep it in any longer, he chuckled and pressed a kiss to the tip of his lover's nose.

"I'm just an illusion, love, but it's really me here," he said. "You were so cute, Tom."

"Cute?" repeated Tom, sounding offended, and then Harry jumped a bit when Tom growled and bit his bottom lip as punishment for his lip. It wasn't really a punishment though, so Harry just chuckled and pushed slightly away, seating himself down on Tom's desk and tugging Tom down so he would sit on his own chair.

Tom looked wistful when they were both seated, "I wish we could have actually christened the Minister's office."

"And who says we can't?" asked Harry, and grinned when his Intended's eyes darkened with lust. "*But* not before we talk about why I was sent here."

"And where your *actual* body is," said Tom, sounding angry. "I *told* you not to trust her!"

He winced, "So you know she's behind this?"

"Of course I know!" snapped Tom. "She came to me just a few hours ago and told me that she had something planned and that it was better if you stayed where you were. And that I had only to concentrate on *my* side of things here and that you were perfectly safe where you were." Tom huffed angrily before he suddenly paused, his red eyes regarding Harry with intense concentration. "Which you are, correct? She *is* keeping you safe?"

"Oh Tom," he said, his heart aching at the sound of Tom's voice. "I am, love. I'm safe."

Tom's anger seemed to deflate at his words and the tension went out of his shoulders. Tom tangled his fingers with Harry's, his thumb going to run soothing circles on the back of his palm. "So where are you, then?"

Just when he got Tom to calm down. He hesitated for a split second and that was enough for Tom to start frowning. He couldn't lie though, not when this might be the last time he saw Tom for a while. "In Dumbledore's hideout, actually."

"What," said Tom, his tone flat and expressionless and Harry winced because he knew that he was in for an outburst.

"But I'm safe," he tried to protest even when Tom unconsciously tightened his grip on the hand still within his. "Magic's keeping me safe, Tom. Really. They haven't found the last horcrux so they have no reason to kill me."

"No reason to *kill* you?" repeated Tom, his tone bordering on dangerous now. "Magic is keeping *you* safe? She sent you there in the first place, Harry!"

"I know, I know," he immediately tried to backtrack. "You were right, Tom. She wasn't to be trusted and now I'm paying for it."

Tom's expression softened, and now he looked concerned. "I didn't want to be right, love. I know you like her, trust her even."

"I did," said Harry, "But that doesn't mean I *still* like her, Tom. I know we can't trust her."

"Then why do you think she's keeping you safe?" asked Tom, and his tone was no longer angry, just curious.

"Because she needs me alive," said Harry. "I never would have thought that would have been her only motivation for that, but," he sighed, and Tom immediately caught onto the way he was feeling. Lily was great and she had tried her best to relieve the feeling of betrayal, but she wasn't Tom.

Tom knew that he was hurt by Magic's betrayal. Tom always knew when he was hurt and although his love couldn't do much to alleviate the pain now that they were separated, it was still healing just to *be* with his Intended. It had felt like a hole had been created in his heart and every second away from Tom had inched it a little further apart. He wanted Tom. He needed Tom and it was killing him to be so far away from him when they hadn't spent more than a few hours apart for the past three years.

"There's more than one reason to her keeping you alive, Harry," said Tom, his voice soft. "Because I won't help her become more powerful if she doesn't. I know I've been fighting for this cause for so long, but none of it matters if you aren't with me at the finish."

"You can't give up everything for me," he whispered, his mind racing because this was just like Tom. Tom would give up the whole world for Harry, but Harry would give up himself for the whole world if he could. And Tom had been fighting for this longer than Harry had been alive - fighting for a world where the wizards could roam free and not worry about the Muggles or the discrimination between Light and Dark. He couldn't come between that.

"I can," said Tom, "And I will. *Harry*, I love you. And only you. None of that matters if you aren't here with me."

"Tom," he said, out of lack of anything else to say, and was promptly quieted when Tom drew him in for a soft kiss, obviously not wanting to hear his protests. He sighed softly into the kiss and when Tom let go, he laid his head down on his love's shoulder. His love's scent calmed him down a bit and gave him the courage to continue. "Magic sent me here because what you were doing was going to ruin her plans." He hesitated on mentioning the Horcrux outright because he wasn't sure how his Intended was going to react.

Tom stiffened and then a second later, his husky chuckle was filling the room. Harry straightened up to look his Intended in the eye and Tom simply returned his look with a smug smirk. "That actually makes me happy to hear."

"Oh? And what have you been doing?" he asked, delighting in the way Tom's smirk grew even smug.

"For starters, I haven't been a very good Minister."

"I rather doubt that," he retorted immediately, his own smile forming, and Tom chuckled, his eyes crinkling at the corners in fondness.

"You're right," he said, "I wouldn't let my reputation go down like that. *But* I haven't been putting any of our plans into place. I stopped a couple of bills that would help further along Her power and I forbid any of our followers to enact any of the ceremonies she taught us. Even the centaurs have listened."

"I thought the centaurs didn't like me anymore," he pointed out, curious. They hadn't talked to him in three years after his last mistake had cost them the gathering that held the most magic in the forbidden forest and he was surprised to hear that they were going along with Tom's plans. Of course, they had allowed them entrance to visit the unicorns thanks to the trinkets Tom had bought them, but they were never friendly with Harry again.

"They know what it's like to be screwed over by a deity," said Tom, his eyes dark with anger. "I won't let her get away with this, Harry."

His heart felt full from seeing the way Tom was so righteously angry over him and some part of that vision was enough to heal the pain from the past six days. But still... "Magic sent me here for a reason, Tom. If what you're doing is ruining her plans..."

"Forget her plans," said Tom, his voice dangerous. "She can either tell us what exactly she's planning or she can do the whole thing herself."

"But the Muggles," said Harry. "If we start fighting with Her now, then do we have a chance if they realize we exist?"

"We'll deal with that if it happens. More importantly, we have to let her know that She can't just kidnap *you* and expect nothing to come of it. I know you came here thanks to Magic and while I am grateful that I get a brief chance to hold you again, I'm not going to let her get away with this without any consequences."

"Then what about the Horcrux?" he asked before he could lose his nerve. Tom blinked at him, obviously misunderstanding when he tilted his head to the side in curiosity.

"The last one's hidden away in the forest we picked. They won't be getting it. You don't have to worry, love."

"No, Tom," he said, biting his lip and wondering how to bring this up. He shifted a bit so he could grab Tom's hands and Tom let him, gazing at him with his eyes calculating.

And then his love's mouth pursed, "*Your* horcrux. Magic delivered you to them with Slytherin's Locket on, didn't she? What did they do to it?"

Harry flinched at the reminder of the cold dark magic that had held him just a few days ago and Tom's eyes softened immediately. "What I would do if I could harm Her," Tom threatened in a low voice, and Harry shook his head, wanting to get back on track.

"Magic said *you* were thinking of actually making a Horcrux."

Tom blinked, not expecting that subject change, but recovered quickly enough. He reached behind Harry, his long fingers sifting through papers quickly before he pulled one back. It was parchment and etched on it were designs of a locket, not unlike the one that he had worn for the past three years. "Magic wouldn't tell me where you were, but I figured it was someplace unsafe. So I figured if they thought *you* made a horcrux," Tom paused to tap his fingers on the parchment before continuing, "Then if they somehow destroy the last horcrux, they won't kill you to rid me of my magic."

He couldn't help the smile that bloomed at Tom's words; it felt like a burden had been lifted at the idea that his Intended hadn't been planning to make a horcrux. He knew that Tom wouldn't; Tom had promised long ago that he would never turn to the vile things. But Magic had been in such a panic and Harry had been missing for six days that he hadn't known what to think.

"Thank Merlin," he murmured and Tom quirked an eyebrow at him.

"You believed her, didn't you? It's okay, I forgive you. You're obviously not in the right mind after being surrounded by Light imbeciles all day."

"Hey," he started, offended, and Tom laughed brightly before sobering up just as fast.

"I promised I wouldn't, love. Loss of magic hardly matters when it'll occur because I lost *you*."

"You're being so sweet again," he said, and Tom grinned, breaking Harry's hold on his hands to shift them so that they were underneath Harry's thighs. Using a bit of strength, Tom pulled him even closer so that Harry was straddling him.

"Do I get a prize? I do believe you promised me a special treat for becoming Minister."

"What if Magic's watching?" he asked, amused, and Tom shrugged.

"Let her watch."

Harry didn't refute Tom's statement, knowing full well that if Tom really did think Magic was watching, he really would try to gouge Magic's eyes out. But still, this wasn't the time for

thinking dirty especially when Harry didn't know how long Magic was going to keep him here. So he settled for changing the subject. "If you creating a horcrux is the only thing going against her plans, then what *are* her plans? Why is refusing to help her gain more power not making her anxious?"

Tom frowned before sighing heavily. "Then that means she's already strong enough for what she has planned."

"Which means we can't stop it," said Harry, his heartbeat quickening.

"Hey," said Tom, "She sent you here to be with me and that's her first mistake, alright? As long as we're together, we can figure it out. She's still visiting you while you're in Dumbledore's hideout, correct?"

Harry gasped, his eyes widening. "Do you think she's been hiding Dumbledore from us this whole time? We spent three years trying to find him and we hadn't succeeded. Granted, we didn't try as hard as we could have, but that *would* make sense. I think she has someone from there on her side because she wasn't the one who brought me in. Oh," he paused, wondering if Magic had told him or if Tom had assumed his lack of magic was because he was an illusion and then figured he might as well mention it anyway. "She used the bracelet from before to lock away my magic."

"She what?" asked Tom, his voice dangerously low again. "You don't even have magic to defend yourself in that bloody place?"

"It's not as bad as it sounds," protested Harry. "Lily's there and she's been giving me potions in order to stall off the effects of not having magic."

That threw Tom and he blinked slowly for a second as he thought about what Harry just said. "Lily Evans? Prince's girl?"

Harry hummed in affirmation and Tom sighed. "No wonder I haven't seen Prince in a while. Do you think he knows?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "Magic sent her there."

"If I recall, Evans hasn't underwent the ritual to see Magic."

"She sent instructions through Sev," he said, and Tom frowned, his expression thoughtful. "And having no magic isn't that bad. I'm assuming Magic will burn off the bracelet eventually and the lack of magic means I can walk around the hideout freely. Well, with a guard, but it isn't so bad."

"Just be careful," said Tom. "We still don't know if Magic *will* keep you safe."

"She does want to keep me alive," Harry mused, "but I'm not sure how long that will stay a truth."

Tom looked worried, but when Harry squeezed him reassuringly, the expression dropped and a fond smile took its place. "You do always have a way to make me worry less."

"That's only because you worry too *much*," Harry said.

"True," said Tom. "Anyway, since Magic is still visiting you, you work on getting her plan out of her. And if the Light are treating you well, in hopes of turning you to their side I assume, then you can work on changing their views on magic. Even after killing Dumbledore, we do still need them to join our cause. But of course, your first priority is to take care of yourself."

Harry paused at Tom's words, wondering if it was odd to not feel like defending Dumbledore against Tom's violence. This was probably the first time he hadn't protested against killing the old wizard. He didn't want to draw attention to it though, and instead took it in stride. "Sounds fair," said Harry. "It shouldn't be too dangerous, I think. Most of the people there are from Hogwarts and they all have a positive view of me still. Just with the added thought that you manipulated me into a relationship which is annoying, but." He shrugged to show how much he didn't care about those people and then smiled when Tom laughed. "And I know you said you've been sabotaging the bills we wrote up, but since Magic hasn't been worried about that at all, maybe we should try something else. You can work on letting the general public know about the danger of Muggles?"

Tom hummed as he thought about it before nodding. "So nothing directly adding to her power, but enough to keep us safe if the Muggles attack. And of course I'll be working on finding Dumbledore's hideout. I know Magic will be keeping it hidden, most likely, but maybe I'll be able to find a loophole."

"And if you still don't have enough to do," he smirked in order to let his Intended know he was just teasing him because Tom *never* had enough to do, "you can work on the international state of things. I know England has been mostly closed off because of how disgustingly Light the whole place is, but with the new bills you passed, maybe other Ministers would be willing to actually compromise with us."

"I've been thinking about that," said Tom. "Have you heard of the Triwizard's Tournament?"

"With Durmstrung and Beauxbatons?" When Tom nodded, Harry grinned. "That could work. It's subtle enough that they won't suspect anything and it's simple enough Bellatrix can take care of it. Isn't Regulus a seventh year now? He'll be a good Champion."

"Always promoting your little Slytherins," said Tom, and Harry shrugged.

"He'll help add credence that Hogwarts is the best school out there right now. Thanks to your last three years, of course."

"Our last three years," amended Tom. "Anyway, now that we decided on our next course of action, when do you think Magic will whisk you away again?"

"She did say I'm visiting you in my dreams. I'm guessing that means I won't leave until I wake up."

"Perfect," said Tom, "I think that means I get my prize now, then."

Harry laughed and let Tom pull him into a kiss.

"Don't worry," Magic said. A bubble, so bright that it nearly burned the eyes to witness, was cupped within her hands. The surface of it changed rapidly, but the person she was talking to didn't dare look down. "I'll keep them safe for you."

"I know," said the same person who had taken Harry into Dumbledore's hide out for Magic replied. "I trust you." The person took a deep breath before pointing his wand at himself. "*Obliviate*."

Magic bent forward just in time to catch James Potter as he collapsed from the weight of casting mind-altering magic on himself.

The next time James stirred and opened his eyes, Magic was no longer there.

A/N: I know Alice Longbottom is supposedly in Gryffindor, but for the purpose of this story I made her a Hufflepuff.

Also, I decided to use my Tumblr for updates on how my writing is going, so if you want, follow and ask me anything :D whitepinkdandelions.tumblr.com

So, I figured I should wait after I finish the whole story to post, but sadly that did not happen. I only got two chapters done, and I kept on going back and adding stuff to one chapter (which is why this is like 11k worth of words...) so i was like maybe it's safer just to update xD and plus I feel guilty...it's almost two months since I last updated.

As always, thank you thank you for such kind words. You guys really help to inspire me to write, and thanks for sticking with my little story all the way to ch 18.

The Beginning of the War

Chapter Notes

this chapter is dedicated to eveiss: because she read over this chapter for me AND decided to be savage and answered YNOMH when I asked her what drabble she wanted me to write...

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

Day 4

Tom didn't like lying to Harry. He hated it. He didn't even remember the last time he actually kept information from Harry.

But Harry was deep within the enemy's hideout, and even more dangerous than that was that Magic was still watching him closely. And Magic had been the one who sent the illusion of Harry to him, so while Tom was pretty sure the illusion of Harry *was* Harry, it was still too risky to say anything.

Because what he was planning was going to go directly against Magic's wishes. He still wasn't sure what her plan was, but he suspected that it was going to do no favors to his Harry. And he had gone too far and loved too hard to let his Intended die on him.

So a day after Harry had come to him, Tom asked Sirius to accompany him to America. He left Abraxas in charge of his duties that day, and when it was still nighttime in England, he apparated the two of them to Nurmengard.

He had already disabled the traps that kept them from apparating them directly to where Grindelwald was kept so after giving strict orders to Sirius to send a patronus if anything outside changed, he apparated into the tower.

Grindelwald was blonde and blue-eyed and *young*. The stasis charms Dumbledore weaved into the magical prison had the side-effect of stopping the wizard from aging. It had to be done because Dumbledore hadn't wanted to imprison a house-elf to feed him alongside the wizard when he had been locked in. After all, the house-elf would be wielding magic which Grindelwald could somehow use to escape, or live out Dumbledore's biggest fear: the man taking his own life. Because if Grindelwald died, then Dumbledore's magic would be stripped from him.

Tom had thought about just killing Grindelwald for a long time when he had first found his way to the prisoner. It would take away Dumbledore's magic and ensure that Harry was safe. But now he was glad he hadn't. Because they had a bigger enemy than Dumbledore and Grindelwald knew Magic. He knew her and that had been the main reason he had been locked away.

There had to be a reason that Magic had left Grindelwald imprisoned here. If Magic had truly cared about Grindelwald or truly believed that he could accomplish his goals for her, Dumbledore's prison wouldn't have stood a chance against her. Which meant that Grindelwald had failed her. That must have been the reason why she decided to seek Tom out instead, to do the task that Grindelwald could not.

"Are you here to kill me?"

Tom startled out of his musing before tapping on the glass that separated the two of them. It disappeared and Tom stepped gingerly into the dirty room. Dumbledore hadn't been kind when he sentenced his Intended here and that thought made him frown. Because Harry had told him the parallels between the two of them. If Harry hadn't believed him and instead had decided to betray him like this... That was enough to stir the compassion that Harry had awakened in him all those years ago and he drew his wand, waving it above the dirty bed and transforming it into luxurious four poster bed, not unlike the ones in Hogwarts.

Grindelwald watched all this with hooded eyes and didn't even move from his position on the floor. He had his back against the wall and his knees up against his chest. Tom scoffed at the pathetic sight and continued to tidy up the room. It was mostly bare with only the essentials and it made him scowl because how could Dumbledore be so *cruel*. It was one thing to sentence your Intended to an imprisonment, it was another thing to make him live out the rest of his existence with nothing to color it. He hadn't even given the man satisfaction of growing old and dying that way.

"I wouldn't try anything if I were you," Tom started out with, because old habits die hard and he was better at making threats than he was at being nice. That was Harry's job.

Grindelwald's smile was humorless. "You mean you don't know? And here I thought you were supposed to be the second coming of *me*."

"Know what?" he asked, warily. "And how do you know of me? You've been stuck in this imprisonment for years."

"Dumbledore used to come by to rant about you. I used to welcome his visits because it gave my life some meaning, but I soon realized it was always going to be about him."

"You mean you didn't hate him after he stuck you in here?"

"I already failed," said Grindelwald. "Being stuck in here doesn't change anything."

"Ah," he said, understanding coloring his tone. "You mean your debacle with Hitler."

"That wasn't me," Grindelwald immediately retorted, some life flowing back into him. "I would have never resorted to using a mere Muggle to help my cause. And you know what I failed."

"Helping Magic," he said.

"That's why I'm in here. I'm sure you realized that Magic's given up on me. Or else why would I still be in here, locked off from the real world and from my magic?" Tom couldn't hide the surprise on his face and Grindelwald smirked. "You really didn't know, did you? She doesn't tell

you anything. Here, take a look." He lazily raised his wrist and this time Tom couldn't stop the gasp that escaped him.

Because the bracelet Grindelwald was wearing was the exact same one had seen on Harry just two days ago. It had the same engravings, color, and thickness. There was no mistaking they were one and the same. But if Harry was wearing the one from Slytherin's Task, then Dumbledore must have had two of them. Or perhaps Magic had created them.

"Look," said Grindelwald, his smirk crossing over to pity now, "I'm sorry you fell for her lies, too. It must not be easy to know that she's been lying to you all this time."

"What else has she been lying about?" he asked, feeling numb. "Is that bracelet from Dumbledore or from Magic?"

Now Grindelwald looked like he was pitying him, and Tom resisted the urge to snap at the wizard. Because really, he was Minister for Magic and Grindelwald was a man trapped in his own fortress. But the real reason it rankled him so was that he strongly suspected that Grindelwald had a *right* to pity him.

"Why don't you sit down? It's going to be a long story and I suspect it won't be very pleasant to hear."

He didn't protest, simply sitting down on the four poster bed he had created just mere minutes ago with magic. "The bracelet...it's from Magic, isn't it?"

"You've seen it before?" asked Grindelwald, his eyebrows raising in surprise. "If you have, your situation must be even worse than I thought."

"My Intended, Harry, Magic put the bracelet on him before he was shipped to your Intended's hideout. I don't know how much Dumbledore's told you, but I suspect he hasn't been by to visit you after he's gone into hiding."

"He hasn't told me much," affirmed Grindelwald. "It didn't help that I barely reacted to his words. But yes, what you suspect is true. The bracelet belongs to Magic. It's the key to unlocking the gates of Avalon."

"Then how did Dumbledore get it? He claimed it was an heirloom."

"All a lie," said Grindelwald, scowling. "I suspect Magic may have given him a copy when he was still visiting me. She still gets power by being in my presence because of how many times I summoned her in the past. And Dumbledore knows the existence of my bracelet and how it hinders my ability to use magic."

He let out a harsh exhale, wondering just how much Magic had lied to him. And how much he had helped her.

"It's not your fault," said Grindelwald, correctly interpreting his expression. "She's a deity. She doesn't think like we do and she's been cultivating this plan since Merlin. We had no chance against her. She preyed on our ambition and unfortunately we were too weak against the greed for power to say no."

He wanted to protest but he didn't because Grindelwald was right. He had been too weak when she had approached him. He had been drunk on the idea that he had a *cause* to fight for. To prove that he was trying to save the wizarding world from a population that wished it harm.

"You don't know anything, do you? Merlin was Magic's first hope in getting back to Avalon. She really thought he could do it, but unfortunately Merlin sacrificed himself for nothing. Avalon's gates never opened even though he wielded her power at the time."

"Merlin sacrificed himself?" he asked, chills running down his back. "I thought he died of a broken heart."

"That too," said Grindelwald, his smile wry. "King Arthur was dead so he had no reason to say no when Magic proposed her plan to him. To give up his life to ensure peace for all magic wielders? How could he say no?"

"How do you know so much?" asked Tom.

"Magic told me," said Grindelwald. "We were close back then, just as your Intended is with Magic."

"And how do you know they are close if Dumbledore didn't tell you?"

"You've killed before, haven't you?" When Tom nodded, Grindelwald shrugged. "So have I. Multiple times. Unfortunately, that corrupts the soul enough that we can't wield Magic's power effectively. That's why Merlin's attempts at opening up the Gates failed. And the reason Magic created soul marks."

"She told us that it was a way to honor Merlin and his unrequited love with Arthur."

"It was," said Grindelwald. "In a way, she did it to honor Merlin's last request. But mostly she did it because soulmates are more powerful together and soul marks would help them find each other. After all, the only people she could appeal to take on a cause like this *are* Dark. Like you and me. But their soul mate may not be. As you know, Dumbledore has never killed. And neither has your Intended."

"And he never will," said Tom, in horror. "He's never agreed to. Did Magic have a hand in that?"

"No," said Grindelwald. "She only knew that Harry was pure of heart. She never would have allowed you close to him otherwise."

"I wish you were lying," he said, a beat of silence passing.

"You don't have to believe me," said Grindelwald, shrugging. "It's no difference to me if you succeed in opening the Gates to Avalon or not. Personally, I'm just waiting to die. But I see myself in you, and I can't just let you walk into this blind as Magic prefers."

"Say I believe you," said Tom. "Why did she give up on you? Why did she leave you locked up in here?"

"Because I couldn't do what she needed me to do most," this time Grindelwald looked pained and the wizard obviously didn't want to answer.

"And what was that?" he asked, when Grindelwald seemed content to stay quiet.

Grindelwald heaved a sigh, and for a second, it looked as if Grindelwald was going to refuse to answer. But when Grindelwald looked back up and his blue eyes met Tom's, there was determination in them.

"To sacrifice my Intended. That's what the Gates need to be opened in this world. A wizard pure of heart."

Day 4

Harry knew the quiet wouldn't last long. He had been left alone except from visits from Lily and the Horcrux Hunters. He never said much to them, knowing they were trying to extract information from him about the last Horcrux location.

But they hadn't tortured him yet. The fastest way to get information was reading his mind, and yet, Dumbledore had been willing to wait when he could have blown apart Harry's shields the first day he had come here.

They had to have come up with an alternative way to make use of him. Or they had already found the last Horcrux location and had no use for him.

But *still*, he was the opposition's Intended. They had to realize that he had some information that was vital to their plan of taking Tom down.

It was on the fourth day that Lily came alone. She had a potion in her hand, the contents a bubbling green.

Harry immediately knew something was up by the way Lily was acting. She was shifty, her hands slightly shaking and her eyes quickly darting from left to right.

She raised her wand, casting a barely noticeable privacy ward before heaving a sigh. She had dark circles under her eyes. "I just got wind of what Dumbledore's planning. I was up all night trying to brew potions that will help you." She paused, setting down the green potion on his bedside, and then reaching into her knapsack to pull out three more of varying colors.

"I'll need all of them?" he asked, bewildered.

"He's going to break you, Harry," said Lily, biting her lower lip in worry. "He's going to go into your mind, get all the information he can, and then leave compulsory charms so deep into your mind that you can't resist them even with your inherent magic."

He felt the thrum of fear start in his body and had to close his eyes for a few seconds to control his panic. "Why go through all the trouble?" he asked. "They just have to kill me after the last Horcrux to remove Tom of his magic."

"Because," she said, her eyes wide. "The Dark Lord was caught with a similar necklace around his neck. Dumbledore thinks that either the Dark Lord has made one more and is keeping it with him now for safekeeping or that you made one and thus killing you won't solve anything."

"So he wants me as a mindless slave, just like how he's made James," said Harry. "I'm more useful alive, even if my death can mean the end of Tom's magic."

"Unfortunately, yes," said Lily, a frown on her face. She pushed the potions toward him, "You'll need to drink these. This one will keep the most personal memories at bay, this one all the memories with Tom in them, and the last implants fake memories drawn from your subconscious. But," she paused, before sighing. "If you call Magic, I think she'll protect you."

"I'm not going to call her," he snarled.

"But Harry," protested Lily, her eyes wide. "I can't protect you from the compulsory charms!"

"I'll find a way, Lily. Even if She won't help me, there has to be a way for you to remind me of who I am." His words didn't look as if they comforted Lily at all and he tried to get her to believe him by placing a hand on hers. "I'll still have Tom's name on my heart. It won't be too easy to force me to forget him."

"You don't even have magic," said Lily, her eyes watering. "At least *try*, okay?"

"There's no way to summon Magic," he pointed out, "If she really wanted to help, she would already be here."

Lily deflated at his words, obviously realizing what he was saying was true. If Magic had a way to help, then she would be here. "Drink the potions, at least."

"Of course," he said. "After all the work you put in them," he started to tease, but stopped when Lily just frowned at him, obviously not appreciating any of his snark. He appeased her by downing the potions one by one, grimacing as the aftertaste touched his tastebuds.

Lily vanished the flasks before standing. "I can't be here when Dumbledore comes. If he succeeds, if he *really* is able to alter your mind, I'll be right there to change you back, okay?"

"Thank you," he said, sincere. "And if you can't, then Tom can."

Lily nodded, her expression pensive, before suddenly leaning forward and pulling Harry into a fierce hug. When she let go, her green eyes were bright with unshed tears. She fled before she could dissolve into sobs, and Harry was left there, staring at the wooden door, alone with his thoughts.

Tom felt numb. He knew Grindelwald was working up to something like this and he *knew* Magic was up to no good, but he had stupidly believed that Magic wouldn't dare harm Harry. After building Harry up in his mind, how could She believe that Tom would let go of him so easily? Maybe Magic had only gotten him to love Harry to manipulate him. Maybe she thought he was so Dark inside that he would give up Harry without a moment of thought.

He hadn't cried since he was a teenager. But he felt tears prickling at the edges of his eyes and he resisted the urge to wipe them away. He refused to appear weak in front of Grindelwald. And beyond that, the tears weren't of sadness, they were born out of pure anger. Because how *dare* Magic do this to him. She had been aiming for Harry's sacrifice all this time and she hadn't even

let him know about it. Instead she had let him fall heads over heels for the younger wizard she planned to sacrifice.

"And..." continued Grindelwald, his voice soft, "love. You must be wondering why she chose soul mates in particular. She wanted the two to be in love; she wanted you to nourish Harry just as she did."

"So to save Harry all I have to do is not love him?"

Grindelwald's smile was wry, "Do you really think it's that easy? I would have taken that way out if I could have."

"We're Dark Lords," murmured Tom. "Shouldn't it be easy for us to let go? We're not pure. We're not *meant* for true love."

"Everyone is capable of love," said Grindelwald.

"If it's to save Harry, I can do it."

"But does Harry want to be saved? If you told him he could sacrifice himself to save the wizarding world, would he say no? Because Albus would have done it in a heartbeat and I couldn't do that to him."

Tom didn't know how to reply to that because he knew Harry would say yes. Tom would sacrifice the whole world for Harry, but Harry wouldn't want that. Even now, he still remembered Harry's hopeful voice when he learned there was another way to open the Gates -

And then he realized there *was* someone who could verify Grindelwald's story. Someone who wouldn't lie to him - someone who had known the truth all along and yet had kept it from him because of the rules. But now that he knew, maybe Carmilla would help him. Because he refused to believe that there was no way to save Harry. Maybe if he united the wizarding world *before* Magic decided to sacrifice Harry, he had a chance.

"The vampires, did you know them?"

"Ah," said Grindelwald, "you want to verify my story then? Go right ahead. She'll tell you who Magic really is."

"And you don't mind me telling Carmilla where I learned this? She was forbidden to tell me."

Grindelwald nodded. "But even if you don't believe me, you must hurry to try to find another way. The bracelet's on your Intended now, correct? Once Her magic has been built up in Harry, she can sacrifice him by destroying the bracelet."

He couldn't help the chills that ran down his back once again at the thought of Harry being gone from him forever. "Thank you," he said, because while he *wasn't* a nice guy, even he could admit that Grindelwald had told him a lot. And had given him a lot to think of if what he said was actually true.

He was just about to apparate away when he paused, turning to face Grindelwald again.

"What is it?" asked Grindelwald.

"If you could do it all over again, would you tell Dumbledore? Would you give him the choice?"

Grindelwald hesitated, pain warring in those crystal blue eyes. He bowed his head, obviously giving Tom's question a lot of thought before he let out a harsh exhale. "No. But I'm selfish that way. A world without Dumbledore is a world not worth living."

"He's an asshole, you know," he couldn't stop himself from saying and Grindelwald didn't take offense, his blue eyes lighting up in delight.

"He is, isn't he? Didn't believe a word I said about Magic. But thank Merlin he didn't, or else I might really have been tempted to let him know. But it's my cause, not his, and I couldn't ask him to sacrifice himself for it."

"I will kill him," he warned.

Grindelwald sighed, "I thought so. And yet I couldn't let you walk blindly into the same mistake I once made. Please find a way. Your Intended shouldn't have to sacrifice himself for the Greater Good."

"Never," he said, vehemently, and *not* just because the phrase reminded him of Dumbledore. Because he would sacrifice *the world* before letting Harry do so, and he didn't need a promise to a diminished Dark Lord to make sure he never let Harry die.

"Good luck," whispered Grindelwald, and then Tom was spinning on his feet and disappearing.

Day 4

There was a knock on the door. Harry didn't move to open it, because the knock was simply a courtesy, nothing more. He had no power to refuse entry and the knock was a way to make him feel even more vulnerable.

He was proven right when Dumbledore didn't wait for an answer, instead pushing the door open.

"Hello, Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice solemn. He had adopted an expression of grandfatherly concern, and Harry sneered at it, knowing it to be a façade.

"Have you come to finally visit me?" he spat out. "Instead of just torturing me by making me spend time with your brainwashed pawns?"

Dumbledore smiled, "Ah, Alice is one of the better turnouts. Such a gullible young witch."

Harry stared in horror at Dumbledore's words, and flinched when he saw Dumbledore rolling up his sleeves. He knew what was coming.

"You must have been wondering," said Dumbledore, as if they were casually addressing the weather, "why exactly you have been left alone in the middle of the hideout. You're full of necessary information to win the war and a direct link to our greatest enemy. Why haven't we been torturing you?"

"I actually haven't been thinking about that at all," he quipped back in the lightest tone he could manage and was rewarded by the tiny furrow in-between Dumbledore's eyebrows. He would take simple pleasures where he could, especially since he knew it would only be mere minutes before he couldn't even remember his Intended.

"Right," said Dumbledore. "You won't be remembering this at all. Why bother explaining?" He stepped forward, closing the last bit of distance, and roughly jerked Harry's head up. "*Legilimens*," whispered Dumbledore, the word imbued with the great wizard's magic, and then Harry felt extreme pain exploding behind his eyes.

It *hurt*. Dumbledore wasn't bothering to be gentle in his foray into Harry's mind, and even with his mind so hazy, Harry was able to pick up on the compulsion charms the older man was leaving behind. Dumbledore wasn't even being subtle about it, almost as if he wanted to let Harry know just why exactly he was going to be fighting for the Light after Dumbledore was done with him. It made Harry want to throw up – even physical torture would have been preferable to *this*. Dumbledore was robbing him of his *free* will.

He didn't know how long it lasted, but halfway through, the pain started to numb. Dumbledore was mumbling something above him, but he couldn't manage the concentration to understand just what exactly Dumbledore was saying. Everything hurt and then he gasped loudly when Dumbledore suddenly pulled his hand away, leaving Harry's head to drop listlessly, his strength to even hold up his head gone.

He panted to try to regain his breath, his head dizzy and his heart beating fast, and flinched when Dumbledore tilted his head upward again, a satisfied smirk on his face.

"And how are you doing? Ready to fight for the Light?"

He opened his mouth to respond, but nothing came out, and the triumphant gleam in Dumbledore's eyes told him that was exactly what the older wizard was looking for.

"I see," said Dumbledore, "Perhaps it would be best if I left you alone to your thoughts for a while, Harry. Maybe then the compulsion charms would have set in. It's for your own good, though, to be free of the monster that is your soul mate."

And then after a few more searching glances of Harry's face, Dumbledore straightened and left the room, the door falling shut.

Harry didn't know how long he stayed in the same position after Dumbledore left. He didn't know much of anything at all. He chased fleeting memories as best as he could, but they never lasted longer than a few seconds, flickering away as soon as he turned his attention to them. It was draining and heartbreaking all at once, and Harry knew it wouldn't be much longer before it would all be over.

He closed his eyes, silent tears of frustration streaming down his cheeks as he waited for the inevitable end. It would only be moments now before he forgot the love he held for his Tom. Even now he felt the compulsory charms start to come to life, granting him a shock of pain whenever he thought of Tom fondly.

The door slammed open just as another shock of pain ravaged him and he let out a gasp when light suddenly flooded into the dark room and loud footsteps sounded throughout. He shrunk

away from the sound and the light and was completely surprised when his head was jerked roughly upward.

James was staring at him, his brown eyes clearer than he had seen them in a long time.

"We have to do this fast," said James. "Because even now, it hurts to have all my real memories in one place."

"What?" he got out between the shocks of pain and his memories slipping away, and James shook his head.

"There's no time to explain," said James, his tone urgent. "Open your eyes."

Harry didn't waste time protesting because he knew this was the only chance he would get. He opened his bright green eyes as wide as he could, and was barely able to stifle his gasp of shock when blue light enveloped them.

He knew this magic as intimately as he knew his own, and he bowed to it, letting James fix everything that Dumbledore had destroyed.

James was panting when he finally let go, his hands shaking and white knuckled on his wand. The compulsory charms were gone, and the only memories ruined were the ones implanted by Lily.

There was a profound silence between them, James' attempts to gain composure the only thing breaking it.

"Why are you helping me?" asked Harry, eventually. "You and I..." he trailed off, unwilling to hurt James when James was his savior. And thinking back on that time only brought regret and guilt to his heart. But he continued anyway, his voice soft, "I told you we weren't brothers anymore."

There was a brief flash of pain in James' eyes before he straightened up from where he was kneeling on the floor. He stared at Harry, before leaning down and pressing a soft kiss to Harry's forehead. "Because you're still my brother, Harry, even if I may no longer be yours. You're mine to protect because it's *my* fault you're here."

Harry's emotions were already in a devastated state so he wasn't very surprised when tears started to sting at the edge of his eyes. "I didn't mean it then or now," he whispered. "You're still my little brother, James."

James' smile was sad, almost wistful. He straightened up completely, one of his hands coming down to rest gently down on top of Harry's. "Thank you. You really don't know how much that means to me."

Harry was about to respond when the clock's chimes sound throughout the room, telling listeners that it was almost supper. James stiffened, his expression worried, and he turned to look at Harry, his tone urgent once again. "We don't have time to talk, Harry. For now, you *have* to pretend that Dumbledore's charms are working. You have to *hate* your Intended and you have to pretend that you've turned over a new leaf. Alice is bloody crazy. Dumbledore's brainwashing

has worked a little *too* well on her. Frank's not too bad, but he goes along with anything Alice says because he's in love with her.

"Dumbledore wants you to hate Tom. He wants to train you into a perfect soldier to take down all of Tom's soldiers even if *you* can't hurt Tom because Tom can't hurt *you* because you're his soul mate. Which makes you the perfect weapon against Tom."

There were footsteps outside when Harry opened his mouth and James shook his head frantically, his wand turning in a few circles in order to enhance his hearing. His voice dropped to a whisper when he spoke again, "I won't remember this. And that's okay, because now I know there's a chance we can be brothers again. Just like when we're young. Sirius and you are the only ones keeping me going."

"Why won't you –" Harry started, and then he gasped softly, his eyes wide in horror. "The *obliviations*, Merlin, Jamie, you're obliterating yourself every night! That's what Lily saw. That's dangerous; you might damage your brain forever!"

"I know," said James, his voice sad, but then he shook his head, a determined light shining back into the brown eyes. "Of course I know, Harry. But what other choice do I have? If I don't, Dumbledore will just order me to tell him everything. And that's something I can't risk."

"The blue magic," said Harry. "*You're* the one who brought me here."

"Yeah," confirmed James. "Which is why I have to protect you." He paused, almost as if he was about to turn and hightail it out of there, before he suddenly leaned down, wrapping strong, powerful arms around Harry.

Harry felt a brief sting in his heart as he remembered the last time James had hugged him so tight – when he had been comforting him over being chosen as a Slytherin, and just like that he was crying again. Because James was still the same now, even when they had all grown up, James was still looking out for him. It didn't matter that James had hurt him so much, because James was still here *now* and still loved him even after all the hands they had been dealt.

"Love you, big brother," whispered James, and then he was pushing away.

"Me too," said Harry, and this time, this time James heard the words and the brilliant smile he had missed so much was shining back at him.

And then James was slipping away, probably off to a dark corner to obliterate himself, and Harry sat there, his mind whirling as he devised a plan to keep himself *and* James safe.

Day 5

The day of the public appearance was stormy. Dark clouds loomed over the public square Tom had chosen to hold the press conference at, threatening rain. A series of protective weather charms ran across in a protective dome above them, and the magic rippled under the force of a few stray droplets.

Dorea tightened her grip on the elegant umbrella that she had at her side. It wasn't needed, but it gave her comfort in case the wards broke and they had no protection from the rain and from

other things. It was enchanted to transform into a sword if she needed one, with toxins embedded on the blade and the umbrella's protective circle would protect her from any standard offensive magic. It was an heirloom, but looked innocent enough that no one would suspect her of carrying a weapon besides her wand. She had heard too many of Harry's plans to expect herself to be in tune with her magic at all times.

It wasn't as if she expected someone to attack Tom. But someone had been stupid enough to attack Harry, so all bets were off now.

Tom showed up with only a minute to spare. He still looked weary, dark circles prominent under his bloodshot eyes, but there was a rare smile gracing his lips. When he caught sight of her, the smile only grew, and he pulled close to whisper into her ear.

"Really?" she asked, her heart bursting with relief. "He's safe?"

He nodded, and then exhaled a long breath to get his emotions under control. Dorea stepped forward, using her wand to make Tom look even more disheveled because Tom was announcing his Intended was missing and couldn't look put together. Since Tom had found Harry, Dorea expected Tom to have revised his speech to sound less desperate and more about the issues that plagued the Wizarding World.

When Dorea stepped out after Tom, the flashing of the cameras almost blinded Dorea. She turned to smile at her husband when he put his hand on the small of her back to help her across and then focused her attention on Tom.

"I apologize now for my absence. I have had trying matters to attend to, such as my Intended going missing right after the celebration of my becoming Minister." There was a loud gasp throughout the room, and Tom bowed his head, obviously affected by what he would presume to be a disappointment in his magical prowess to protect Harry. "I have tried everything to find him and I have reasons to expect foul-play. As the world knows, Harry is my rock. My foundation. He is the reason I decided to run for Minister, to change the world to be a better place for *him*. He's being held captive for now, but my magic is still intact, so I hope for the best. I know as the Minister, the Wizarding Society looks to me for guidance. But I come before you all now to ask for *help*. We can find Harry Black if we all work together."

There was a scoff, the sound traveling through the quiet atmosphere after Tom's sincere speech. Dorea saw the exact moment that Tom's stance turned from vulnerable to dangerous Dark Lord and watched as Tom raised his head, his red eyes scanning the crowd that had gathered to hear him.

He didn't have to wait long. A young man, a man that Dorea didn't recognize and strongly suspected may be under a polyjuice potion, made his way out of the crowd, facing Tom with a sneer of his own. "A better place?" The man said, his sneer growing more pronounced with each word. "The lies you use to ensnare the public are laughable at best. You dare to imply that you are saving the world? When you *are* the Dark Lord?"

The crowd was deathly silent in the face of this revelation, and Tom didn't answer for a long moment. He stared at the newcomer with a slight frown, "And the evidence you have to support this claim?"

"You're a parselmouth!" argued the man.

"Yes," agreed Tom. "Just as many others that have descended from the Slytherin line. I'm afraid you're going to have to do better than that to imply that I am a supposed Dark Lord."

"Dumbledore was the paragon of the Light. And yet you chased him out into hiding because you were *afraid* of him," spit out the man. "He already defeated one Dark Lord, so he can tell *you're* one."

"I do believe he chased himself out," said Tom, his voice barely hiding his anger. "If you recall, he attacked *my* Intended first."

The man shook in his anger and before anyone could react, raised his wand and shouted a string of Latin words. A spell shot out from the tip toward Tom, its color nasty.

Dorea was moving before Charlus could stop her, every fiber of her being recognizing the spell. She had seen it once before, in the memories Harry had shown her long ago. But unlike long ago, this time the spell blasted through Tom's *Protego*, shattering the shield with its course unaltered. She grabbed Tom's hand just in time, throwing him behind her and letting the spell hit her head on.

She only hoped that they had figured out a cure.

She crumpled to the floor a second later, a victim to the spell that had taken the Potter patriarch long ago.

Chaos erupted as soon as Dorea fell.

Tom was by her side already, casting a multitude of diagnostic charms. As such, he was entirely open to the spell that was traveling in its shadow; the spell had made use of the earlier one's ability to shatter shield charms. This spell was purple and it enveloped Tom as soon as it hit him.

Charlus knew this spell just as his wife had known the earlier one. He had seen countless notes on it in his childhood, prototypes that his brother had lying around long ago. It was a vamped up version of an ancient spell that told others whether a wizard leaned more toward the Light or Dark. *This* one though, sought out the Darkest wizard alive, and it clearly marked Tom as one. It bled out Tom's magic and filled the square with its aura.

The strength behind it was *staggering*. Charlus nearly dropped to his knees from the sheer force of it, and watched as others in the square around them all stumbled under the force of it. Peoples' expressions changed when they understood the magic for what it was; even though Tom always downplayed the differences between Light and Dark magic, it was easy to tell that Tom's magic was inherently Dark, perhaps the Darkest that any of these wizards and witches have ever felt.

And he watched as comprehension melted into pure fear. People feared what they did not understand, and even more they feared power. Tom could kill them all if he wanted to with the magic that was flowing into the square.

Tom was shaking under the sheer force of the spell, his fists clenched tight as he tried his best to rein in his magic. He laid down Dorea with shaking hands before stumbling to his feet, looking

the most vulnerable Charlus had ever seen him. The spell must do more than out Tom as a Dark Lord, and Charlus feared its effects.

Tom's eyes were bright red, glowing in the midst of the intensity of the air around them, and when he spoke, his words were clear, belying the state Tom was in. "Yes," he said, his voice deceptively calm, "My magic is inherently Dark. Dark enough to be considered a Dark Lord."

There was a triumphant sound from the man, who was making no move to get away. He was staring up at Tom as his features rippled, the polyjuice potion obviously starting to wear off.

"But," continued Tom, "does that make me evil? I realize that this assumption may change things; it is already easy for me to see the fear in your eyes. But I am still the same man that was elected as Minister For Magic."

"Or," interrupted the man, and Charlus' heart skipped a beat when he saw who was standing in front of them. Fleamont Potter, Harry and James' father, and his brother. "You can join the Light. Dumbledore will stand against this evil that has wormed its way into the highest position of our society and will chase him out just as he did Grindelwald."

Tom blinked in surprise, and that was enough to spur the man into continuing. "All that has to be done is to send a letter to Dumbledore. This is the time to act! We can't let this Dark Lord continue to change our society as he is."

Tom sneered, "Putting your faith into a man who saw fit to remove another wizard's right to magic?"

"He was only doing what was necessary for the Greater Good," retorted Fleamont Potter.

Tom shook his head, obviously tiring of the conversation. "Aurors," he called in a deadly voice. The Aurors hesitated, exchanging doubtful glances, but after one stepped forward, the rest fell into line. "Arrest Fleamont Potter on accusation of treason."

Fleamont didn't make an attempt to get away, his smile wicked as the Aurors came up on each side of him, using *incanealous* to bind him tight. "It's too late," he said, "The world already knows what I say is true."

And even though Tom just scoffed and snapped at the Aurors to take him away, Charlus felt his heart sinking. Because Fleamont had done what he had set out to do. The public was already whispering furiously and exchanging worried glances and Charlus feared that it was already too late. Tom had no way out of this now. No amount of Tom's charisma and smooth talking could hide away what happened today.

The public now knew he was a Dark wizard, and while they may not know he was the Dark Lord, it was already bad enough press that Tom may be ousted as Minister.

And if he was, that meant Tom would have to take over the position with force.

The War had begun.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So...can I say how ashamed I am that I haven't updated in a whole year? I promise this won't happen again - if I get stuck, if I lose inspiration, I'll still try to upload a 5k chapter before two months are up no matter how insecure I am about it. I got most of the ending of the war written, I just got to get everything else done...

Also, if anyone knows anything about Dark Lords / leaders of the other countries feel free to pm me! It'll help a ton :)

The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore

Chapter Notes

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

Day 4

Carmilla listened to his story without saying a word, her elegant hands folded in front of her as Tom recounted Grindelwald's story.

Then she smiled.

"So you've finally found out," she said. She leaned forward and pressed a kiss against his forehead, her expression full of affection when she pulled away. "I've been waiting for a long time, love."

He stared at her, bewildered, and took her hand when she offered it to him.

"It's time you meet the Elders," said Carmilla, and when she snapped, Tom's vision went black.

Day 6

Regulus followed his brother out of Hogwarts, under a heavy disillusionment charm and a warm cloak. He had suspected his brother for days; Sirius would head out in the middle of the night and go missing for hours. He had given his brother the benefit of the doubt, suspecting him to be grieving and worried for Harry, but it had gone on for too long.

Even Lucius had moved on to more productive things and he was one of Harry's closest friends. Especially since their Lord had told them yesterday that Harry was safe for now and that they need not worry about his safety. If the Dark Lord ensured their friend was safe, then they had no reason to worry about Harry. Harry could take care of himself.

He kept his footsteps light and followed Sirius despite the chill that persisted in the air. And nearly blew his cover when Sirius finally stopped, because even this deep in the Forbidden Forest, he never expected to encounter this. Because Sirius was surrounded by a garden, one with stakes in it and green vines growing all over them. And even though he had zero interest in Herbology, he *recognized* these because they were Harry's.

The very same plant that Harry used in the Founder's Tournament. The plant that stole magic from its victims.

He briefly thought that Sirius was doing this because he knew Harry was living without magic because of the bracelet, but then he realized that was impossible because these plants took weeks to grow and that was *with* judicious use of galleons. While Sirius was well off, the Dark Lord and Dorea Black definitely would have noticed the missing funds. Which meant that either Sirius had to have gotten the galleons from somewhere else or he had been growing them for

quite a while. And then there was the question of how Sirius had known how to grow them. To his knowledge, Harry had only shared his findings with their Lord and the only specimen had been in Riddle's vault.

He was just about to call out to Sirius when he choked the cry back down because there was a shift of magic in the air and James Potter was *there*.

He didn't look the same as he had three years ago. Then, he had been healthy. The glow from his hair was lackluster at best and there were painful, deep dark circles underneath his eyes. He no longer looked like the confident James Potter from his school years.

But his smile was still mostly the same, even if it was diminished from what it used to be. It looked like James had forgotten how to smile and it was only in Sirius' presence that he was getting used to it again. James leaned into Sirius' personal space, the side of his body pressed close to Sirius' and Sirius smiled, wrapping an arm around James' side and leaning downward to press an affectionate kiss to the side of James' head.

They stayed like that for a while, as if loathe to move, before James sighed, pulling away and then leaning down. Regulus almost charged out of his hiding place because James pulled out his wand then, even though he knew James would probably never hurt Sirius. But all James did was wave his wand and collect the plants into an enlarged knapsack.

"How are you doing?" asked Sirius, his voice soft. "Last time you came, you said Dumbledore was acting strange."

"He's fine," said James, his voice rough and his eyes never straying from his task. "He's stopped coming around as often to question me because he has Harry to worry about now."

"Good," said Sirius. "So you haven't been *obliviating* yourself every night, right?"

James sighed and the clearing was silent for a while as James flicked his wrist to tie the knapsack shut. "I have to, you *know* that, Sirius. It's the safest way."

"Why can't Magic get rid of the Unbreakable Vow?" asked Sirius, his voice accusing. "I thought she was the one who gave us magic in the first place."

"I can't just ask her to do so," said James, his voice weary as if they had had this argument multiple times already. "She's already doing me a huge favor as it is. I mean, I'm here with *you* now thanks to her."

"Fine," grumbled Sirius. "But that doesn't mean I have to like Her. I mean, it's bad enough I have to keep this from Harry and my brother."

"I'm sorry," said James, his voice soft.

"You don't have to be," said Sirius, immediately after James had spoken. "Look, I've been complaining a lot, but it's only because I'm worried about you. I know you trust Magic, but she betrayed Harry, so I can't help but to wonder if she's actually telling the truth. Maybe she's leaving you in the Unbreakable Vow because it allows her to control you."

James' frown was easy to see despite how far Regulus was and he straightened from his crouching position. "Maybe," he said, eventually, even though he looked loathe to believe what Sirius was saying. "But better her than Dumbledore."

"I don't know," said Sirius. "Dumbledore's at least a human so we can guess his motivation."

James sighed, "I didn't come here to fight with you, Sirius. And our time together is already awfully short." He paused and Regulus had to turn away when James stepped closer and tugged Sirius into a bruising kiss. He knew he might miss something, but he really didn't want to watch his brother make out with James Potter.

When Regulus turned back, James and the knapsack were gone. He watched Sirius' lonesome figure for a while, his heart sinking as he realized he was going to have to betray Sirius. Sirius may have to keep this information from their Lord, but he didn't have to and neither did he *want* to. Their Lord deserved to know.

"You can come out now," said Sirius.

Regulus froze, his mouth dropping open in shock as he processed Sirius' words. He hadn't made a sound; there was no way Sirius would have heard him.

"Regulus?" called Sirius. "I'm afraid I can't let you leave without talking to you." He raised his wand, and then the full force of his older brother's magic was filling the air. Regulus winced when he felt the wards come up to the harshly barked words of Sirius and he hung his head, defeated. He couldn't possibly fight against Sirius, not when the older wizard had five more years of experience than him.

Regulus slipped out behind the tree, his hands up in the air in surrender.

"I wasn't sure if you would follow me or not," said Sirius. "Did you really think I wouldn't ward the area? Seriously, little brother." Sirius sighed, but his eyes twinkled in mirth. "I thought I taught you better than that."

"I thought you were distracted," he admitted, honestly.

"I know I love my soul mate," said Sirius, "But I think meeting James in the Forbidden Forest would make me paranoid enough to put up wards. I mean I have more than enough on my bedroom in Hogwarts."

"How long have you been in contact with him?"

"A year. We had two-way mirrors right before he left, but James never answered whenever I called for him. But he contacted me one day, telling me that Dumbledore won't know anything that James himself doesn't know."

"What does that mean?" asked Regulus. "Is it about the obliations?"

Sirius nodded, his expression pensive. "You see, James had been casting obliations on himself for a year now. He knows the spell inside and out. Naturally, his skill with the spell is easy to replicate since I'm his soul mate."

It dawned slowly on Regulus what Sirius was hinting at. Sirius was already raising his wand when Regulus tried to get away and he froze in place in horror at the end of his brother's wand pointing at him. "Please," he whispered, but Sirius' expression hardened.

"It's for the best, little brother. You'll remember this in time. When it wears off, you'll be able to help validate my soul mate. *Obliviate*."

Regulus stiffened when the spell hit him, his mind going hazy and his vision blurring. Sirius murmured something but he couldn't hear it, and then he promptly forgot that thought. A second later, he was blinking at Sirius' concerned face.

"Are you alright, brother?"

He nodded slowly, bringing one hand up to shake his head to get the fuzziness out. "What happened?"

"I'm not sure," said Sirius. "You surprised me earlier when you followed me, but I'm just out here on our Lord's orders. I guess the surprise made you stumble a bit."

Regulus rolled his eyes, "It's your fault for being so secretive."

Sirius chuckled, slinging an arm around his shorter brother. "Right, and do *you* want to go against our Lord's orders? He's been proper paranoid ever since it's got out he's the Dark Lord."

"True," he said. "Are you really not allowed to tell me?"

"Nope," said Sirius, cheerfully, maneuvering Regulus so that they were now facing the opposite direction. "But it's all done now. Time to head back and drink some firewhiskey."

"You shouldn't impair all your senses now of all times," muttered Regulus, but acquiesced when Sirius just laughed and pulled them into a brisk walk back to Hogwarts.

Friday, Day 7

Alice looked exuberant when she came to visit him. Her hair was done up, held together by spells to make an intricate pattern of blonde hair, and her clothes looked expensive. She sat on the chair in the room, crossing her legs and smiling at Harry.

"Hi Harry," she said.

"Hello," he said, cautiously. He wasn't quite sure of what the girl knew of his 'changed' loyalties, and didn't know how thick of an act he had to put on in front of her.

She didn't seem to expect much of him though, and his suspicions were confirmed when she aimed a sly, slow smile toward him. "Have you heard the news?"

He didn't trust himself to speak without snapping at her teasing tone, and instead shook his head.

"Your father got arrested by the authorities." She smiled when he flinched at the mention of Fleamont Potter, and leaned forward to pat him on the arm. "It's okay, honey," she said, "He was able to get the message out."

"What message?" he asked, dreading the answer, and Alice smiled even wider.

"That Tom Riddle is the Dark Lord and that the Light are recruiting. Letters are already flying in as we speak."

"The public would never believe that," he couldn't stop himself from saying, and Alice laughed at him.

"Oh, don't worry, Harry, the public's eyes are already open. You see, Fleamont bled out the Dark Lord's magic in front of *everyone* during Riddle's press conference and everyone knows just how truly Dark he is. Thanks to his efforts, everyone now knows that we have to fight against the evil before it's too late."

He was saved from responding when there was a knock on the door. James walked in, and looked surprised to see Alice.

"Alice? Why are you here?"

"Why are *you* here?" countered Alice, but she seemed to be in a playful mode because of how happy she was. She stood, made her way across the room to James and linked their arms together. "Did Frank send you to come get me?"

"Uh," stammered James, looking lost at Alice's behavior, and she giggled happily.

"He did, didn't he? Today's just *so* wonderful, James! Let's go greet the new recruits, okay? Also, did you know Harry's *finally* one of us! He's reformed!" She smiled, waved a hand at Harry, and then pulled James toward the door.

James sent a desperate glance back at Harry, obviously not wanting to leave, but Alice wouldn't take no for an answer. 'Don't speak,' he mouthed, just as the door was swinging close.

Before the door slammed shut, Lily slipped in, quietly closing the door after her. "Are you okay, Harry?"

He nodded, and then mimed keeping quiet. He wondered if his room had been compromised; if they had decided to set up listening spells just in case. He then pointed at his soul mark, in a clear way to tell Lily that his memories were still intact, and that he was still deeply in love with his Intended.

Lily stared at him until comprehension dawned in her eyes, and the smile that followed was simply breathtaking. There were tears at the corners of her eyes, and she leaned forward, bringing Harry into a tight embrace. "Oh Harry," she breathed, "I'm so happy you're better now! I was scared you would follow the Dark Lord forever." It looked like the last words pained her to say, but Harry understood her true meaning anyway.

“I’m happy I’m better now,” he said, “All thanks to Dumbledore.”

Both of them grimaced at the words, and he laughed when Lily stuck out her tongue. She mouthed, ‘Disgusting,’ and then stood, going through her bag and pulling out dress robes. “You have to get ready for the meeting, Harry. You’re going to be the guest of honor.”

“Guest of Honor?”

“A sign that those closest to the Dark Lord can be saved. Reformed into better versions of themselves.” She helped him into the robes, taking his outer robe and going to hang it in the wardrobe.

She did it without magic.

“Lily,” he said, “Where’s your wand?”

She flinched, and nearly dropped the robes as she tried to hang it. “I don’t really need it when I’m brewing Potions.”

They had taken it away. Of course it had been suspicious when potion ingredients went missing in the middle of the night with no new potions to show for it. Lily must have taken the fall for him.

Was the listening spell for him or for Lily?

He was safe because of his connection to the Dark Lord.

Lily wasn’t.

His heart panged at the thought that Lily was in danger because of him and he cursed Magic colorfully in his mind for sending Lily here without any protection.

‘I’m sorry,’ he mouthed when Lily turned and she smiled, though it was shaky.

‘It’s okay,’ she mouthed back, and Harry had to force himself to speak.

“Hey, I don’t have one either. Who needs wands these days anyway?”

Lily laughed, and she was a good enough actress that it didn’t sound fake.

Alice stopped halfway through leading James toward the Great Hall of the Hideout and sighed.

James blinked, nearly tripping because of the sudden stop. “Everything okay?”

Alice jumped, almost as if she had forgotten James was still there, and then turned to look at James with a smile. “Of course! Just remembered that Frank definitely needed new dress robes before today.”

James followed as she practically skipped the rest of the hallway, wondering just when Alice had become so bloody crazy.

Monday, Day 10

“People are going missing, my Lord.”

“You can say it,” said Tom, and he wasn’t able to keep the annoyance out of his voice.

Yaxley didn’t seem to take offense to his tone though, simply nodding and going through the list in front of him. “We fear that the absence of our Aurors is a direct correlation to what happened at the press conference a week ago. People fear you are a Dark Lord.”

Tom laughed, though it was closer to a bitter scoff. “I *am* the Dark Lord, Yaxley.”

Yaxley’s smile was wry, but he bowed his head in acceptance of Tom’s words. “Public ratings have been dropping rapidly, my Lord. I fear drastic measures may have to be taken.”

“How many have going missing?”

“Mostly wizards and witches from predominately Light backgrounds. Almost all the Muggleborns. Very few purebloods besides the blood traitors. The Auror department was hit the hardest. For now, the Wizengamot seems to be on your side.

“And some Professors have gone to Dumbledore, my Lord. Bellatrix owled this morning. McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout, and Hooch have vacated their rooms, leaving nothing behind. Bellatrix believes some students have followed them as well. Professor Slughorn is still there, but I suggest we keep a closer watch on him.”

Tom knew he shouldn’t have kept some of the Professors on because of their close allegiance with Dumbledore. But they hadn’t kicked up a fuss when Dumbledore had fled, and Tom had thought that they had cut ties with Dumbledore because of his callous treatment of Harry. But apparently Tom’s Dark magic was too powerful to keep them from running back to Dumbledore.

“We can use this,” he mused. “With professors and students leaving to be on the run, we can twist it to seem like Dumbledore is trying to get underaged students to fight for a cause that shouldn’t need fighting for, risking both their education and their lives. How can they have a future career without OWLs or NEWTs? We need to put in severe punishments for all students that have gone missing.”

“My Lord, if I may?” When he nodded, Yaxley continued cautiously. “These policies may send even more people toward Dumbledore.”

“They may. But these people who go to Dumbledore believe in the Light so fiercely that their disappearance may be beneficial to our cause. Those wizards and witches would never follow a Dark wizard. And by following Dumbledore, they’re giving up their role in society. How can a missing person come to a Wizengamot meeting? And beyond that, if they’re in hiding, how will they come to Gringott’s?”

He stood at that, his mind racing as he thought of ways to punish those who had gone against him. The goblins were notorious for being neutral in wars, but Tom had ways around them. He could close Diagon Alley off from any one missing for more than a day. Policies would have to become more stringent, and people would have to report more frequently to the Ministry, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

They could call for his abdication as Minister, but there was no reason for Tom to listen.

After all, Tom was the Dark Lord.

He had resources beyond what Britain knew, and it was time he called on them.

Yaxley was already getting Tom's more formal cloak, his sharp mind keeping up on par with Tom's.

When the cloak slid on, Tom strode to his fireplace, intent on carrying out his plan.

Wednesday, Day 12

"They're calling him a dictator."

Lucius paused, adjusting his mask to ensure it was still there, and he stepped closer to where the corner hid him.

The witches were talking quietly, but Lucius could enhance his hearing enough to hear the whispered words.

"Derek's already left," said her companion. "He thinks Dumbledore can save us."

"Will he take us in? I wasn't a Gryffindor."

"He's taking everyone," answered the witch, and then there were startled gasps.

Lucius smiled, knowing the magic on the other side as intimately as his own, and stepped out from behind the corner.

A masked figure stood regally above the bound witches, and he stayed regal for a split second before he noticed Lucius and gave a two-fingered salute.

Lucius resisted the urge to sigh, and instead turned his attention to the witches. "There is a taboo on you-know-who's name," he said. "Anyone who uses his name must submit to interrogation for treason."

"We didn't mean it," one of the witches started to argue. "We were just gossiping."

"Then you won't mind telling it to the authorities," said Gilderoy, and then he hummed, waving his wand and floating the two witches up into the air.

After they finished dropping the witches off, another masked figure joined them. “How are you liking Britain?” asked Gilderoy, always one to make small talk.

“Ah,” started the wizard, and Lucius had a split second to become annoyed as he recognized the figure’s voice. “I wasn’t, until you came into ze picture, monsieur.”

Gilderoy seemed too baffled to make any kinds of movement, and as such was completely caught off-guard when the wizard took his hand into his. With his left hand, the man removed his mask, revealing chiseled cheekbones and crystal blue eyes, and with his right, he brought Gilderoy’s hand closer to his pursed lips.

Lucius nearly snarled when they met, and it took all his self control not to march up there and take back what was his.

“Are you flirting with ze natives, Julien?”

“Only with ze beautiful Gilderoy,” answered Julien, and he straightened, the hood falling off his head and revealing curly red locks. His smile was still flirtatious, but Lucius ignored it in favor of studying the newcomer.

She was also a redhead and if Lucius recalled correctly, she was the older sister of Julien. Anette and Julien both served under one of the reigning noble pureblood families in France, and had been sent here under a request from their Lord.

With the Aurors going missing, there was a distinct lack of wizards that could enforce the Minsitry’s authority. As such, their Lord had offered up a solution in the form of his Knights of Walpurgis. They weren’t going to be under the Ministry’s wage; they were their Lord’s personal army.

Since the Aurors undertook an eclectic number of tasks, no one could come up with a formal protest. After all, without the Aurors, who was going to assuage the common wizard’s problems?

The masks were to protect their identity and to distinguish them from the remaining Aurors. Since Dumbledore was obviously targeting the Dark Lord, Riddle had insisted on keeping his Knights safe. He was sure that the Light would attack the Knights because they had his favor. The masks also hid the fact that almost half of the Knights were from different countries.

They were sent by the formidable allies their Lord had gathered throughout the three years. While Riddle had worked hard on maintaining his social standing in Britain, Harry had worked tirelessly on attending a multitude of events worldwide in order to curry favor with other wizarding societies. He had gathered trust and then used that trust to show them Magic, and the rituals had been enough to convince them that Harry and Riddle were the ones to follow in the upcoming War.

“*Oui*,” said Anette, stalking closer to Gilderoy and staring up at him with a mischievous look. “’e is very ‘andsome, isn’t ‘e?” she purred, and if Julien hadn’t pulled her away, Lucius probably would have.

Gilderoy’s mask hid his expressions, but Lucius knew the wizard was flustered. Gilderoy hadn’t been this openly flirted with for the past three years, because by then, everyone understand that

Gilderoy was *his*.

“Anette,” warned Julien, and Gilderoy cut him off with a soft chuckle, shaking his head and then removing his mask.

“She’s fine,” he said, smiling. “Are you two off duty soon? Want to join us in the training rooms?”

Julien hesitated, regarding Gilderoy with a searching look. Lucius understood, since they were both foreign trained warriors, it was dangerous to allow the two of them to get a glimpse of their dueling style. They were allies, but only temporarily.

But then Julien smiled. “*Oui*,” he said, and he gestured for them to lead the way.

Lucius was quiet, momentarily stunned that the French wizards were so open to getting to know them. He wanted to suspect something was up, but he knew better not to. They needed allies more than they needed enemies to defeat Dumbledore.

“Is ‘e your Intended?”

Gilderoy and Julien were in front of them, making small talk, so Lucius was certain that the two of them hadn’t heard Anette’s quiet words. The words still made his heart beat faster though, and he only contemplated lying for a few seconds. If he said yes, then Julien would stop flirting with Gilderoy.

But...

“No,” he said, and Anette made an understanding sound.

“You know,” she said, quietly, “Ze French don’t care as much about soul marks as you English do.”

“I don’t understand,” he said, even though he did, and Anette laughed.

“If you love ‘im, zhat should be enough.” She patted him on the shoulder, and then caught up with the other two, quickly linking arms with her younger brother. Julien paused mid-sentence, but when Anette didn’t interrupt, continued talking openly with Gilderoy.

Lucius watched, having no urge to join the three, and instead sighed softly.

If only love was enough...

Thursday, Day 13

An inhumane screech came from Alice.

Harry flinched at the sound, barely refraining from covering his ears with his hands, and stared at the Daily Prophet she had thrown down onto the dining table.

Bathilda Bagshot was on the front cover. She looked old and frail in the accompanying photograph, but her eyes were glittering with determination as she sat in front of Rita Skeeter,

conducting an interview.

Dumbledore's secrets revealed in new book 'The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore' by Rita Skeeter.

He was barely able to hide the satisfied grin that crossed his face after reading the title, and instead, forced himself to act calm as James reached over him to pick up the paper.

"This is unacceptable," hissed Alice, stabbing the potato on her plate with unnecessary force. She was trying to keep calm, but the way her knuckles went white as she clutched onto the utensil betrayed her outward appearance.

"She's an old witch," said Lily, hesitantly, "No one will believe her."

Alice's eyes looked furious as she turned her attention to Lily. "An old witch that lived near Dumbledore," she said, her scorn easy to hear in her chiding tone.

"Alice," said James, and Alice sighed, changing her glare from Lily to the paper.

"They're releasing a *book*, James. We can't just let them get away with this."

"They're having a press release on Saturday in Diagon Alley," read Frank over James' shoulder. He frowned, and then sat down next to his girlfriend, placing the tray of food in his hands down on the table. "That doesn't give us much time."

"Much time for what?" asked Harry, unable to keep from speaking up.

Alice's eyes moved to him, and her smile was saccharine. "To tell the world that Bathilda Bagshot is full of lies, of course." She paused, turning to press a chaste kiss to her boyfriend's cheek. She then stood, after finishing her bite of potato, and addressed them again, "Excuse me, I need to talk to Dumbledore."

Frank watched her with pride in his eyes before he turned his attention back to the other three. "Amazing, isn't she?"

"Sure," said Harry, even though she definitely was *not*. He wondered what she had planned, but knew that even if he found out, there was next to no chance he would be able to warn Tom beforehand. But he trusted his love. If anyone could keep in front of Dumbledore, it was Tom.

Friday, Day 14

"Here."

Gilderoy blinked tiredness out of his eyes before looking away from his notes. His vision felt fuzzy after staring at the written word for so long, and it took a while for his eyes to focus.

Lupin was wearing a shy smile in front of him, and he was holding a bracelet with a charm out in front of him. It had a little wolf on it.

"What's this?" he asked.

“A charm,” explained Lupin. “It has protections weaved into it. I’ll feel safer if you had it.”

“I’ve been hiding Horcruxes for three years,” he pointed out, but he took it anyway, slipping it onto his left wrist.

“I know,” said the werewolf. “But I’ll still feel better.”

It was better if the werewolves weren’t sighted in public with the Dark Lord right now. They were already considered Dark creatures; with their Lord’s reputation as it was, it was something they didn’t need.

And besides, they were needed elsewhere.

Even if the book release of Bathilda Bagshot’s new book had the potential to be dangerous, they couldn’t afford to split their resources so thinly. They still had to work on increasing their weight in international affairs and besides, the werewolves weren’t necessary if the Dark Lord was going to be there.

Still, Gilderoy was thinking the same thing as the werewolf. He would feel better with Lupin watching his back.

“Thank you,” he said, and Lupin smiled. He took Gilderoy’s left hand into his own, and then pressed a chaste kiss against it.

“Be safe,” he said.

“I will,” he promised, and was rewarded with a smile.

“Shouldn’t you get some rest?”

“Shouldn’t you?” shot back Sirius.

Severus frowned, and Sirius shook his head, a contrite expression on his face.

“Sorry,” the wizard mumbled, and he lowered his wand, the target in front of him still smoking from the force of his blasting curse. “I’m a little worked up.”

“We all are,” he said, trying his best to sound empathetic rather than condescending, and knew he failed when Sirius just shot a wry grin at him. “You should still get some rest, though.”

“I can’t,” said Sirius, and he sighed, sounding weary. “I know we’ve planned for this, but I can’t stop thinking something will go wrong.”

“It’s risky,” he said, still trying to play nice.

“I know you’re thinking the same,” he said, turning to face Severus completely. He gestured at the potions ingredients in Severus’ hands.

“Can’t believe you recognize the ingredients,” he couldn’t help snapping, and he clamped his mouth shut a second after, guilt running through him. This was the last thing Sirius needed. But *still*, old habits die hard.

But Sirius just laughed. He walked over to Severus, and Severus didn't fight him as Sirius took the ingredients out of his hand, using magic to float them over to a nearby table. He then slung his arm around Severus' neck. "Let's get a drink."

Severus curled his lip up at that, "We'll need our wits around us for tomorrow."

"*One* drink," said Sirius, sounding petulant and sounding so much like Harry for a second that the fight left Severus.

"One," he repeated, sternly, and let Sirius lead him away.

Saturday, Day 15

The day of the book release was clear. No clouds in sight, and only the bright sun shining down on them.

Bathilda Bagshot was complaining about the sun already. It was too hot for someone of her age. Amelia sighed when she heard, and immediately made her way toward the event coordinators, intent on telling them to put some cooling charms in place.

Their Lord beat them to it. He waved, and a cooling breeze set through the street. She bowed in thanks to their Lord, but he just nodded, an amused hint to his smile.

They had elected to have the book release in front of Flourish and Blott's. It made sense, since almost all book releases were held in the biggest bookstore of Wizarding Society. The only reason it was outside was for the journalists and the crowd they were expecting.

And because it would be easier to plan for an attack outside than inside. Less chance of casualties and debris getting in the way.

Because there was no way the Light was going to let this go quietly. They had to ruin Bagshot's name before the book was released to the public. There was no way out of it.

They had planned this book release in order to not only raise interest in the book, but also to defame the Light even more. If they hurt people in their desperation to disprove Bagshot, it would only improve their Lord's standing.

As such, security was tight and woven into the crowd. Only the Knights of Walpurgis stood at attention in front of the temporary stage that was going to house Bagshot.

Amelia wasn't part of them today. Her mask was still on her desk at home. She had been put in place of protecting Bagshot, and she could do that best if she was herself. After all, a Bones held some clout out in the political world. The Bones family had never produced a Dark wizard in all of history. If the Light struck her down, then their reputation will fall even further.

There was a crowd when the event finally started. Amelia recognized half of the people who showed up; most of them were Hogwarts students. She wondered if any of them were the people who deserted for the Light.

Rita Skeeter was up on stage with Bagshot. Amelia wasn't paying attention to her inane questions though, knowing that Skeeter was simply trying to get the crowd more and more excited about Dumbledore's sordid past.

As such, she noticed when everything went wrong.

The wards went down first. They hadn't erected strong ones to entice the Light in coming, but still, they shouldn't have gone down so quickly. She worried her bottom lip, but her hesitation only lasted a second as she made her way out to the stage to put herself in-between Bagshot and the attackers.

Cracks were heard all over the square. Light wizards were appearing, and she resisted the urge to scoff loudly.

They weren't even wearing masks. Were they stupid? They were already wanted for deserting their lives, did they also want their families to join them on the wanted list?

Imbeciles.

"The Dark is attempting to brainwash you," spoke a voice, and Amelia stifled a gasp as Dumbledore made his presence known. She hadn't expected for him to come himself; none of them did, actually, not even their Lord had thought Dumbledore would have risked everything to come.

Apparently, their recruiting hadn't gone as well as Dumbledore would have liked. Or else Dumbledore wouldn't be here, trying to get his reputation back to what it used to be.

"What a pleasure to see you again," answered their Lord, his red eyes glittering in triumph. "As always, you spread lies."

"Why stoop to such underhanded tactics, my boy?" asked Dumbledore. "Bathilda," he continued, not waiting for Tom to do anything other than scoff at him, "Did he threaten you? You can come with us, we'll protect you."

Bathilda Bagshot was old, and frail, but she wasn't vulnerable. At Dumbledore's words, she gave an even louder scoff than the Dark Lord. Amelia saw movement behind her, and was entirely unsurprised when she raised her own wand up at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore didn't seem fazed that Bathilda wasn't responding to his tactics, almost as if he expected her to be difficult to convince.

That seemed to be the signal, because suddenly the Light were attacking. Chaos reigned as the wizards lifted their wands, shooting fire toward the grand bookstore.

They wanted to get rid of the copies.

But that was utterly idiotic, why try to destroy the books when they could simply make more?

Perhaps all that time hidden away from the Wizarding World had affected their intelligence.

She didn't move, a smile on her face as she watched the Knights of Walpurgis descend onto the scene. Already, the remaining Aurors were escorting the crowd out of harm's way while their Lord's knights met the attacking Light wizards head on.

Further in the chaos, Dumbledore was dealing with their Lord. Their Lord was laughing, even as he reflected each and every one of Dumbledore's spells, and it seemed as if they were in an intricate dance.

Sparks and flames flew alike as the fighting reigned on, and Amelia's smile slowly slipped off her face. The Light were stronger than they had hoped they would be.

"They're not going to take down my book like this," hissed Skeeter behind her, and Amelia watched in fascination as Rita cast a *sonorous* on an open book. Immediately, a disembodied voice started to read the words, causing most of the fighting wizards to still in shock.

"...questions everything that his admirers believed of Dumbledore's supposed hatred of the Dark Arts, his opposition to the oppression of Muggles, even his devotion to his own family."

The words cast a somber effect on the fighting in front of them, because despite the chilling words, the fighting continued. The Light were determined to keep on fighting, and *nothing* made sense because they had no goal to win since the book was still being read.

She dithered, wondering if she should abandon Skeeter and Bagshot to join the fray, when one of the Knights of Walpurgis apparated right in front of her. The crack was silent, so Amelia immediately knew it was Sirius. He was the only one advanced enough in magic to do so.

"Sirius?" she asked, her heart beating ridiculously fast. "What's wrong?"

Sirius was shaking, but there were no signs of injuries on him. She frowned, her eyes searching as quickly as possible, when Sirius shook his head. "The Horcrux Hunters are at Hogwarts."

"A diversion," the word torn from her out of shock, and Sirius nodded.

"I can't leave our Lord," he said, regret plain to hear in his voice. "Find the others. But Lucius and I will have to stay here."

"There's too many of them," said Amelia, trying her best not to panic. "How did they get so many?"

"You know why, Millie," said Sirius, his voice tight, and then he was off, apparating back into the fray.

She did know why. Trust in their Lord was failing, and it was easy to turn their attentions to the wizard who used to hold their admiration. It made *sense*, but it didn't mean it was an easy thing to accept.

But she had to put it behind her and find the others.

They never should have moved the fake Horcrux to Hogwarts. They thought it would be safer there, since the wards around Hogwarts were much stronger than the one in the Forbidden Forest.

How had they found out the location?

There were so many questions, but Amelia didn't have time to dwell on them.

If the Horcrux Hunters found the fake Horcrux, then Harry was in danger.

And Amelia already failed Harry once. She wouldn't be doing it a second time.

Chapter End Notes

A month ago, someone took YNOMH and tried to make their own story off of it using its words. I had a talk with the author, and I don't blame them - they took it down promptly, but it still messed me up for a while. It's hard seeing someone else claim your words for their own and a little scary thinking it could have went longer if a reader didn't message me right away on Tumblr.

So anyway, here's a disclaimer: please don't use this story without messaging me and asking permission. thank you! :)

On a happier note - this story has almost reached FOUR THOUSAND KUDOs. That's just so amazing, and it's all thanks to you guys and I'm soooo grateful. Thank you!

--also the book excerpt is taken from the page featured in the movie ^^

Almost Safe

Chapter Notes

Make sure to read chapter 22! I've uploaded two chapters to avoid cliffhangers!

eternally grateful to have eveiss put up with my work and betaing the last two chapters <3

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

“Why am I here?” grumbled Harry, again, and Frank sighed. “I don’t have my magic,” he tried his best to sound friendly, but he was *annoyed*.

“Maybe that’s why you’re here,” snapped Frank, and Alice turned, glaring at her boyfriend.

“*Frank*,” she said, lowly, and Frank angrily turned away from Harry.

Harry exchanged glances with James and James shrugged.

Even if Dumbledore had ‘rewired’ him to be on the Light side, it looked like none of them trusted him. Harry would have been surprised if they did, though, especially since he had done nothing to warrant their trust. They would be stupid to believe he was truly changed.

Still, they were ridiculously easy to read. They wanted him here as a safety net. If Tom decided to come to Hogwarts instead of fighting Dumbledore, then Harry would be their bargaining chip. And if anyone found them and decided to attack, Harry would be an excellent meat shield; if he died here, protecting them, none of them would have to feel the guilt of actually killing him off.

But just because he understood why they wanted him there didn’t mean he would make it easy for them.

He withheld a sigh as he followed the Horcrux Hunters down the empty hallway. They were using strong Disillusionment Charms to escape attention, but they needn’t have worried. There was no one in Hogwarts.

Harry was tempted to try to find someone to help him escape, but he knew the risks were too high. He wanted to stay and save his brother foremost, and besides, Harry wasn’t going to be much help in a fight. He would be a liability.

It was too risky.

So he followed them, and was grateful that he didn’t know where the last Horcrux was held. That way their questions were rendered futile when directed toward him.

He was sure that they didn’t have a plan, that they were going to wander Hogwarts until they hopefully stumbled upon the last Horcrux.

But he was wrong.

Slughorn was waiting for them at the end of the hallway. Harry faltered in his step, but Alice hurried forward, waving her wand and canceling her disillusionment charm.

“Professor!” she called, and Slughorn’s eyes lit up in recognition.

“Alice, my dear,” he said, and he was trying to convey confidence, but Harry could hear the nervousness in his words. His eyes weren’t focused on Alice even as he was talking to her in low tones; they were too busy scanning the hallway.

Harry glowered at Slughorn, even if the man couldn’t see it. He had thought Slughorn could be trusted, but apparently, the man was only after saving his own skin.

He had never seemed to like Dumbledore so he was deemed safe. Now, it seemed like this decision was to be their downfall.

Slughorn was leading them upward. None of the others canceled their charms; instead, they followed at a sedate pace. Alice was Slughorn’s favorite, after all, and it seemed as if he was only aware of her presence.

They ended up on the seventh floor.

“I’m not sure what’s inside,” dithered Slughorn, loud enough that they could hear him despite the distance.

“It’s okay,” said Alice, placing one hand on Slughorn’s arm. “We can find it.”

“Of course,” said Slughorn, wringing his hands. “Dumbledore told you about the door?”

“In his own way,” said Alice, her nose wrinkling. “But don’t worry, we’ll be able to find it. Wait outside for us.”

Slughorn nodded.

They were taking Slughorn back to the Hideout. He wouldn’t be safe here if Tom found out he was the one to betray them.

Harry promised himself that Slughorn wouldn’t be safe there either.

Alice was pacing in front of the door, turning back three times. Before his eyes, a door materialized.

He didn’t have much time to ponder about it before Alice was throwing the door open. Frank grabbed his arm and pulled him in right before the doors swung shut behind Alice.

“Now where could it be?” mused Alice. She was making complicated wand movements in front of her, gold tendrils of spell magic falling as she tried to cast a spell to find the fake Horcrux.

“That’s not going to work,” said James. His voice was curt. “You remember what Dumbledore told us. It can’t be summoned.”

“I know,” said Alice, exasperated. “But there’s no harm in trying.”

“Let’s just split up,” cut in Frank before the two of them could start arguing. “James, stay with Harry and Lily.” He pulled Alice away after he finished speaking, starting to speak to her as soon as they were a far enough distance away.

“I hate her,” said Lily.

“I know,” said James, and he sounded tired. “But at least Frank’s taken her away. Let’s just try to look for it.”

“Fine,” said Lily.

Harry was glad that Frank and Alice had left them, because the three of them didn’t try very hard to find it.

“Why did we hide it in the Room of Requirement?” grouched Regulus. They were taking the steps two at a time, and it was grueling enough without having to answer Regulus.

Lucius didn’t have the same problem, snapping out a quick response. “Because it would be easy to lure them in there. You remember the spell?”

“Of course,” said Regulus. “How could I forget? We only spent the last two years learning it.”

Lucius didn’t reply, and Regulus fell quiet. They had reached the seventh floor.

Slughorn was waiting outside of it. When he caught sight of them, his shoulders slumped in relief.

“They’re inside,” he said. “Or Alice is. Don’t know who else is with her.”

“You didn’t see them?” asked Lucius.

“Disillusionment charms,” explained Slughorn. “I didn’t expect them to come here,” he said, a second later, nervousness easy to see in the way he was looking at them.

Slughorn didn’t have a spine, but he would never dare to betray their Lord. So Amelia was grateful to him for playing his part perfectly, even if they had never expected this plan to be needed.

She let out a soft sigh of relief. When Sirius had told her that the Horcrux Hunters were at Hogwarts, she really didn’t expect them to approach Slughorn. But she was glad that Alice had been a favorite of the Professor’s and she believed Slughorn would help them.

Because this put them right where they wanted them.

With James, Frank, and Alice dead, the War would be won much easier. After all, without Dumbledore’s Heir, there would be nothing holding the Light together when Dumbledore died.

They would cast the spell together. Fiendfyre was almost impossible to control, but with each of them creating just a portion of the magical fire, they had a chance.

The Room would be ruined by it, but their Lord would fix it when the war was over.

“Ready?” asked Gilderoy. Slughorn had stepped back and away from the door that was now in front of them.

She stared at the Room of Requirement, sending a thought of apology toward it for what they were planning to do.

“Ready,” she said, and they began to cast.

“Do you smell that?” asked Harry.

James paused in where he was halfheartedly shifting things around in front of him. Books were scattered at his feet.

“No?” he questioned, and then paused.

Lily was frantically running toward them. She had disappeared a few minutes earlier, wandering ahead to look at something that had interested her.

“Run!” she screamed, and they didn’t need to question her. There was fire behind her, formed into a dragon’s mouth and it was coming straight toward them.

James and Harry didn’t wait, turning immediately to run. Lily caught up to them and James grabbed her hand, pulling her along as her breath faltered.

Another dragon was coming toward them. Harry turned abruptly, knowing his brother would follow as he led them further into the Room. They didn’t have a choice; the way out was surrounded by fire.

“How do we get out?” asked Lily.

They were trapped.

But James’ eyes lit up. “There!” he called, pointing upward. Two brooms lay on top of a pile of miscellaneous things.

“You’re the Quidditch Captain,” Harry pointed out as James took out his wand and summoned them. They came dutifully, landing in front of them.

“You’re my brother,” said James, sounding confident. “You’ll be fine.” He didn’t wait to see if Harry agreed, mounting the broom. Lily got on after him, and they took off in the sky.

Harry took a deep breath, James’ unshaken confidence in him giving him the confidence he was looking for. James was right. They were twins. Surely, he couldn’t be horrible.

Unbidden, his memory of his first year came to his mind. The broom had jumped into his hand then, eager for him to fly. He had never put much stock in Quidditch, too busy trying to survive a school dominated by both Dumbledore and Tom. With all the Heir business, concentrating on Quidditch was the last thing on his mind.

He didn't think it would be the same, but it *was*. The broom flew upward into his hand as soon as he uttered the word, and then he was flying. He caught up easily, and James shot a grin over at him, and without words, Harry could tell his brother was proud of him.

But they didn't have time to celebrate. The dragons were coming toward them.

"Follow me," ordered his brother, and then dropped into a roll. Harry followed suit, the both of them narrowly missing a fiery death.

It was a dangerous game they were playing, but Harry was having *fun*. The bracelet had locked away his magic, but not his inherent one, so riding a broom might be the closest he had been to using magic in a long time. And it was exhilarating to dodge death this way, and it brought him back to what felt like decades ago, when they were competing in a Tournament to prevent the very war they were in now...

They flew in circles, in zig-zags, and sometimes even upside down. And it was fun. Until it wasn't.

A dragon made of fire was coming straight toward them and they wouldn't be able to escape.

Harry didn't close his eyes, still frantically looking for a way out when inconceivably, the dragon faltered, and then exploded mid-air. It sent them tumbling, the tail-end of both brooms lit on fire from the explosion.

Harry tried his best to stay upright, but the broom was ruined. He was spinning, tumbling over and under and barely able to keep grip on the broom.

He slammed into the wall, knocking the breath out of him. A gasp of pain left his mouth at the impact, and the broom splintered in his hand, breaking into two. He saw stars in his vision, and the smoke was making it hard to breathe, but he had to get up before the room burned down with them still inside it. And although he was in pain, he needed to see where James and Lily were and make sure they were okay.

He spotted them in seconds, both of them unconscious. While his broom had gone up into flames, James and Lily hadn't been able to dodge a burst of fire and it was probably only thanks to magic that they were only unconscious and not dead.

He had to get them out before it was too late. Thankfully, they had fallen near the entrance, and Harry only had to drag them out to get them to safety.

The doors were no longer grand. They were burned, breaking apart at the edges, and Harry was sure that as soon as he tried to open it, it would fall apart.

But they couldn't stay in here. The fire still reigned and if the door broke, they would be stuck in here forever.

He didn't hesitate any longer; he stepped forward and pushed the doors open. At his touch, the door seemed to disintegrate, but Harry pressed on, desperate to get the doors open enough for them to escape.

Behind them, towers of misplaced things were falling, burning to a crisp even without the fiery dragons.

Before them, the doors disappeared, leaving only the Hogwarts hallway in front of them. With some effort, he was able to get both James and Lily past the broken doorway and away from the burning room.

At first, the sight was relieving. And then Harry blinked and the vision changed.

Alice and Frank were desperately fighting against someone. Spells sparked in the hallway; misaimed spells were being absorbed by the paintings in the walls even as their subjects protested loudly at the fight.

Harry couldn't tell who they were fighting against.

And then, the smoke cleared and he saw. Lucius. Gilderoy. Amelia. Regulus.

The relief in him was so sudden and so intense that he went weak.

This was it. Tom might not be here, but his *friends* were. He could finally escape.

Because they were winning.

His friends were talented. He knew that. He trained them himself. And he saw their talent in the way they wove around the spells Alice and Frank threw, and how they protected each other whenever one was on the offensive. It was truly a work of art.

But his friends' spells didn't hold the vibrancy they usually did.

It slowly dawned on him. Fiendfyre was a spell Tom held dear to his heart.

The four of them would have had no idea he was in there with them. Fiendfyre was the best way to ensure the Horcrux Hunters died, and Harry couldn't even be mad he had gotten caught in the crossfire, he would have advised them to do the same. In a locked room with them watching the exit, if they were able to control the fire, the rest of them were as good as dead.

They were lucky Alice and Frank had distracted them because the fire would have been deadly otherwise. That had been why the fire dragon had died before it had reached them.

He wasn't angry that they were the origin of the Fiendfyre.

He was *worried*.

Because they were tired from it. Fiendfyre was a huge undertaking, not creating the fire itself, but attempting to *control* it. They must have wrestled with the magic for a long time to get it to do their bidding, and it showed.

He only hoped that they would subdue them soon before Alice and Frank noticed them.

Amelia suddenly fell to her knees, tripped up by something Alice had sent toward her feet. Alice advanced, wary at the sudden vulnerability, but when the others seemed distracted by Frank, she raised her wand and struck.

Only to fail.

Regulus had deflected her attack with one strong burst of magic, and then, using his wand this time, sent a *stupefy* toward her. It hit her straight in the chest and she fell.

Frank didn't fare any better than his girlfriend. Regulus had used a *stupefy*. Lucius had used a spell Harry had never heard of before. *Sectumsempra*.

In front of his eyes, Frank was being torn apart. Cuts were appearing quickly, blood being ripped from Frank's body and falling around him.

Hope started to rise in his heart. Surely, they couldn't win against this.

And then suddenly, all of his friends were down and unconscious, none of them expecting an attack from the back.

Slughorn came into his vision, and although he had been the reason Harry's friends were now down, he didn't look happy about it. He met Harry's eyes with fear, and Harry made sure that Slughorn understood how much trouble he was going to be in for betraying them.

"Tom will kill you," he seethed, and Slughorn's eyes hardened in resolve.

"I've always only looked out for myself," he explained, "it's about time I did something for someone else." He knelt down next to Amelia, and Harry's blood ran cold as he realized this very well might be the end of his friend.

"Wait," he pleaded before Slughorn could do anything. He didn't have anything to threaten Slughorn with, and neither was he particularly close to the Professor. But James and Lily were unconscious behind him and even though they were all on the same side, Slughorn didn't know that. He could use them as bargaining chips to get his friends out of here alive.

But Slughorn was looking at him sadly, interrupting him before he could say anything. "They're still my students," said Slughorn. "They won't come to harm."

He left Harry's friends tied up together with an *incarcerous*, and then carefully levitated both Alice and Frank over before approaching Harry.

Harry reared himself up to do something; he didn't have magic, but he had his youth on his side and if he could just surprise Slughorn then maybe he could get away.

But there was voices and footsteps fast approaching and Slughorn panicked. It obviously wasn't the Light's reinforcements that they were expecting, and Slughorn had to get them all out before they were found.

"Sorry Harry," said Slughorn, the end of his wand pointing straight toward him.

Harry snarled, and then lunged forward before the telltale red hit him straight in the chest.

When Harry woke, Dumbledore was standing in front of him. James was standing behind him, but Harry didn't dare meet James' eyes in front of Dumbledore in fear of Dumbledore seeing

something.

His hands were tied behind him, and there was a chain around his right ankle.

“Harry,” started Dumbledore, and Harry was surprised to find Dumbledore sounded remorseful. “The horcrux in Hogwarts has been destroyed.”

The room had been burned beyond repair, and the fake Horcrux along with it. But there was still one more Horcrux left – the one Tom had been sighted with in the papers. The one the Light believed to belong to Harry.

James interrupted his thoughts, “There’s still one more horcrux left, sir.”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, sounding thoughtful. “If our sources are to be believed, the last one is protected by Tom, himself.”

James nodded, but Dumbledore continued. “However, I am inclined to trust Slughorn. He doesn’t believe Harry has created a horcrux. To create one, Harry would have had to kill someone. And I don’t believe you would ever take someone’s life.”

“You don’t know me,” he snarled, and Dumbledore crouched so that they were eye level.

“I do,” said Dumbledore, solemnly, and stoutly ignored the way that Harry glared at him. “Regardless, I’m sorry to say you will be executed tomorrow morning.”

His blood ran cold and even despite his earlier conviction, Harry couldn’t stop himself from meeting James’ eyes. His little brother’s eyes were just as wide as his; James hadn’t known about this.

“Don’t worry, you will be remembered for your sacrifice, Harry.” He ignored Harry’s protests and stood, placing a comforting hand on James’ shoulder. “Say your good-byes to your brother, James.”

He didn’t stay for much longer after that, departing without what seemed like a single ounce of guilt in his posture.

“I’m sorry,” said James, crouching the same as Dumbledore had before, but the difference was James’ eyes were full of anguish. His voice dropped low into a whisper, just in case someone was listening outside. “You won’t die tomorrow. I promise.” He leaned forward, and if anyone was watching from outside, they wouldn’t have seen James deposit a kiss on Harry’s forehead before he straightened up.

Harry didn’t dare ask questions, even when it seemed like despair was going to overwhelm him. He had to trust in James. Tom would never let him die here, and beyond that, Magic needed him. This was what she had been working toward, and he had to believe that everything was working exactly as she had planned.

He wouldn’t die tomorrow.

He couldn’t, not when he had every intention to be in Tom’s arms once more.

“I know you’re there,” James said quietly. He had ducked into an abandoned alcove as soon as he was able after leaving Harry’s “cell”.

Magic materialized out of thin air in front of his very eyes, her worry plain to see on her face. “It’s too soon.”

His breath caught in his throat and he nearly choked, tears threatening to spill down his cheeks. “We can’t lose Harry,” he begged, and Magic regarded him with a calm gaze. “*Please*,” he continued, “he’s the only reason I’ve been helping you. You *promised* to keep him safe.”

He knew that he was being pushy, that Magic didn’t play by the rules and could punish him for his rudeness. But he knew she needed Harry as much as he did.

“If he dies,” said James, “then we lose.”

She must hear the promise in his words because she bowed her head.

“Give this to him,” she said, taking his hands into hers. Blue light flashed and then faded into his.

It was a fine dinner. But Alice hadn’t been hungry and had only nibbled on some grapes whenever anyone looked at her.

She had been nervous meeting the other leaders of the Light and had barely been able to speak. Luckily, Dumbledore hadn’t expected her to, and had instead given her a kind smile when she apologized to him afterward. She was one of his Horcrux Hunters; there had been no reason for her to feel nervous. And with what happened at Hogwarts, with Frank and her getting such horrible injuries, Dumbledore really couldn’t blame them for anything, not with how grateful he had to be to them.

Frank had fallen asleep when they had gotten back to their room despite the early hour, and while she had napped with him, she had woken up in the early night. Frank had been snoring still, obviously passed out from such a hearty dinner, so Alice got up by herself to go to the kitchens. Her stomach felt empty from not eating anything at dinner, and she was sure she could beg some of the house-elves for some leftovers.

The halls were eerily quiet, and it put her on edge. Usually, people would still be bustling around at ten in night; more importantly, it was Friday, and there was almost always a party going on near the “Gryffindor” quarters. Frank had been too tired to go tonight, but Alice and he were frequent visitors.

She changed her course from the kitchens, deciding to head toward the room to see what was up. The Gryffindors were notorious for sleeping late and would probably entertain her for a while.

The hallway was dark and silent. When she got closer, she knocked quietly, and with worry growing in her heart, she started to rap loudly on the door. She took her wand out and unlocked the door, and was surprised to find most of them passed out, snoring in the dark room.

She had to get to Dumbledore. Someone had put everyone to sleep and they were left vulnerable.

She was halfway there when she ran into Lily.

She was standing in front of the door, and she jumped when Alice's footsteps sounded throughout the empty hallway. She turned, a shocked expression on her face that was schooled immediately into a worried one.

"Why are you up?" Alice asked immediately, and her wand was still tightly gripped in her hand so she raised it, pointing it at the redhead. "The food was poisoned, and everyone else is asleep."

"Poisoned?" questioned Lily, her voice shaking. She pressed herself closer to the door, and her hand went back, knocking three times on the door. "Are you okay, Alice? You don't look well."

It was her. It had to be. She was their only resident Potions Master, and she had access to all of their ingredients. She could have easily made it into sleeping potions and distributed it into the food by tricking the house elves.

But she had someone helping her. It was obvious by the way she knocked on the door. James had to be her accomplice. After all, only James would care that Harry was to be executed tomorrow. But he was powerful. He was Dumbledore's heir and could take her out without any trouble.

Alice had to be careful here.

She lowered her wand and took a deep breath. "Someone's poisoned the food, Lil's. And Frank ate it. It could be the Dark."

Lily nodded nervously and pressed herself closer to the door as Alice approached her. "We can go to the Potions room and whip up an antidote. It won't take long."

Alice nodded, and forced herself to act normal as she got closer. And then she pointed her wand directly at Lily and shot an *incarcerous* at her, wrapping her body in ropes just as the door flew open.

She used a summoning charm on Lily's body and caught her, pointing her wand at Lily's back.

James stared at the scene, his eyes wide and he dropped something invisible, immediately going to grab his wand.

"No!" she shouted. "You try to fight, and I'll kill Lily."

"You wouldn't dare," snarled James, but he hesitated, clearly unsure.

"You want to try me, traitor?" she spat out. "Dumbledore made you his Heir and you betray him for a disowned brother. Harry doesn't care about you."

James glared at her, his jaw clearly clenched in anger. But he was stuck.

Because while Lily was nice, Alice had never liked her. She would be laughably easy to kill to keep the Light safe.

“James,” said Lily, her voice calm despite the way Lily was shaking against Alice, “Go.” And there was pain emanating from Alice’s stomach, and Alice barely kept upright enough to send a blasting curse at James.

James spun immediately, and then there was a crack in the air just as one of the debris hit him head on.

She snarled, throwing Lily onto the floor as she pressed her right hand on her stomach. A knife was sticking out of her, and she pulled it out with a grimace, casting a quick healing spell to keep it from bleeding.

She was glad that they had never given Lily back her wand. Beautiful Lily who had entranced the school’s population of boys with her stupid red hair and extraordinary green eyes.

Alice hated her.

She knew Lily was a traitor, but Dumbledore had believed she was good. That she could be saved from being Harry’s friend.

She kicked Lily in the stomach once, eliciting a hiss of pain from the witch. “He left you behind,” she taunted. “His own girlfriend. How does it feel knowing the one you love betrayed you?”

“I told him to go,” she said, and although she was in pain, Lily was smiling. “And he’s not the one I love.”

The smile set her off, and Alice felt rage in her heart. Lily had gotten James Potter, Dumbledore’s *heir*, and yet she had the urge to betray him? Stupid bloody infuriating Lily.

But she couldn’t kill Lily yet. She had to use her to create the antidote. She hauled Lily up, and then started to drag her toward the Potions room.

As soon as everyone was awake, Alice was going to kill Lily Evans.

Regulus’ head hurt.

It throbbed and then he gasped as he felt his vision waver. Amelia was there instantly, supporting him and letting her lean into her side.

With her help, he made it to where their Lord was standing in front of a kneeling figure.

Potter was bloody, the gash on his forehead bleeding and staining his cheeks with dark red. Sirius was hovering behind him, obviously out of worry, but he didn’t dare try to help his soulmate.

Not when Potter was currently pleading for their Lord’s assistance.

“How can I know you are trustworthy?” Their Lord’s voice was soft, but it carried throughout the clearing. As far as Regulus could see, Knights of Walpurgis were starting to gather, Gilderoy and Lupin near the front. “Dumbledore still holds his Vow over you.”

Potter flinched at his words, and he stared down at his hands for a few long seconds. Then he looked up, his gaze fixing immediately on Regulus.

Then he smiled.

Faster than any of them could react, Potter was drawing his wand and pointing it at him. “*Finite*,” whispered Potter, and suddenly, Regulus remembered.

He leaned harder into Amelia, and he heard her worried voice. It drifted above him, and he wanted to tell her not to worry, but speech was beyond him.

Then there was a strong grip underneath his chin, a cooling touch to his forehead transferred by two fingers, and then he was staring into a red gaze.

He remembered running into Sirius in a clearing not too far from Hogwarts, and witnessing Sirius betray them by meeting with Potter. He remembered that he had wanted to tell their Lord, but he had been stopped. Obliviated by his own brother.

When he was let go, he fell back into Amelia’s arms heavily, and she held onto him tightly, her heart beating fast behind him.

“This only tells me that one of my own Knights betrayed me.” Their Lord’s voice sounded tight and dangerous. He was not happy. “And do not point your wand at one of my Knights ever again, Potter.”

Sirius dropped to his knees immediately, his head bowed. “Harry gave us the plants, my Lord. We’ve been growing them ever since he told us how to get them.”

“Harry?” There was a long, pregnant pause before the Dark Lord turned his gaze on Sirius, a dangerous frown on his face. “You had contact with him and did not tell me?”

“No, it was Magic,” said Potter, and he stood. He had healed himself when the Dark Lord had been occupied with Sirius and was now standing tall in front of their Lord, his head held high and his back straight. There was no fear in his eyes.

“She’s using you,” said their Lord, but he didn’t seem as angry as he was before. Instead, he was regarding Potter with an inquisitive look, almost as if seeing the wizard in a new light.

“I know,” was Potter’s response, and there was a wry smile on his face. “But that doesn’t mean I wasn’t using her. She was my only escape from Dumbledore.”

The Dark Lord hummed, and then inclined his head. “You say the Light have been incapacitated.”

“Within hours, the plants will have drained the Light of their magic. We were caught by Alice just as we were leaving, but we have to act now because Harry’s in danger and I don’t know how much longer he’ll be safe.”

“And Lily?”

That was Severus, and Regulus stared in surprise that Severus would cut the Dark Lord off. But there was a look of crazed worry in his eyes, and it seemed like their Lord noticed it too because he didn't punish Severus for interrupting.

But James paused, his lower teeth worrying his bottom lip, and Severus made an anguished cry. “She's *alive*, Prince,” he said, “But we need to go *now*.” He pulled out a slip of paper, worn and folded over many times. Potter's scrawl was on it, and he passed it to the Dark Lord. “Our place was under a Fidelius Charm. With this, everyone should be able to apparate directly to Dumbledore's hideout.”

The Dark Lord nodded, handing the piece of paper to Severus. Severus glanced at it then passed it on to Gilderoy. As the paper made its round through the Knights, the Dark Lord summoned a Patronus charm, the wispy white forming into a large snake.

He hissed at it, and it disappeared, off to carry a message to the rest of the Dark Lord's followers.

“We move in ten,” said the Dark Lord, his voice still carrying a remnant of his hiss, and he gestured at Potter. “With me, Potter.”

Potter hesitated, but after exchanging a worried glance with Sirius, followed quickly after the Dark Lord.

“The plants may not have worked when we get there,” murmured Amelia, worry clear to hear in her voice.

“Then we will kill them,” said Regulus, and though three years ago, Amelia would have protested to unnecessary death, she nodded, grim and determined.

She might have been born a Hufflepuff and on the Light side, but she was one of them now.

And Regulus would rather have no one else by his side.

James was nervous.

He had been waiting three years for this battle. Three years to break away from Dumbledore's grip and get back to Sirius. To be on the same side as his brother.

There were only hours left until his goal was finished.

He had years to dream up scenarios, to work out the final kinks of this crazy plan, and yet his heart was still beating uncomfortably fast. Because he planned this down to every last detail, but Riddle and Magic both were unpredictable.

He knew they were on the outs with each other, and he didn't know how Riddle would react to having the last battle with Dumbledore planned by Magic.

Riddle didn't say a word as they made their way through Hogwarts' grounds, and James took the time to drink in the sight of Hogwarts. He had missed his home away from home.

The room they ended up in was heavily warded. And James flinched when he walked through the doorway, the magical power in the room oppressive. Riddle made a tempus charm, the clock ticking quietly next to them to show the time they had left.

"She cannot hear us here. I need to know how loyal you are to her."

"She was a means to the end," he responded, honestly. "But she's a deity, and I don't think we can fight against her. Even if she continues to threaten Harry's life."

There was a sharp smile on Riddle's face. "And the Light? Will they rally behind you when Dumbledore is killed?"

"I don't know," he said, and he took a deep breath. "But I don't want to be a leader. I'm not cut out for it."

"Let us hope they do," said Riddle, ignoring his words, but he didn't sound too worried. "You know where Harry is being kept, correct? Can you apparate directly there?"

"Yes," he said, "But Dumbledore may be waiting there."

"Take Sirius. The two of you should be enough."

"You aren't coming?"

"The Dark Lord has to be on the battlefield," said Riddle, and James would have snapped at the Dark Lord for *that*, for disregarding Harry's safety so callously but there was pain in those sharp red eyes. The wizard obviously had something planned that had to take him away from Harry's side, and it obviously gutted him. "But," said Riddle, softly, and he held out a charm, placing it into James' outstretched hand. "If you think you need me, if the choice is Harry's life or our goals, then I'll choose Harry every time."

"You're going after her," said James, because really, there was nothing else in the world that could draw Riddle away from Harry's side.

Riddle inclined his head, looking amused that James had guessed correctly, and then smiled. "Despite being twins, I always believed the two of you had no similarities. Now, you remind me of him. You've grown up, Potter."

"When I was younger," said James, his voice soft, "I told Harry that I was hoping he would change you for the better. Change you into believing in the light and not the dark. I told Harry that love is a beautiful thing, and then I turned my back on him because I found out you were a killer. But I'm older now, and I don't believe in the same things. Please, Professor, kill Dumbledore."

Riddle was silent during his talk, his expression impossible to read, but when James finished, his red eyes were gleaming in excitement.

"Gladly," said Riddle, and it timed exactly with the tempus charm hitting zero.

Chapter End Notes

please check out chapter 22 for the final battle!

The Final Battle

Chapter Notes

warning: someone dies in this chapter

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

Werewolves could see magic.

It was something granted to them as an apology for having to deal with the curse. As such, while some werewolves disliked the conception of it, none of them could deny the usefulness.

Tom sent them ahead to scout, knowing that most of them would be able to stay out of harm's way. And if some of them couldn't?

Well, Tom would deal with it later. This was war, and he should expect to lose some of his pawns. He hadn't lost any yet, but they hadn't had any real battles. He hoped Fenrir would be able to accomplish his task of setting up the Runes to transport the ones who couldn't apparate.

He turned his attention to the crowd gathered in front of him. His Knights were behind him.

"Try not to spill magical blood," he started out with. Even if Magic had betrayed them, their main goal remained the same. They had to make sure they didn't lose more magicals even during a War.

There were more important goals to think about.

More dangerous enemies to prepare for.

"But as always, safety comes first. Kill before being killed."

The throngs of his army were greater than he expected. He knew the numbers, but they had never been gathered in one place before. Vampires were to the right. The French to the left. And in the middle, making up the biggest percentage of the crowd were his allies of old. Abraxus stood in front of them, masked, but his platinum blond hair marked him as if he wasn't. Tom knew he could count on him to lead when he was gone. Behind the crowd, Rosier stood with a group of other wizards, all highly trained to deal with the dragons behind them. And to the right of them were the Centaurs and the Giants, all ready to fight.

The plan was simple. His army would keep the Light busy and round up the ones that were beaten either by his army or by the plants Potter claimed to have put on them. Tom knew the effects of the plant intimately, and he knew its effectiveness. He only hoped that the Light didn't have any surprises in store for them.

Tom would work with the Vampires to deal with Magic. And most importantly, Potter and Sirius would be saving Harry.

“Once the Werewolves send word back,” said Tom, “we will join the battle. Giants, Centaurs, and the Dragons will go first.” They would be the ones most likely to withstand any surprise magical attacks and would be a decent shield to the ones coming after. “Then we will apparate in.”

He paused, waiting for any questions, but no one dared to speak. The silence was almost oppressive in its tension, all of them waiting for the Patronus from Lupin that would signal the start of the battle.

“This has been a long time in coming,” he said, “and we’ve prepared for it. We will emerge victorious.” His voice was tinged with confidence and was firm, and the army heard it, their spirits lifting.

They wouldn’t lose.

They believed in Tom and Tom wouldn’t let them down.

He planned every part of this battle, and the only way the Light could ever win was if they had Magic on their side.

But they wouldn’t.

He would make sure of it.

The Light had spotted them.

Remus was hiding behind a large tree, Fenrir’s *protego* charm sparkling in front of them as it withheld the Light’s attack.

He knew Harry’s plans must have made a dent to their numbers, but there were still more than he expected. But he had seen their Lord’s army. They would not fail.

Closing his eyes, he thought back to when he had first felt safe with Fenrir. It was the memory he had always drawn on, and despite knowing Gilderoy was his Intended, it was still one of his happiest memories.

A wolf burst out of his wand. He didn’t tell it to say anything, because he didn’t need to. Their Lord would know the significance of its arrival.

Minutes passed torturously slow. Remus added his own magic to Fenrir’s spell, hoping to protect their comrades behind them.

Remus saw the dragons first.

Four of them. They towered over the Light wizards and had seemed to appear out of thin air right behind them.

A roar echoed, a war cry from the Centaurs that Remus couldn’t see. Arrows started to shoot down out of the air, hitting a hasty shield put up from the Light Wizards.

No one was attacking them anymore.

Remus let out a sigh of relief, his shoulders slumping as he stopped supplying magic to the shield. It had taken a lot out of him, but his people were safe. Fenrir supported him, his arm going around his shoulders and keeping him standing.

A crack sounded.

Their Lord stood in front of them, his red eyes glittering as they scanned the trees behind them.

“Good work,” he said.

Pride sprouted in Remus’ heart. He bowed his head.

“Any casualties?”

“Just a few injuries,” said Fenrir, and Remus was grateful. He wasn’t sure if he was able to speak without sounding hoarse.

“Good,” said their Lord. His eyes fell on Remus and Remus did his best to stand straighter. “I know you’re tired, but I need your help.”

Remus felt sluggish and drained. But he knew their Lord wouldn’t ask if he didn’t truly need it. So he nodded, knowing that he would do whatever needed to be done to help.

This was the last battle, and Remus was determined for the Dark to come out on top.

Tom was nervous.

He hadn’t felt this nervous since Harry had disappeared. He knew Potter was probably saving Harry right now, and it was only the charm not warming in his tightly clenched fist that kept him from following.

He would be of more help to Harry here. Magic had been the one to derail all their plans, and she could do so again if he didn’t stay.

He *knew* he was doing the right thing, but if Harry got hurt...

A hand squeezed his. He tensed, but when he met Carmilla’s eyes, he calmed. Being nervous would only be a detriment to their plans.

The Werewolves would lure Magic to them. And then they would trap her here.

They were in a cave on the outskirts of the Light’s hideout. It wasn’t the preferred place to work magic on a deity, but it would have to do. Tom knew it would be hard to lure Magic away, and the smaller the distance, the more likely they would succeed.

They were counting on Magic’s soft spot for the werewolves to lead Her away from the battle. Some of the werewolves had gotten injured during the fight with the Light, and Magic would feel compelled to heal them. After all, it would only take a second.

But it would only take a second for Tom's blood to trap her.

They had made a circle of Tom's blood near the entrance of the cave. As soon as Magic couldn't move, they could complete the ritual.

She seemed to appear out of nowhere. She looked different. She was no longer pale; in fact, it seemed as if she was at the height of her power. Tom felt anger rising inside of him at her appearance; he knew she only looked well because she had been siphoning power from his Intended. She looked confident, and Tom couldn't wait to wipe that smugness right off her face. She was going to pay dearly for crossing him.

She was looking directly at Tom when his blood bound her. She let out an inhumane screech, blue light immediately filling the room and making his eyes hurt. He was forced to close his eyes, but luckily, the blood held, keeping Magic in place.

Once the magic faded, and his eyes were open once more, Tom strode in front of Carmilla, standing directly in front of Magic.

She looked different; her face was twisted in pain and her skin looked wispy once more. Behind him, the Vampire Elders were chanting a spell in a language he could not hope to understand. Power were imbued in the words, and it was obvious it was their spell that was taking its toll on Magic.

"Tom," Magic spoke before he could. "Tom, please, what are you doing?"

"What I should have done long ago," he said. He wasn't in the mood to gloat; he wanted to get this over with so he could go to Harry. He didn't get distracted by Magic, raising his wand and adding his own strength to the spell.

Chains were forming around Magic. A single bead of sweat ran down the side of his head as Tom concentrated; the spell was taking more out of him than any spell had done so before.

In front of him, Magic wasn't looking so nice anymore. The chains were burning the flesh they touched, and she was screaming. Tom took comfort in the fact, knowing that this meant the spell was working.

He had to do this fast. They couldn't hope to contain the deity if she got out.

Just as he was about to finish the last link, there was a cry from the Elders behind him. The blue light that had enveloped the room beforehand was suddenly back; it had rebounded from the end of the cave and was now on the Elders. Their concentration had wavered, and although Magic was still bound in place by his blood, she now had the ability to weave magic where she stood.

And the chains were no longer holding her down.

She looked furious, both of her hands up in the air as she tried her best to destroy them. Tom threw the force of his own magic behind the hasty shield he put up, the blue light rebounding off it, but coming back stronger. He didn't know how much longer he could hold it up.

But he didn't have time to worry, because Carmilla was stepping in front of the shield. Her cape was gone, and her hair undone, the curly tresses flying behind her from the force of the deity's

magic. She didn't look afraid.

Magic seemed to recognize her, her magic faltering in the face of Carmilla's appearance. "Carmilla," she breathed, and then Carmilla was casting magic of her own.

Tom didn't stay to watch them fight, instead turning to check in on the Elders.

They were old. And it seemed as if their age was going to be their downfall.

He hurried to their side, kneeling on the hard ground to prop the closest one up into his arms. There were gashes from where the blue magic had hit, and he didn't know if he could heal them.

"We'll need more blood," said the Elder, and Tom didn't hesitate, cutting his wrist and holding it above the Elder's mouth.

Blood dripped down, the blood that Magic had relied on so long and that reliance on it would give them the ability to cast magic against her.

That, and their knowledge of the world Magic had come from.

The ritual would be even more risky now. Tom could see the strain it had taken on the elders from the first cast, and he wasn't sure if they could survive the second.

But he knew better than to ask. This was a fight they could not afford to lose. If they couldn't survive a second cast, then they could not.

Their loss would be remembered.

He turned his attention back to the fight in front of them.

Carmilla was holding her own, but she was *losing*. Magic may be bound in place, but she was not weak.

Tom started to cast again. This time, even Tom felt the strain more acutely, and he knew that even he had to be careful.

But the charm had not warmed in his hand, and he had no clue on how Harry was faring. He didn't care about his own safety.

He just wanted vengeance.

And to get it, he had to bind Magic.

So he ignored the warning twinges of his magic and continued to cast.

Chains appeared above Magic, and when they fell, flesh burned once again. Immediately, the blue magic faded, and Carmilla stood above Magic. A second later, she added her own magic to the chains, lightening the load on Tom considerably.

That was enough.

There was a second right before the last chain fell into place that had the magic faltering, but as a cry behind him sounded, the spell completed.

Tom didn't dare look back.

Instead he stepped forward, past Carmilla and in front of Magic.

"To me, you are bound," he spoke, this time in Latin, and there was power in his words. Magic's head whipped up, her eyes wide and pleading as she stared at him. That completed the spell, and the chains disappeared in a flash, leaving Magic on all fours in front of him, collapsed in the face of her failure.

Tom slumped back, relief filling his body. They had bound Magic. She could never disobey him again and was a pawn once more.

He allowed himself one second of relief, before calling down on the ancient magic from the spell. Chains appeared, and they brought pain to Magic and would keep her trapped. Tom smiled at the sight.

Vengeance was sweet.

But he didn't stay to watch his success play out; Magic's punishment was secondary to Harry's safety.

He turned, and Carmilla met his eyes. Tears were running down her cheeks, but she didn't blame him for the Elder's deaths. They had known the cost, and they had paid it despite the cost being their deaths.

"They will be remembered," he promised.

Carmilla didn't say anything, and he didn't wait to say anything else.

He needed to save Harry.

He disappeared with a crack, his heart pounding as his magic transported him to his Intended.

Harry wasn't sure how much time had passed.

He didn't dare worry. He knew better than to lose himself in that. If he did, he feared he would never make it out.

He had to believe Tom was coming.

It started so softly that Harry missed it at first. The crack hadn't sounded, but there were footsteps sounding through the empty room he had been locked in.

It wasn't a prison. Dumbledore never would have been so foolish to lock Harry in a cage made with bars. He wondered if this was a remnant of the cage Dumbledore had locked Grindelwald in.

The door swung open before he could react. James stood there; Sirius' face visible behind his shoulder.

He didn't speak for a second, too shocked at the idea his twin brother had come for him.

"Jamie?" he asked, his voice shaky of disbelief, and James' eyes softened.

"Harry," was the answer, and James rushed through the door. The wards melted at his presence, and James was suddenly there, throwing his strong arms around Harry. "You're safe now," he promised. "Your Intended's out there, fighting."

He let out a sob of relief at the words, unable to stop himself at the thought that Tom was so near. It wouldn't be long now until it was all over, and he could once more rest in his Intended's arms. Tom would get the bracelet off. Tom was here now, to save him, to save them all.

Once James brought Harry past the wards, Sirius also brought him into a fierce hug. "Missed you," Sirius murmured, and Harry bowed his head further into the wizard's neck, glad that it was almost all over.

But of course, it wouldn't be that easy.

Tom was out there, fighting.

Not everyone else was.

The Hallway's light was diminished by a single figure.

James was shaking almost imperceptibly but Harry could feel it pressed up against him as he was. He felt weak, and James' figure was helpful to stay standing.

"Shouldn't you be out fighting, *sir*?" James' words rang through the hallway, and Harry knew immediately who was blocking their way.

He pushed away from James, loathe to show weakness against the one person he truly hated.

The single figure took a step forward, finally illuminated by the light. He looked the same as ever, with his grandfatherly look and his horribly out of fashion looks, but it still sent a chilling sensation down his spine.

Tom was dealing with something out there. That something had to be Magic, Harry knew that was their plan to deal with her and that would be the only thing to keep Tom from his side. Which meant they were on their own.

And while he trusted Sirius and his brother with his life, he knew Dumbledore could destroy them all without much trouble.

Harry still didn't have access to his magic, after all.

"Oh James," sighed Dumbledore. The disappointment in it was easy to hear and James flinched noticeably. Sirius stepped forward at the words, placing a calm, steady hand on his

Intended's shoulder. James took comfort from it, standing tall once more and slowly raising his wand to point directly at Dumbledore.

It was a clear gesture. James had chosen their side.

He was no longer Dumbledore's pawn.

Dumbledore seemed to realize the significance at the same time, judging by the way his face grew angry. His grandfatherly look was now gone, replaced by a man who was enraged.

"Do you know what you're doing?"

"Yes," replied James without an ounce of hesitation. "Now, more than ever. I know what I want, what I'm fighting for, not like back then. Not when *you* kept me in ignorance, when you made me a figurehead of a War I had no intention of fighting."

"I taught you everything I know," rebuked Dumbledore. "You are still my Heir."

James' expression never wavered, and his hand held steady as he held it pointed upright at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore's face hardened even more, and his gaze switched to Harry. The open disgust was clear. "You could've prevented this," said Dumbledore. "You could've been strong like me."

"You were never strong," said Harry, knowing that Dumbledore was referring to his denouncement of Grindelwald. "And I would never turn my back on Tom. Ever."

"I see my magic has failed you," said Dumbledore. "I thought I could've saved you."

"Saved me?" Harry blurted out before he could think the better of it, thanks to how much Dumbledore's words angered him. "You tried to warp my mind with magic."

"And think how much better you would've been if it worked," said Dumbledore. He sounded sad, as if he truly believed that his magic would have saved Harry.

As if Harry needed to be saved.

He scowled, about to let Dumbledore have a piece of his mind – something he had been looking forward to ever since he had to swallow his words to convince Dumbledore his magic had worked – when Dumbledore spoke again.

"James, kill your brother."

James froze. Harry and Sirius did the same, so shocked at Dumbledore's words that it took a moment to process.

The air immediately felt heavy from the magic of the vow.

Harry had once hoped that James had been lying. That the vow was something James had made up to explain his actions during the Tournament.

But he had lived in this Hideout and seen the effects of the vow on his brother.

It was real, and now it was going to make James kill him.

But James was shaking his head, even as sweat from disobeying the vow dripped down his forehead. "You lost your magic once because of me," said James. "It's only fitting that I lose my magic to save you."

"Jamie," he breathed, shocked at the conviction in his brother's voice and even more so at the sight of it in his brother's eyes. It wasn't something he could ever ask of his brother; he had never wanted retribution for that time in the Tournament. He would never wish something like that on his little brother. But it looked like his brother was going to pay the price anyway.

And it wasn't right.

But what else could he do?

His magic was bound, and it was taking all of James to hold himself back from listening to the vow. The most he could do was try to take Dumbledore's attention off James; perhaps with Dumbledore distracted, the vow wouldn't be as trying on James.

It seemed like Sirius had the same idea, because he had already drawn his wand, immediately firing off magic at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore easily deflected it, and although it was hard to tear his eyes away from the brutal fight that was ensuing through his friend and Dumbledore, James had fallen to his knees, his hands drawing blood from where he had dug his nails into his arms.

"Jamie," he called, his heart clenching, and James shook his head, his teeth gritted from the pain and tried his best to smile up at Harry.

"It's okay," he said, "It won't be much longer now."

Harry's heart clenched, but it wasn't as if he could do anything other than offer up his life to James. He never felt as useless as he did now; his friend doing his best to defend them and his *little* brother giving up his magic for him. He wished he could do something, anything to stop this from happening.

At first, Harry couldn't tell the room was shaking; he thought it was his sight becoming blurry out of the sheer desperation of hoping something would happen. He whirled around, watching as Sirius staggered and Dumbledore did the same, and knew it wasn't happening because of either one of them.

The earth was still shaking, and he didn't have much time to ponder on what exactly was causing it when James reached out and grabbed his hand.

Almost immediately, blue light enveloped him, just as it had during the Last Task. This time, the blue light was accompanied by a series of runes, traveling all along his skin and never stopping, and he felt even more powerful as he had last time. The bracelet fell off into pieces, shattering beyond the two pieces it had left last time, ensuring that it would never be rebuilt again.

And thankfully, this time, his veins didn't burn and there wasn't any pain accompanying the sudden emergence of magic. It wasn't as restricting as last time; he could reach into himself and grab his magic if he wanted.

But he didn't need to use his own magic, not when he could see the magic in the air, leftover from the spells Dumbledore and Sirius had been throwing at each other. There was magic everywhere; in the wards of the Hideout, in the objects left almost carelessly in the hallway, in the Vow hanging over James' head...

He reached out, angry, grabbing at the Vow and dissipating it almost immediately. James relaxed in relief, his breaths shallow and pained, and Harry spared a moment to smile at his brother.

After all, he knew there was nothing Dumbledore could do to him now. Not with magic coursing through his veins, not when he remembered how it had gone last time, when it had been simpler times and he had arced a lightning bolt straight toward his brother.

It hadn't harmed James, but this one *would* harm Dumbledore.

It was already forming, crackling and bright and blue, and he felt the hotness of his eyes as he turned to face Dumbledore and knew his eyes were shining with the same eerie blue that accompanied Magic.

Dumbledore had grabbed Sirius in front of him while they had all been distracted, intending to use him as a shield.

Harry had never been so angry at that exact moment. He had been beaten, tortured, and kept beyond his will because of this man. Dumbledore had been the single cause of everything that had gone wrong in his life, and Harry was not going to let him kill Sirius Black.

With his left hand he used magic to separate the two of them, leaving Dumbledore alone and defenseless. Dumbledore's eyes were hard as he put up a shield charm between the two of them, but a shield charm couldn't save him from the blue lightning bolt in Harry's hand.

He raised his hand to throw it...

And Dumbledore slumped over to the ground, dead.

Grindelwald was still shaking. He had dropped his wand after he had done the deed and then fallen to his knees.

But Tom didn't have any attention to spare for him. He didn't have time to wonder how Grindelwald had followed Potter or why Grindelwald suddenly decided he wanted to kill Dumbledore. He didn't tear his eyes away from Harry, his eyes drinking in the beauty that was his Intended.

It had been so long since he had seen Harry. Truly seen Harry with his own two eyes in person that it was taking all his effort not to go running toward him to sweep him off his feet.

But Harry hadn't noticed him yet. Harry was still glowing the blue of the Magic that had betrayed them, runes and characters shining on his skin and illuminating the walls around them. James was in Sirius' arms, both kneeling on the floor, leaving Harry the only one still standing.

And when he *finally* noticed Tom, his eyes were still glowing that eerie blue.

Tom let himself hesitate a second more, his horrified thoughts realizing that Magic had *still* gotten to his Intended even after binding her to her will, but then he didn't let that stop him for a second longer.

He had to hold Harry.

So he ran, past Grindelwald, past Dumbledore's crumpled body, past James and Sirius, until he was in front of Harry. He didn't hesitate as he wrapped his arms around his Intended, even though the magic could burn him – had done so before – but luckily, there was no pain, only warmth.

Harry's arms came up behind him, shaking but *real* and *there* and nothing like the last time Magic had spirited Harry to him, and Tom let out a shaky breath and held tighter, and thought he would never let Harry go. Never again.

Harry was his, and Harry belonged in his arms.

Harry could've killed Dumbledore. The blue magic had been there, sparking, just asking to be created into that arrow Harry had told him about before. It would've killed Dumbledore if it struck him, releasing James from the Vow and stopping his brother from losing his magic.

And unbeknownst to Harry, it would've saved him from Magic's machinations. He would never be sacrificed to open the path to Avalon.

There was a split second before Grindelwald raised his wand that Tom could've stopped him. He could've bound Grindelwald and stole that moment of vengeance from him. He could've let Harry kill Dumbledore, and thus render Harry safe.

But...

Magic was right when she had chosen Harry.

Harry wasn't meant to kill. It wasn't him. He would have regretted it for the rest of his life, and Tom never wanted Harry to go through anything he didn't want.

So he held tighter, and buried his face further into Harry, and forgot about Magic's plans for his Intended, and only thought about the fact that Harry was now safe and in his arms.

A few seconds passed before a muffled voice sounded, "Are you planning to hold me forever?"

Tom only held tighter at the amusement in his Intended's voice, loathe to let go even as Harry teased him.

Harry's voice was soft when he next spoke, "I don't want to let go either, Tom, but..."

At the sound of regret in Harry's voice, Tom reluctantly let go, meeting Harry's amused eyes with his own.

He was still glowing, the light now reflecting onto Tom and making him blue. Tom stared at it, a frown making his way onto his face at the reminder that Magic had done something.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, unable to keep the worry out of his voice. Harry heard it, and his smile grew. He shook his head and held tighter to Tom's hands.

"No," he said. "It's...I'm not hurt."

Tom was about to protest, because Harry was still glowing blue first off, when Harry continued.

"Not when you're here," he said, and gripped even tighter to Tom. There was a sheen of tears clouding those green eyes, and Tom couldn't help himself, taking one hand out of Harry's tight grip and cupping it to Harry's cheek.

He couldn't begrudge Harry's tears – they hadn't seen each other in so long, that if Tom was even more sentimental than he was he might be finding his own vision blurred. But no, he didn't want a single thing to mar his vision of Harry.

"Can I see it?" asked Harry, his voice soft. It felt as if there was no one else there, even though Tom was aware that Potter and Sirius were still kneeling on the floor. He only had eyes for Harry.

His heart full, he bowed his head, releasing the glamour with wandless magic. His soul mark glowed, mixing with the blue from Harry.

Harry's eyes softened even more, and this time, Tom didn't hold back as he drew his love into a deep kiss.

They had a war to win. People were still fighting aboveground.

But Dumbledore had been defeated.

And Harry was safe in his arms.

So Tom let the world melt away for a few seconds more as he lost himself in his Intended.

Chapter 13: Commission by blop of the confession scene



Chapter End Notes

thank you to eveiss for looking this over, please enjoy this gem of eve reading over my typos. thank you for the snark, eveiss is the best gryffindor and is SO BRUTAL and im so grateful love you

ME: Tom was about to protest, because Harry was still growing blue first off, when Harry continued.

EVE: Awww Harry's finally hitting his growth spurt??

IT'S ONE LETTER APART EVE I SWEAR!!

Anyway, thank you for reading! Please check out chapter 13 to see the commission by blop for the confession scene! it is absolutely BEAUTIFUL. (i also posted it right above here so people can see it and will probably delete it later).

also the warning for major character death is for dumbledore.

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