

Rebirth

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Rebirth

by [Athy](#)

Summary

Two boys grow up together in an orphanage, grow powerful at school, are torn apart by death and brought back together by rebirth. Horcruxes aren't the only way to live forever. Necromancy, reincarnation, HP/TR Slash dark!Harry.

Notes

Rating: T, but it will have some violence that will eventually earn an M rating.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Note that this story was first posted back in 2010 - so it's kind of old! 'Book 1' is in here, in its entirety, and 'Book 2' gets a number of chapters in as well. My time to write is super-duper limited these days, and it's been... probably 2 years, since the last time I updated, before dropping the big bomb of 'Book 2' chapters up, in August of '15. Do not go into this expecting to see an ending to the story any time soon, if ever. If I manage to write more, then I do. But I make no guarantees.

Rating: T, but it might eventually be changed to M

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not J K Rowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

Credits: **Just warning right out that the majority of chapter 1 is paraphrased from Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince by J K Rowling.**

The first batch of chapters that take place back in the 30's are very 'tell' and not 'show', most especially for the purpose of moving things along more quickly. Trying to cover several decades in as few chapters as possible requires skimming over a lot of stuff. I've tried to pick and choose my 'show' scenes and still keep them brief to keep things moving.

Summary: Follow the lives of two boys, both orphans, who grew up together with only each other to depend on as they suffered through fear and prejudice, and then the discovery that they were in fact, truly powerful, *magical*, people. Follow them as they form a bond that even death cannot break.

— — — — Rebirth Chapter 1 — — — —

In the middle of a terrible winter storm, on the thirty-first of December, 1926, a weak, sickly-looking woman, full with child, stumbled through the door of St. Ada's Children's Mission in London. She was already in labor, and the nuns and attendants of the orphanage quickly helped her into a room and called for a midwife.

She hadn't been there more than an hour before the baby was born. A boy, born with a thin dusting of pitch-black hair, black eyes, and precious features. He was a beautiful baby – a stark contrast to the woman who had birthed him, who few would ever claim a beauty. The woman lived just long enough to instruct the sisters to name him *Tom*, after his father, and *Marvolo*, after her father. And that he should carry his father's surname. *Riddle*.

Tom Marvolo Riddle.

And then she died. She never even told them her name.

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It was four months later that another young boy was brought to St. Ada's Children's Mission. They estimated he was probably about the same age as young Tom. He was brought in by the constable who informed the sisters that he was found in the arms of a dead woman in the park. The woman had no identification on her, and was dressed oddly. The only form of identification for either was an embroidered name on the baby's blanket. *Herakles*.

It was an odd name. One of the sisters recognized it from Greek mythology, although she didn't really know the specifics of the old myth surrounding the character. Just that he was a son of Zeus.

They had no last name to go with the first, so one of the nuns named him Herakles Jude, after St. Jude, the patron saint of desperate cases. Herakles, being such an odd name, was quickly shortened to Heri by the nuns.

The evening that young Heri was brought to St. Ada's, he was placed in the same cot at Tom since there were none other set up. They were the two youngest, the next being already two and a half years old. Funds being as tight as they were, the newest addition was left to share a cot with Tom for nearly two months before they bought in another. And yet, there was no rush. The two seemed perfectly content to share a bed.

Tom had always been a bit of an odd baby. Always so quiet. Never cried. Heri was different. He was the smaller of the two, but seemed to have twice as much energy. He was also the only one that Tom seemed to connect with at all.

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It was early July 1938, and Albus Dumbledore was walking briskly down the streets of London towards an old, gray-stone building with a tall wrought-iron fence around it. The sign on the gate read St. Ada's Children's Mission, London, England.

Dumbledore's long auburn hair and beard blew slightly in the breeze. He was wearing a rather flamboyant suit made of plum velvet and was drawing the shocked and bewildered gaze of the people on the street that he passed. He made his way up the small pathway to the front door and knocked. He was greeted by a young girl whose eyes widened considerably as she took in the old man's appearance.

"Good afternoon. I have an appointment with a Mrs. Cole, who, I believe, is the matron here?"

Oh," said the bewildered-looking girl who still seemed rather stunned by the man's eccentric appearance. "Um. . . just a moment . . . MRS. COLE!" she bellowed over her shoulder.

Dumbledore stepped into the shabby, but spotless hallway and waited with a calm smile on his face. Before the front door had closed behind him, a skinny, harassed-looking woman

came scurrying toward them. She had a sharp-featured face and was talking over her shoulder to another aproned helper as she walked toward Dumbledore.

". . . and take the iodine upstairs to Martha, Billy Stubbs has been picking his scabs and Eric Whalley's oozing all over his sheets — chicken pox on top of everything else," she said to nobody in particular, and then her eyes fell upon Dumbledore and she stopped dead in her tracks, looking as astonished as if a giraffe had just crossed her threshold.

"Good afternoon," said Dumbledore, holding out his hand. Mrs. Cole simply gaped.

"My name is Albus Dumbledore. I sent you a letter requesting an appointment and you very kindly invited me here today."

Mrs. Cole blinked. Apparently deciding that Dumbledore was not a hallucination, she said feebly, "Oh yes. Well — well then — you'd better come into my room. Yes."

She led Dumbledore into a small room that seemed part sitting room, part office. It was as shabby as the hallway and the furniture was old and mismatched. She invited Dumbledore to sit on a rickety chair and seated herself behind a cluttered desk, eyeing him nervously.

"I am here, as I told you in my letter, to discuss one Tom Riddle, and one Herakles Jude, and arrangements their future," said Dumbledore.

"The both of them? Are you family of either?" asked Mrs. Cole.

"No, I am a teacher," said Dumbledore. "I have come to offer Tom and Herakles a place at my school."

"What school's this, then?"

"It is called Hogwarts," said Dumbledore.

"And how come you're interested in these two?"

"We believe they have qualities we are looking for."

"You mean they've won a scholarship? How could they have? They've never been entered for one."

"Well, they have both had their names down for our school since birth —"

"The both of them? They're close, but I know they're not related. They both came to use at different times, even. It's hard for me to imagine that two boys here would both be down for your school. Who put their names down? Their parents?"

It was quickly becoming obvious that Mrs. Cole was an inconveniently sharp woman. Dumbledore subtly withdrew his wand from the pocket of his velvet suit, at the same time picking up a piece of perfectly blank paper from Mrs. Cole's desk.

"Here," he said, waving his wand once as he passed her the piece of paper, "I think this will make everything clear."

"That seems perfectly in order," she said placidly, handing it back. Then her eyes fell upon a bottle of gin and two glasses that had certainly not been present a few seconds before.

"Er — may I offer you a glass of gin?" she said in an extra-refined voice.

"Thank you very much," said Dumbledore, beaming.

It soon became clear that Mrs. Cole was no novice when it came to gin drinking. Pouring both of them a generous measure, she drained her own glass in one gulp. Smacking her lips frankly, she smiled at Dumbledore for the first time, and he didn't hesitate to press his advantage.

"I was wondering whether you could tell me anything of Tom Riddle's and Herakles Jude's history? How the two came to be in your care. You said they came at different times?"

"That's right," said Mrs. Cole, helping herself to more gin. "Tom came first. I remember it clearly, because I'd just started here myself. New Year's Eve and bitter cold, snowing, you know. Nasty night. And this girl, not much older than I was myself at the time, came staggering up the front steps. Well, she wasn't the first. We took her in, and she had the baby within the hour. And she was dead in another hour."

Mrs. Cole nodded impressively and took another generous gulp of gin.

"Did she say anything before she died?" asked Dumbledore. "Anything about the boy's father, for instance?"

"Now, as it happens, she did," said Mrs. Cole, who seemed to be rather enjoying herself now, with the gin in her hand and an eager audience for her story. "I remember she said to me, 'I hope he looks like his papa,' and I won't lie, she was right to hope it, because she was no beauty — and then she told me he was to be named Tom, for his father, and Marvolo, for her father — yes, I know, funny name, isn't it? We wondered whether she came from a circus — and she said the boy's surname was to be Riddle. And she died soon after that without another word. Well, we named him just as she'd said, it seemed so important to the poor girl, but no Tom nor Marvolo nor any kind of Riddle ever came looking for him, nor any family at all, so he stayed in the orphanage and he's been here ever since."

Mrs. Cole helped herself, almost absentmindedly, to another healthy measure of gin. "Heri came some months later. The constable brought him in. It appeared his mother died in the park while holding him. Someone found something fierce wailing in the arms of a dead woman. Brought him here. His blanket had his name 'Herakles' on it, but nothing else. The woman didn't even have any papers, so we had no idea what surname to give him. One of the girls gave him the name Jude."

She swallowed down another bit of gin as she paused. Two pink spots had appeared high on her cheekbones. Then she said, "They're odd boys, those two."

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "I thought they might be."

"Thick as thieves, too. Never go anywhere without the other. But the other children don't want much to do with them... They're... odd."

"Odd in what way?" Dumbledore asked gently.

"Well they –"

But Mrs. Cole pulled up short, and there was nothing blurry or vague about the inquisitorial glance she shot Dumbledore over her gin glass.

"They've definitely got a place at your school, you say?"

"Definitely," said Dumbledore.

"And nothing I say can change that?"

"Nothing."

"You'll be taking them away, whatever?"

"Whatever," repeated Dumbledore gravely.

She squinted at him as though deciding, whether or not to trust him. Apparently she decided she could, because she said in a sudden rush, "They scare the other children."

"You mean they're bullies?" asked Dumbledore.

"I think they must be," said Mrs. Cole, frowning slightly, "but it's very hard to catch either of them at it. There have been incidents. . . . Nasty things ..."

Dumbledore did not press her, though it was clear that he was interested. She took yet another gulp of gin and her rosy cheeks grew rosier still.

"Billy Stubbs's rabbit. . . well, Tom said he didn't do it and I don't see how he could have done, but even so, it didn't hang itself from the rafters, did it?"

"I shouldn't think so, no," said Dumbledore quietly.

"But I'm jiggered if I know how he got up there to do it. Even with Heri's help... and Heri gave him an alibi, but we all know that's nothing to really go on. All I know is he and Billy had argued the day before. Tom insisted the fight was because Billy was picking on Heri. And then" — Mrs. Cole took another swig of gin, slopping a little over her chin this time — "on the summer outing — we take them out, you know, once a year, to the countryside or to the seaside — well, Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop were never quite right afterwards, and all we ever got out of them was that they'd gone into a cave with Tom and Heri. They swore they'd just gone exploring, but something happened in there, I'm sure of it. And, well, there have been a lot of things, funny things. . . ."

She looked around at Dumbledore again, and though her cheeks were flushed, her gaze was steady. "I don't think many people will be sorry to see the back of them."

"You understand, I'm sure, that we will not be keeping them permanently?" said Dumbledore. "They will have to return here, at the very least, every summer."

"Oh, well, that's better than a whack on the nose with a rusty poker," said Mrs. Cole with a slight hiccup. She got to her feet, and remained surprisingly steady, even though two-thirds of the gin was now gone. "I suppose you'd like to see them?"

"Very much," said Dumbledore, rising too.

She led him out of her office and up the stone stairs, calling out instructions and admonitions to helpers and children as she passed.

"Here we are," said Mrs. Cole, as they turned off the second landing and stopped outside the first door in a long corridor. She knocked twice and entered.

"Tom? Heri? You've got a visitor. This is Mr. Dumberton — sorry, Dunderbore. He's come to tell you — well, I'll let him do it."

Dumbledore entered the room and came within the view of two young boys. The smaller of the two was sitting cross-legged on the floor with a book in his lap and his eyes widened comically as he took in the old man's appearance. The other, who was sitting on the edge of his bed, looked over Dumbledore and narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

Mrs. Cole closed the door and the group was left in silence for a moment. Both boys looked quite similar. Black hair, although the one sitting on the bed had his combed back very neatly and styled while the smaller one on the floor's hair seemed to be a bit more crazy and insistent on fighting against the forces of gravity.

The boy on the floor quickly began to scramble to his feet, setting the book on the small bed behind him, against the opposite wall.

"How do you do?" said Dumbledore, walking forward and holding out his hand.

The smaller boy who was already on his feet glanced briefly at the one still sitting on the bed, before turning back to the eccentric-looking man and hesitantly taking his hand and shaking it.

"Are you Herakles or Tom?"

"I'm Herakles," the boy said slowly. His eyes were slowly narrowing.

Tom hesitated a moment longer before standing up and taking Dumbledore's hand as it was offered again. Dumbledore drew up the hard wooden chair and sat down in it, as the two boys sat down, side-by-side on the bed that Tom had occupied a moment early.

"I am Professor Dumbledore."

"Professor?" repeated Tom. He looked wary. "Is that like 'doctor'? What are you here for? Did she get you in to have a look at us?"

He was pointing at the door through which Mrs. Cole had just left.

"No, no," said Dumbledore, smiling.

"I don't believe you," said Tom. "She wants us looked at, doesn't she? Tell the truth!"

He spoke the last three words with a ringing force that was almost shocking. It was a command, and it sounded as though he had given it many times before.

Tom's eyes had widened and he was glaring at Dumbledore, who made no response except to continue smiling pleasantly. After a few seconds Tom stopped glaring, though he looked, if anything, warier still.

"Who are you?" Heri asked in a cold voice.

"I have told you. My name is Professor Dumbledore and I work at a school called Hogwarts. I have come to offer you a place at my school — your new school, if you would like to come."

Tom's reaction to this was most surprising. He leapt from the bed and stood directly in front of Heri in a defensive position, separating the small boy from Dumbledore, and looking furious.

"You can't kid me! The asylum, that's where you're from, isn't it? 'Professor,' yes, of course — well, we're not going, see? That old cat's the one who should be in the asylum. We never did anything to little Amy Benson or Dennis Bishop, and you can ask them, they'll tell you!"

"I am not from the asylum," said Dumbledore patiently. "I am a teacher and, if you will sit down calmly, I shall tell you about Hogwarts. Of course, if you would rather not come to the school, nobody will force you —"

"I'd like to see them try," sneered Tom.

At this point, Heri had managed to grab a hold of Tom's forearm and was pushing him to the side. Tom looked down at him and the two's eyes connected. Neither said a word, but it almost seemed as if a silent conversation had passed between the pair because Tom gave a small growl and sat back down on the bed beside Heri.

"Hogwarts," Dumbledore went on, as though there had been no interruption at all, "is a school for people with special abilities —"

"I'm not mad!" Tom snapped.

"I know that you are not mad. Hogwarts is not a school for mad people. It is a school of magic."

There was silence. Tom had frozen, his face expressionless, but his eyes were flickering back and forth between each of Dumbledore's, as though trying to catch one of them lying. Heri's face seemed to shift from shock to realization to elation.

"Magic?" Heri repeated in a whisper.

"That's right," said Dumbledore.

"It's. . . it's magic, what we can do?" Tom said.

"What is it that you can do?"

"All sorts," breathed Tom. A flush of excitement was rising up his neck into his hollow cheeks; he looked fevered. "We can both move things without even touching them. Heri disappeared from the grounds and appeared up on the roof," he paused and glanced over at the smaller boy who was nodding his head in acknowledgment. "I can make animals do what I want without training," Tom continued breathlessly. "I can make bad things happen to people who annoy us. People who try to hurt Heri. I can make them hurt if I want to."

Tom's hands were shaking now and he bowed his head, looking down at them for a moment before clasping them in his lap. "I knew I was different," he whispered to his own quivering fingers. "I knew we were special. Always, I knew there was something."

"Well, you were quite right," said Dumbledore, who was no longer smiling, but watching Tom intently. "You are both wizards."

Tom lifted his head. His face was transfigured: there was a wild happiness upon it, yet his finely carved features seemed somehow rougher, his expression almost bestial. His head turned and he looked at Heri sitting beside him, who was looking awestruck. Their eyes met and a wild grin spread across Heri's face.

"Are you a wizard too?" Heri asked, turning back to Dumbledore.

"Yes, I am."

"Prove it," said Tom at once, in the same commanding tone he had used when he had said, "Tell the truth."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "If, as I take it, you are accepting your places at Hogwarts —"

"Of course we are!" Tom shot back.

"Then you will address me as 'Professor' or 'sir.'"

Tom's expression hardened for the most fleeting moment before he said, in an unrecognizably polite voice, "I'm sorry, sir. I meant - please, Professor, could you show me - ?"

Heri sent a side-along glance at Tom and smirked slightly before masking his face and giving an equally polite smile to the Professor.

Dumbledore drew his wand from an inside pocket of his suit jacket, pointed it at the shabby wardrobe in the corner, and gave the wand a casual flick.

The wardrobe burst into flames.

Tom and Heri both jumped to their feet howling in shock and rage. But even as Tom rounded on Dumbledore, the flames vanished, leaving the wardrobe completely undamaged.

Tom stared from the wardrobe to Dumbledore; then, his expression greedy, he pointed at the wand. "Where can I get one of them?" Heri's eyes were also drawn directly to the small wooden stick Dumbledore held in his hand although his expression was less greedy and more awestruck.

"All in good time," said Dumbledore. "I think there is something trying to get out of your wardrobe."

And sure enough, a faint rattling could be heard from inside it. For the first time, Tom looked frightened. Dumbledore watched as Heri's eyes widened in horror and he swallowed thickly watching Tom with worry appearing on his face.

"Open the door," said Dumbledore.

Tom hesitated, then crossed the room and threw open the wardrobe door. On the topmost shelf, above a rail of threadbare clothes, a small cardboard box was shaking and rattling as though there were several frantic mice trapped inside it.

"Take it out," said Dumbledore.

Tom took down the quaking box. He looked unnerved.

"Is there anything in that box that you ought not to have?" asked Dumbledore.

Tom threw Dumbledore a long, clear, calculating look.

"Yes, I suppose so, sir," he said finally, in an expressionless voice.

"Open it," said Dumbledore.

Tom took off the lid and tipped the contents onto his bed without looking at them. Once free of the box, they stopped quivering and lay quite still upon the thin blankets.

"You will return them to their owners with your apologies," said Dumbledore calmly, putting his wand back into his jacket. "I shall know whether it has been done. And be warned: thieving is not tolerated at Hogwarts."

Tom did not look remotely abashed; he was still staring coldly and appraisingly at Dumbledore. At last he said in a colorless voice, "Yes, sir."

Dumbledore turned his gaze on Heri, expectantly. The smaller boy swallowed again and nodded his head. "Yes, sir."

"At Hogwarts," Dumbledore went on, "we teach you not only to use magic, but to control it. You have — inadvertently, I am sure — been using your powers in a way that is neither taught nor tolerated at our school. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, to allow your magic to run away with you. But you should know that Hogwarts can expel students, and the Ministry of Magic — yes, there is a Ministry — will punish lawbreakers still more severely. All new wizards must accept that, in entering our world, they abide by our laws."

"Yes, sir," said Tom and Heri simultaneously.

It was impossible to tell what Tom was thinking; his face remained quite blank as he put the little cache of stolen objects back into the cardboard box. When he had finished, he turned to Dumbledore and said baldly, "We haven't got any money."

"That is easily remedied," said Dumbledore, drawing two leather money-pouches from his pocket. "There is a fund at Hogwarts for those who require assistance to buy books and robes. You might have to buy some of your spell books and so on secondhand, but —"

"Where do you buy spell books?" interrupted Tom, who had taken one of the heavy money bags without thanking Dumbledore, and was now examining a fat gold Galleon. Dumbledore handed the other to Heri who quickly opened it and placed two coins, a Galleon and a Sickle, on his palm, observing the differences.

"In Diagon Alley," said Dumbledore. "I have your lists of books and school equipment with me. I can help you find everything —"

"You're coming with us?" asked Tom, looking up.

"Certainly, if you —"

"We don't need you," said Tom at once. "We're used to doing things for ourselves. We go round London on our own all the time. How do you get to this Diagon Alley — sir?" he added, catching Dumbledore's eye.

Dumbledore handed Tom, and then Heri the envelopes containing their lists of equipment, and after telling the two of them exactly how to get to the Leaky Cauldron from the orphanage, he said, "You will be able to see it, although Muggles around you — non-magical people, that is — will not. Ask for Tom the barman — easy enough to remember, as he shares your name —"

Tom gave an irritable twitch, as though trying to displace an irksome fly.

"You dislike the name 'Tom'?"

"There are a lot of Toms," muttered the boy. Then, as though he could not suppress the question, as though it burst from him in spite of himself, he asked, "Was my father a wizard? He was called Tom Riddle too, they've told me."

"I'm afraid I don't know," said Dumbledore, his voice gentle.

"My mother can't have been magical, or she wouldn't have died," said Tom, more to himself than Dumbledore. "It must've been him."

"So — when we've got all our stuff— when do we come to this Hogwarts?" Heri asked, drawing attention away from Tom's mutterings.

"All the details are on the second piece of parchment in your envelope," said Dumbledore. "You will leave from King's Cross Station on the first of September. There is a train ticket in there too."

Heri nodded and Tom's attention was finally drawn back from the contemplative mode it had been in moments earlier. Dumbledore got to his feet and held out his hand again.

Taking it, Tom said, "I can speak to snakes. I found out when we've been to the country on trips — they find me, they whisper to me. But Heri can't do it. Is that normal for a wizard?"

"It is unusual," said Dumbledore, after a moment's hesitation, "but not unheard of."

Dumbledore's tone was casual but his eyes moved curiously over Tom's face. They stood for a moment, man and boy, staring at each other. Then the handshake was broken, and offered to Heri. It was a much briefer interaction, although young Heri was clearly scrutinizing the elder wizard with narrowed, suspicious eyes. Finally, he broke as well and a moment later Dumbledore was at the door.

"Good-bye, Tom; Herakles. I shall see you at Hogwarts."

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Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

----- Rebirth Chapter 02 -----

The pair spent a great deal of the next month and a half making their way through London and visiting Diagon Alley.

Tom was always good with managing money, and Heri was good at spotting deals. Tom wanted them both to look their best, but also acknowledged that neither of them had much and that, what was given to them was likely all they would get for the whole year. Their most notable splurge was their outer robes, since that was what everyone would see and Tom insisted that appearances were everything. The rest of their clothes, their books, trunks, cauldron, scales, and telescope were all secondhand. They found a shabby looking apothecary down a rather dark and questionable-looking alley called 'Knockturn', that sold most of the potion ingredients cheaper than the main apothecary on Diagon Alley.

The very first thing, that the two of them purchased were their wands. Tom had gotten his first. About thirty minutes of trying out various wands had passed before the old man, Ollivander, had matched Tom with a yew wand, 13 ½ inches, with a Phoenix feather core.

Heri's search for the perfect match took even longer though, and as nearly an hour had passed, he was beginning to look seriously dejected. Ollivander, in contrast, looked more excited by the moment and kept muttering about 'tough customers'.

Finally, he gave Heri a long piercing look before glancing over to Tom and back again.

"The two of you aren't brothers are you?" he asked.

The two blinked in surprise before informing him that they were *not* brothers – not biologically anyway.

Ollivander muttered a bit under his breath for a moment as he went back in the store and came out with a box identical to the one that Tom's wand had come from. Heri took it and felt

a surge of warmth through him, gave a small smile, and with a quick flick, the wand shot out a shower of green sparks, the same color as his eyes.

Ollivander looked most pleased, while Heri just looked relieved that he had finally been matched with a wand. Ollivander then went on to explain that the wand that had chosen Heri was the brother wand to the one that had chosen Tom. The two wands were different wood types – Tom's was Yew, while Heri's was Holly – but the cores were identical. Both of them had come from the same phoenix, and were the only two feathers that particular bird had ever donated to wand crafting.

The two boys seemed pleased with this discovery and had quickly paid the wandmaker before leaving the store to continue their exploration of their new world.

In addition to shopping and the exciting exposure to a whole new magical culture, Diagon Alley also featured a public library. The two boys spent a great deal of time there, trying to learn as much about the Wizarding World as they could manage before starting their new lives at Hogwarts.

It also had the added benefit of getting them away from the orphanage, and any excuse to get away from there was welcome.

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September 1st finally arrived and the two made their way to King's Cross Station, onto the hidden magical platform, and boarded the bright shiny red train. The two kept to themselves for the long ride to the school, were greeted in the tiny wizarding village of Hogsmeade by a bent old wizard named Ogg, and led across the lake in boats. After a brief wait in a small anti-chamber, all of the first years were called into the Great Hall and lined up down the center as a ratty old hat on a stool began to sing a song.

Then, one-at-a-time, their names were called and they went up, sat on the stool, and were sorted into their houses.

"Jude, Herakles." Dumbledore called out, and Heri gave one last hesitant glance at his one and only friend before making his way up to the front and sitting down on the stool.

The hat had been upon his head for less than 30 seconds before the rip in the front opened up and it called out *"SLYTHERIN!"*

A spattering of students sitting at the Slytherin table clapped politely for him as he strode towards it with as much confidence as he could muster. As soon as he sat down, his eyes were instantly drawn to Tom's and gave him what he hoped was an encouraging smile.

It felt like ages passed before Dumbledore finally called out the name, "Riddle, Tom."

Tom made his way up with his chin held high and smooth confidence in his strides. He sat down on the stool and let the hat fall over his head. It had barely touched his head at all when the hat called out *"SLYTHERIN!"*

Heri heaved a relieved sigh and began to clap enthusiastically the moment the hat was removed from Tom's head.

The other boy smirked lightly at Heri as he confidently began to walk to the Slytherin table. However there was very little clapping from anyone else. Many of the older students were observing him with narrowed eyes and a few sneered at him. Tom noticed this, of course, but pointedly ignored it as he came to stand beside Heri, who was shoos the boy beside him to scoot over and make room.

The sorting finished after two more children and after a very brief word from Headmaster Dippet, the feast was served and everyone began to eat and converse.

The scowls and upturned noses, aimed at Tom continued and finally Heri, having noticed it, turned to Tom and whispered. "What is their problem with you?"

"It's my name," Tom said in a low voice with a carefully concealed angry glint in his eyes.

"What? What's wrong with your name?"

"It's *muggle*. They think I'm a muggleborn, or at least a half-blood."

"Why the hell would that matter?" Heri hissed angrily.

"This is Slytherin house, Heri. Did you even read the books I gave you?"

"Of course I did!" Heri responded indignantly. "But I don't read as fast as you do... nor do I remember every bloody word I read."

"Salazar Slytherin despised the muggles. It's why he left the school," Tom explained in a slightly exasperated voice. "His house stands for blood purity. People with impure blood aren't very welcomed here."

"So why aren't they glaring at me? For all they know, I'm a half-blood or even a muggleborn. I don't know *anything* about my parents."

"Yes, but *your* name isn't quite so muggle."

"Herakles? It's bloody *Greek*. It's *weird*."

"It's not weird. You were named after a *god*, Heri. It's a fantastic name. And at least it's not *muggle*." Tom said with a grimace.

"What's wrong with Tom? I like your name. Thomas... that's a really nice name."

"My name isn't Thomas, it's *Tom*," he responded with a mild sneer.

Heri snorted. "Yeah, well my name isn't Heri, but that's what everyone actually calls me. You could be Thomas if you wanted."

"In what way is Thomas *less* muggle than Tom? Besides, it isn't *Tom* that they're sneering at. It's *Riddle*. It's not a magical surname."

"And Jude is?"

"Perhaps Jude *is* a magical surname." Tom pointed out. "We don't actually know."

"True, but even if it is, I'm not related to them. Jude isn't really *my* name; it's some random bloody saint one of the damn matrons named me after."

"But *they* don't know that."

"That's the point! They don't know anything about us, and yet they're judging you! Chances are that at least one of your parents were magical. Marvolo sounds like a wizarding name. And that was your grandfather's name, right?"

"On my mother's side, but she couldn't possibly have been magical. She *died*." Tom sneered.

"Being a witch or wizard doesn't make you immortal, Tom."

"She could have used magic to save herself."

"You have no idea what had happened to her. Maybe she was so ill that she couldn't save herself, even with magic."

"It's pointless to waste time theorizing about all this," Tom finally said, cutting off the conversation.

Heri sighed and shook his head, refocusing on the mountain of food placed before him and eagerly digging in.

"What are we going to do about them?" Heri asked after a few minutes had passed, as he made a movement with his head towards the older Slytherins who had been glaring and scowling at Tom earlier.

"Slytherin valued two things. Blood, and power," Tom said simply with his chin turned up slightly. "I will simply prove myself as powerful enough to earn their respect."

Heri smirked a bit and nodded his head.

—

While Hogwarts was a significant improvement over the orphanage, it was far from being an easy life for the pair. At the orphanage they at least had their *unique* skills to intimidate the other children into leaving them alone, or obeying their orders. They had no such advantage here. In fact, as first years, they were some of the weakest in the school. But out of their year mates, they were clearly the strongest.

They were both at the tops of every one of their classes, often bouncing back and forth between first or second place depending on the class. Tom, however, was more often in first,

but he was also more competitive and had the most amazing ability to remember almost everything he read, word-for-word – a skill that Heri often coveted, but accepted he would just have to live without.

The pair stayed at the school for winter holidays since there was no way they'd go back to the orphanage for the 3 week break. Their gifts for each other were simple as neither had much spending money for frivolous things. One of their housemates gave Heri and Tom both a box of chocolates in appreciation for help they'd given her on her Transfiguration work. Rather, Heri had insisted to help her, and Tom had simply grudgingly gone along with it.

Another housemate had given Tom a couple books in thanks for assistance he'd lent him, and it was at this point that Tom first began to fully comprehend how beneficial it could be to him to 'help' those in his house with their studies. The Slytherins were mostly old pureblood families, and many of them were quite wealthy. These children were spoiled and had easy access to untold riches in their home libraries. More often than not, the children had grown up with easy, constant, access to a veritable mountain of books and knowledge, and had disregarded just how valuable it was. They discarded the books as if they were worthless, but Tom and Heri as well, realized just how much power resided in knowledge.

Tom spent a great deal of the second term worming his way into the esteem of the more powerful, influential, and *wealthy* of his housemates, and Heri followed right behind.

While there were still many who openly disliked Tom due to his assumed blood status, the fact that he was sorted into Slytherin was often used to argue the fact that he couldn't possibly be a muggleborn – because *no muggleborn would ever be sorted into Slytherin* – and even if he was a halfblood, he was still powerful.

His performance in classes and all of his and Heri's extracurricular studying had put them leagues ahead of their classmates. Tom and Heri were even frequently found helping Lucretia and Walburga Black, who were cousins and who were a year ahead of them.

The Blacks were a powerful old family, and, at least the branch that Walburga came from, were staunch blood purists. The fact that even *she* could move beyond Tom's questionable blood status and ask for his assistance, was enough to open up most of the rest of the house to treating him with the respect that he was so fully convinced he fully deserved.

—

The end of first term, and return to the orphanage was a dark time for the two young wizards. While they had both done remarkably well on their exams, and the fact that Slytherin had won the house cup was in large part due to all of the points the two of them had gained in classes through the course of the year, any joy derived from these facts was lost as they departed the train and began to make the journey through London, back to the orphanage.

They were not greeted warmly.

The older children taunted them and shoved them around. Tom and Heri couldn't even fight back since the Ministry had added an extra layer of wards around the orphanage during the course of the year, now that it was known that two magical children resided there. The wards,

while theoretically there to 'protect them', were really there to protect the muggles. They would detect any and all acts of magic performed there, even the 'accidental' kind – the *wandless* kind – that they had been performing, unknowingly, before Dumbledore had come to tell them about magic a year earlier.

They had been warned before leaving the school that any use of magic outside of school was strictly forbidden, and any use of magic against a muggle would not only result in expulsion, but could even get them in trouble with the law.

Now that the two had absolutely no way to directly fight back at all they were practically sitting ducks.

Tom managed to track down and acquire a couple snakes and often used them to attack and intimidate the other children, but Heri couldn't speak to snakes like Tom could. He was also still the smaller of the two, and the older boys often singled him out and used him as their personal punching bags. Tom tried to be there to protect his friend, but he couldn't always be there. And this frustrated and angered him.

It was a long and miserable summer, and by the end of it, Tom was committed to finding some way to avoid ever having to go back again.

—

The return to Hogwarts in September was a monumental relief. The pair quickly slipped back into the routine that they had developed over the course of the previous year. All of their teachers loved them, except for Dumbledore, who seemed eternally suspicious of the pair. Tom would never forgive himself for allowing his mask to fall so utterly in the aged wizard's presence, but Heri tried to reassure him that one suspicious old man didn't matter in the greater scheme of things. Dumbledore was a powerful wizard – there was no denying that – but he was just one man, and Tom and Heri had the rest of the faculty tightly wrapped around their little fingers.

Their head of house, Horace Slughorn was especially smitten with the two of them. Tom was the most outgoing and dominant of the pair and as such drew the most attention. Not only the attention of the staff, but also the students.

While, the previous year, their fellow classmates had learned to appreciate Tom and Heri's value in academic pursuits, they began to appreciate them in other areas this year. Tom and Heri were more than academically accomplished, they were also magically powerful. The most powerful in their year by a significant margin. A dueling club run by the Defense Professor Merrythought, spanned multiple years, and in 2nd year Tom and Heri were finally able to attend. They easily wiped the floor with quite a few students several years above them. This attracted a following to the two of them. Their roommates, Walter Gibbon,

Aldous Baddock and Casper Crouch took to sitting with the pair during meals, and joining them to study sometimes in the library. Even Druella Rosier began to sit with them, and she had been quite cold their first year.

It was during one of their study sessions in the library that Tom stumbled across a book that would bring about an obsession that would last for years.

"Heri!" Tom exclaimed in an excited whisper as he came rushing around the row of the shelves he had been sequestered away in for the last hour. Heri looked up from his book, blinked twice and sighed, wondering what Tom had found now. There were exceedingly few things that got Tom excited enough to show it. Normally the boy kept his emotions tightly locked away inside, opting to instead display a polite, respectful, young man, rather than the fiercely ambitious, aggressive, and admittedly, often times rather cruel, boy that he truly was. But aside from his rather dark underbelly, Heri was privy to Tom's protective, possessive, and absolutely brilliant side as well. And while possessiveness might not be seen by many as a very positive character trait, Heri found he didn't mind it much.

Tom had a tendency to collect things, and anything he considered 'his', he protected with a ferocity beyond description. Heri had grown accustomed to being one of Tom's treasured 'things' and found he actually liked the position.

"What is it, Tom?" Heri said with an air of exasperation, but mostly resignation.

"This isn't the same as usual, Heri! This is really incredible!"

"Of course it is," Heri said in a slightly condescending tone that instantly earned him a hard glare. Heri shifted his expression to an innocent smile and Tom rolled his eyes and huffed.

"Look at this," Tom said, dropping an open book on the table in front of Heri and pointing to a passage.

Heri looked down and quickly began to skim it. His brows furrowed slightly for a moment before they rose into his hairline and his eyes widened dramatically.

"Parseltongue?" Heri asked, looking up at Tom.

"Yes! That's what I can do! My ability to speak to snakes! It's called parseltongue! And it's a blood trait. The only family line that has ever been known to carry it is the Slytherin line!"

"So you're descended from Slytherin?" Heri gasped.

"Yes!"

"That's incredible..." Heri said in an awed whisper.

"But there's more!" Tom reached down and flipped a few pages further in the book and let his finger jab down violently on one of the paragraphs. "Read that."

Heri turned his eyes back down to the book and began to read the passage. Slowly his eyes widened again before he finally finished and looked back up at Tom.

"The Chamber of Secrets? You think it really exists?"

Tom gave a curt nod. "I do. And if I'm his descendant, I'll be able to open it. I can continue Salazar Slytherin's noble work!"

"You mean rid the school of the mudbloods?" Heri whispered back quietly while darting his eyes around for an instant to make sure they wouldn't be overheard.

"Of course!" Tom snapped. "They're filth and they have no right being here."

"Tom, for all we know, *I'm* a mudblood." Heri responded with a pointed look.

Tom scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. You're at least a halfblood. With a name like Herakles? What muggle names their child Herakles? Besides you and I are far too powerful to be mudbloods."

Heri sighed and shook his head, but smiled slightly at the other boy. "Fine, fine. So what – you want to try and find the Chamber of Secrets?"

"I *will* find it."

Heri chuckled. "Awfully confident, aren't we?"

"When have I ever failed to accomplish something when I set my mind to it?" Tom asked with a smug smirk.

—

Tom had always hidden his ability to speak to snakes after the way Dumbledore had reacted back when they'd first learned of the wizarding world, but now that he realized what it was and what it meant, he had no hesitation in allowing the other Slytherins become aware of his unique skill.

Any hesitation that had remained among the older Slytherins in regards to showing Tom any respect thanks to his unknown blood status vanished with the first demonstration of his parseltongue ability.

It was kept solely within the students of Slytherin house, but word quickly spread that Tom Riddle was most likely the heir of Slytherin. A title, which he had no hesitation in propagating.

Tom and Heri easily stayed at the top of their classes, and Tom continued to milk his newfound fame and respect while building alliances among their housemates, and every free moment was spent searching every inch of the school for any signs of the Chamber.

The year passed quickly and before they knew it, the summer was drawing near. With only a month left to go until the end of term, Tom approached their head of house, Horace Slughorn, to see if there was anything he could do, so that he and Heri could remain at Hogwarts over the summer. Slughorn didn't think there was, but suggested that he bring the matter to the Deputy Headmaster and inquire with him.

At that point, Tom felt a weight settle into the base of his stomach. The Deputy Headmaster was Dumbledore, and Dumbledore's dislike for both Heri and Tom was an indisputable fact.

Finally, building up his resolve, Tom scheduled a meeting with Dumbledore to discuss his concerns with he and Heri returning to the muggle orphanage over the summer. Tom refused to admit to the shame of being weak in the face of muggles, so instead used the excuse of the growing turmoil in muggle Europe.

The Nazi's had taken Czechoslovakia just a few months earlier in March. And the Nazi's had just signed the 'Pact of Steel' with Italy. Everyone knew the British were going to be signing an alliance pact with Poland soon, and would be mobilizing forces soon.

The excuse did not seem to fly with Dumbledore at all. It was clear that he did not believe a muggle war was the reason for Tom's hesitation to return to the muggles. The fact was that he believed it was nothing more than prejudice in play. That Tom and Heri did not like to return to the muggle orphanage because they believed themselves better than their muggle fellows. And while that was actually true, the reason Tom did not wish to return was entirely based on the abuse the two suffered at the hands of the children and their caretakers.

In the end, Dumbledore didn't even take Tom's request to the headmaster and had instead simply refused it, outright.

Bitter and angry, Tom returned to the dungeons, cursing Dumbledore's name under his breath.

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Rebirth Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 03 -----

Once again, Tom and Heri easily completed their finals with top marks. Unfortunately with the end of term finals, came the *end of term*, and a return to muggle London.

When they returned to St. Ada's Children's Mission, they were greeted with a sight that horrified the both of them. Father Lucas was back. The man had gone on a mission out of country for several years, and both Tom and Heri had hoped the man would never come back. But here he was.

The two tried to stay under everyone radar, and succeeded for several days. They would escape into London and spend as much time as they could manage at the public magic library off Diagon Alley. But one week after their summer holidays began, the inevitable happened.

Tom tried to always stay by Heri's side. Separating them made them weaker. Together they were stronger. But today, for some reason, the two were not together. Tom was making his way through the large, gray, stone building, looking for Heri so that the two of them could leave and head into London, but he was nowhere to be found.

He was walking down a deserted hallway when he heard muffled whimpering coming from behind one of the doors. He turned and instantly knew which door it was. Father Lucas' door. And that only meant one thing. One of the unfortunate boys of the orphanage was currently enduring the man's perverse desires.

Tom quickly turned to leave, intent on getting far away as possible before he drew undesired attention to himself when a louder yelp caught his ear.

Tom felt the blood in his veins turn to ice. It was Heri.

He spun around, threw the door open, and ran inside. There he saw Heri being pressed against the wall with his pants down around his ankles, Father Lucas' knee pressed firmly between his legs and Heri's hands wrists held tightly by one of the large, filthy man's sweaty

hands. Tears were streaming down his face while the man's other hand was planted firmly over his mouth.

"GET AWAY FROM HIM YOU FILTHY MUGGLE BASTARD!" Tom bellowed as his hand flew up and a burst of wandless magic sent the man flying across the room and smashing against the wall.

—

While Tom had saved Heri that day, his actions only brought about a mountain of problems that followed them through the rest of the summer.

First Tom received a letter from the Ministry of Magic informing him that they had detected use of magic in the presence of a muggle. It was only a warning, but if he got a total of three warnings, he could be facing expulsion from Hogwarts, and if any muggles were ever badly hurt by him, he could be facing legal prosecution.

But that was only the start of the trouble. The week following Tom's attack on Father Lucas, he was taken, forcibly, out of his and Heri's room, in the dead of night by a group of clergymen and some of the older boys from the orphanage. Several more stayed behind to restrain Heri.

Heri learned later that they had taken Tom to perform an exorcism on him. The boy refused to tell Heri any of what was done to him, but Heri could tell that Tom was both furious and shaken by the experience.

Heri knew that Tom was also ashamed by the whole experience. Being unable to use his magic to fight back made him feel weak and helpless and that was a feeling that utterly infuriated Tom. While at Hogwarts they were both so powerful and quickly gaining a tremendous amount of respect. But once back in the muggle world, they were just weak, helpless boys again. Now even more unable to defend themselves than before thanks to the Ministry's increased security wards.

After the incident with Father Lucas, Tom refused to allow Heri to go anywhere without him. Outwardly, Heri acted as if he were annoyed by the whole thing, but he had to admit that he felt a lot safer knowing Tom was there with him. He too had been shaken by his encounter with the priest and what had almost happened.

The two made it a point to spend as little time near the orphanage as humanly possible, and it was with great relief that they traveled to King's Cross station on the morning of September 1st.

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Their third year at Hogwarts was productive in many ways, and also frustrating in others. They had begun attending what was called the 'Slug Club'. It was a gathering of students who were seen as having the potential to be powerful or influential in the future, by the Slytherin Head of House, Horace Slughorn. It wasn't solely made up of Slytherins though – but rather anyone and everyone who was seen as having vast potential.

Heri and Tom being invited was both surprising and not. Being orphans, they had no familial connections to power or prestige, but that made the accomplishment of getting the invitation to attend, that much more valuable. It showed that they had both garnered Slughorn's attention entirely on their own merits.

Tom's power and influence in Slytherin house continued to grow, and Heri was seen as his right-hand man and received almost as much respect by association. They continued to excel in their classes, and were evening matched with the sixth years in Merrythought's Dueling Club.

This was also the year that Tom first managed to start conning the teachers into giving him access to the restriction section of the library – which had been a highly fruitful endeavor.

One endeavor that continued to fail to produce results, however, was the search for the Chamber of Secrets. They continued to comb the school in search of anything that could lead them to the secret Slytherin chamber, but turned up nothing. They had found the secret entrance to the kitchens, knew where the entrances were to the other three house common rooms, had found a secret passage way behind a mirror on the second floor that seemed to lead into Hogsmeade village. But no signs of the Chamber of Secrets.

They stayed over the Yule holidays and used the three weeks where the castle was nearly deserted to continue their search. Tom and Heri also used it to raid the restricted section of the library.

They had managed to get a signed permission slip from Professor Merrythought for an extracurricular project they had volunteered to do over their holiday. They actually had their 'project' done the first week, but continued to spend their days in the library, using it as an excuse.

Second term continued on much like the first. Professor Slughorn continued to invite the pair of them to Slug Club dinners, Tom continued to grow his base of respect and awe among the Slytherins, as well as spend a great deal of time delving into the Dark Art's books he found in the restricted section. And Heri was there by his side at all times.

Once again, as finals drew near, Tom tried to convince his professors to allow him and Heri to remain in the castle over the holidays. However it seemed that Dumbledore was even more suspicious of him now. It seemed he suspected something about Tom's and Heri's frequent explorations into the restricted section of the library, and thought they'd simply use the unsupervised nature of the summer to take further advantage of it. So he was once again, turned down.

That summer was one of the worst ever. Some of the older boys who had taunted them in their youth had grown quite large, and very violent during their months away from London. Tom and Heri both found themselves on the receiving end of their fists and kicks. At one point, Tom was so badly injured that Heri had apparated them to St. Mungo's out of desperation. The act had earned Heri a warning of his own, both for performing under aged magic, but also for apparating without a license.

Tom had yelled at Heri afterwards – telling him he was a fool for getting such a warning on his record and risking expulsion, but Heri had only yelled back, telling Tom that he'd do it all over again, the consequences be damned. He would never stand by and watch Tom dying.

It seemed to take a bit for it to sink in, but Tom had, in fact, almost died. And once it really did occur to him just how close he had come to death, he seemed to become consumed by a powerful and almost irrational fear of death.

Tom was such an ambitious person. He had so many things he wanted to do. Things he wanted to learn. Things that he couldn't do if he died young.

The two managed to get an invitation to visit the Black family house in London thanks to Lucretia. While there they were introduced to her younger brother Orion who would be starting Hogwarts that September. After dealing with the pleasantries that were mandated by polite pureblood society, Tom and Heri were finally free to explore the Black Family Library.

Lucretia hung on Heri's every word, and it was clear to Tom that she was developing a crush on the smaller, delicate, teen, and yet Heri himself seemed utterly oblivious. Tom wasn't sure how he felt about Lucretia paying his friend so much attention. On one hand, it had gained them access to the Black Family's collection of Dark Arts books and a temporary escape from the orphanage during the summer. On the other hand, whenever she would hang onto Heri, or place her hand on his arm, or his shoulder, a small, angry demon seemed to emerge from Tom's chest and all he could think about was how badly he wanted to make her hurt for daring to touch what was *his*.

Lucretia and Orion's mother, Melania, seemed a bit smitten by Tom's charms, and this turned out to be a tremendously beneficial occurrence. While looking through the library, Tom and Heri came across several books that they were practically drooling over – if they were tactless enough to do such a thing... which of course, they *weren't*. But just the same, they desperately wanted them. Removing them from the family library, however, did not seem to be an option.

It was at that point that Melania had offered to make copies of the books for them. Tom had played the part of the polite, impressed, and disparately appreciative young man, and spent the time asking polite and intelligent questions about the process involved in copying a book. It wasn't at all a simple spell, and the fact that Melania was able to perform it so fast and with such perfect results, just showed that she was truly a powerful witch.

In the end, the pair spent four days in Black Manor before September 1st arrived and the four of them took the floo to King's Cross and onto Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$.

Heri found Orion to be interesting enough. He was a bit eager for a Slytherin, but Heri couldn't blame him for being excited, seeing as how this was his first year attending Hogwarts.

While on the train, they met up with Cygnus, Orion and Lucretia's cousin, and the younger brought of Walburga. Walburga was made prefect that year, so she merely deposited her younger brother in their compartment and left with her nose in the air. Tom did not wish to be rude to the family that had taken him and Heri in for the last week of their holiday, and who

had given them free copies of several incredibly rare and fascinating books on a wide range of subjects, but he really had no desire to spend the train ride with a couple of first years. He and Heri managed to excuse themselves as politely as possible, and went to find the compartment that had their year mates, Walter Gibbon, Aldous Baddock, Casper Crouch, Duella Rosier, Astraea Malfoy, and Chthonia Carrow.

Tom's appearance drew all of their attention directly to him. Their eyes were filled with awe and respect and Heri could feel the smug elation pouring off of his friend and smirked at him. He had come a long way from being the 'mudblood of Slytherin'. Heri also knew that this was exactly what Tom needed, after two months of subjugation under the filthy orphanage muggle's fists.

The train ride passed quickly enough and the group of fourth years took the carriages up to the castle. The first years were sorted, and as expected, both Orion and Cygnus were sorted into Slytherin house. The feast was filled with conversations about summers spent traveling abroad, or spent with private tutors hired by their parents. Tom and Heri remained silent during most of this. There were a few who asked them questions about any news on the muggle war. Being sequestered away in the magical world beneath mountains of ancient wards, very few of them had any exposure at all to what was going on in the muggle world and their war.

The previous December had marked the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, so the Americans were now deeply embroiled in the war along with the rest of Europe. There had been air raids from the Germans in Britain for months, and they had targeted London quite a number of times. Nothing had gotten close enough to the orphanage for Heri or Tom to be directly impacted, but the uneasy air that had surrounded the city has still managed to effect them.

Tom dodged most of the questions, insisting that the muggle's problems were no concern of his, and he would gladly sit back and watch them all destroy themselves with their bombs and their planes.

September first had fallen on a Friday that year, so they had Saturday and Sunday to rest and prepare before classes on the 4th. Heri and Tom took advantage of that time to sequester themselves away with the books they'd gotten from Black manor. The one that Heri would come to treasure the most was a Necromancer's Grimoire. The book would end up consuming a vast amount of time for Heri during the next year and beyond.

One of the books that Tom had gotten was the first book that he had ever encountered the term, *Horcrux*. It was a book on soul magic, that only discussed the theory behind the Horcrux, but it was more than enough to spark a powerful interest in Tom. His close call with death over the summer had brought him face to face with his own mortality, and the more he thought about it, the more determined he became to utterly defy death.

Again, another year began to pass by with surprising speed. The pair continued to search for the Chamber of secrets, and continued to not finding it. They did, however, find something else incredible.

It wasn't even during one of their searches of the school when the discovery was made. Heri was alone, wandering the castle late in the evening past curfew. He had his grimoire with him

since he had been cross-referencing something in it with a book in the restricted section of the library – again, somewhere he wasn't actually supposed to have been, and didn't have permission to be in. He had heard a noise outside the library and had disillusioned himself just in time to slip past the caretaker and begin to race down the halls to escape. He had, however, rounded a corner just in time to see one of the Professor's turning into that corridor from the far end. He had instantly doubled back and ended up racing up the stairs in his attempt to avoid detection.

All the way up to the seventh floor, he had run. Encountering Peeves, *another* professor, and the caretaker *again*, all in his travels.

Heri knew that he'd be in trouble if he was caught, but that he would be in even *bigger* trouble if he was caught with *that book* in his possession. Necromancy was strictly forbidden by the British ministry, and even owning such a book could get him into a world of trouble. He was finally getting so desperate that all he wanted was to find a place to hide the blasted book, so he could retrieve it later when there were fewer people patrolling the halls, when a door suddenly appeared on a stretch of blank wall that he'd doubled back in front of in his attempts to avoid detection.

Heri gaped at the door that hadn't been there for a few seconds, stunned by its sudden materialization out of nowhere, when he heard footsteps from down the hall behind him. He quickly pulled the door open and stepped inside. Little did he know, as soon as he'd stepped inside, the door on the outside vanished, completely hiding him inside.

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"It was *filled* with junk!" Heri whispered excitedly. "And books! So many books! All sorts of questionable, and banned books! You've got to see it!"

"And it was in the seventh floor corridor opposite the tapestry of Barnaby the Barmy?" Tom asked.

"Yes!"

"We *searched* there. There was nothing there."

"I think the trick is that you have to walk back and forth in front of it needing something. I needed a place to hide my book and suddenly there's this room filled with things that other students *obviously* wanted to hide as well. I mean, it wasn't just books that could have gotten them in trouble, there were tons of broken things, and even an axe with dried blood on it! Loads of the objects in there looked incriminating. I bet I'm not the first person who wanted to *hide* something who stumbled across it."

"We'll definitely have to check it out..." Tom mused thoughtfully. It made him wonder what other things they may have missed in their searches just because they didn't walk past something more than once, or speak the right words, or mentally *think* the right thing while they were there. It was utterly frustrating to think that he could have gone right past the Chamber's entrance already and just missed it because he didn't do the right silly trick.

But no... he was sure that there would be some sort of sign. Something that only one of Slytherin's descendants would be able to see, or identify, or activate. He just had to keep trying.

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"You're always reading that book..." Tom griped quietly as the two of them sat on their respective beds that were placed directly next to each other in the Slytherin dorm room. They were the only ones there – the other's opting to attend the Gryffindor – Slytherin Quidditch match that was currently being played.

"It's fascinating," Heri said in a muffled voice, as his face remained buried in the book.

"No doubt. But there are *other books* as well."

Heri looked up and rolled his eyes. "I know that. However *this* book is more interesting right now. There's just so many... concepts I'd never considered. The way it describes the spirit plane, and the course that souls take, and rebirth... it's just fascinating."

Tom snorted. "Rebirth. *Ridiculous*."

"What do you mean?"

"Sounds like nothing but speculation and religious nonsense to me."

"It's nothing like that. And it's not speculation. Necromancers are able to transport their consciousness to the spirit plane. They can commune with the dead, and *have* been speaking with them for thousands of years. There are volumes of documented studies conducted by Necromancers in their surveys of the spirit realm and the experiences of the souls that exist there.

"The truly powerful of them can actually call the soul of a dead person back into the physical plane and if they're powerful *enough*, they can even reattach that soul to a living body! Although it's rarely effective in the long term, and it's seen as a defiance against nature to attempt such an extreme act with the intention of maintaining it since it upsets the balance and goes against the natural flow of life, death, and rebirth; but for brief returns, it's possible. They've made a study of learning all the aspects of the spirit plane, the journey the soul takes upon death, and the process of being reborn; how long it usually takes before a soul is considered cleansed and allowed to return to the physical plane... It's a powerful art that's been in practice among Necromancers for thousands of years. The reason most people don't know about it is because they hold their secrets tight. Only those studying the necromantic arts under a necromancer master are supposed to ever gain access to a grimoire like this. I wonder how this thing ended up in the Black library..."

"Perhaps one of the Black's ancestors was a necromancer." Tom suggested.

Heri nodded his head slowly. "That's the best I can figure as well. He probably died unexpectedly though because a Necromancer is supposed to guarantee that his grimoires end up in the hands of another necromancer, or that they're destroyed."

"That's the book that Mrs. Black couldn't copy, right?" Tom asked after a silent moment of contemplation.

"That's right. I'm still shocked she let me keep it."

"You *did* notice the look on her face when she saw you reading it, didn't you?" Tom asked, narrowing his eyes.

Heri looked up and blinked in confusion. "What look? I didn't see any look..."

"When she saw you flipping through that book she looked shocked," Tom mused slowly. "I got the distinct impression that she didn't expect any of us to be able to even *open* it, let alone read it."

Heri's brow furrowed and he looked down at the book for a moment. He closed it, set it down on the floor in front of him and looked across at Tom. "Okay, you pick it up and open it."

Tom rose a single brow as if he had just been given a challenge and stood up from where he had been sitting on his own bed. One stride was all that was necessary to come standing beside the book. He bent over and picked it up. He began to pull the cover open, but was instantly met with resistance. He narrowed his eyes, focused on a buildup of his powerful dark magic and tried harder. Finally he managed to pull the book open, but suddenly came up short as he discovered the pages blank.

"It's blank." he said flatly.

"What?" Heri gasped as he stood up and darted over to Tom's side.

He looked over Tom's shoulder and frowned at the book as he took it from Tom's hand. He closed the book, and reopened it without any trouble. Suddenly all of the pages were once again filled with text and drawings.

"Well, that's curious," Tom mused.

"What do you think it means?" Heri asked, still frowning in confusion at the book.

"Well, don't they say skill in Necromancy goes through families? Perhaps, in order to read from that book, you have to have descended from a necromancer."

"Or maybe, in a past life, I was a necromancer!" Heri exclaimed.

Tom gave him a flat look for a moment before rolling his eyes. "Sure. In a past life. Personally, I think it's more likely that one of your parents or grandparents was a necromancer."

"You just don't have any faith in the afterlife."

"As far as I'm concerned, there's no legitimate evidence that we don't just blink out the moment we die."

"Well, if I can become a necromancer, then I'll be able to provide you with proof." Heri said, tilting his head up indignantly.

"No, that's the problem. Necromancers cannot *prove* anything that they have supposedly 'discovered' in their journeys into the other plane. They can just tell people what they experienced and we have to take their word for it. I don't work that way."

Heri huffed and rolled his eyes. "Fine. Then why don't you try to become one too and then we can explore the spirit plane together. If you see it for yourself, then you'll be convinced."

"Well, if that blank book was anything to go by, I may not have the correct biological or magical affinity for it." Tom said, sneering disdainfully at the book.

Heri scoffed. "As if that would stop you from mastering it anyway."

Tom looked up at him and smirked. "You do know me, so well."

—

The remainder of their fourth year passed in a whirlwind. The two paid frequent visits to the Room of Hidden Things, as they had dubbed the mysterious magical room that Heri had stumbled across that year.

They had both come to the conclusion that it was an utter treasure trove for them. People had lost, or hidden a great many things in the school, and a fair amount of those things were *valuable*.

Of course, the illicit books were a severe boon to them. There were so many books on every imagining dark subject, hidden away in there – no doubt from students who didn't want to get caught with them, much like Heri's own reason for having discovered the room. The difference was that the owners of those books had apparently never figured out how to get back into the room to retrieve their things later.

One day while in there, Heri had discovered someone's old school trunk, still completely full. From the homework lodged inside the book bag, they determined that it was about 15 years old. It was filled with clothes of a high quality, and had belonged to a Slytherin. The robes even fit Tom perfectly, while being a bit long and a tad loose on Heri. They had divided them up between the two of them, so that they could have some fine-looking clothes for once. Tom was the one who suggested that the room of hidden things probably had some sort of charm on it that preserved everything within it, exactly as it had been when placed there, since they discovered nothing in the room that was molding or disintegrating, despite the presence of some cauldrons still filled with failed potions, and even a few boxes of chocolates.

Harry had almost eaten a couple cauldron cakes before Tom stopped him, waved his wand over them, and with wide eyes, instantly banished them. Heri had looked at him questioningly until Tom replied that they had had Amortentia in them – the world's most powerful love potion.

Heri had swallowed thickly at that, and vowed not to ingest *anything* found in the room. Even with the preservation spells, there was no telling what would have happened if he had ingested expired love potion.

In addition to keeping all of the fine robes, and a complete set of 5th and 6th year textbooks from the abandoned trunk, they also kept the *trunk* itself. The student who had owned it was undoubtedly from a wealthy family that spared no expense in regards to their son. The trunk had several compartments. The first compartment *looked* normal, but had a false bottom with an expansion charm. Pull the bottom up and out and suddenly you're looking down into a space twice the size of the trunk. The second and third compartments were normal sized, and appeared depending on how many times you turned the key before opening it. Close the lid, turn the key twice, open the lid, and you've got the 2nd compartment. Close the lid, turn the key three times, open the lid, and you've got the 3rd compartment. It was undeniably handy.

Heri allowed Tom to claim it, since they shared everything anyway, and he knew Tom would appreciate having a fine, expensive-looking trunk more than he would. Heri cared less about appearances than Tom did, plus Tom also had an image to uphold with the other Slytherins, as the heir of their house's founder.

In all, their trips to the Room of Hidden Things was very fruitful for the two magical orphans. Tom had filled the expanded hidden bottom of the trunk with anything and everything that appeared valuable, with the intent of pawning most of it off that summer for additional spending money. And their book collection had grown considerably.

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Rebirth Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 04 -----

Summer came and the pair returned to London. Their first week back, they made several trips to Knockturn Alley, and primarily to a store there called 'Borgin and Burkes', which was basically a pawn shop for dark or questionably legal items. The man was a real scoundrel and tried to scam them on quite a few items by barely offering them even a quarter of the item's value, but Tom never fell for it, and would go through several rounds of bartering before he parted with anything.

The two spent most of their days either at the wizarding public library, or at this little pub and in down Knockturn, called Monte's Inferno. They would sit at one of the booths towards the back, order a few drinks – usually Butterbeer since, despite the establishment's questionable clientele, the bartender still refused to serve a 'couple of kids' fire whiskey – and they would spend their afternoon reading some of the books they had taken from the Hidden Room.

They spent as little time as possible at the orphanage. Now that they had a reasonable savings of money, they could afford to buy their lunches and dinners elsewhere on a daily basis, and had no need to even return to the orphanage for their meals. They were at the orphanage just long enough to sleep, bath, and leave again. As such, they became very familiar faces among the regular customers and the shop owners on Diagon and Knockturn Alley's – although mostly the latter.

Despite their attempts to keep as distanced as possible from the muggle world, the events going on around them were impossible to ignore.

Eisenhower had arrived in London the last week of June to begin planning the American's efforts in Europe with the other Allied Forces. The Germans had besieged Sevastopol earlier in June, and by July 3rd, they'd taken it and began to drive towards Stalingrad. The air raids over London continued, as well as countrywide rationing of food and supplies.

Word was tricking in from time to time about some Nazi camp called Auschwitz, where the German's were mass-killing all the Jews and the Gypsies they had managed to round up over

the last few years of their occupation of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and surrounding countries.

The Jews, Tom didn't seem to give a damn about, since they were 'just muggles', but the gypsies were another matter all together, since a vast many of them were actually witches and wizards, or squibs.

Tom had managed to get his hands on some sort of 'scientific paper' in relation to what the Nazi's were doing with the Jews, in addition to killing them all off, that is. It was called 'Eugenics' and the concept fascinated Tom to an almost frighten degree. When Heri had finally grown a bit frustrated with the whole thing, he'd asked why the hell Tom was so obsessed with some stupid muggle science? Tom had gotten that look in his eyes that would scare the daylights out of anyone else, but usually just made Heri a tad bit wary, since he usually associated it with something that would come and bite him in the ass later, and he would be forced to do damage control.

Tom had informed him that Eugenics was the 'applied science or the biosocial movement which advocates the use of practices aimed at improving the genetic composition of a population,' usually referring to human populations. When Heri had just blinked at him dumbly, Tom had rolled his eyes, made a small, frustrated growl in the base of his throat, and then spent several *hours* explaining how it could be used by wizards to solve a lot of their blood purity issues. That this Eugenics was basically just a new incarnation of a lot of Salazar Slytherin's ideals.

Heri didn't really see the connection, since the whole thing was derived from the muggle genetics science, which he, admittedly, knew very little about. But Tom had explained in an excited voice about how it was all about bloodlines and heredity. All about breeding, and weeding out the weakest traits.

The Nazis apparently had started sterilizing anyone who they deemed unfit to breed. Tom had then suggested with that excited, frightening, gleam in his eyes, that they could simply sterilize all the muggleborns and then there would be no risk at all of any contamination from their filthy blood.

Heri didn't know what to make of it all, and honestly, wasn't sure he had the mental capacity to think about it at all. What he *did* allow himself to worry about, were the stories of a powerful German wizard named Grindlewald, that was using the muggle war as a cover to conceal his incredibly fast rise to power. Tom, however, seemed rather excited by this, since the German wizard seemed to be mostly fighting for the rights of the oppressed Dark Wizard minority, and as far as Tom was concerned, that was a cause worth fighting for.

Heri couldn't disagree with that, but he worried that Grindlewald's efforts were becoming to open and obvious and his actions would risk exposing them all to the muggles. Tom had scoffed, insisting that the muggles were too blind, and too preoccupied with their little war to see a snidgit flying two inches in front of their own noses.

In the end, the summer had been blissfully uneventful, and it was once again time to return to Hogwarts.

The pair was entering their fifth year, and Tom had received word in his Hogwarts letter that summer that he had been chosen as the male Slytherin Prefect. Heri had been very proud of his friend, and his accomplishment. When it came to ride the train to Hogsmeade, Tom had been hesitant to leave Heri behind in order to attend the prefect meeting and Heri had scoffed before shooing him out of the compartment. Outwardly, Heri tended to act annoyed or irritated at Tom's overprotective tendencies, but inwardly, he was actually rather touched that Tom hadn't wanted to leave him behind, even though being made a Prefect fell right in line with his goals for notoriety and respect.

Heri had spent the first few hours of the train ride with Lucretia, Orion, and Cygnus Black since he hadn't spent much time with any of them during the last term. Walburga was there for a moment in the start, but quickly left to go to the Prefect's car. Lucretia was a year above Tom and him, while Orion and Cygnus were only just now starting their second year. They shared no classes, and even their free periods didn't line up. When Tom returned from his duties patrolling the train, he dragged Heri off to the compartment that housed a selection of their year mates. Walter Gibbon, Casper Crouch, Astraea Malfoy, and Chthonia Carrow.

Duella Rosier had been made the other prefect for their year, and while she dropped in to say something to Tom, she didn't stick around.

Stories were exchanged about their summers, and Casper and Walter both seemed to be awestruck by Tom and Heri spending almost the whole summer hanging out in Knockturn Alley. It seemed that Walter's mother still refused to even let him set foot in the Alley, even with his father, and Casper had only ever gotten to go there a few times, and of course, always with a parent.

Astraea acted as if it were nothing at all, and kept her nose properly in the air, like a Malfoy should, but Chthonia kept hanging onto Tom and gushing over him, as if he were god's gift to wizarding kind. Heri couldn't help but find himself extremely annoyed by this and by the time the train arrived in Hogsmeade, he was glaring daggers at the bushy-haired girl. Tom didn't exactly look like he was enjoying her particular form of attention either, but her family was nearly as wealthy as the Malfoys were, and she had developed a tendency the previous year to buy Tom rather extravagant gifts – usually rare books, which was always a fantastic way to get onto Tom's limited good side – and Tom wasn't about to blow such a valuable resource. He was more than capable of pretending to be polite and charming when in annoying situations since as far as he was concerned, most of his life was an annoying situation.

The train arrived and the group took the carriages up to the castle. They met up with the rest of their year mates and all sat down in an orderly fashion at the Slytherin table; a stark contrast to the rowdy nature of the Gryffindors.

Tom sneered disdainfully at their behavior and turned to Heri.

"You'll never believe who they made head boy," he drawled with an obvious edge of derision.

"Who?"

"Charlus Potter," Tom spat.

Heri grimaced. "Bloody hell. Well, it's not much a surprise is it? He *is* Dumbledore's favorite." Heri turned and watched the Gryffindors for a moment, barely managing to contain his snickers as one particularly enormous third year accidentally caused the bench to wobble precariously when he sat down on it, and causing the boys to his left to fall off.

"Stupid oaf," Heri chuckled quietly under his breath.

"He's just a filthy half-breed. It's disgusting that they allow his sort even to attend." Tom sneered.

—

Term quickly got into full speed and the two easily settled back into their school routines. Tom was extremely well respected in Slytherin, and Heri by extension. Having become Prefect only added to Tom's respect level. It also added to his authority, something that really only added to his already powerful, smug sense of self-importance. Heri was only amused by it though, and he was happy for his friend.

When Tom did his prefect rounds, Heri would continue with his study into the Necromantic arts. Tom still scoffed at most of it, so Heri relegated most of his study to times when Tom was busy with something else. The only time Tom had shown any interest at all in his Necromancer's Grimoire was when Heri had told him about the section he'd found on reanimating corpses to create inferi. Heri considered it the most bare and simple form of necromancy though and held very little respect for it. He was far more interested in the control and manipulation of the spirit plane and its inhabitants.

Months passed and Heri and Tom were both frequently invited to Slug Club meetings with their head of house. In mid November Professor Slughorn announced that he was going to throw a big Yule party that year, the last week of term. There would be live music, dancing, and lots of mingling. And of course, there would be lots of people invited who were old students of the Professor – all former members of the Slug Club who had gone on to lead powerful and influential lives.

It was invitation only, but if you were asked to the dance by someone invited, you could attend. Since both Heri and Tom received invitations, the female population of Slytherin, and quite a few Ravenclaws as well, began to fawn over the two boys, all hoping to be allowed to attend the dance with one of them.

It wasn't the first time that people had fawned over either of them, of course. The girls were always hanging all over Tom, although he usually managed to turn down their advances in a polite and charming way. Heri rarely bothered with being charming *or* polite about his dismissals. He was usually a rather quiet and aloof personality in Slytherin house, so when approached by some giggling girl, he would usually just raise a single brow and give them a cold, hard look, that seemed to question their sanity for bothering to approach him. Tom seemed amused by this. While Heri was huffing in frustrated annoyance at their persistent advances, Tom's eyes would dance with mirth and amusement.

But Heri simply wasn't interested in any of those girls. They were all annoying, simpering, bubble-headed bints as far as he was concerned. None of them were up to par, intellectually.

He certainly couldn't carry on an intelligent conversation or debate with any of them. Not a one of them interested him at all, and he found he wasn't even the slightest bit attracted to any of them either.

And so by the time the dance rolled around, he had decided to simply go stag, because he wasn't wasting his time with some stupid girl who would just fawn all over him all night long.

Tom had invited Astraea Malfoy, since she was too poised and proud to spend the night hanging all over him, and *giggling* was beneath her. Tom had no actual interest in her at all, and Heri knew that, and yet he still got the oddest twisting feeling in his gut as he watched Tom and Astraea dance.

—

The Yule holidays finally arrived and the school emptied of its chaos-creating populace. Tom, once again, took advantage of the empty school and three solid weeks without classes, to continue his search for the Chamber. Heri went back to the Room of Hidden Things to go digging through more of the books and things contained within it. It was a cathedral-sized room with an incredibly tall ceiling. He knew it had to be space expanded because it could simply *not* fit inside the school, given the size and shape of this part of the castle from the outside. It also meant that no matter how many times he visited it to go digging about, there was always something more to find the next time he came back.

He'd collected a sizable stack of books to look through and slipped them into space-expanded knapsack he'd discovered in the Room months earlier. He'd just left the room and was about to head back down to the Grand Staircases when he had a bit of an epiphany. He turned back and looked at the blank wall and thought about how he activated the room. He walked past it three times while focusing on the thought, 'I need a place to hid things' and it would appear. But he wondered suddenly, what it would do if he needed something *else*.

He'd been wishing for a place where he could practice necromancy skills. It was a banned Dark Art and he was worried that performing any of the more advanced spells would get him caught by the school's wards, and he obviously couldn't do it over the summer since he was still underaged.

He began to walk back and forth in front of the blank wall while thinking, *'I need a room where I can practice really Dark Arts and not get caught'*. On his third pass, a door appeared. It was a different door than he was used to though, and his eyes grew wide with excitement and his heart began to race in his chest.

He pulled the door open and went inside. It was a large, empty room with columns along the dark stonewalls. The only things in the room were three dummies, standing in a row along one wall. Mustering up his determination, Heri took out his wand, aimed it at one of the dummies and cast one of the darker curses that he and Tom had learned from one of their many Dark Arts books. The usually only practiced that one in the Forbidden Forest, aiming at trees. The spell impacted the dummy and a wide, deep gash appeared across its abdomen, and rubbery-looking bits in the shape of intestines, spilled out and onto the floor with a thud.

Heri stood frozen for a moment before he ran to the door, poked his head out, and looked around cautiously, wondering if anyone was coming to expel him.

No one came. After fifteen minutes, he went back into the room and gleefully began practicing away. Tom was going to be so excited!

—

"I found it!" Tom exclaimed with the most powerful, maniacal, accomplished gleam Heri had ever seen in his eyes.

Heri blinked at him. "Found what?"

"The Chamber!"

Heri gasped. "You're kidding!"

"No! I found it!"

"Where?" Heri hissed as he stood up from his bed and hurried over to Tom who was standing in the entrance to their room.

Tom laughed humorlessly. "Oh, it's the most ridiculous place. It's in a girls lavatory!"

"You're kidding!"

"No. The girls lav on the second floor. One of the sinks doesn't work. On the faucet is a tiny snake. A little parseltongue and the sinks all moved to the side to reveal a large pipe."

"Have you gone down?" Heri asked, suddenly feeling a bit left out.

Tom gave him a very small smile. "Not yet. I wanted to wait and bring you with me.

A relieved smile spread across Heri's lips. "Thanks... Oh! I've discovered something rather incredible too!"

"Oh?"

"Yeah, you know how we activate the Room of Hidden Things?"

"Yes?"

"Well, if you think something else, instead of 'I need to hide something', you get a different room. I tried thinking 'I need a place to practice Dark spells and not get caught', and I got this huge warded practice room with target dummies that simulate the wounds the spells cause."

Tom's eyes widened with interest. "That sounds... brilliant."

"Yeah, we'll have to check it out soon, but first..."

"The Chamber of Secrets," Tom finished with a wide, feral grin.

"We'll have to do it tomorrow. Dinner is in a half hour and if we aren't there, Slughorn will wonder what we're up to." Heri said.

"More likely that *Dumbledore* would start to wonder what we're up to," Tom sneered and Heri nodded in agreement.

"They won't care too much if we miss lunch. We can go down early in the morning and spend the whole day down there."

"Right," Tom agreed.

Heri paused and took on a hesitant, worried, look. "Hey, Tom?"

"Yes?"

"Well, the Chamber is supposed to have some sort of monster in it, right?"

"Yes?"

"Well, what if it tries to eat us?"

"I'm the heir of Slytherin, Heri. It won't try to eat me," he said with absolute confidence.

"Yeah, but *I'm not*. It might try to eat me."

"I'll tell it not to. It's no doubt some sort of serpent. I'll speak to it in parseltongue and tell it not to harm you."

Heri sighed and shrugged. All he could do was trust that Tom was right and that it really would be as simple as he seemed to think it would be.

—

The next day the pair of them got up early and as soon as breakfast was finished, they escaped to the second floor girl's bathroom and Heri watched as Tom hissed at the sink and opened the secret entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

They both grimaced at the state of the slimy-looking pipe. Tom looked thoughtful for a moment before he started hissing at the opening to the pipe. After a minute, the slippery slide suddenly began to morph and transfigure into steep steps instead.

Heri smirked approvingly at Tom, who had a smug look on his face. The two started to make their way down the long, narrow stairs and as soon as both their heads had cleared the entrance, Tom hissed at it and it closed behind them. They both used their wands to illuminate the path, and continued the long journey down.

It felt like *ages* before they finally reached the bottom. There was a small mountain of dead animal bones at the base. They made their way down a long tunnel, seemingly carved directly out of the stone bedrock, and finally came upon an elaborate door with large serpents on it.

Tom hissed at it and a moment later the snakes started moving across the front of the door, seemingly unlocking it, and allowing the door to swing open on its own.

The Chamber itself was a huge temple-like room with rows of pillars and carved serpents. At the far end was a massive statue of Salazar Slytherin from the shoulders, up. The two slowly walked down the center of the chamber, looking around with awe-struck expressions as they took in the elaborate, beautiful room.

It was cold, and there were pools of standing water between some of the pillars. As soon as they stepped inside, rows of torches mounted to the pillars, erupted into blue flame, illuminating the grand space in soft shades of blue and green as the light reflected off the deep greenish pools of water.

The two began to examine different parts of the vast room, searching for any signs of what Slytherin's 'monster' could be. There were some tunnels extending from the room, but they all appeared to just circle back and connect with the main chamber again. Most of them had lots of standing water in them, and they *all* seemed to be filled with the skeletal remains of various small animals.

"Well it's been a millennium since the school was founded. I suppose it is rather silly to expect the creature to still be alive down here." Heri said with a sigh.

Tom just scowled at him and huffed as he continued to walk along the walls, tracing his hand and fingers over the rough carved rock surface, looking for clues.

Heri sighed at Tom's determination, but smiled softly at his dear friend. He resumed searching as well, using his wand to cast various magical detection spells, searching for any sign of a secret entrance or hidden objects.

"Heri! Come here!" Tom called out suddenly and Heri jogged across the chamber to where Tom was examining the wall to the side of the large statue. Tom was tracing his fingers over the wall and Heri just looked at it with confusion written across his face.

"What?"

"Don't you see it?" Tom asked, his wild, excited eyes, turning towards Heri.

Heri looked back at the wall, squinted and searched it for anything, but saw nothing unusual.

"No... nothing."

"Just more proof that I'm his heir," Tom whispered. "That must be why I can see it."

"What do you see?" Heri asked in a hushed voice.

"It's writing. It wiggles a little. Like tiny squirming baby snakes, slithering in and out of each other... but I can see understand it, almost as if it were written in English."

"So... written parseltongue?" Heri gasped.

Tom nodded.

"What's it say?"

"It lists what to say to open the door to his library..."

"There's a library down here?" Heri gasped.

"...and it says what to say to call the basilisk out."

"BASILISK?"

Tom nodded his head. "Yes... it says that Slytherin's creature was the king of serpents; the basilisk."

"But a basilisk can kill with a single look into its eyes! One look and you're dead!"

Tom nodded his head gravely. "We'll have to take precautions when we call her out."

Heri coughed out a humorless laugh in response. "Yeah... well... let's check out this library thing first. At least the library probably won't kill us... probably..."

Tom chuckled and led Harry into one of the cylindrical tube-tunnels that circled out and around the outer walls of the Chamber and came to stop at a blank bit of wall and hissed at it. A moment later, a circular door seemed to carve itself from the curved wall and opened. The two walked through and down another short hallway before emerging into a large, circular room with bookshelves making up the entire length of the outer wall. In the center of the room was a single desk, with a single chair.

"...wow." Heri said in an awestruck voice.

He glanced over at Tom and saw that fierce, triumphant glow in his eyes. This was all *his* now.

—

The following day, Heri took Tom to the Room of Hidden things, but summoned the magic practice room instead. Tom seemed mildly impressed, but in the end, he rarely took advantage of the room. He was far too preoccupied with the Chamber and the treasure trove that was Salazar Slytherin's personal library.

Heri quickly realized that the library wouldn't be a lot of good to him, since the majority of the books in it were written in either parseltongue, or a very old English dialect he could hardly decipher at all. One book, however, did draw his attention. He felt as if it were calling to him because when he and Tom had explored the library, Heri had gone straight to it like a moth to the flame.

It was a Necromancer's Grimoire. Even older than the one he had gotten from the Black Library, and it reeked of powerful black magic. Just *holding* it filled him with a sense of power. To say he was excited and elated would be a severe understatement. Aside from the

Grimoire from the Blacks, Heri hadn't managed to find a single detailed source of information on the Necromantic Arts. Now he would finally have two. He could cross-reference, and see if the authors of these two books agreed or disagreed with each other on some of the more important issues that had drawn his interest.

Tom had looked over his shoulder and scowled when he found himself magically compelled to look away from the book. Heri had laughed at him and told him it was only fair since when Heri looked at the rest of the books in this library, all he saw were meaningless squiggles. It was only fair that he could have at least one book where the tables were turned.

And so the rest of their holidays were spent visiting the Chamber as often as they could manage to get away and spending their days reading.

They didn't summon the creature yet since neither was exactly feeling comfortable with the idea just yet. Before they knew it, classes were back in session and all of the students were back in the castle. It also meant that they had considerably less time to get down into the Chamber. Heri didn't exactly feel like there was a lot of reason for him to go all the way down there anyway, since only the one book was any use to him, and he had taken it with him. So while Tom continued to go down into the Chamber to read through Slytherin's books and journals, Heri began to retire into the Hidden Room's magical training room and finally practicing all of the things he was learning from his two Necromancer Grimoires. By March, he'd learned how to induce the trance necessary to begin transporting his conscious mind along his ethereal tether that connected his physical body to his astral body in the astral plane – which was the foundation for all more advanced necromantic magical exploration.

It was dangerous to tamper with such things because a person could easily lose themselves in the astral plane and never find the way back to their physical body – leaving it an empty shell until it would just die.

During that time, Heri and Tom had also begun investigating another side-project. One of the seventh years had informed them that there was a way – a mixture of charms, potions, and a ritual – to magically generate an accurate family tree. It was apparently often used in disputes over inheritance when the deceased left no will and it was difficult to determine if all parties claiming interest were actually related to the deceased. It was also the spell used to create the elaborate family tapestries that they had both witnessed at some of their more wealthy housemates' homes during their brief and limited visits.

Tom had continued to put most of his time into exploring the Slytherin Library, and had said if he came across anything while there that seemed worthwhile to their hereditary pursuit that he'd set it aside, but Heri was the one who was primarily responsible for researching the spells and potions necessary for the task. By March, he had determined everything that was necessary and had begun ordering all of the ingredients they would need for the two potions they would brew – one for each of them with their blood as the key ingredient. The potions would take one lunar cycle to brew, but once it was done, all they had to do was soak a large piece of parchment or tapestry cloth in the potion, hang it up to dry, and perform a few specific charms on it. Twenty-four hours later, a detailed family tree going back ten generations would have completely appeared. At the full moon, Tom and he both started their potions.

They had gotten permission from Professor Slughorn to use one of the empty classrooms in the dungeons to brew, and even gotten him to allow them to lock the door so no one could come in and disturb the process. It was a low maintenance potion, and Tom – being busy with the Chamber – left most of it to Heri.

—

One day in early April, Tom came into their dorm room, with wild, half-mad eyes, and a rather frazzled and uncharacteristically disheveled appearance.

"I did it," Tom panted.

"Did what?" Heri asked as he cautiously stood up from his bed and took in Tom's crazed expression.

"I called the basilisk. I released it into the school."

Heri felt as if someone had just poured a bucket of ice water down the back of his shirt.

"You did what?" he hissed. "Are you out of your mind?"

"I'm going to complete Salazar's noble work! I'm going to finally rid this school of all the filthy mudbloods!" Tom exclaimed in a harsh whisper.

"You're going to get yourself expelled, or worse, *locked up in Azkaban*, is what you're going to do!" Heri snapped back. "Is it out there now? Has it... did it kill anyone?"

"She's back in the Chamber right now. We encountered one filthy little mudblood girl in the bathroom. She spotted the basilisk in the mirror and only got petrified," Tom sneered with disappointment.

Heri gaped at him. "Are you insane? You nearly killed... Tom, how can... I..." Heri shook his head before lowering it and pinching the bridge of his nose as he attempted to calm his breathing. "Circe, I hope you know what the hell you're doing, and for *Merlin's sake*, don't get caught!" he hissed angrily as he looked back up and glared at Tom harshly.

"Of course not!" Tom snapped angrily. "Do you take me for some stupid impetuous Gryffindor?"

"Well, this seems rather sudden to *me*. How long have you been planning this?"

"Don't be a fool, Heri – what do you think we've spent the last three years searching for the Chamber of Secrets for? So that I could go up to Slytherin's monster and have a chat?" Tom spat.

Heri snorted. "Even I'm not *that* naïve, but I certainly didn't expect you to release the damn thing while we were only in our fifth year!"

"What did you expect, that I would wait till the last week of term in seventh? That's hardly enough time to deal with all the filth inhabiting this school right now. It will take time. The

basilisk needs to regain her strength. She's been in a stasis sleep for centuries. She's only allowed to wake for a brief period of time every few hundred years, and an automated compulsion charm draws in large quantities of small animals through a small cave and tunnel that comes from the Forbidden Forest. She eats her fill and then goes back to sleep. She needs to regain her strength right now, before I really set her loose in the school."

Heri sighed a small bit. "Okay... and how long will that take? Do you seriously intend to have this thing start killing students? How exactly are you going to make the beast distinguish between the mudbloods and the rest of the students? What if it starts eating everything in sight? If you have to go around babysitting the damn thing to make sure it only kills the right people, you're bound to get caught! How big is this thing anyway?"

Tom's face grew wicked again and a greedy grin spread across his face. "She's enormous. Probably the largest basilisk that's ever existed. She's nearly fifty feet long!"

Heri sucked in a harsh breath through his teeth, making a hissing sound.

"Fifty feet? FIFTY FEET? That's insane! How are you supposed to be subtle with a fucking FIFTY FOOT SNAKE?"

"Be Quiet!" Tom hissed.

"No! No, Tom, this is insane! You're out of your mind!"

"This is my duty as Slytherin's heir! He left the chamber behind in hopes that his heir would one day discover it and fulfill his wishes. Complete his noble task! I'm simply –"

"Don't pull that shit with me, Tom! You're not doing this out of any sense of hereditary duty! You're doing this because you want to! You're looking for that powerful rush you used to get when you killed the other kid's pets! You just want to kill something, but the animals aren't enough for you anymore! You figured that out with the roosters you had to kill, didn't you? I know you were the one that offed all of Ogg's roosters. Couldn't risk one of them crowing while you had the monster out of it's safe little cave, could you? So you killed them, but it just wasn't enough.

"Well, if you're so damn eager to kill someone, why can't you just wait until this summer when we can do it with some subtlety? We'll have our hereditary trees done by then and we can finally track down any living family we have and make them pay for never even *trying* to find us! Kill someone who has specifically wronged *you* – don't do this random, meaningless slaughter that's liable to get you caught!" Heri hissed in an angry harsh whisper.

Tom stood up tall, raising his chin and looking down at Heri imperiously.

"I'm *not* going to get caught." Tom snapped in a crisp tone as he stared at Heri with narrowed eyes.

"You say that now..."

"I'm no fool! I know what I'm doing."

"I sure as hell hope you do."

—

Rebirth Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 05 -----

By May, there were five students petrified in the infirmary. Tom was exceedingly frustrated. It was as if there were some bizarre magical force working against him. Every time he brought out the basilisk, no matter what, whoever they came across was somehow saved from the deadly stare, and only got a grazing glance through some sort of reflective surface. Looking in a mirror; reflected off of a puddle of standing water; looking through a spyglass. One of the damn students was even saved by having caught sight of the basilisk while looking through a ghost!

Tom was *seething*; Heri was secretly *relieved*, and the school was in a total panic. The muggleborns were especially on edge since every single student who had been petrified so far was a muggleborn. Tom had at least been able to manage that. Not a single pureblood had been hurt. Heri wasn't even sure how the hell Tom was managing it.

And then, in the last week of May, Tom finally succeeded. A Ravenclaw muggleborn named Myrtle was killed by looking *directly* into the basilisk's eyes. Tom was elated because he had found her especially annoying. She was one of those exceedingly whiny girls. Overly emotional, and bitchy to an extreme. Tom was barely able to contain his glee from the public view and Heri had to kick him in the shin a few times during meals or classes to remind him to tone down the maniacal look in his eyes.

However his glee was short lived because three days after Myrtle was found dead in the very bathroom that housed the entrance to the Chamber – which Heri had insisted was an exceedingly *stupid* place to kill someone – Headmaster Dippet stood before the entire school in the Great Hall and announced that if the cause of these attacks could not be found and stopped, that Hogwarts was going to close it's doors for good.

Heri and Tom both instantly realized the percussions of this. If there was no Hogwarts, there was only the orphanage. They had no where else to go, and returning to the orphanage for two months out of the year was already horrible, but to return their permanently and without finishing their magical educations...

Heri shot Tom a very hard glare, silently demanding that he figure out some way to *fix this!* Tom looked slightly sick, but his face took on a stoney determination very quickly.

By the end of the following week, Tom had 'caught' the perpetrator. He pinned the whole thing on the stupid halfbreed oaf, Hagrid – a third year Gryffindor who was obviously half-giant, and who had an obscenely ridiculous fascination with creatures that could eat you. Tom had apparently noticed months earlier that Hagrid was tending to a few dangerous creatures, and that the boy was stupid enough to be hiding a live acromantula in the school. Anyone with half a brain would know that an acromantula small enough to live in the cupboard where Hagrid was keeping it, would not be capable of killing anyone. Not to mention that acromantula didn't petrify people. And yet, the Headmaster, and the Ministry Aurors easily accepted this explanation and Hagrid was promptly expelled and had his wand snapped.

Heri almost felt sorry for the poor sod.

Almost.

Dumbledore came to the rescue of his poor Gryffindor though, and managed to talk the Headmaster into keeping the boy on as an assistant to the groundkeeper, Ogg. It was obvious that Dumbledore knew Hagrid had *not* been the one responsible. Fortunately for Heri and Tom, he seemed to be the only one.

Hell, Tom even got an award for special services to the school! Heri would have laughed if he hadn't been so high strung with stress from the whole ordeal. But his stress did not instantly dissipate. Dumbledore not only realized that Hagrid *hadn't* caused the girl's death, he also seemed to know that Tom and/or Heri, *had*. He watched the two of them like hawks, and it became nearly impossible to slip away and do anything without him being near by. Heri and Tom suspected that Dumbledore had the many magical portraits around the school reporting to him.

Again, Heri wanted to rant and rave at Tom's stupidity at allowing the *one* successful kill to happen in the same room as the Chamber's entrance, because Dumbledore seemed to be watching that particular room with extreme interest. Thus, Tom found it near impossible to go back down there, even just for the books.

The two kept their noses clean for the rest of term, not doing a single thing out of the actions of normal students. This also meant that Heri's training in Necromancy was put on hold since he couldn't risk going into the Room of Hidden Things, or it's Training Room.

They did, however, finish the hereditary trees, and the both of them now had a clear and detailed picture of their family history, going back several generations. This particular thing had dropped quite a bombshell – although it was one that Heri had been entirely expecting.

They were both half-bloods. Tom's father was a muggle, while Heri's mother was muggleborn. Tom was utterly disgusted by this, and raged when they were first faced with the evidence. Heri had scoffed at Tom and told him he was over-reacting.

This, of course, was not something Tom wanted to hear. The thought of being 'tainted' by the filthy blood of a muggle, horrified him. Heri asked how he could be so surprised by this

discovery when he himself had basically assumed both of their cases to be something along those lines all alone.

Tom's wizarding relatives on his mother's side were a family called the Gaunts. They were the last living descendants of Salazar Slytherin, and in the ten generations that the family tree displayed, Tom could pinpoint the exact place where the family branched off, and who his closest living relation was with the Slytherin name. He could literally see exactly how he was related to Salazar Slytherin. It was a thrilling discover for him. But aside from that, he could also tell one other significant thing. According to the family tree, two of the Gaunts were still alive.

Marvolo Gaunt, and Morphin Gaunt. Tom was able to send a few requests to the Ministry of Magic during the last few months of school to see if there was any records about either men, and it turned out that there was. Both had criminal records, in fact, Marvolo Gaunt was currently locked up in Azkaban for having attacked a Ministry employee. An address was on record for Morphin, and the man apparently lived just outside a little muggle village called 'Little Hangleton'. And so Heri and Tom made plans to visit it during the summer.

An especially interesting bit of information came up in Morphin's criminal records. It turned out that he had spent a short stint in Azkaban for having attacked a muggle. A man by the name of *Tom Riddle*.

As for Heri, it turned out that there wasn't a single living soul that the pair could hunt down for vengeance as every one of the people listed on his family tree was already dead. They *did* discover what his full name was actually supposed to be though, since apparently, his family had performed the proper rituals upon his birth to magically name him. Herakles Lucan Valerius. Heri and Tom had both gasped as they examined his family tree and realized just whom he descended from. The Valerius gens was one of the most ancient and most celebrated in Rome; and no other Roman gens was distinguished for so long a period.

Word was that they had also been an exceedingly wealthy family. Tom was the first to suggest that Heri should visit the goblin-run bank, Gringotts, to see if there was any chance he could claim an inheritance from the family. If he truly was the last of the line, and he had apparently *not* been disinherited for having a muggle-born mother – and according to the tree, no disinheritance had been set – then Heri very well could be quite wealthy.

It was certainly worth looking into.

And so the pair spent the end of their fifth year doing their homework, eating meals with their fellow Slytherins, spending most of their freetime in the common room, or the Library, and just generally keeping their heads down.

Term came to an end and the pair left the school on the train, heading back to London.

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The first thing the pair did upon entering the city was go to Diagon Alley and visit Gringotts. Seeing as how they intended to visit Little Hangleton that summer, spending money would be a real boon. They had, once again, collected a sizable amount of junk from the Room of

Hidden Things over the course of the year to sell to Borgin and Burke, but hadn't been able to do their last minute raid on the room thanks to Dumbledore's close watch. So any miraculous inheritances would be greatly appreciated.

The goblins had been extremely dubious of the pair. It was apparently rather common for ruffians to show up on their doorstep claiming to be the last heir of some ancient and wealthy bloodline that had died out without a will to designate where the money went. Thus, the pair spent a long and tedious day at the bank while the short nasty creatures ran a wide array of tests and rituals on Heri's blood to verify his claim.

In the end, the goblins had grudgingly admitted that Heri *was* an heir to the Valerius family, and according to their spells, in full right to claim access to the ancient family's vault. Their vault, however, was not in Britain. It was in Rome. Gringotts had a branch there, and could transfer a set amount of galleons from one branch to another, but if Heri wanted to personally visit the vault and see what objects or artifacts might be stored within it, he would have to actually travel to Rome in person.

By the end of the day, they had gone through with transferring a hefty sum of gold galleons out of Heri's new vault, and the pair had left the alley to return to the orphanage. Heri made his way back in a daze – stunned and overwhelmed by the enormity of everything he had discovered that day.

One thing *did* occur to him though. If there were any Necromancers in his family, they would have left their Grimoires in the family vault. And he was fairly sure that there *were* necromancers in his family since he was positive that he had seen the name Lucan Valerius – his grandfather, according to his family tree – in one of the books he'd found that talked about the art of Necromancy, and mentioned a few people who were historically known as practitioners of the black arts.

He would definitely need to find an opportunity to go to his family vault. But the idea of traveling all the way to Rome was a bit overwhelming, even with his sudden and unexpected surplus of funding; and especially on such short notice. It would have to wait though. Probably the following summer when they actually had the time to plan it.

This summer was going to be focused on Tom's *family*. And Tom's revenge.

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The second week of July the pair, through means of muggle transportation, made the journey to Little Hangleton. Tom had insisted that they keep their travels as inconspicuous and untraceable as possible, and Heri certainly wasn't going to argue with him.

During the previous school year, Tom had managed to get some rather useful information out of one of the seventh year boys whose father worked for the Ministry in the misuse of magic office, and who also intended to go onto a similar career path. It was one of this department's jobs to identify and track down any instances of magic being used in the presence of muggles, or use of magic to *attack* muggles. They worked closely with the obliviators department, and also with the department that kept track of, and punished, the use of magic by underage wizards.

When Tom had realized all of this, he had grilled the boy for any and all details he could give him about the different measures used to determine when magic had been performed by a minor. He had learned a great many very useful details.

The first line of detection were the wards the Ministry had placed around the orphanage. Any underage wizards, living in a muggle environment, had wards placed upon their residence to identify and catalog every instance of magic use. The wards couldn't specifically identify exactly *who* had cast magic, only that they could identify that magic had been cast, make note of exactly what magic had been cast, and alert someone at the Ministry immediately.

The second line of detection was a trace placed on all wands sold to underaged wizards, at reputable shops, such as Ollivander's where they had both purchased their wands. That one was easy enough to get around if you knew exactly how. Specifically, you had to break the wards protecting the trace spell using an unregistered, untraced, wand. For that, they had purchased one from a shady shop in Knockturn Alley. It didn't work particularly well for either of them, but it was enough for them to dissolve the traces from each of their wands and then to chuck the nearly worthless wand into the bottom of one of their trunks for any future emergencies.

There was another 'line of defense' that the boy told them about, but it was still in development. Apparently it was a trace that would be put on the *child*, rather than on their wand. The boy had explained that it was the Ministry's intention that at the first alert of powerful accidental magic being performed by any magical child, the Ministry would send someone out to apply the trace to the child, in secret. That way even during the early years of the muggleborn populace, should any powerful accidental magic be performed, the Ministry would be alerted right away and could send out obliviators, should that be necessary.

He'd gone on to explain a number of other things, but in the end, the basics were all they'd needed.

As long as they were not within the wards of the orphanage, and used either wandless magic, or wands with the Trace removed, the Ministry could not detect what they were doing.

With this knowledge bring them a small degree of security, they arrived in Little Hangleton and began the search for the shack that Morphin Gaunt apparently lived in. It took longer than either had expected, but they were finally able to find it by following a snake the Tom came across. He had conversed with it in parseltongue for several minutes while Heri had stood there waiting patiently. Finally the snake began to slither down the road and finally turned and disappeared in a small overgrown opening in the hedgerow that they had passed earlier and apparently missed.

The house at the end of a long, twisting, path was made mostly of stone, covered in moss and other overgrown plant matter. The roof looked as if it were moments away from collapsing in on itself, and the windows were thick with grime, and several were cracked or even broken.

A dead snake was nailed to the front door, but Tom paid it no mind as he went straight up to it and knocked. There was no response for a long moment, but suddenly some muffled noises could be heard deep within, followed a moment later by the sound of angry hissing.

Heri watched as Tom's eyes widened slightly, but his face remained otherwise impassive. Suddenly the door flew open and a old, withered, and sickly looking man with dirty scraggly hair and filthy clothes appeared in the doorway.

He hissed angrily and Heri could see that the man was missing quite a few teeth, and the rest were yellowed and rotten.

When Tom hissed *back*, the man's face slackened in shock. Heri almost chuckled, but managed to refrain, keeping his face blank and impassive while his hand continued to subtly grip his wand at his side.

After a few more minutes of hissing back and forth, and a few glares at Heri from Morphin, they were apparently invited inside. The interior was just as sad and decrepit as the outside and Heri refused to sit in any of the chairs present. Tom clearly shared his opinion as his lip curled in distaste at what he saw and he resolutely remained standing while Morphin walked over and sank into a disgusting looking old armchair.

Hissing continued and Heri shifted his attention to Tom's face. He couldn't understand what either of them were saying to each other, but he could at least observe Tom's reactions to whatever the hell Morphin was telling him.

Several times he saw a fire of pure fury suddenly begin to rage behind Tom's dark eyes, only to see it quickly masked away.

Finally, and with an almost surprising suddenness, Tom turned his face to Heri and said, "We're done here."

For a moment it looked as if Tom was simply going to turn and leave the rotting hovel, and Morphin seemed to expect as much as well, but an intense, pointed look from Tom instantly told Heri that something was about to happen. He'd known Tom all his life and he new how to read the other boy.

He began to act as if he were turning to leave as well, but kept his eyes on Tom's body movement, waiting for the exact moment...

Suddenly, Tom's wand arm whipped around and a stunner flew from his wand and hit Morphin square in the chest. The man was thrown back and he collapsed back into the chair, unconscious.

Heri blinked at it for a moment before relaxing.

"Alright, so now what?"

"Now, we go kill my filthy muggle father." Tom sneered.

Heri paused and then looked back at the unconscious Morphin. "What about him?"

"We'll pin it on him. I'll take his wand and use it to perform the finishing spell, then we bring it back and place a memory charm on him. He's already got a record with the Ministry for having attacked the man. It'll be simple."

"So you're father's still alive then?"

Tom's eyes narrowed and flashed red for a moment. Something that Heri had only seen happen a few times, and only when Tom was exceptionally angry.

"Oh he's alive alright," he said through clenched teeth.

—

The pair had made their way back up the road to a large muggle manor house, surrounded by finely kept gardens. They'd used notice-me-not charms to prevent anyone from really seeing them, or making note of the presence. On the way there, Tom had explained what he had managed to learn so far from his uncle.

It seemed that his mother, Merope Gaunt, had fallen in love with the handsome muggle boy from down the road. Morphin had accused her of being a squib, but Tom was hesitant to believe it. Heri could see the pain and disgust behind Tom's eyes at the thought of having had a squib mother, and a muggle father.

After Marvolo and Morphin were taken away by the Ministry and both locked up in Azkaban, Merope had run off with the muggle. Morphin had been released from Azkaban after a year and a half since all he'd done was attack a muggle with a fairly meaningless hex. Marvolo was still there because he had attacked a Ministry official. Morphin had returned to find his sister missing, as well as a family treasure – a locket that had belonged to Salazar Slytherin himself.

Not too long after that, the muggle, Tom Riddle, had come back to Little Hanglestone, claiming to have been bewitched by Merope. That she had somehow tricked him – put him under a spell or something – and forced him to marry her. When his spell had worn off, she'd tried to trap him in the marriage by getting pregnant. But he was no fool – no. He wouldn't be trapped by some nasty woman. So he'd left her. Abandoned her and his own unborn child, and returned to live with his parents.

And that was who Heri and Tom found when they got to the tall, beautiful manor house on the hill. Tom Riddle, Charles Riddle, and Elizabeth Riddle. All muggles. Tom's living blood relatives. His father and fraternal his grandparents.

Their deaths were not pretty. They were not painless. They were not quick.

When done, the two returned to Morphin's little shack, and returned his wand. Tom had then done something that gave Heri pause for a moment. Tom had gone over to the still sleeping wizard and removed a ring from his finger. Once done, he had placed the memory charm on him and allowed the sleeping spell they'd left him under to slowly wear off as they quickly left Little Hangleton, with no intention to ever look back.

Heri had asked Tom about the ring and had been informed that Morphin had said it was a Slytherin family heirloom. He'd allowed Heri to look at it, and Heri had been transfixed with the small stone set in the ring. It had a strange symbol carved into it. A triangle with a circle

and a line inside it. But the stone itself seemed to vibrate with powerful black magic.
Necromantic magic...

Heri had asked Tom to tell him everything that Morphin had told him about the ring, but there had been very little to tell. Morphin said it was handed down from the Peverell family, to the Slytherins, to the Gaunts. Heri continued to examine it as the two rode the bus back to London, but had to reluctantly hand it over to Tom once they'd gotten back.

In the end, they were only gone from the orphanage for two nights, and no one paid their absence any mind.

After that, the two resumed the summer routine they'd developed the summer before. They slept in their beds at the orphanage, bathed there, and sometimes ate breakfast there, but left for London as soon as possible, and spent the remainder of their days in the wizarding Alleys until it became late and they had no other option but to return to their small, dingy, beds.

Heri could tell that Tom was secretly affected by what had happened. Even the death of that Ravenclaw girl had been rather intense for him. It was one thing to kill the pets of people who had annoyed him, or angered him in some way, but now he had killed *people*. Tom was now directly responsible for the deaths of four different people. Myrtle was slightly indirect, since Tom had simply guided the basilisk to kill her for him, but there was absolutely no denying Tom's very *direct* role in the deaths of the Riddles. Heri had stood by and watched, so he was unquestionably an accessory, but he had left Tom to do the actual deed.

About a week and a half after the whole incident, Heri and Tom had been reading a copy of the Daily Prophet while eating lunch at one of the wizarding pubs they often ate at, when they'd spotted a small article several pages in, about a wizard having been arrested for the murder of three muggles in a small muggle village called Little Hangleton. It described the gruesome nature of the muggles deaths and mentioned the wizard's history of encounters with one of them.

Tom's eyes had almost glowed with manic accomplishment as he read the article. He'd done it. He had achieved his vengeance and had successfully managed to place the blame upon his uncle.

Heri could tell that Tom felt an supreme sense of power from his accomplishment. Like he could do almost anything and get away with it. Heri had made an effort to bring Tom back down to Earth by pointing out that he had very nearly *not* gotten away with Myrtle's death, and he couldn't afford to get cocky.

Tom had scowled at him, but seemed to accept the wisdom in Heri's warning. Heri was the only person alive at this point who could dare to 'scold' Tom, and not instantly gain the boy's hatred for it. Tom respected Heri's opinion and his words. He trusted him, and was trusted in return. They were each other's worlds. They were all each of them had, and neither of them could imagine their world ever not being that way.

They returned to school to begin their sixth year at Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall of Gryffindor was made Head Girl that year and she seemed intent on making Tom's time in the prefect meetings living hell. She did not like him one bit, and he liked her even less. There were times that Tom would come back from a prefect meeting in such a huff that Heri actually wondered how much longer McGonagall would live.

September passed with very little happenings, however on October 2nd, Tom came across a book in the restricted section of the library that would change his and Heri's lives... *forever*.

The key word... *Horcrux*.

Heri would easily tell people that Tom had little to no fears. But *death* was one of those rare fears. Heri knew that Tom had been absently looking for anything in any of the books he read – especially those down in the chamber – that mentioned reliable methods for achieving immortality.

'If we're magical then we should be able to do anything. Even defy death!'

During the course of his occasional researching, Tom had come across a few things, but nothing quite up to his required specifications. There were a number of rather Dark rituals that could slowdown, or even halt the physical aging process, but none of those protected you from sickness or from major bodily harm via attack or accident. What Tom wanted, was a way to guarantee that he would not *die* at all. He wanted invulnerability, or as close to it as he could get.

Heri had often insisted that he was being ridiculous about the whole thing and that *death* really wasn't something to be so terribly feared. Tom would retort sharply that he was not *afraid* of anything; least of all *death*. He simply wanted to guarantee that he continued to live for as long as he desired it so that he could accomplish all of the things he wanted to do with his life. Which were a great many things, indeed.

So when Tom first found mention of a bit of incredibly dark magic, known as the Horcrux, he nearly became obsessed with it.

A Horcrux was a piece of one's soul, broken off from the main soul and attached to a physical object, kept somewhere in the physical world, to act as a tether for the main soul. As long as *part* of the soul was permanently tethered to the physical world, the rest of it would remain there as well, even if the teather holding the soul to the body was broken – which was what happened when the body died. Creating a Horcrux would prevent the soul from ever returning to the astral plane and going through the natural process of death and rebirth. Rebirth, that Tom still insisted there was no proof for, anyway, but that Heri frequently insisted was the way the afterlife worked, and the way spirits were intended to exist.

Most books that mentioned the Horcrux (and there were *not* many books that mentioned it) did only that. *Mention* it. No detailed description. No explanations. No instruction on how to do it.

But one did.

One book, that Tom had finally found by the start of November, did in fact describe in detail, exactly what was necessary and how to perform the ritual to create a horcrux.

Heri's years of study in the Necromantic arts gave him a rather deep theoretical understanding of how souls functioned and how they were attached to the body. He could even slip into a special kind of magically induced trance that allowed him to project his consciousness outside of his body in order to examine the astral tethers that connected all living beings with their astral self. He wasn't yet advanced enough to force his consciousness back along his own tether and into the astral plane, but he'd come a long way.

Heri had come to learn from his various Necromancer books that the Astral Plane – as most sources referred to it, although some simply called it the Spirit Plane, or the 'after life' – was where all life has to initially exist. In fact, they all still existed there at that very moment. But they co-existed in the astral plane and the physical plane at the same time. The astral plane still housed their soul, but it was connected to their physical body by a 'tether'. A thread-like magic that a portion of their soul traveled along and lodged itself inside their body in order for their consciousness to be there.

What the horcrux did was draw out an additional portion of the soul from the astral plane and attach it to an object. But in order to draw out another portion of the soul you had to cause a fracture in your soul first. Fractures were caused by a few different extreme circumstances, but an absolute guaranteed way to do it was to commit *murder*.

When Heri first came to understand this fact, he was momentarily worried that Tom was going to go and kill another one of the mudbloods in the school just out of impatience and the supposed 'need' to get this started as soon as possible, but they discovered that fractures from murder healed slowly and could be taken advantage of for even several months after the actual act was committed. The fact that Tom had killed three people in July meant that his soul was probably quite fractured at the moment and it would take a while longer before the fractures were healed.

While this was good in one aspect – Tom could get started right away – it also meant that *Tom could get started right away*. Heri was worried that Tom was jumping into something that was horribly stupid. The fact that he only had so much time left to take advantage of the murders he'd already committed meant he was in a rush and Heri really would have preferred if Tom had taken more time to think about what he was doing. It seemed insane to Heri.

As far as he was concerned, this Horcrux nonsense sounded tantamount to self-mutilation. The soul was what made you *you*. It was the *real you*. Your body was nothing more than a temporary vessel. As far as Heri was concerned, as long as your soul continued to exist and be reborn, you almost already *were* immortal. But Tom didn't agree. He wanted immortality in *this life*.

Reluctantly, Heri agreed to help Tom with his task if for no other reason than to make sure Tom didn't horribly maim himself in the process. His experience with necromantic magic helped him greatly. He already understood the basics of sort of 'poking at' the soul tether since he'd been examining and experimenting with his own in his attempts to reach along it and access his astral body and the astral plane directly.

Applying that experience towards tugging at Tom's soul through his tether wasn't that hard, and the spells described in the book covered the rest.

Tom had to chose an object to place tje piece of his soul into and the object he chose actually surprised Heri a bit. It was an old diary. One that he had started when the pair of them first got to Hogwarts when they were eleven. Heri had seen Tom writing in it many late nights over the years, but never intruded on Tom's little bit of privacy. They shared everything, really, but Heri was more than willing to give him his space when he obviously wanted it.

Heri wasn't sure *why* Tom had chosen his diary of all things to contain a piece of his soul, but in a way it was somewhat poetic. A book where Tom had poured his soul out in words would now house an actual piece of it. Still, it seemed a bit fragile to him.

"It will have protections, *obviously*." Tom had said, exasperatedly. "The book has nearly a whole chapter dedicated to the protective measures *alone*. A person won't be able to burn it, even if it's made of paper. It will be impervious to everything."

"Nothing is impervious to everything. Even a Horcrux. Didn't the book mention something about magical smelting still being able to destroy them?"

"Fiendfyre? Yes, that will do it, but nearly no one can control fiendfyre. Most wizards are terrified of it, and who would think to use it? A person would have to know what it is first, and the only ones who will know what it is are you and me, and *you're* not going to tell anyone, are you?"

"Of course not!" Heri had sputtered. "It's a piece of your bleedin' soul, Tom! I still can't believe that you'd be willing to just stick it in some object and leave it laying around. I still say this whole thing is idiotic."

"It will be perfectly safe, Heri. And the point of it is that with it set aside and put somewhere safe, I will forever be safe from death."

"Your body can still die. It only keeps your soul around."

"And I can create myself a *new* body."

"Not alone, you can't. When you're just a spirit stuck wandering the physical plane, you'll be practically helpless! I'll be able to use your horcrux to bring you back and help you make a new body, but what will you do if I'm no longer around? You may wind up getting stuck floating around in a sort of purgatory. I really *really* wish you'd reconsider this." Heri ended with a whine.

"I'm not! I've set my mind to this! Now stop pestering me and help!" Tom had snapped angrily and Heri had finally heaved a resigned sigh and they had resumed their work.

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Friday of the last week of first term, their head of house, Horace Slughorn had held another gathering of his favorites. This 'Slugclub' meeting had gone just as any other. Tom had fully

achieved a position as most respected and followed in Slytherin House. Being the head of Slytherin House, Slughorn did tend to include more students from his own house than the others, and all of those Slytherins in the Slugclub were faithful followers of Tom. Even the two seventh years bowed down to Tom, despite being older than him.

The meeting had run long and Slughorn had dismissed everyone off to their beds. Heri had paused at the door when he realized that Tom was lingering behind. He'd shot him a questioning glance but Tom had subtly shooed him away. Heri had sighed and left the room, but waited outside. Nearly fifteen minutes passed before Tom emerged from the room. Heri was instantly tense as he saw that gleam of achievement in Tom's eyes.

"What was that all about?" Heri asked quietly as the two began to walk down the hall, back towards the Slytherin dorms.

"I needed an educated opinion on some things I've been thinking about with my... project. I knew Slughorn would probably *know* – although he would never openly admit to possessing such knowledge in public. The man is, fortunately, obscenely easy to manipulate, and I was able to get the information from him."

Heri's eyes widened. "Are you talking about your *you-know-what*?" Heri hissed quietly as his eyes darted around at a few of the sleeping figures in the portraits mounted to the walls.

"Of course."

"You didn't... say anything that could have... you know. Slughorn may be gullible, but he's not an idiot. He could put the pieces together!"

"He won't. And he wouldn't say anything about it to anyone either."

"How can you be sure?"

"I just am. I got the information I wanted anyway. I'm ready. As soon as the students are gone from the castle for the holidays I want to begin the preparations."

Harry sighed and shook his head. "Merlin, I hope we don't end up regretting this."

"Stop being so pessimistic! It's going to work."

"I just wish you'd wait. There's got to be a better option for... what you want to achieve, than *this*."

"I'm not having this argument with you again, Herakles! Drop it!" Tom said sharply, turning to face Heri and giving him a fierce glare. His eyes even flashed red for a moment and Heri's eyes widened in surprise. Tom had never been angry enough with him to look at him that way. Not really.

"I'm just worried about you Tom." Heri said quietly. "You're... you're important to me. You're all I've got," he whispered. "I don't know what I'd do if something happened to you."

Tom's face softened and his tense shoulders sagged. He sighed and his hand came up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry I was so short with you Heri. This is important to me. Please, stop fighting me."

Heri nodded his head. "I'll try..."

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Rebirth Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 06 -----

One week later, using the Hidden Room and calling forth a large, roomy space that was warded against detection of Dark magic, the two of them performed all of the spells necessary for pulling one of the fractured shards of Tom's soul out and anchoring it to the diary.

Tom seemed mad with accomplishment after that. He was convinced that this was his first step towards fully defeating *death*. It was nearly a month later before Heri finally managed to get Tom to admit to the full extent of his plans regarding his Horcrux.

Heri had felt that this was it. That this one Horcrux was enough, seeing as how from all he'd read on them, that was all anyone had ever even considered doing. One Horcrux.

But no. One wasn't enough for Tom. He was determined to push his magical accomplishments beyond any limits that had stopped anyone else prior. He wanted more than one. One safeguard wasn't enough for him. And if he was going to make more than one, why not more than less? It turned out, that evening Tom had stayed behind the SlugClub meeting, he had asked the professor his opinion on whether or not a person could make more than one Horcrux, and what number would be best.

Seven. That was what Tom had decided upon. Seven was the most magically powerful number, after all, and it was only appropriate that his soul be in seven pieces. That meant six Horcruxes and then the piece that still resided inside his body.

Heri was horrified when Tom finally disclosed the full extent of his plan. Tom was planning to utterly decimate his soul. Heri wasn't sure if it could even be put back together at all, after being so thoroughly shattered as that. Again, he had tried to talk Tom out of it, but it had only brought about more arguments between the two of them. Their relationship remained tense for nearly two whole months, during which Heri became rather deeply depressed. Tom was basically giving him the cold shoulder, and Heri had never felt so alone.

He buried himself in his Necromancy instead and managed to get further than he ever had before. He managed to successfully perform a spell that gave him *The Black Sight*, which transformed his eyes so that he could now perceive those entities and energies that stemmed directly from the astral plane. Spirits, energy-based beings that had no physical form, yet still existed here among them all but unseen, and the residual signs of Dark magic. It left traces of itself upon everything it touched, and now he could see it.

It was crucial to the work of a necromancer to be able to see Black magic since they had to manipulate it so deeply. Necromancers didn't often rely on wands – it was a magic older than wands – and much of it was done through hand gestures that gave the Necromancer a very tactile control over the powers they wielded.

Heri was beginning to form a very deep understanding of the interaction and the connection between a person's physical body, their magical core, and their soul, or astral body. Not all astral beings possessed magic, or were of the same level of power and intellectual potential. Astral beings could be separated by levels. The lowest level beings were compatible with a certain group of physical beings and they would get reborn again and again into the bodies of these simple creatures.

Muggles and Wizards were not of equal level as far as astral bodies were concerned. While both were human, the wizards carried just the right sort of physical difference that put them a notch above the muggles. Because their bodies were slightly more capable, they drew in the astral bodies that had a magical core attached to them. They were compatible with the magic. Muggles, however, had astral bodies of about the same level, but without any magic.

It appeared that Muggleborns happened when a muggle was born with some sort of mutation or perhaps they were descendants of squibs and had managed to gain a recessive trait that gave them back the capacity to retain magic. Neither of Heri's Necromancy books knew the answer to this question, but both speculated on various reasons for it to happen.

A squib was when a human body with the physical capability to be a wizard was born, but for some odd reason, the soul that ended up tethered to the body was one without a magical core. They were still compatible, so it wasn't that unbelievable for it to happen, it was just rare. And quite unfortunate, honestly.

Heri ached with the desire to tell Tom all of the things he'd learned and come to understand lately. He'd finally managed to achieve the first level of trance and was able to slip far enough along his tether to call to some of the more powerful spirits of the astral plane. Mostly they were spirits of other Necromancers who were between lives. Waiting to be reborn, but powerful enough in the Black arts to maintain awareness while in the astral plane. It was from them that he was learning the most. And many of them were very willing to share their knowledge with a young aspiring Necromancer.

However speaking with spirits was just not the same as speaking with Tom. Heri missed his friend so dearly. He finally came to the conclusion that Tom was too important to him to risk losing him over some stupid disagreement. If Tom was dead set on splitting his soul into seven pieces, all Heri could do was do everything in his power to help him do it, and make sure it worked.

If Tom wanted to be immortal, Heri would make sure it happened.

It was early April when Heri managed to get Tom to come with him to the Hidden Room so they could talk. Tom was cold and gave him hard looks, but Heri pressed on and ended up spilling his guts to the taller boy. By the end, a few tears had even managed to escape his thick black eyelashes in his despair as he begged Tom for forgiveness and promised that he had decided to commit himself to helping Tom and making sure that nothing went wrong. That he wouldn't try to stop Tom from making his Horcruxes, only that he would help make sure achieved his goal of immortality without destroying himself in the process.

Tom's hard face had softened through the rant and in the end he had heaved a sigh and wrapped his arms around his friend's shoulders, holding him as Heri finally broke and began to sob into Tom's shoulder.

"I missed you so much, Tom," Heri said in a muffled voice as he pressed his face into the taller boy's chest.

Tom let his forehead fall and rest on Heri's head. "I missed you too," he whispered as he tightened his arms around Heri's shoulders.

The two held each other for a long time, neither really wanting to let go. Heri had wrapped his arms around Tom's waist, his hands coming up and gripping Tom's robes in his fists, but eventually they relaxed and were simply placed, palm-flat, along Tom's back. The close contact was more than either of them often experienced. No one had ever hugged them aside from each other, and it was a contact that they rarely engaged in. But it was nice. Warm and calming.

Subconsciously Harry's hands began to move up and down, smoothing Tom's shirt beneath his palms and trailing the pads of his fingers along gently. Heri felt Tom shudder slightly and the taller boy's grip around his shouldered tightened for a moment before it slackened. He began to pull back and Heri felt himself fill with a moment of disappointment. He'd known the moment would have to end, but he hadn't wanted it to end so soon. It had been so nice...

Tom slowed having only pulled back a bit and he looked down while Heri looked up. Their eyes connected and it was as if there was a typhoon of uncertainty rolling and storming behind Tom's obsidian orbs. So much expressed in his eyes, while his face remained absolutely blank. Heri blinked up at him, feeling unsure with the strange roller coaster of emotions coursing through him.

He had the most absurd urge to kiss Tom. His eyes kept darting to the taller boy's thin red lips. His perfectly chiseled cheeks. His sharp, angular, jaw. His flawless nose that was only flawless because he had used magic to heal it every time any of the children at the orphanage had broken it. Tom was just so... *beautiful*. He was horrible and yet perfect. Capable of being charismatic and charming, but also terrible and ingenious. Heri loved every bit there was to Tom. The beauty and the ugly coldness. He knew Tom, utterly, and yet he still loved him. Both despite who he was, and because of it.

And then Tom's head was slowly moving closer and Heri blinked almost in disbelief at what he was seeing. When Tom's lips pressed against his own, he was stunned for a moment.

Almost convinced that he were dreaming. But it felt so real. So good. Tom's lips were so soft and they moved against his own smoothly.

The moment of shock broke and Heri began to kiss Tom back. It was chaste and hesitant, which was rare for Tom. And it was gentle. Almost sweet. One of Tom's hands moved from Heri's shoulder up into his hair and he threaded his fingers into Heri's long black mess and used his position there to help turn Heri's head slightly as he cocked his the opposite direction and deepened the kiss.

And then slowly, the two pulled apart, still staring into each other's eyes. Tom's eyes displayed his uncertainty for a moment, while Heri's were mostly filled with surprise and wonder.

"Was that okay?" Tom whispered quietly.

Slowly, a small smile appeared on Heri's face and he ducked his head slightly with embarrassment as he nodded his head. "Yes... I liked that a lot, actually."

Tom's face shifted slightly to relief before his lips curled into a smug grin. "Good, because I intend to do it again."

Heri smirked back and a moment later the two were kissing again.

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Tom's group of 'friends' unquestioningly accepted Heri back amongst them and he instantly resumed his old position as Tom's closest and most trusted, and all of the respect that position came with.

Tom and Heri kept their shift in relationship secret from the others. They'd learned during their six years in the wizarding world that same-sex relationships were not unheard of, but still not openly spoken of. The muggles tended to pretend such things didn't even exist, and any such relationships were considered unnatural and sinful. The wizards didn't seem to think of it as something evil or disgusting, however, propagating their already thin bloodlines and continuing to grow the wizarding race was important to them – especially the Dark families and the old Pure-blood lines – and being with a member of the same gender would result in no heirs, and as such, seen as counter productive.

If a witch or wizard decided to take on a lover of the same gender after marrying and producing a child with another person of the opposite gender – well, that was fine, as long as the infidelity was approved of by the spouse, and not flaunted in the public eye.

Despite all of the extenuating circumstances and the theoretical potential approval of the wizarding world, Heri and Tom had still been raised in the muggle world. With *Catholics*. Same-sex relationships were *not* okay in the world they'd come from. So they kept it secret. It was their private love-life, after all, and no one else's business but their own.

One positive thing could be said though. While they came from the close-minded muggle world, they no longer had any obligation to ever go back. That December for Tom, and

January for Harry, they had each turned seventeen.

They were now of age. That spring they each took their apparition tests, and of course, both passed. When the end of June was drawing close, they arranged with the owner of a pub on Knockturn Alley to stay there for a few weeks with the option of staying the whole summer, if they didn't find something better.

In the muggle world, 18 was the age of adulthood, and they could have, technically, returned to the orphanage for that summer... but why would they? They no longer had to, and thus they had no intention of ever setting a foot back in that place ever again. Unless it was to burn the place down.

Heri had decided to hold off on going to Rome to investigate his family heritage until after graduation, so they simply spent the summer in London with one very brief detour where the two of them apparated to the country to the same sea-side area that they had been taken to in their youth many years ago. Tom picked a muggle at random. A young woman who seemed to be out there all alone and managed to secret her away from any of the crowds unnoticed. Heri and Tom took her into the same cave where they had tormented Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop when they were young children.

Tom had wanted to play with the muggle some first. No doubt he would get a thrill out of killing her slowly and listening to her scream, but Heri had insisted it be quick and simple. The woman had done nothing to them, personally. Her only crime was being a muggle – and while Tom seemed to think that was crime enough, Heri managed to win out, and Tom had simply killed her with the killing curse. They transfigured her body into a rock and tossed her out into the sea and then used the large cave to perform the spells necessary to split off another piece of Tom's soul. This time it was anchored to the ring that Tom had stolen from his uncle Morphin.

Tom had then given the ring to Heri, which had honestly surprised him. Tom had said there was no one else he would trust to protect it, and he knew that Heri had been fascinated by the ring ever since Tom had acquired it.

Heri was convinced that it was some sort of necromantic artifact. His Black Sight told him he was right since he could see black tendrils of magic spooling around the stone. Tom had attached his soul to the actual ring, while leaving the stone specifically untouched just in case it really did have some greater purpose that the two of them were unaware of. The protections were applied to the entire thing though, and only Heri and Tom would be able to wear it without being cursed.

Once finished with their task, the two magically cleansed the cave of any evidence and apparated back to London.

They ended up renting a small one room flat above one of the Knockturn Alley shops for the rest of the summer. It was almost strange how sharing a bed had almost instantly felt natural. As if the two had always done it. Their physical relationship reached new limits that summer, and when it came time to return for the seventh and final year at Hogwarts, they were both saddened by the idea of having to sleep in separate beds again, and having to restrict their intimate activities to places they could guarantee privacy like the Hidden Room.

But with the new school year came something that both had honestly been expecting. Tom was made Head Boy.

Heri's playful teasing was about the only thing that kept the taller boy from floating away with the fat head he had. Heri had joked that Tom's head was filled with smugness and if he wasn't careful, he was going to just float away. Tom had swatted at him, but his glare was playful and not truly angry. There was no denying that Tom was proud of his achievement. He had the entire school in his back pocket. Well... except for Dumbledore.

Dumbledore had never stopped suspecting the two of them. He'd kept an eye on them all sixth year, and seventh was no different. They still managed to slip away when they really wanted to though.

The Hidden Room got a lot of use that year.

Tom spent a lot of that year with his political maneuvering and his manipulations of the school populace and the teachers. While he was busy doing things that he needed to do alone, Heri resumed his Necromancy research. He didn't have to always retreat to the Hidden Room for it since a lot of what he was doing now only required he slip into the proper trance and he could even do that in his dorm room.

He was searching for a specific highly acclaimed necromancer that several of the other spirits had told him about, and was having trouble locating the man. He was worried that the spirit might have already been reborn, in which case, Heri wouldn't actually be able to find him. Fortunately, for him at least, it was a tendency with those who had the power to retain their awareness in the astral plane, to spend a great deal of time there between their rebirths.

Heri learned that, while there, in the astral plane and not tethered in any way to the physical plane, these necromancers had access to the memories of every physical life they had ever lived. They remember each and every time they were born, lived, and died, with perfect clarity. However, once reborn and back in the physical world, they lost access to those memories, and with them, all of their knowledge and skills. And even if they managed to become a Necromancer again in their new life, and were able to slip their consciousness back into astral plane, the memories of their astral body would still be blocked from them. Only the dead can remember every life they lived.

At least, that was what each of the spirits Heri had come across insisted. Heri was beginning to suspect otherwise, though.

Another thing that he learned during his communications with the spirits of the astral plane was that he was apparently a very young soul. Several of them suggested that they were quite sure that this was, in fact, his very first life.

Heri had initially asked them if they could tell how old he was because he suspected he may have been a Necromancer in a previous life, however, many of the spirits seemed convinced that was not the case. He was too young and his energy too bright.

It was quite rare for new souls to be 'born'. There were already so many and there was rarely a cosmic demand for new souls that couldn't be filled by those that already existed. But from

time to time a new soul would come into existence. Heri wanted to know more. Know how these souls were born, and if it meant that some souls could die, but the spirits he spoke with did not have the answers and he was left with only conjecture, speculation, or simple responses like 'I have no answers for your many questions.'

Heri's available time to continue his research and exploration into his Necromantic powers quickly grew slim as the NEWT exams drew nearer. Heri finally admitted temporary defeat and set his personal studies aside in exchange for focusing on his school work and revising for his exams.

The closer it drew to graduation, the more focus was drawn to the students future career prospects. Everyone was convinced that Tom would go straight to the Ministry, and most likely a surprising high position for someone fresh out of school.

Heri was the only one that knew what Tom actually intended to do. Not that he necessary approved of it. He felt it was truly beneath the other wizard, but the job itself wasn't the point. The point was the objects that the job would give him access to.

Tom intended to go work at the largest shop in Knockturn Alley. Borgin and Burkes – the shop that they had pawned so many Dark objects off to over the years. Tom had decided, during the course of the year, that he wanted his four remaining Horcruxes to be significant, important, artifacts. It was his true desire to have a relic of each of the school's founders, but didn't know if he'd actually manage to find them. He really hoped to someday find the locket that his uncle had told him had once belonged to his mother. The locket of Salazar Slytherin. But both of them admitted that the chances of that happening were slim.

Still, if he hoped to find any at all, working for Borgin was the best shot. While he searched for his future Horcruxes, Heri was going to finally make his trip to Rome and visit his family vault. Once the two of them were done with their separate tasks, they intended to travel to Albania where, Tom hoped to find the diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw. Tom had managed to discover from the Ravenclaw House ghost, the Gray Lady, that she was in actuality Helena Ravenclaw, Rowena's daughter. Helena had apparently stolen her mother's famous diadem and taken it with her when she ran away to hide in the forests of Albania.

Once done with that endeavor, they would begin traveling Europe together. Searching for obscure magic and Dark wizards who could teach them things that they would have never learned at school.

Tom's true hope for a career had actually been to stay at Hogwarts – a fact that only Heri really knew. Tom had even gone to Headmaster Dippet and asked if he could fill the Defense Against the Dark Arts post since Professor Merrythought was retiring that year. However Professor Dippet had turned him down. He had insisted that Tom was still too young for the job and needed to go out and live his life for a while before taking on a teaching position at Hogwarts. Tom had been bitter and angry about the brush off, but had kept his ire to himself.

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Tom had graduated top of their class, with Heri second behind him. Much to the shock of everyone, Tom started working at the assistant buyer for Borgin one week out of school.

They rented another one-room flat, and a week later, Heri was taking the international floo to the mainland, and then a couple floo hops later, he found himself in Rome.

He checked into a hotel and the following morning made his way to the Rome branch of Gringott's for a scheduled visit.

The Valeriusn family vault was mammoth. It was a cavern-sized space filled with gold, books, trinkets, furniture, art, magical portraits put under stasis charms, and a tremendous number of magical artifacts that were radiating Darkness.

Heri found himself standing there, gaping at the vault in shock and awe.

He ended up spending nearly a month in Rome. Every day he would go to visit the bank and spend the day in the vault, cataloging the objects in it, setting aside everything that he intended to take with him, and going through the treasure trove of books.

He and Tom sent letters back and forth every few days, keeping each other up to date on their progress. Tom had seen a lot of very interesting objects, but nothing that he found worthy enough to become the next vessel for a piece of his soul.

During the course of Heri's journey to investigate his family's past it became very obvious to him that his family held a long line of Necromancers. He found nearly a dozen grimoires in the vault and out of all the treasures contained within the bank, he considered those books the most valuable.

By the start of August, Heri returned to England, and to Tom. Both were greatly relieved to be back in each other's company – the last month having been the longest period of time that the two had ever been apart from each other. They celebrated their reunion in bed, and then again each and every night after that.

It was eight months before Tom finally hit the jackpot. An old wealthy witch by the Hepzibah Smith, had quite a few incredibly valuable treasures that she had revealed to Tom, but he had known that she had more that she had been holding out. He'd been wooing her favor for months and finally he managed get her to show him two of her most prized possessions. A cup that had belonged to Helga Hufflepuff, and... a *locket*.

It was *the* locket. Salazar Slytherin's locket that had once belonged to Tom's own mother. Hepzibah told a story of Borgin swildling it out of some poor ignorant girl who didn't realize what she had or how much it was worth. And Hepzibah had bought it from Brogin.

Tom had come home that night and informed Heri that they would be leaving England very soon and that he should pack up everything he wanted to keep and be ready to go.

Heri had spent those past months in self study as he poured over the grimoires he'd brought back with him from Rome. As long as he had his books with him, he was ready to leave at a moments notice, so he had no problems with Tom's sudden proclamation.

He had been slowly developing an idea from the things he'd been reading and studying lately. He hadn't yet told Tom of his theories since it was not only untested, but also because he

knew his ideas were no where near fleshed out enough to be sure it could even work... he wanted to be sure before he brought it up, so he had kept his research mostly to himself while Tom had continued his search.

That night, Heri and Tom went back to Hepzibah Smith's home. Through the course of their brief visit they managed to seal the locket and the cup, kill the old witch, and Tom even manipulated the memories of the old woman's house elf so that she would remember having accidentally killed her mistress herself.

Despite the confidence that they both had in the layers of precautions they had taken to lay the blame somewhere else, they both left England the very next day.

The next task on their list was Ravenclaw's diadem. Tom now had two founders objects, and had a fairly clear idea on where to find a third, so he was eager to get going. It took them four months of searching to finally locate the diadem, magically hidden inside a tree.

It was during those four months that Heri had finally succeeded in his first proof of theory and finally felt comfortable telling Tom of what he planned to do.

"Tom, I'm ready to tell you what I've been working on." Heri said as he came into the sitting room of the small cottage they'd been renting for the last few months. Tom's head shot up and he eyed Heri with wide eyes. He'd been pestering Heri to tell him about his work for months, but Heri had been insistent that he wasn't willing to go into it until he was sure it would work.

Tom moved the books and scrolls off from beside him on the couch, and onto the low table in front of him. Heri came over and sat down beside Tom, leaning forward with his hands clasped between his knees.

"I know you don't exactly *believe* in the rebirth cycle of the soul, but I ask that you to suspend your disbelief long enough for me to explain what I'm planning to do."

Tom rose a single eyebrow at Heri, but he gave a curt nod and relaxed back into his side of the couch, giving Heri his full attention.

"It's important to first understand the nature of the astral plane, the physical plane, and how life coexists in both places. We – all of us – really exist in the astral plane. Even right now, you and I both exist in the astral plane. That's where our souls live. A *portion* of the soul lives inside our physical body, extending our consciousness here to this plane of existence, but even while we are physically alive, our primary soul still resides in the astral plane. Our body is tethered to our soul and it keeps us here, in the physical world, living. Its the same thing that your horcruxes do. As long as there is some portion of your soul tethered to the physical world, the rest of you can remain here as well.

"Normally, when the physical body dies, the tether snaps and our consciousness returns completely to the astral plane. Your horcruxes prevent this action. You already know all this."

Tom nodded his head to acknowledge that he *did* in fact, already know this.

"Okay, so from my research and from my own ventures into the astral plane to commune with the spirits there I've been able to determine a few things. One, our soul or astral body, or whatever you want to call it – it remembers *everything*. Every life that a person has ever lived, they can remember with absolute perfect clarity, while they are in the astral plane. However when we are here, in a physical vessel, we no longer have access to any of that knowledge or any of our memories. There is a filter on the tether that connects our primary soul to the bit that resides in our physical body.

"The stories of people who have bits and pieces of memories of their past lives are the result of a defective filter on their astral tether. But the filter tends to mend itself which is why most past life memories occur in children, and fade away by adulthood. They have access to those memories. They only have access to the physical, imperfect, memories stored chemically in their brain."

Heri paused for a moment. Tom looked interested at the very least, and less skeptical than he usually did when Heri talked about all his 'astral plane' stuff.

"So I started to wonder – if it's possible for this filter to be faulty and allow partial access to the soul's memories, what would happen if the filter was removed entirely? At first, it occurred to me that full access to one's astral memories would mean perfect recall. I could have even better memory than you, Mr. Eidetic-memory," Harry said with a teasing tone, earning him a pair of rolled eyes from Tom.

"But it goes even further than that. If I was able to *permanently* destroy the filter I would *always* remember everything. Even after I died and was reborn. I would still retain all of my memories. All of my knowledge." Heri continued, getting excited. "So I summoned the spirits of some of the more powerful necromancers I've found in the astral plane and asked them for their opinion on my theories. It's been done before! I'm not the first necromancer to think of doing this. And what's more, destroying the filter would mean that I would retain full access to all of my magic as well, no matter how many times I'm reborn. Every new life would simply be a continuation of the last, only in a new body. My own personal brand of immortality."

Tom's face betrayed his surprise for several moments before his brows knitted together. "This is all assuming that you will, in fact, be *reborn*. You've said in the past that some of these Necromancers you speak with have been in the astral plane for hundreds of years..."

"That's simply because they choose to exist there. They could trigger their rebirth at any time if they wanted to."

Tom continued to frown and grumbled quietly under his voice. He sighed and ran his hands down his face. "I wish you'd just create a horcrux..."

Heri growled quietly. "No! No, Tom! I refuse to mutilate my soul like that!"

"I haven't mutilated anything!"

"You have, too! But we're not having this discussion again! You've chosen your path, and now I'm choosing mine. If you're going to live forever, I want to live forever with you, but

I'm not creating a horcrux."

Heri and Tom's eyes connected and they simply stared, silently, at each other for a long moment. Finally Tom sighed and looked down. "What can I do to help?"

Heri smiled softly and pulled out the small leather-bound booklet he always kept with him for notes and original spells. "It's fairly complicated... but I'm confident I can do it."

Rebirth Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 07 -----

Nearly a decade had passed before the two set foot back in Britain. During their travels abroad the wizard Grindelwald had been defeated in a duel by Albus Dumbledore, and his war to reclaim power over Europe for the Dark wizards had collapsed with his incarceration in the very prison that he had founded. But all of that had seemed a world away to the pair as they traveled and studied magic. Their return to Britain marked the completion of their studies, and the beginning of their primary quest.

Tom had never been one for small plans. As far as he was concerned, the way the magical world of Great Britain was run was an atrocity. A crime punishable by total annihilation. Tom wouldn't be satisfied to work his way into the Ministry and try to fix its severe deficiencies from the inside out. No, he would only be happy if it was completely destroyed and rebuilt from scratch. Rebuilt in the way he deemed best. Heri was more than willing to follow Tom down whatever path he chose, and eagerly helped his lover in his recruiting efforts. He agreed fully that the way the British Ministry of Magic was run was flawed beyond redemption, and was looking forward to playing a significant role in rebuilding the world of magic that he loved so dearly.

Tom had always been extraordinarily charismatic and persuasive with the masses, so gaining followers was not that difficult. He also understood psychology and had studied revolutions of the past. Pin-pointing what had worked and what had led to failure.

Tom had come to understand that a successful total revolution would need strong leadership (himself and Heri), ideology that featured a scapegoat for the problems of the masses and a utopian retelling of the future, propaganda, terror, and a way to twist the truth around in a way that was able to convince people to think in novel, revolutionary way that defied the rules of simple logic. When he had first explained this one simple summary of his plans to Heri, the wizard had cocked a single brow at Tom and remarked that he made it sound amazingly simple and yet he somehow imagined it would not nearly be so easy a task to accomplish.

Tom, however, was convinced that he could do it. And he had the perfect plan for doing it. He wanted total control, but he needed to get people to support him. His base had always been the Darker wizards of Britain society. Former Slytherins, mostly, but plenty of others as well. Old pure-blood families and believers in the traditions of olde magick.

Finding a scapegoat for them point the finger at was simple and obvious. Muggles and muggleborns. Easy. Hitler's scapegoat in the second world war was the Jewish population. He made Germany believe that the Jews were responsible for everything that ever went wrong in the history of their country. Using terms like "lice" and "subhuman" to describe Jews, Hitler made clear who Germany's enemy was, and the country loved him for it. They eagerly handed over the reigns to him and hardly even put up a fight.

Heri was quick to point out that Hitler was *dead* but Tom brushed it off, insisting that he would learn from the stupid muggle's mistakes. *He* would not be so easily defeated.

And so they set to the task of recruiting followers. Tom already had a nice-sized group of wizards who were deeply loyal to him when word first reached his ears that the Defense Against the Dark Arts position was once again available at Hogwarts. It was now 1957 – ten years exactly since he and Heri's graduation from Hogwarts. And ten years since the last time he had applied for the post.

Wasting little time, Tom applied for the position and an interview was arranged. He claimed that he was only doing it so that he had a valid excuse for re-entering the castle. He had wanted to hide one of his horcruxes in the school. Hogwarts had been his first home and as sentimental as it sounded, he liked the idea of a piece of himself always being there. The plan was to hide it inside the Hidden Room – which would be simple since he would have to pass that portion of corridor on the way to the Headmaster's office for his interview.

Heri knew, however, that part of Tom was honestly hoping to get the job. Even with all his grand plans and goals, Tom truly did enjoy teaching. Knowledge was and would always be his one true weakness. After all; knowledge is power.

—

The horcrux that Tom hid in Hogwarts was the Diadem of Ravenclaw. Slipping into the Hidden Room and placing it had been a simple matter, and he had quickly cast several layers of charms that would work as a more powerful version of the notice-me-not charm. He had then left and made it to the headmaster's office right on time.

Dumbledore was now the headmaster of Hogwarts and the aged wizard made it perfectly clear that he still held no trust for Tom Riddle. He even remarked on Tom's use of an alias and his recent gathering of Dark wizards. The name *Voldemort* was mentioned.

Tom returned to Heri in an angry huff. Dumbledore hadn't even considered his application for the job, just like he had never even considered Tom's request to stay away from the muggles during the summers, all those many years ago. Dumbledore had simply accused him of having ulterior motives and asked him, rather bluntly, why he was really there. Not that Tom really expected much different from the man, but it still angered him.

--

Tom and Heri continued to grow a powerful base of wizards with spies in every department of the Ministry imaginable. As the years passed and violence began to escalate people became more and more aware that all-out war was on the horizon.

Tom was in high spirits. His plans were moving along perfectly. His life with Heri was never better. It was January 1966. Tom and Heri had both just turned 40 years old. Forty years together. Forty years of hardly ever being apart for more than a few months at a time.

That was the month that Heri died.

It was during a raid that would have seemed to be entirely unremarkable at first. Heri and Tom were both there personally, leading a group of their personal fighters known as the Death Eaters, when Albus Dumbledore himself appeared with a group of his own allies.

The battle escalated and Tom began to duel Dumbledore with a tremendous ferocity. It was a duel worthy of the annals of history. Tom had the upper hand for most of it. He was fighting wonderfully. Heri had kept track of his lover out of the corner of his eye as he duelled with two of Dumbledore's allies at once.

He had dealt a swift death to one of them and had just successfully sliced the head off the second with a powerful Dark severing charm when he heard Tom exclaim. He turned to refocus on the duel between Dumbledore and Tom. Heri wasn't sure exactly what had taken place. All he could figure was that Dumbledore had to have been getting desperate to sink to using his enemies tactics. Whatever spell he had cast was dripping with *Dark* energy and it had Tom suspended a few feet above the ground, unable to move at all.

"This ends now, Tom," Dumbledore's deep voice boomed as he aimed his wand.

Heri saw a mixture of horror and fury in Tom's fiercely glowing red eyes. As Harry heard the words uttered from Dumbledore's mouth that he would have never expected the venerated Light wizard mutter, and saw the sickly green light begin to shoot from the tip of the man's wand, his body seemed to move before he could even signal the command to do so.

He screamed out in horror and all he could think was "*Not Tom!*" as he flung his body through the air, and intercepted the curse.

The scream of rage that escaped Tom at that moment was powerful enough to decimate whatever spell Dumbledore had been using to restrain him. The massacre that followed would leave no witnesses behind of what had happened that day, save one. Dumbledore himself had barely managed to escape with his own life, but had abandoned all of his comrades to Tom's explosion of anger and grief.

Heri was dead. The love of his life. His grounding force. His sanity. And Dumbledore would pay for taking him away. Tom swore to himself. Dumbledore *would pay!*

--

No matter how *sure* you think you are about whether or not something is going to work, doubts have a way of quickly crawling their way into your mind. And Tom had never had a lot of faith in Heri's chosen method of immortality. The idea that his lover would have to be reborn into a new body and then *grow up again* was disconcerting on its own, but he wasn't even sure if he believed that would even come to pass.

He continued his war, and the violence only escalated after Heri was killed by Dumbledore's hands. But Tom never stopped looking or waiting for some sign that his Heri had returned. He and Heri had established a code-phrase so that when they saw each other again and Heri was in a new body, Tom could determine that it really was Heri.

One would say '*Non mortem timemus, sed cogitationem mortis*', which was a quote from the Roman philosopher Seneca. It meant 'We do not fear death, but the thought of death.'

In response, the other was to say '*Omnia mutantur; nihil interit*'; Everything changes, nothing perishes.

Heri had setup a similar deal with the goblins in relation to his vaults. He had instructed the goblins that in the case of his death, his personal accounts should be frozen but not closed. He set up a very specific list of requirements and told them if anyone came by who was able to precisely fulfill all of them, that the vaults should be turned over, in full, to that person. After Heri's death, Tom had, had Heri's wand placed in his personal vault in Gringott's London branch. It had been a terribly difficult thing to do, but was also a sign of his own personal hope. A hope that Heri would be back and some day be able to reclaim his wand.

But the years passed and nothing happened. No one ever came up to Tom and spoke Seneca the Younger's words to him. And no one ever accessed Heri's vault in London. So as to not get devoured by his own hopeless despair Tom put all of his focus into his war. If he couldn't have Heri, he could at least have Britain, and someday – *the world*.

— — — —

Everything was reddish and warm. Rhythmic wooshing and thumping sounds made up his entire world along with the occasional muffled voice of a woman. His awareness was inconsistent. In and out, his reality would come and go. His connection was still tentative, he realized. For quite a while he truly had no conscious awareness of what he was or what his world was. It was like a dream that he was only partially aware of.

His eyes started to work a bit better. Everything was still red and the world was a blurry mess, but he realized he could see his own hand. He also realized that he had a hand and that he knew what a hand was. He tried to wiggle his fingers, but found he had no conscious control over any of his muscles. His physical brain wasn't wired right yet. Any jerky movements his body made seemed entirely involuntary. The needed connections weren't there to allow him to communicate his needs to his various extremities.

So he was in utero. And he still knew who he was. It had worked. He would have smiled had his unborn infant body been capable of such a thing. As it was, he wondered if he even had lips yet. For that matter...

Crap... did that mean he was going to be a girl, or that his man-parts simply hadn't grown in yet? *Oh wait... ah. Yes. There it is. A boy then.*

He mentally sighed in relief. He'd been aware of the possibility of being reborn as a female, but it wasn't an idea he had particularly fancied.

He knew that he had to be fairly far along since he had individual fingers and toes, not to mention his man-parts. And his eyes worked. That was probably the biggest sign that he had to be nearing the finish line. Those were all things that happened in the late second and third trimesters. Not to mention the fact that he felt rather cramped.

He wondered what it would feel like to be born, but realized that he actually remembered it from his first life. His soul remembered everything, even the things from before he had destroyed the filter that separated his conscious mind in his physical body from the rest of his soul. So many years ago, when he had undergone all the rituals and performed the necessary necromantic spells to destroy his astral memory filter, he had gained access to the perfect, crystal clear, versions of all of his memories from the moment he was first born. But he had had to consciously intend to access them in his previous life since his physical mind wasn't accustomed to tapping into them.

One of the most interesting confirmations that Heri had made by doing all that, was that his life as Herakles Lucan Valerius really was his soul's *first life*. The spirits he had talked with in his youth had been right. He had been a new soul. So he hadn't been a necromancer in a past life. His tie to the necromantic arts was entirely based on biological heredity. The Valerius family had produced quite a few necromancers, after all, and it really only made him even more grateful that he'd been born into their family, even though it had meant being raised an orphan.

It had been a little disappointing at first, when he'd first realized that he was a new soul. He had actually hoped to suddenly have access to memories from lives he lived thousands of years ago. To suddenly know what life had been like millenia ago, or to suddenly know how to speak some long dead languages, or know of long-lost magics. But it was probably better this way. He was still himself, entirely. Nothing new or seemingly 'foreign' had been added in.

—

Time passed oddly. His awareness still came and went and he realized that he slept a lot. During that time he determined that his limbs liked to jerk about randomly and entirely of their own volition. He also determined breathing amniotic fluid was very odd, and that hiccups were insanely frustrating.

Birth was... strange. His first breath of actual air to fill his lungs was both an incredible relief, and a tremendous shock. Everything was so bright and *so cold!*

Put a blanket around me damn it!

And then there was that familiar feminine voice. He was placed directly upon her bare chest and she held him and cooed and cried while a man hovered beside her, smiling and tearing up

a bit. The woman had such profoundly *red* hair. And bright green eyes. She was quite beautiful.

They were speaking but Heri found he had trouble making sense of any of the words. His brain wasn't processing sound right yet. The sounds came in and he heard them, but the wiring just wasn't quite right yet for it to be interpreted in any way that made sense. It was just garbled nonsense.

Another frustration, but he knew this all would just be temporary. Infancy was brief.

He looked up at the woman again and felt engulfed by the sense that he was loved. He had only ever felt loved by Tom, before. No one else had ever loved him and here, these two people instantly and unconditionally loved him even though they didn't even know him yet. At least for now. He would reserve judgment. But things were looking up.

Maybe he would actually be granted a nice childhood this time around. Wouldn't that be nice?

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It took about a month before his brain formed the proper wiring for him to finally understand the sounds he heard. His vision still sucked, but all infants had crappy vision. He just hoped it would improve.

By some sort of cosmic insanity, it seemed that his parents had named him Harry. What were the chances? It would certainly simplify things in the long run. Less confusion at least.

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Dumbledore. Bloody, fucking *Dumbledore* was in *his home*! The goddamned bastard that had *killed him* was fucking *holding him*! He screamed and squirmed and fussed and his mother quickly took him away, shushing and cooing at him, trying to calm him down and making apologies, insisting that he was usually such a calm baby. "He hardly ever cries at all. It's so strange," she was saying. "I've never seen him react like this to anyone before..."

*Yeah, well, you never let the man who **killed** me hold me before either.* Harry thought bitterly as he continued to scowl angrily at the old man who just looked at him, rather bewildered.

Harry couldn't help but notice that Dumbledore looked a lot *older* than he had when he had killed Heri. There wasn't even the slightest hint of auburn hair left on the man's head or face, and his beard had gotten a lot longer. It was the first time that Harry really wondered just how long he'd been dead for.

He knew he'd spent longer in the astral plane than he'd intended to, and time seemed to flow differently there than in the physical plane... He really had no idea at all how much time had passed, and couldn't even begin to wager a guess. He hadn't heard anyone say the date yet. He knew it was summer, but of what year – he had no idea. It was the first time that a horrible pit sunk into the bottom of his stomach.

Just how long have I made Tom wait?

--

Well fuck.

So he'd come to realize that his new last name was *Potter* the first time that his mother ventured out into town with him in tow, in order to get some groceries. Some woman in the local market had called her Mrs. Potter and Harry had almost choked on his own spit. He had *hated* Charlus Potter back in school, and realizing that he was now related to the stupid man was less than pleasing. His only consolation was that he was probably a pure-blood in this life.

No such luck. No, his mother was a mudblood. But that wasn't what was really upsetting him now – no, he was fine with that. He'd been a half-blood in his last life and had come to terms with that. What was upsetting him now was the sudden realization that he had been born into a family that was very much on the wrong side of the war.

His parents were members of a group run by *Dumbledore*. This group was called the Order, or something like that, and they were fighting against a Dark Wizard – who, amusingly enough, none of them seemed willing to speak his name, save Dumbledore himself – and this Dark Wizard's group of fighters that were called *Death Eaters*.

Fuck...

At least he knew that Tom was still alive and still fighting. That was at least slightly reassuring.

He was nearing the three month old mark and his mother apparently felt the need to attend one of the 'Order's' meetings herself. She had insisted to his father that she was tired of being cooped up in the house all day and that this was her war as much as anyone else's.

Great...

She had considered getting a babysitter, but apparently all of her female friends who she would consider for the job were *also* members of this Order thing. But since Harry was such a remarkably well behaved baby, she decided to risk it, and just brought him along.

He was passed along the people sitting at the table and various people standing around a large kitchen of some sort. He recognized a few of them as visitors to the house from the past three months. His 'uncles' were there. Mooney, Padfoot, and Wormtail. Ridiculous nicknames that were used around the house. Now, at this meeting, he became aware that 'Padfoot' was a Black. A grizzled man with a few too many scars had called his last name out sharply and Harry had been stunned by the mere concept of a *Black* being on the Light side of the war. It was dumbfounding. But then freaking *Padfoot* had responded back. The man was his godfather, as best he could figure. So his godfather was a Black. Interesting, but still confusing. Why was a Black best friends with a Potter?

The meeting progressed and he kept his mouth shut and squirmed as little as humanly possible. Life as an infant was insanely *boring* and this was by far the most interesting thing he'd experienced yet. Perhaps if he behaved good enough, his parents would continue to take him to these meetings.

If nothing else, he could at least use his time here to learn some valuable information about Dumbledore's operation from the inside.

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Something was going on. He could tell his parents were trying to act normal around him, but it was obvious that they were stressed, and worried. *Afraid* even.

Dumbledore had been visiting a lot lately and there had been talks of going into hiding. Hiding from the Dark Lord. Why? Harry had no idea. It was obvious that his parents were trying to shelter him from their stress and never discussed it when he was in the room.

He knew that his father was an auror, and so was his godfather, Black. They worked together, but this week, his father had officially put in for a leave of absence. He would be staying home with Harry and his mum as a part of this 'going into hiding' business.

It seemed that his family had been specifically targeted for some reason. They seemed convinced that the Dark Lord himself was trying to track them down. Dumbledore even came and helped them cast a Fidelius charm around their home with that stupid balding man, Wormtail, as the secret keeper.

His father and Black had argued about it before hand. Black was supposed to be the secret keeper, but in the end, they had decided that was too obvious so Black became the decoy.

Tensions were high and everyone was on edge. Time seemed to be passing at a snail's pace and it was frustrating.

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Harry's first birthday passed with an overdone party and a cake. His dad had even gotten him a toddler-sized toy broom. He was walking and running with an acceptable level of stability now, but he still couldn't get his tongue and mouth to cooperate with his brain and could barely get out anything more complicated than 'No', 'Muh muh,' and 'Hungy'. It was annoyingly limiting, but at least things were progressing. A little bit more time and he was sure he'd finally be able to gain enough control over his vocal abilities to actually *communicate* again. He was looking forward to that.

Moony and Padfoot were there for the birthday party along with his mum's friend Alice and her son Neville whose birthday was only one day earlier than Harry's, but whose party they had held the weekend prior at Longbottom Manor. He overheard his mum and Alice speaking at one point in whispers and toddled his way over to eavesdrop. He was startled to hear the pair of them talking about... a *prophecy*? Alice and her husband Frank were going into hiding as well with their son Neville.

Dumbledore didn't think the prophecy was about Neville, but they couldn't be too careful since they didn't know for sure if 'You-Know-Who' would just go after both of them just to be thorough.

Just as things were getting interesting and Harry felt like he was on the brink of finally getting some idea as to what the hell was going on, damn Padfoot came up and snatched him up and flung him in the air and then perched him on his shoulders.

Harry squealed in surprise and Padfoot mistook it for a sign that Harry was enjoying himself and quickly began to run around the room with Harry on his shoulders.

Harry wasn't sure he ever remembered being so bloody frustrated in *either* of his lives.

--

Halloween.

"It's him! Lily, take Harry and run!"

It's him? Tom? Tom's here?

What the bloody hell is she doing! Doesn't 'run' usually involve leaving the house, not running up the bloody stairs? Even Harry could feel the anti-apparition and anti-floo wards as they went up. Up the stairs is not going to be an effective escape route!

Harry was placed in his crib where he quickly stood up and clung to the rails, looking towards the door with trepidation. From what he had managed to piece together over the last three months, Dumbledore had overheard some sort of prophecy. This prophecy named a child that, it appeared, was destined to be a threat to the Dark Lord. It also appeared that this child was Harry.

This would be fine and meaningless – since *all* prophecies are bullshit unless someone believes in them and acts on it – if it weren't for the fact that a Death Eater had also overheard the prophecy and gone straight to Tom.

Harry certainly couldn't blame Tom for coming after him. Tom didn't realize who he was. As far as Tom knew, it was just the child of a Potter. A Light wizard; an Auror; a member of the Order. A child professed in some way to be a threat to him.

It was self preservation. Remove the threat before it becomes a real danger.

Harry felt the spike in the magic in the air, followed by a heavy *thump*, and knew that his father was probably dead. He heard the creak on the fourth stair from the bottom and knew Tom was drawing near. He watched with a bit of bewildered shock as his mother put her wand away and simply stood there, in front of his crib.

As Tom calmly entered the room Harry was stunned by what he saw. Gone were the man's handsome good looks. The silky black hair, always maintained in a perfect wave. His aristocratic nose and sharp, angular jaw... all of it had been replaced with sickly pale skin that had an almost scale-like quality to it. A flat plane with narrow slits where a nose belonged.

Even his eyes had an unreal serpentine quality to them, thought they were still that familiar ruby red.

What had Tom done to himself to cause this? He was filled with a horrible sadness at the sight. It mattered not that he was surely about to die. Harry had come to terms with that fact. He would simply have to try harder this next time to make sure he was reborn almost instantly. He had only wasted about a year and a half with this life. He could recover.

Get reborn again. Go through infancy again. Hopefully in Britain still, but it wouldn't really matter where he was born since he could always find a way to get back to England. He *would* be gambling again on the gender...

"No, not Harry! Please, not Harry!" his mother pleaded.

"Stand aside you silly girl! I am only here for the boy."

Harry blinked. Was Tom offering his mother a chance to live? How... odd. Why would he do that? She was a muggleborn. Tom hated mudbloods...

"Please! Not my son! Take me! But not Harry!"

The next thing Harry knew, Tom's wand was leveled at his mother, a green light flashed and filled the room, and her lifeless body crumpled to the floor.

He watched her body fall, feeling a surprisingly powerful loss at the sight. She had been so kind. So loving. Even if he fundamentally disagreed with their politics, she had still been his mother, even if only for a short time.

But she had chosen her side in this war. She and James Potter both were fighters in a war, and had become casualties. But that didn't mean it didn't hurt to see them go...

He looked up, meeting Tom's gaze with resignation and calmness. He even sighed. There was no way he could speak the proper words to Tom. He could still barely string three words together, let alone speak a whole phrase in Latin.

Tom seemed unnerved by his behavior because his wand faltered for a moment and he frowned at the fifteen month old baby, standing in the crib, mere feet from him, staring him in the eyes with no fear. Then his serpentine face filled with determination and he once again leveled his wand.

"Avada kedavra!"

The glowing green light shot forward and Harry thought that he was about to die from the same curse, for the second time, but something different happened. The curse struck him in the forehead and he was thrown back in his crib.

It hurt!

Which was extremely strange. It wasn't supposed to hurt! I hadn't hurt last time he'd died, had it? No. There was no pain, just... death.

What was even more odd was that he didn't seem to be dead. And... and Tom was *screaming!* He wrenched his tear-filled eyes open just long enough to see the green light had somehow rebounded back and... and *hit Tom!*

No! No! Not him! You're supposed to take me! Not Tom!

The glowing light consumed Tom's entire body and then exploded in a shock wave that seemed to shake the very foundation of the house.

The last thing that Harry saw before he passed out was the billowing shape of Tom's robes as they fell to the floor in an empty heap. His body seemingly having disintegrated to nothing by the magical explosion.

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He had slipped in and out of consciousness over the next 24-hours. There had been a healer at one point. Dumbledore standing over him with his wand, frowning deeply. Then he had been given to that giant oaf, Hagrid and had been flown through the air in some sort of charmed motorbike that he recalled belonged to his godfather Sirius Black.

He'd woken again to see Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall, who he knew thanks to the Order meetings, had become a professor at Hogwarts at some point in the last couple decades. They were standing over him and McGonagall seemed to be arguing with Dumbledore. Something about '*worst sort of muggles!*' had been said a one point.

Harry's head still hurt like hell and his vision was even worse than usual. He felt so *damn tired*. He just wanted to sleep, but he was cold and uncomfortable. He seemed to be in a basket of some sort, and wrapped in a blanket. But it was fucking *cold* out! He was a baby, for Merlin's sake, shouldn't they be taking him inside now, rather than just standing around in the dark arguing in bloody *November*?

But then Dumbledore bent down and tucked an envelope in the basket with him and smiled down at him, genially.

Merlin, he hated that smile.

And then... *wait... where the hell are they going? They can't be serious!*

They left!

They left him on a bloody *doorstep!*

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AN: That's all I've got written at the moment. I think I'll probably be coming back to this story again in the future, but make no guarantees. As I said at the top of EVERY CHAPTER SO FAR – I make no guarantees that this story will be continued. It's been a very intriguing and rabid little plot bunny, and I've managed to get more than 70 pages of it written while consecutively working on my other story. I think I'll probably continue to come back to it as more time progresses. **But it may be quite a while before you see an update.**

Rebirth Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: I managed to crank out another chapter of this one. Again, no guarantee on regular updates. I'll work on this one when I work on it. No schedule or plans really.

— — — — — Rebirth Chapter 08 — — — — —

Harry had only met his aunt once before, and he hardly remembered her at all because it was on the day he was born and he'd spent most of that day sleeping. She had come into the hospital delivery room carrying her own exceedingly pudgy infant, propped up on her hip. She had visited only very briefly, looked at him, frowned, handed over a rather cheap-looking teddy bear and promptly left.

As such, Harry almost had no idea who the woman was when she woke him up with her blood curdling scream the following morning. She had actually slammed the door once she was done screaming and he had wondered if he'd be better off at this point climbing out of the basket and just wandering away until someone picked him up and took him to the authorities. He'd end up in another orphanage, but at least he was familiar with that. His mum's muggle sister was another matter entirely.

But she came back, and brought her husband with her. The enormous man was wide-eyed, red-faced, and had a mustache that seriously reminded Harry of a walrus. Not to mention the similarities the man shared with the creature in relation to his girth.

They had quickly scooped his basket up and brought him inside, muttering something about the neighbors seeing him. They quickly placed the basket, with him still inside, on the floor and stepped back as if they were afraid it held some sort of contagious toxin. The woman, whom he had properly identified as his aunt by this point, snatched the letter out from beside him and quickly opened it. The walrus-man began to read it over her shoulder and his already red-face was quickly turning puce. Then both paled considerably.

Harry never found out exactly what had been written in that letter, but whatever it was apparently gave his relatives the impression that they had absolutely no choice but to take Harry in.

Harry was very familiar with what it was like to be feared and loathed. Obviously, as an adult, he helped to run an army of revolutionaries that the standing government liked to portray as evil monsters out to spread fear and death among the masses. He was feared and loathed by a lot of people. But even as a child, he had been accustomed to it. The children at the orphanage had been afraid of him and Tom. Several of them had hated the strange pair of children simply because they were different. But these children, and the matrons and nuns of the orphanage had mostly feared Tom and Heri because they were the unknown. They were *different*. Their powers were frightening because the children and the caretakers didn't understand it.

The Dursleys *knew* what Harry was. He could tell. They never said as much – in fact, the word 'magic' seemed to be taboo in their home – but it was still more than obvious that they knew about the world of magic. They knew that Harry was a wizard. And they hated him that much more, for it.

He was a burden in their house; one they wanted nothing to do with. Petunia had a child of her own to care for, and had no desire to take care of another. Her son Dudley who was born just over a month earlier than Harry had been, and he was a fussy, needy baby.

Harry had a sinking suspicion that if Dudley hadn't been around and still in diapers himself, she probably wouldn't have bothered getting any for him. As it were, he 'potty trained' himself within a month of entering the Dursleys' household out of necessity. Petunia didn't exactly deem changing his soiled nappy on any regular basis as very important and Harry found that he really hated diaper rashes.

Despite the convenience his 'potty trained status' brought to Petunia, and the fact that she'd be hard pressed to find a potty-trained year and a half old baby anywhere else in Surrey, the fact that Harry had done it seemed to be yet another sign of his 'unnaturalness' and reason for scorn, instead of an action to be praised or appreciated.

Harry was often left to his own devices, and as long as he didn't get into anything and start making a mess, he was ignored. Of course the second little 'Dudders' was turned loose on the living room, he quickly set to emptying out the little rectangular basket that held all of Petunia's magazines and began ripping them to shreds, or he would grab the remote to the telly and start banging it on the coffee table so hard that the little plastic back and the batteries came popping out. In comparison, Harry's quiet contemplating and eerily observant eyes, was accompanied by him calmly sitting, often looking out the window or simply watching Petunia as she tended to his cousin or the housework. He blended into the background and very rarely demanded anything outside of food, and so he was easy to overlook.

For the first four months in the Dursleys' house, Harry had been put in a small, uncomfortable, travel cot in Dudley's nursery with him. This was entirely because it was more convenient for Petunia to simply have them both in the same place. At the end of that time, Petunia relocated Harry to a separate room of his own so that their precious Dudders wouldn't have to share. However, using the word 'room' was probably going a bit far in this

case, since in reality, it was a boot cupboard. A large storage closet, under the stairs, just beyond the entry hall.

Apparently little Dudders needed his own space and the 'freak' was making it difficult for Dudley to sleep at night.

In reality, Dudley was a fat, spoiled baby with a touch of colic who was accustomed to waking at least once a night in order to get cuddled by his mother. Despite the poor quality of the 'room' he was moved into, Harry found he was actually rather relieved to finally be removed from Dudley's room. He was sick of getting woken up several times a night by the stupid boy's wailing cries.

In addition to that, being in the cupboard meant he was on the first floor, while the Dursleys were all up on the second floor. It was a small level of security, but he was glad for it.

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As soon as Harry had woken in front of the Dursleys' house that first morning, he had been able to sense that there were wards around the house. He could feel the power of the magic, but hadn't been able to decipher exactly what sort of wards they were with his still limited perceptions.

As part of the modifications he made to his astral tether, he now and forever had a direct connection to his magical core. He also had nearly forty years of experience, wielding a diverse range of magics, and a perfect, crystal-clear, memory of how to use it.

Despite all of this, his body was still less than two years old and wasn't made to handle such power. He was going to have to wait some time still, to summon any significant quantity of magic into himself.

Shortly after he was moved to his 'cupboard', he had started to spend his hours of alone time focusing and summoning his magic slowly into his young body. His body was still weak and most definitely not equipped to handle a lot of magic, but Harry had a plan for force-feeding his magic upon himself until he adjusted to it. He meditated and syphoned the magic through his small body every day. Just feeling the magic move through him and through the things around him. Not making it do anything, yet. Not trying to bend it to his will; simply pulling it into himself and letting his body grow accustomed to it.

He continued on in this vein for more than a year. It wasn't like he had much else to do. The Dursleys ignored him as much as possible. It was legitimate neglect, but Harry preferred it that way... to a point. He would really have liked more food than he was given. But he did prefer to be left to his own devices. It made things easier for him.

When he was noticed – specifically when he was noticed by Vernon Dursley – it was rarely, if ever positive. He was called a 'freak' and admonished for his unnaturalness. Vernon would rant and rave about having to support the 'worthless little monster', on a regular basis. The fact that Harry would stare at the fat man with cold, unwavering eyes, and absolute silence, certainly didn't help. But Harry enjoyed the unsettled and flustered looks the man would get.

The fact that this enormous whale of a man could feel intimidated by a mere two-year old was entirely amusing to him.

At least, it was amusing until the first time Vernon hit him.

The man was enormous. He had enormous meaty hands, and a fierce back-hand. Harry had been caught off guard by the sudden movement and hadn't been able to dodge. He'd ended up getting thrown back against the wall behind him and knocked unconscious.

He'd gotten what was probably a severe concussion from that incident. The fact that he could focus his magic into specific areas of his body to localize healing was probably the only thing that saved him.

It quickly became clear that, as Harry grew older, Vernon's ability to restrain his violent urges grew weaker and weaker. Harry's tendency to remain utterly silent the majority of the time, and glower fiercely up at his relatives, didn't help much. His aunt even called his icy glares demonic, on several occasions. She seemed to grow more and more convinced that he were simply possessed by some sort of horrible evil that went far beyond his 'freakish nature'.

It was almost comical how close to correct her assumptions were.

But then again, Harry wasn't exerting a lot of effort in concealing his true nature from them. He hated them and had no energy or will power to conceal his disdain. Nor did he have the energy or will to pretend to act like a normal three-year-old. This was actually the primary reason that he remained mostly mute. He didn't want to pretend to possess the limited vocabulary of a toddler, so he simply chose not to speak much at all.

So he turned three years old and still barely said any words at all to his relatives. Dudley was finally jabbering in something resembling coherent speech. Petunia cooed and fawned over her little boy to a sickening degree that disgusted Harry. The boy was going to be such a spoiled brat of a child. He was already a spoiled brat of a toddler. It would only get worse.

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It was around this point that his efforts in forcing his body to rapidly adjust to, and accept, his magic began to bare fruit.

One thing that had been especially bothering Harry, was his eye sight. It had never really improved over the years. If anything, it was getting worse. On top of that, he had grown accustomed to having the *Black Sight* during his previous life, and now that he was without it, he felt as if he had been deprived of one of his senses. Which, was true, actually. It was almost as if he were deaf. A vital sense that he had grown dependent upon was gone. He wanted it back.

The *Black Sight* would give him the ability to see and identify certain types of magic, as well as energies and spirits, ethereal strings, and searching tethers from the astral plane. The ritual to acquire the Black Sight was a type of ancient necromantic magic and as such, did not make use of a wand.

It did, however, require a small ritual that involved ingredients that he did not actually have.

When Petunia did her grocery shopping at the market, she would put her *precious Dudders* in the seat of the grocery cart. But Harry, had to walk. One day in the late fall of the year he had turned three, he slipped away from his aunt and went to the spices section, then on to the fresh vegetables section, then the floral department, and finally he visited the section of the store where loose-leaf teas were sold.

In the end, he managed to find quite a few of the ingredients he needed, or items that would work as suitable replacements. The ones he had never expected to find in a muggle market were, surprisingly enough, found in with the loose-leaf teas. He'd managed to get gotu kola, eleuthero, rooibos, cardamom, and kava root there. Many of them were mixed in with other things, so he would have to carefully sift through them and separate what he needed versus what he would discard, but it was the best he could hope for. In the end, he thanked the muggles ever-growing love of exotic teas for his success and found his way back to an annoyed aunt Petunia who scolded him for wandering off.

He did not even bother trying to pay for the things he'd found. He probably could have slipped them into his aunt's cart, but then he would have to retrieve them from the grocery bags before she found them and he didn't want to risk that. So he'd simply stowed his bounty in the overly-large rags his filthy caretakers clothed him in. It wasn't that hard. Very few people would actually suspect a three-year-old of being a shoplifter.

Despite his success in finding far more of the ingredients he needed than he had expected, he still did not have everything he needed. For the final few ingredients he would have no choice but to wait until spring. He still needed some chickweed – which he had seen growing near the park the previous spring, but hadn't had the forethought to pick at the time – and the fresh, crushed leaves of the bilberry shrub. The great thing about the bilberry shrub was that it was a very pretty-looking decorative shrub, and it was growing in the yards of several of their neighbors. *Unfortunately* it was practically barren and yellow at the moment since winter was drawing near. He would have to wait.

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In the spring he finished collecting everything he needed. The trouble now was brewing the potion, drinking it, and remaining uninterrupted for a full ten hours. One night, after his relatives had gone to bed, he focused as much of his magic as he could muster on unlocking the small bolt lock that kept him trapped inside his cupboard during the night. He felt incredibly drained afterwards, but he forced himself onward. Wandless *standard* magic had never been his forte. Tom had always remarked how strange it was that Heri could do the most remarkable necromantic magics without use of a wand, but ask him to do something more complex than summoning something from across a room without a wand and he'd find himself breaking a sweat and worn out.

Heri's response was always to point out that the old necromantic spells used entirely different means of focusing for the magic, while the traditional spells used by wizards today were *designed* to be focused through a wand. But it didn't matter now. Harry's body, while far more advanced than any normal 3-year old wizard, was still that of a child. The fact that he could wandlessly unlock the door at all was impressive. He was honestly surprised.

He slipped into the kitchen in the darkness of night, and pulled out a large stainless steel pot. He pulled one of the chairs up to the sink, filled it with the appropriate amount of water and then shakily transferred it to the stove where he started the burner. Muggle appliances had come a long way since his youth, growing up in the orphanage, and he was thankful for it. He got the water to a boil and began to add in the various ingredients. All the while, he was hyper aware of every noise or creak made in the house, constantly darting his eyes to the kitchen door.

Miraculously enough, he managed to get the entire thing done without anyone waking or stumbling upon him. He finished the potion around four in the morning. He stored it in an old thermos and quickly began to clean up after himself. He hid the thermos in the far back of his cupboard, focused his magic and relocked himself back in. He fell asleep upon his ratty little cot quickly after that.

He waited until Friday night to perform the ritual. The Dursley's enjoyed sleeping in Saturday mornings, so it was the best opportunity he would have. He slipped into his cupboard early, drank the potion, and began the complex series of hand-motions while quietly whispering the appropriate incanted word with each one. After thirty minutes of constant incanting, his forearms were growing weary, but he could feel the powerful magic swelling inside him. He spoke the last word and felt the rush of magic in his veins suddenly surge towards his eyes.

He barely managed to contain the yelp as his body was jolted with sharp stabbing pain and he collapsed back onto his cot, holding his fists to his eyes.

He clenched his teeth and breathed in sharp pants as he pushed through the pain. An hour later and he thankfully passed out.

When he woke to the sound of impatient pounding against his cupboard door and the sound of the bolt being unlocked, he warily pried his eyes open.

His eyes were still sore, and his entire head ached, but he smiled none the less. He had his Sight back. It had worked.

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He did a magical survey of the house he had been abandoned to. With the use of his Sight, he could examine the wards in more detail. There were a *lot* of layers to them. There were all of the standard fair wards; anti-apparition and anti-portkey. There were a few different magic detection wards. One seemed to be the same ones that he knew the Ministry had used back in his youth on the homes of any identified muggle-born or muggle-raised students' homes to track any accidental magic in front of muggles that would require the work of the obliviation squads. The second set, however, was clearly different. He knew it was *possible* that the Ministry had simply created a new set of observation wards over the years since a lot of time had passed since his previous life, however he suspected that wasn't actually the case.

From what he could make out of these wards, they were not rigged to report back to the Ministry, but rather, they were rigged to report back to the specific individual who had cast them. Harry suspected it was Dumbledore. These wards also appeared to be more sensitive. The Ministry's wards probably wouldn't pick up any lesser accidental magic at all, and they

would only record any magic performed in front of muggles. Dumbledore's ward, however, looked like it would record the slightest bit of magic performed within them. Harry wondered if his use of wandless magic had popped up on the man's radar or not. It was inconspicuous enough that it wouldn't deem much concern.

Neither of these wards, however, would be able to detect his necromantic magic. It was an entirely different sort of magic and it was old enough, and had been kept secret enough, that no wards in use today were able to identify it.

There also appeared to be a very complex and powerful ward that – as best Harry could tell – identified the magic associated with the Dark Mark, and prevented entry from anyone who had one.

The final dome of wards was the strangest and Harry couldn't quite make sense of what little he could see of them. His Sight didn't seem to be able to make them out very clearly, and it took him months of observing and studying the wards before he began to form a theory.

They seemed to be based on some strange ancient form of *Light* magic. It was much like his necromantic powers were so old and secret that no one knew much about it except those who practiced it. Whatever this Light magic was, it was a power Harry knew nothing of. It was the only ward in the batch that actually did not appear to have been cast by Dumbledore. Yet the magical signature was still familiar. When he finally realized where he knew it from he cursed his own idiocy for not realizing it instantly.

It was his mother's magical signature. Lily Potter.

Had his mum cast protective wards around her sister's house? Harry actually had trouble believing it. From what he had gathered, his mum and aunt weren't exactly on good terms. And while he was sure that if Petunia had asked for it, his mum would have cast protective wards around her house, Harry seriously doubted that Petunia would *ever* ask for such a thing. She *despised* magic. It was unnatural and freaky and she wanted nothing to do with it, even if it would save her. She would have hated the idea of there being some sort of invisible magical thing around her house.

So what was this ward, and why was it there?

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Another confusing revelation had come with the reacquisition of his *Black Sight*. Ever since that fateful halloween night, Harry's forehead had been graced with a very strange scar. It was a cursed scar – Harry could tell that much. A strange mark left behind by the killing curse that had mysteriously not killed him. It was in the shape of a lightning bolt, and even before he got his Sight back, he could tell that there was some sort of strange power in it.

With the return of his sight, he could see that there was far more to his strange scar than he had ever suspected. It pulsed and swirled with subtly restrained Dark magic. Magic that had been sealed and restrained by some incredibly powerful Light magic. It was as if there was a microscopic war being waged inside the small mark on his forehead. A war that had reached a stalemate and was resting, stagnant. Waiting.

It was shortly after his realization about the nature of the strange ward around Privet Drive that he realized that the Light magic that was encircling and entrapping the Dark power in his scar, was the very same as the ward. It was faintly touched by her magical signature; although it appeared that Dumbledore's magic was in there too.

He had faint memories of Dumbledore hovering over him with his wand in hand and frowning, as Harry came in and out of consciousness that day after the attack. Had Dumbledore done something to him?

It was standard practice with cursed scars to try and cleanse the effected area of all traces of Dark magic, but it didn't appear that what Dumbledore did was a *cleansing*. Perhaps whatever Dark residue was left by the killing curse could not be cleansed? So instead, Dumbledore sealed it in. Somehow, magic from his mother had also played a role in this. How, he really truly did not understand. She had been dead before he even got hit with the curse.

However this came to be, Harry found himself mildly conflicted about the whole thing. He was probably better off with whatever this was, sealed away. It would probably be slowing killing him if it was free. Or he would be dead already. He would have to continue to observe and monitor it. He needed to understand what it was. Clearly, Dumbledore had been unable to remove it, but Harry knew a lot more about Dark curses than Dumbledore did. What Dumbledore had needed to seal away, Harry could very well remove. He just had to figure out what the hell it was first.

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His time spent on Privet Drive with the Dursley's was slowly driving him mad. He was both bored and frustrated and terribly terribly angry. He was impatient and wanted nothing more than to find *some way* to try and find Tom. He knew the rituals that were needed to bring Tom back, and yet he was helpless to do anything with that knowledge. His body was still too weak, and too young. He still did not have his wand, and even if he did, he couldn't perform any standard magic while in the Dursley's house because it would be detected and Dumbledore would be alerted.

In addition to that anger-inducing frustration, there was also his continually deteriorating treatment at the hands of his relatives. The older he got, the less inclined they seemed to be to feed him properly, and the more often Vernon would resort to physical violence.

The spring of his fourth year, Harry found that he'd had enough. He refused to allow some stupid, fat, muggle, to continually cause him bodily harm. At this point, his left shoulder had been dislocated multiple times by the stupid man, due to his tendency to grab Harry by the upper arm and yank *hard* to pull him in whatever direction Vernon wanted. Once it had been dislocated that first time, it was prone to doing it again and again with ease and it was indescribably *painful!*

Harry had also sustained at least one more concussion, and what he assumed was a couple bone fractures – not that he got medical treatment for any of these incidents. He was fucking *four years old* and he'd already had numerous dislocated shoulders and fractured bones. He would *not* endure this treatment any longer! Most certainly not from some stupid filthy muggle!

But Dumbledore's wards were still a problem that he would have to work around, and Harry still had no wand. Whatever he did, it couldn't be standard fair magic. He would have to rely on his necromantic skills. This would be perfectly fine if he were willing to resort to lethal force. But if his uncle suddenly and mysteriously died, it would likely draw in Dumbledore's attention anyway. Even if it didn't, Petunia would no doubt run screaming to the man, insisting that the devil-boy he had left in their care had murdered her husband.

So non-lethal it would have to be. Unfortunately, necromancy wasn't big on non-lethal. The name said it all, really. Necromancy was originally named for the greek word nekros – meaning 'dead body'. Although the Renaissance name, nigromancy was equally appropriate. *Black Magic*. He had found he rather liked that definition.

In several cultures of the world, necromancers were known by the title 'black mage', or 'death mage'. The terms were all interchangeable and varied in names depending on language, location, and culture. But the magics were all similar no matter what area of the world it had been developed in. Still – the Greeks and the Romans had taken it far, and it was from there that his heritage and the largest portion of his knowledge had stemmed from.

He searched his memories, replaying for himself the words of many of the books and grimoires he had read over the years in his last life, in an attempt to determine what would be the best solution to his problem with the Dursley's. Finally, the week after his fat pig of a cousin turned five, Harry had determined exactly what he was going to do.

The spell he wanted to use did not require any potions or exotic ingredients. It did, however, require a life sacrifice, and some blood. Not a human sacrifice, but a living sacrifice, none-the-less.

He chose to go with one of the cats that belonged to the squib down the street. Her name was Mrs. Figg, and she was the one that the Dursley's often left him with whenever they wanted to go somewhere fun, or when they went on holidays. Obviously, they weren't willing to take Harry somewhere *fun*, so they left him behind with the crazy old cat lady from down the street.

Up until Harry had gotten his Sight back, he had thought that she was nothing more than just that – a crazy old lady with too many cats. The first time he was left in her care *after* getting his Sight back, he realized that there was a lot more to the woman than he had ever suspected. For one thing, her house had some magical wards around it. They were very basic though, and underpowered. Cheap wards. Secondly, her fireplace was hooked up to the floo network. She also had a few magical objects in her house, but not many.

When he looked at *her*, he could also tell that her body was capable of magic, but her soul had no magical core. She was a muggle's soul in a witches body. Physically compatible with magic, and yet incapable of it. A squib.

The fact that this woman was living in Little Whinging, just down the street from *him*, and that she had ended up being the only one of his many neighbors willing to babysit him for *free*... well, Harry thought it was fairly obvious that the woman probably worked for Dumbledore.

What pissed him off the most was that she still made his time with her miserable. She also knew, precisely, how he was treated by the Dursley's and yet she did nothing. Or perhaps, she *had* told Dumbledore and it was *he* who did nothing. No matter, really. They were all bastards. And while he couldn't do anything to Dumbledore – *yet* – he *could* do something to exact at least a small bit of revenge against the bloody squib. *And deal with Vernon at the same time.*

So Harry slipped out one evening when the two elder Dursley's were glued to the telly. Dudley was spending the night with his friend from down the street – some boy name Pierce or something. The adult Dursley's in the living room didn't even notice Harry leave out the back kitchen door – not that they ever paid him any attention. He jogged, stealthily down the alley until he came to Mrs. Figg's back gate and slipped inside.

There were cats everywhere. There were *always* cats everywhere. He slinked forward and found one of them that he knew the batty old bint especially liked. He pet the cat and cooed at it quietly, and sending out calming waves of magic. Finally he was able to calm it enough that he was able to grab it and carry it back out, down the alley, and back to the Dursley's house.

He subdued it's weak struggles with some soothing waves of his magic, licking at the pitiful creature's very soul. It was a simple matter to calm animals – especially mundane animals like a house cat. Part of him felt the slightest inkling of pity for the poor feline. Killing animals had never been his thing. That was *Tom's* thing. But Harry was far from squeamish. If he needed to kill a cat for this spell to work, he would kill the ruddy cat.

He slipped into the kitchen and retrieved one of the carving knives from the counter, and then a wide bowl from the cupboard. The cat was practically lethargic at this point and did not struggle at all as Harry held it by the scruff of it's neck over the bowl with one hand and held the knife with another. He continued to pour waves of calming magic into it, lulling it to a peaceful sleep that it would never wake from.

He quietly chanted a series of seven words over and over three times before he brought the knife to the cat's neck, slicing it open and holding it there while the blood poured into the bowl. He set the bloody knife down on the floor, grabbed the not-quite-dead-yet cat by the scruff of its neck with one hand and the bowl with the other. He carried the two objects, dripping a trail of blood on the floor as he walked, out of the kitchen, down the hall and into the open door to the living room. He was coming in behind his relatives, who were both sitting on the couch that had its back to the doorway and was facing the obnoxiously blaring telly.

Harry silently set the dying cat down on the floor, and it's blood continued to pump from it's neck and pool on the floor at his feet. He brought his hands up, staring directly at the back of Vernon Dursley's head and began to perform a series of fast, complicated, hand gestures. Each gesture was accompanied by a quietly whispered word and he focused all of his Dark black magic on his task. He felt the power surging forth and coursing through his tiny, malnourished body, filling him with strength and a tinge of glorious madness. He reached out and found the astral tether connected from his uncle's physical body, through the ethereal mists to his astral body and he latched his claws into it, wrapping the magics he was wielding

around it and locking his control over it, deep into the man's very soul. He knew the moment the magic had peaked and finished his chant with the closing command.

He watched as Vernon suddenly jerked forward in his seat slightly, as if he had just been kicked in the chest. Harry reached down quickly, grabbed the bowl, and placed his foot over top of the cat's skull. With one quick motion, he had smashed the feline's head in and with a flick of his hand holding the bowl, the blood was sent flying, soaking the fat man's head with blood.

The screams of horror, and the raging bellows of fury that followed was monstrous. The two muggles seemed stunned beyond words for an instant, but before Harry could even blink, both had risen from their seats and spun around to look at him.

Petunia looked as if she were about to faint, right then and there. Vernon's face was flushed nearly as red as the blood now dripping down from his head.

"WHAT UNNATURALNESS IS THIS? WHAT THE FUCK HAVE YOU DONE YOU FREAKISH LITTLE MONSTER?" Vernon Dursley bellowed in a rage.

Harry saw as Petunia's eyes focused on the dead cat and the blood all over her plush carpet, and then as her eyes traveled down to her couch, which was also soaked in blood. And finally, she realized that she had some of the blood on herself – splash damage from Harry's attack on Vernon. She was screaming quite loudly. Her shrill wails were almost enough to overpower Vernon's bellowing.

The large man was quickly making his way around the couch in a rush to tackle the almost-five-year-old boy, but suddenly came up short – stopping dead in his tracks and suddenly looking deathly pale. His raging screams had died in his throat as well, and left only the horrified shrieks of Petunia to fill the room.

"Oh *do* shut up, you stupid bint!" Harry yelled.

Harry didn't know if it was shock from all the blood, or just stunned surprise from the fact that he almost never spoke at all, but Petunia *did* shut up. Her gaze darted from him, to her oddly silent husband and back again.

Vernon looked like he was going puce again. He still wasn't moving, but he was clearly struggling against something.

"I would stop doing that if I were you, Vernon," Harry drawled as he dropped the bowl to the floor. It made a bit of a squelching sound as it landed on the cat's dead body.

"What are you doing to him?" Petunia cried.

"Right now? Nothing, really. Just keeping him in place. It's really for his own good at the moment. He needs to know the consequences of his actions before he does anything *stupid*. I'm only holding him like this until I can finish explaining to the two of you just what it is that I've done here, this evening." Harry finished with a rather frightening, wicked, grin. Petunia shivered in horror and Vernon paled again.

"You truly are some sort of demon, aren't you?" Petunia whispered.

Harry's smirk grew even wider. "A demon, am I? Perhaps I am. A demon, trapped in the body of an innocent looking child. It's not that far off. But if I'm a demon, the pair of you are beasts. The blatant *disrespect* that you have shown me; it's *disgusting*."

"Disrespect?" Vernon hissed through his clenched teeth as his face went a bit red again.

"Yes, *Vernon. Disrespect!* The pair of you have *lied* to me. Tried to deceive me since the day I was left on your doorstep. Did you honestly believe that you would be able to keep me ignorant my whole life? That I would never discover what my parents were? What *I* am? Did you think you could hide the magical world from me forever?"

Both Dursley's paled considerably at this, but neither said a word.

"The sheer arrogant stupidity you must possess, astounds me. You man-handle me on a daily basis. *Me*, a *wizard*! You dare to to lay a hand on me in violence? You have broken my bones, bruised and cut my flesh, dislocated my shoulder, and *insulted me and my parents* more times than I can count and I have been here for less than four years! You neglect my basic human needs, denying me food, water, and regular access to bathing facilities. The monumental lack of respect that you have shown to me is unforgivable!" Harry hissed angrily through clenched teeth.

He paused and gave the pair of them a disinterested, yet appraising look, tilting his head slightly to the side.

"Did you think this would never happen?" he asked, airily. "Surely you knew that, even if I had never learned of what I am on my own that someday others like me would come for me. When I turn eleven, I'll be going to wizarding school. I'll be taught magic. *You both know this*. Did you think that your disgusting treatment of me would never have repercussions?"

"How do you know all this?" Petunia bellowed suddenly. "You... I've always known you were a freak of a child. Even for a w-wizard! My *perfect* freak sister wasn't even as *weird* as you are, as a child! You don't speak like a child should speak! You don't act like a child should act! You know things you shouldn't know! What *are* you?"

"That is *my* little secret. You have not earned the right to ask questions, *Petunia*," he hissed and she flinched back. "Now, dear *uncle* Vernon," Harry said, turning to face the fat man and giving him a rather twisted grin. "I suppose I should get on with explaining exactly what it is that I've done to you. You see, everyone that lives has a set number of days to their life. Things can interfere of course. Freak accidents can take a person's life early. Murder, can, of course, also bring about a person's death earlier than their life-clock dictates, and wizards and other wielders of magic can extend their number of days through magic – but if a person reaches the end of their allotted time, they will die by one means or another. It may look like a heart attack, or a stroke, or a brain aneurysm. It might look like a freak accident. They may just walk out into the middle of the road for no apparent reason and get run over by a lorry. But it *will* happen on the day that their time runs out. It is unavoidable.

"So what is it that I've done?" Harry asked rhetorically before pausing and giving his uncle another devious smirk. "Well, Vernon Dursley, basically, your days are numbered, just like everyone else's, however, now *I* am the one that dictates exactly what that number is. What I have done goes further than that though. I control more than just your fundamental morality. I have full control of your bodies life and decay."

"That's impossible! I don't care what you say, you couldn't possibly do such a thing, you little *freak!*" Vernon bellowed.

Harry shot him an angry, frightening glare that was so powerful the man actually recoiled from it. Harry raised his hand into the air and snapped his fingers. Vernon's knees buckled and his hand went up to his chest as he gasped in shock.

"You just lost one week off your life. Next time you call me a freak, you lose two weeks. Say it again, and you lose a month. Again, and you lose six months. Again, and you lose a year. You insult my parents, you lose a year. You deny me food? *A year.*"

Harry paused and his cold glare shifted into a sadistic smirk. "Remove your left shoe."

"What?" Vernon croaked.

"Remove – your – shoe!" Harry bellowed in what was a surprisingly powerful voice for one that sounded so young.

Vernon gasped and his legs shook again for a moment. His eyes were wide with fear and rage. He seemed to be torn between his stubborn desire to scream at the boy, and his own self-preservation instincts. Finally he bent down and removed his shoe.

"The sock too." Harry commanded. It was an entirely odd thing to witness such a small, young child, ordering around a pair of blood-soaked adults, and managing to appear entirely intimidating while doing it.

Vernon Dursley removed his sock and stood back up, trying to puff out his chest in defiance, even though he had just followed the orders of a 4-year old.

"Since it seems that demonstrations are the only way to get through that *thick muggle skull* of yours," Harry sneered, "I'm going to give you a little proof to show I'm not just lying. I'm only going to tell you this *once*. I will not tolerate anymore abuse from you filthy pathetic creatures. I am a *wizard!* You are *muggles!* You are ants at my feet, and you have no right to treat me with such blatant disrespect, any longer. Next time you hit me, you lose a toe."

With that, he snapped his fingers again – although it was really just for dramatic effect. The actual action was all being driven through the magical connection he now had, directly with Vernon's astral tether. The moment Harry snapped his fingers, Vernon started to scream in pain. The pinky toe on his foot suddenly started to turn yellow and black and red. It began to shrivel and contort. The skin broke and puss began to ooze from the surface. Petunia began screaming as well; pleading with Harry to stop it.

Vernon collapsed to the floor and his hands began to frantically grab at his foot and his body rocked back and forth as tears streamed down his face. Within a matter of seconds, the toe actually *fell off*, and the skin from where it had been closed up and healed.

After a frantic minute of wails, whimpers, and muffled screams, the room finally fell quiet again. Harry was looking down at the entire scene with impassive boredom. "That's was gangrene. Death of living tissue. You hit me, you lose another. Hit me again? Lose another. If you run out of toes, I'll start taking fingers. If you try to attack me in my sleep, I'll take your whole bloody foot. Before you try anything out of desperation, know that your life is tied to mine. If I die, *you* die."

"How? How can you be doing this?" Petunia wailed. "My sister could never do anything like this!"

"Oh, I suspect that if she had ever had the desire, she could have performed something along these lines. However, Lily Potter was a very kind, loving, witch. She was a *Light* witch, and she would never resort to the *Dark Arts*. But I am not my mother, am I?"

"But you're just a child! How is this even possible! You shouldn't know *anything* yet! Even after seven years in that blasted school, I doubt my sister could have done any of this!"

"Perhaps I am more than just a child wizard. Perhaps I am something much, *much*, more. You were the one that suggested I was some sort of demon, were you not? But I'm not about to waste my breath explaining it to you. A pair of stupid muggles like you would never understand it anyway. All you need to know is that *I'm* the one in control now. More specifically, I control when Vernon here lives or dies."

"What do you want?" Vernon asked through clenched teeth.

"I want Dudley's second room. I want a bed with a new mattress and sheets, and a quality comforter set. I want *new* clothing that fits. I want three full meals a day. I want access to the bath and the toilet whenever I want and for as long as I want. I want to be left *alone*. I will make specific requests from time to time and I expect those requests to be honored. I expect to be treated respectfully and left to my own devices. You leave me be and I'll leave you be. You act civilly, and I won't have any need to *punish* you. I'm not asking for miracles here, I'm simply asking to be treated the way reasonable adults would treat a guest in their home."

Vernon scoffed out an angry laugh. "*Guest?* As if we had a choice!"

"Yes, *exactly*. You haven't got a choice, have you? I've told you my demands. You have until tomorrow afternoon to prepare Dudley's second bedroom. I expect to be taken shopping for some clothing by next week. Oh... and Petunia? Clean this up, will you? I'm going to use the shower."

With that Harry turned on the spot and began to leave. He snapped his fingers as he passed through the doorway and the cat's body began to smoke and sizzle. A moment later, the body had turned completely to ash. Not even bones were left.

Rebirth Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Yup, this plot bunny just keeps clawing away at my brain. It just won't let me put it down. This one is also about twice the length of any previous chapter. Enjoy. Lol

Oh, and as an additional note, if you read the first seven chapters within a week of my having posted them, I've since updated all of the chapters with a very slight change. I had Heri's family name as Valeria, but I've changed it to Valerius. The name really is an actual famous and very ancient Roman family line and, in fact, had quite a few Roman emperors from it. Thing is that Valeria is the female form of the gens, while Valerius is generally the male form, so I fixed it.

----- Rebirth Chapter 09 -----

The dynamic of the house changed drastically after that point. Dudley never understood what had happened to make his parents suddenly act so vastly different towards his cousin. Petunia took on the air of absolute terror whenever Dudley did something that could potentially anger Harry.

Harry was content as long as Petunia reprimanded and punished her son for his misbehavior. He didn't blame the poor stupid child for his own actions. He was only doing what he thought would please his parents. Since he had grown up, watching his parents treat Harry so poorly, he thought that was what he was supposed to do as well. Harry didn't expect an overnight change in the boy's actions, but he *did* expect an immediate change in the behavior of the boy's parents. He got it.

He only had to 'punish' Vernon a few times the first few months after the 'incident'. After that, the man learned to hold his tongue and his violent urges.

Harry got his own room, a new wardrobe, and whatever new possessions he requested, when he requested them. Harry wasn't unreasonable with his requests. Most of what he wanted, he couldn't get in Surrey anyway, so he waited on those things. Mostly he just requested books, trips to the library, and writing utensils.

His relatives avoided him like the plague, which was more than understandable. Petunia would prepare his meals and bring them up to his room, and then fetch the dishes afterwards, just to avoid spending meals with him.

The fall after he turned five, he and Dudley both started primary school. He knew that Petunia was desperately relieved to be rid of him for several hours a day, but he could also tell that she was terrified of the idea of him being near Dudley during that time without her there to witness or supervise.

Harry's teachers all adored him. They thought he was polite and remarkably bright. One of them even used the word 'prodigy' a few times. By the end of his first year of school, his teacher had approached the Dursley's with the suggestion that Harry should be moved up a year. Petunia was tremendously relieved with this recommendation since it meant that Harry would no longer be in the same class with her precious Dudders.

Harry didn't honestly care either way, and accepted the opportunity. That summer, however, he had more important things to concern himself with. The first day of summer vacation he went to Petunia and told her that he needed to go to London.

She blanched at him. "What for?"

Harry raised a single eyebrow. "What does it matter? I just need to go."

"Where in London, exactly?"

"Charring Cross road."

"You're not supposed to go there."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "Says *who*?"

"It was in that letter... the one that was left here with you on our doorstep! It said you weren't to be allowed back into... into *your* world."

"Well, I don't give a damn what the letter said. I need to go to London. All you have to do is drop me off. Then you can leave."

"Just leave you there?" she gaped at him.

"Yes. I can make my way back through other means once I complete my business."

"But... *you're five!*"

"Technically, yes, I am only five. But I don't see how that matters here. Honestly, Petunia; I'm surprised by your level of concern. Really, there's no reason for you to worry about me. I'm perfectly capable of looking after myself and I know what I'm doing."

"I can't just leave you alone in *London!*"

"Sure you can. It's simple. You drive me there, I get out of the car, and then you drive away. Worse case scenario, I don't come back. Well, actually, I suppose for you, that would probably be the best case scenario. But really, no matter what, I will likely be making my way back here at some point. You don't have to concern yourself with it."

She frowned deeply but agreed.

—

The following day after Vernon had left for work, Petunia loaded Harry and Dudley into her car and drove all the way from Surrey to London. She dropped Harry off just down the street from the Leaky Cauldron and then left.

Harry had actually come prepared, to some extent for his first venture into the wizarding world since that fateful Halloween night four years prior. For one thing, he had made Petunia purchase a black, hooded coat for him. It was still a muggle coat, but it was several sizes too large for him so it hung down to his knees. With the hood drawn, it almost resembled a cloak. He still stood out a bit, seeing as how it was the end of June, and quite warm, but at least it allowed him to conceal himself somewhat.

He had stuffed the coat into a knapsack he had brought with him and before entering the Leaky Cauldron he pulled it out and put it on. He clasped all the buttons shut and pulled the hood up, casting his face in shadow. He quickly made his way towards the ruddy looking pub and slipped inside. He didn't spare anyone a glance as he quickly made his way purposefully through the pub and out the rear door into the courtyard.

He stood at the brick wall for a moment having suddenly realized that he didn't know how to open the bloody thing without a wand. With a small huff, he walked up and tapped his finger in the appropriate succession while forcing a bit of his magic out, focused onto the tip of his finger.

It apparently worked because a moment later the wall of bricks began to shift and collapse into itself, revealing the archway to Diagon Alley.

It was mid day and the alley was annoying busy. Harry kept his head down and hood drawn as he quickly rushed through the Alley towards the bank. He didn't have the time to stop and observe the alley any. He'd been to it countless times over the years in his previous life, and his parents had brought him with them to Diagon Alley twice before they went into hiding, in this life. He had long since outgrown the air of awe and wonder that had filled him the first time he set foot in his alley.

He dodged and swerved around people all bustling and rushing to their own destinations. Finally he came up upon the fork in the road where Gringott's bank rested. Down one side of the fork Diagon Alley continued. Down the other was Knockturn Alley. A huge part of him longed to go down and visit the dark alley, but he knew that in his current body and without a wand that would be suicide.

Instead he continued on with his goal and climbed the white marble stairs and rushed through the large double-doors to the bank. The goblin guard at the door looked at him through

narrowed eyes and barred his pointy teeth in an intimidating mockery of a smile. Harry just smirked back and continued on his way towards one of the desks along the furthest wall from the entrance.

He came to stand at the side of the desk, waiting for the goblin there to look up and acknowledge him. After an annoying minute the little gray creature looked up and sneered at him.

"What do you want, boy? I do not deal with *children*."

Harry's eyes narrowed and his lip curled in disdain. "You should watch your tongue goblin. You may regret your words one day. I am not just a *child*, I am a *customer*. I seek an audience with one of the goblins responsible for frozen vault claims."

The goblin sneered at Harry but snapped his overly-long fingers and a little light on the wall beside some sort of goblin rune lit up.

"Wait a moment, *sir*, and goblin Braggok will be right with you."

Harry gave the goblin a cold but curt nod and waited. Several minutes later a goblin emerged from one of the many doors along the wall and looked around with an air of annoyance on his face. He went over to the goblin that Harry had spoken to a moment earlier and the two exchanged a few words in gobbledygook. Then the goblin Braggok looked up at Harry with an even *more* annoyed look before coming over and greeting him.

After a brief exchange of words, Braggok led Harry back through one of the doors, down a long hallway lined with doors and into a crowded, cluttered office filled with strange filing cabinets all overflowing with papers. Braggok sat down in his chair behind the desk and Harry sat in the chair opposite him.

"How may I be of service to you today, young master?" Braggok asked with an overly faked toothy grin.

"I wish to claim a frozen vault."

"Obviously, if you are speaking with me. Which vault do you believe you have the rights to stake a claim in?"

"The vaults of Herakles Valerius. There should be a document on file listing the specifications he designated to determining who could claim his vaults after his death."

The goblin gave Harry a piercing look for a moment before giving a curt nod. He snapped his fingers and one of the many filing cabinets opened up and after the sound of shuffling papers filled the office for a moment, a folder came flying out and sailed across the room to land directly in front of Braggok.

He opened it and thumbed through the papers for a moment before finding the right one and taking a moment to read it. He frowned, then raised a single eyebrow in curiosity, and then

glanced back at Harry who was sitting patiently across from him with a bored look on his face.

Braggok pulled a piece of parchment out of the folder and set it down on the desk in front of Harry. It appeared to be completely blank. Braggok closed the file, set it down and folded his hands on his desk.

Harry sat forward and looked the goblin in the eye. "Do you have a quill made from a flight feather of an eagle owl? Preferably black?"

The goblin's eyes widened minutely before he nodded his head, snapped his fingers and the feather quill appeared.

Harry picked it up, turned it around in his hand three times before setting it on the desk in front of him.

"Do you have red ink?"

Again the goblin nodded his head, snapped his fingers and an ink bottle appeared before him.

Harry looked at it, then back up at the goblin. "The ink well should be made of clear glass."

The corner of the goblin's mouth turned up ever so slightly. He snapped his fingers again and the ink well changed.

Harry picked up the feather, moved it to his left hand, then to his right, then dipped it into the ink. He put it down on the blank parchment at the top center and then drew a single line down the center of the page, all the way to the bottom.

Next, on the left-hand side he wrote the rune Ansuz, then Eihwaz. On the right-hand side, he drew the rune Dagaz. Beneath it he drew triangle, then inside the triangle he drew a circle and a line bisecting down the center of both. It was the symbol from the ring Tom had stolen from his uncle and made into one of his horcruxes.

Harry pondered for a moment, wondering what Tom might have done with the ring after Heri had died. He had been wearing it at the time of his murder. He doubted very much that Tom would have buried one of his horcruxes with Heri's corpse. Not unless, he placed a mountain of protections and wards around where ever the hell he'd buried Heri.

Harry set the quill down with the pointed end towards the ink well. He put both of his hands on the desk then lifted them up, picked the quill back up and turned it over, setting it on the opposite side of the ink well, pointed end still aiming at the ink well.

"I need another quill. One made from the tail feather of a peregrine falcon. Can you provide that?" Harry asked.

"I cannot." The goblin answered, giving Harry an amused pointed-toothy grin.

Harry smiled back. "A kestrel then?"

"Yes, young sir." The goblin snapped his fingers and the new feather quill appeared.

"And blue ink, this time in a black stone ink well."

Braggok nodded, snapped his fingers and the new ink well appeared.

Harry dipped the quill in it, drew a horizontal line across the paper, bisecting it in half again. Next he took the red ink well and poured all of its contents into the blue ink well. Picked up the eagle owl feather, placed it in the ink well, then picked up the kestral feather and placed it in the now empty glass ink well. He set the two on each side of the parchment and set back in his chair with his arms folded over his chest.

"Is this satisfactory?" Harry asked.

The goblin's brows were raised slightly and he nodded his head. "You performed every step detailed in the instructions to perfection. You even spoke the words, line for line. I must admit, that the steps dictated for this claim are quite... odd."

"Yes, I imagine they are." Harry said with an amused grin that told the goblin that he would be getting no details out of the young wizard.

Braggok grumbled quietly as he re-opened the file and took out a sheet of paperwork for the account transfer.

"What is your name?" Braggok asked as he inked a quill of his own and poised ready to write down the answers.

"Harry James Potter."

Braggok's quill froze an inch from the paper and he looked up at Harry with obvious surprise in his eyes.

Harry noticed that the goblin's eyes darted up to his forehead.

"Is there a problem?" Harry asked, feeling slightly annoyed.

"No problem at all, Mr. Potter. I was simply surprised by your identity, that's all." Braggok quickly wrote Harry's name down on the paper. "Date of birth?"

"July thirty-first, nineteen eighty-one."

"That makes you five, nearly six years old. Are you aware, Mr. Potter, that the Valerius vaults contain a great deal of money and valuable, irreplaceable artifacts? It would not do for such a valuable account to be left solely in the control of a child. I would hate to see it mishandled..."

"I am quite aware of the contents of the vaults, Mr. Braggok. I appreciate your concern but I am quite a bit more responsible with my finances than the average five-year old. I also know that the instructions for the transfer of ownership dictated that no matter what the new owners age or youth that full control of the vault and its contents be transferred."

"You are correct young sir."

"There won't be any problems?"

"No, sir, there shouldn't be any problems."

"Good."

Braggok asked him a few more questions as he completed the transfer paperwork. Then the goblin stood and with another snap of his fingers a duplicate was made of the form. One copy went into the original folder and it was sent back into the filing cabinet. The other vanished from thin air.

"I will retrieve your new vault keys, Mr. Potter and arrange for one of our people to take you down to the vault. One of the keys is to the Valerius vault in our Rome branch, the other is to the personal vault here in our London branch. Do you wish to visit your Potter trust vault while here?"

Harry blinked. "My what?"

"The trust vault left to you by your parents."

"I was unaware that I *had* a trust vault. Was there also a family vault? I don't have a key for any Potter vaults. In fact, I have no idea who might be holding it at the moment."

The goblin's face twisted in annoyance and surprise. "Would you like for me to arrange a meeting with the manager of the Potter estates?"

"Yes, please."

"He will need to be called up from below. I can have one of our workers take you to the Valerius vault and you can meet with the Potter vault manager afterwards if you would like."

"That sounds good, Please arrange it."

"Yes, young sir. It will just be a moment."

Harry nodded his head as Braggok left the room. He returned a minute later with the familiar keys to Harry's old vaults and escorted Harry out of the office, back down the hall and towards the main bank entry hall. They turned and headed through the large doors that lead to the entrance to the cart system.

"This is Griphook. Griphook, please take Mr. Potter down to the Valerius vault, number 773."

The goblin Griphook nodded and grunted at Harry to follow. The two got into the cart and a moment later they were rushing down steep cavern-carved tunnels on a rail track in an insanely fast metal cart. Harry was of the mind that no matter how many lives he lived, he doubted he would ever truly become accustomed to these damn carts.

After a hair raising ride, they arrived at the familiar vault and exited the cart. Griphook asked for the key, which Harry handed over. The vault door was opened and Harry's key was returned. He quickly stepped inside while Griphook waited by the cart.

The vault was exactly as he had left it. The only difference was that on a small pedestal that he had left in the very center of the large vault now sat his wand. Harry took a few quick strides forward and reached out for the wand.

A worried pit filled his gut as he was filled with doubts that it would somehow not be compatible with him in his new body, even though he knew it had nothing to do with his body and everything to do with his magical core – which had *not* changed.

All of his fears were quelled as his fingers wrapped around the holly wood wand and he felt that familiar warm tingle rush through his fingers, up his arm and deep inside him. He let out a slow, relieved sigh and grasped the wand tighter.

He looked around the vault, taking the familiar room in fully now. He slipped his knapsack off his shoulder and set it on the floor of the vault. He pointed his wand at it and silently cast a space expansion charm on it so that the interior would hold more than looked possible. Then he cast a feather weight charm on it so it would always be light. This was especially important considering that his five-year old body was crap at heavy lifting. He stowed his wand in his coat pocket and quickly set to stuffing some possessions into the bag. In the deep front pocket, he stuffed several hand-fulls of galleons.

Satisfied for now, he slung the knapsack back over his shoulder and left the vault.

Once he and Griphook reached the surface level again Harry entered the main entry hall just in time to be greeted by another rather ancient looking goblin. The goblin introduced himself as Blitzik, manager of the Potter estates and led Harry into another private office. The two each sat down on either side of a cluttered desk and the goblin leveled Harry with a curious gaze.

"Before we continue, I must prove that you are who you claim to be." Blitzik said opening a desk drawer and pulling out a piece of parchment and a quill. He set them on the desk in front of Harry and Harry scooted forward to get a better look at them.

The parchment had tiny goblin runes all along the edges of the paper. The quill, Harry recognized as a blood quill.

"It is a simple enough process. All you have to do is write your name on this piece of parchment, using this quill. If it is your true name, it will remain in place. If it is not, it will be burned off the parchment."

Harry nodded his head as he reached over and picked up the quill. As he was about to place it onto the parchment, Blitzik interrupted him.

"I must warn you, Mr. Potter, that this is a blood quill. It will use your own blood to write instead of ink."

"I know," Harry said and returned to his task, writing out his full name on the parchment. The back of his hand stung for a moment and he saw his name appear on his own flesh in faint red marks. He set the quill down and the marks on his hand faded away until they were gone.

The words on the parchment glowed for a moment and then did nothing at all.

Blitzik gave Harry a curt approving nod and took the quill and parchment back from him.

"Very good. Things seem to be in order. Now, I am to understand, Mr. Potter, that you have not been receiving the statements on the status of your vaults?" Blitzik asked.

"That is correct. I was actually unaware that I even *had* any vaults. Can you tell me how many I've got?"

"You have your trust vault, to which you are already supposed to have access. There is also the Potter Family Estate vault, however you are not allowed to remove any of the contents from that vault until you reach the age of maturity."

Harry nodded his head, expecting as much.

"You also own two pieces of property," Blitzik continued and Harry looked up and blinked.

"Property?"

"Yes," Blitzik paused and leafed through a folder that was open on his desk. "You are the owner of a house in the wizarding village Godric's Hollow. You also are the sole owner of a five-acre piece of unplottable land in Edinburgh. It says here that there is no property on the land, it is merely a reserve for magical creatures. There is a file in the family vault that has complete details."

Harry paused in thought for a moment, frowning slightly. The house in Godric's Hollow was obviously the house he had spent his first year with the Potters in. He had completely forgotten about the house.

"The house in Godric's Hollow is sitting empty?"

"Correct. It is noted here that the house sustained damage during the attack upon your family."

"Damage? How bad?"

"It does not say."

Harry nodded his head slowly again in thought.

"So you said that you've been sending me statements?"

"Yes."

"I haven't gotten any." Harry said with a pointed look. Blitzik frowned angrily.

"We will have to address that..." the goblin growled.

"What about my keys? Where might they be?"

Blitzik flipped through a few more papers and suddenly his eyes narrowed and his lips curled in a tight snarl. "It would appear that you have a magical guardian on file. Are you living with muggles?"

"Yes, I am. Who's my magical guardian?"

"Albus Dumbledore. He is listed on file as being the only adult contact in the magical world for you. He is in possession of your keys."

This time it was Harry who snarled. "He doesn't have access to the vaults, does he?"

The goblin frowned again. "It would seem that he has access to the trust vault."

"Has anything been removed from the vault since my parents died?"

Blitzik flipped another page. "It appears that there have been two withdrawals since the elder Potters died. One was a sum of one thousand galleons. The other withdrawal was an object, but the vault's inventory only shows that it contained money and one object that was never specifically described or cataloged so I cannot tell you what the object removed was."

"Fucking bastard!" Harry bellowed and banged his fist against the desk.

Blitzik's eyes widened with a mixture of shock and amusement.

"Is there any way to get it back?" Harry asked through clenched teeth.

"Legally, Albus Dumbledore has the right to access the vault, which includes removing objects from it."

"How did that happen anyway? Did my parents have a will? I'm fairly sure that I was supposed to be left in the care of my godfather, Sirius Black, but that obviously didn't happen. Did my parents list Dumbledore as a secondary guardian or something?"

Blitzik flipped through several more pages but frowned after a minute of apparently not finding what he wanted. He snapped his finger and a piece of parchment appeared on his desk. He scribbled something on it and snapped his fingers again, causing it to vanish. "This will take a moment, Mr. Potter. I have requested a copy of your parents will be delivered to us. A copy should have been in this folder, but it appears missing."

Harry's eyes narrowed more in anger but he gave the goblin a curt nod and sat back in his chair.

A few minutes later there was a light knock on the door, Blitzik waved his hand, causing it to open and in walked a much younger looking goblin. He looked nervous and walked over to Blitzik and whispered in his ear. The elder goblin's frown deepened and his whole face was contorted with a scowl.

He spoke to the younger goblin in gobbledegook for a moment before the younger one left. Blitzik turned back to Harry, still frowning.

"It appears that we have some complications in reference to your parents will."

"How so?" Harry asked curtly.

"Their will was sealed by order of the head of the Wizengamot."

"So, it was sealed on Albus Dumbledore's orders."

"Yes. The reasons state that it was for your safety. If it was known who got custody of you after your parents death, that information could be used to find you and that could put you life at risk."

"Alternately, sealing the will prevents anyone from finding out who my guardian is actually *supposed to be*." Harry ground out through clenched teeth. "Funny how he also managed to make himself my magical guardian and gain access to my vault."

"Yes... it is... *curious*." Blitzik sneered.

Harry folded his hand on Blitzik's desk and looked down at them, focusing in thought. He needed to examine this situation rationally before he took any action. It would not do to get Dumbledore's eye focused on him so early. He had access to his magic and now he had his wand back, but his body was still too weak to make full use of any of his powers without utterly exhausting himself or causing actual bodily damage. There was no way he could defend himself, magically, against Albus Dumbledore right now. And he certainly couldn't do it politically either.

So he had to avoid doing anything that would draw Dumbledore's attention to him...

"How long ago was the last withdrawal that Dumbledore made?" Harry asked.

"Both withdrawals occurred within the first six months after your parents death."

"And there's been no activity since?"

"None."

"I suppose it's safe to assume that the bank statements that are supposed to be going to me are most likely getting redirected to him instead?"

The goblin's beady eyes narrowed again in anger. "It would appear that such an assumption may not be too far off."

Harry nodded his head. He would have to look into that as well. If Dumbledore was intercepting his mail from the goblins, there was no telling what other mail he'd intercepted as well. He clearly wanted Harry to remain absolutely ignorant of the magical world, so it made sense that he would prevent any letters about or from it from ever reaching him. The Dursley's would also have thrown a fit if owls were delivering post to their house. They

obviously wouldn't be stupid enough to do any such thing *now*, but before Harry had taken steps against them... well, it would have been bad.

"I intend to set up a private post box," Harry said finally. "I'll return afterwards and provide you with the address. Is there a way that we can keep this information on file, but make it unable for Dumbledore to have access to it, should he ever come to inquire?"

"I believe that the proper arrangements can be made."

"Good."

"Shall we discontinue sending statements the traditional way?"

"No, that would draw his attention." Harry paused and frowned. "Are there any other objects left in the trust vault, or is it just money that's left?"

"The only thing that is in the vault at this point is money."

"Well, I've got plenty of that in my other vault, so I suppose I don't care much about that. And you're sure he cannot access the family estate vault?"

"He cannot."

"Good. Then allow him to continue to receive statements on the trust account. If anything changed, he would likely take notice of it. I don't want to risk drawing his attention this early in the game."

"Considering the wizard you are dealing with, that is most likely a wise choice." Blitzik said in a low, serious tone.

Harry nodded his head in appreciation of the goblin's remark. The goblins had never been fond of Dumbledore. Even in Harry's last life, that had been true. They hated the Ministry, they hated the Wizengamot. Hell, they even hated the International Confederation of Wizards, and Dumbledore was the head of that, too.

Dumbledore had been part of a number of negotiation processes that had occurred over the years between the wizarding governments and the goblin nation, and not a one of those negotiations had gone in the goblin's favor.

Tom had been trying for years to get the goblins to side with him in his war, but the goblins refused to stick their pointed noses into 'wizarding wars'. They said it was none of their concern and that they would stay neutral. When a victor was decided, they would begin negotiations with whoever ended up in power, but until then, they were out.

Harry could appreciate their position and didn't really blame them for it.

"Did you want to visit your vault, Mr. Potter?" Blitzik asked.

"No, I don't think that will be necessary. I do need a copy of the key made, however."

"Ah yes. I have that right here." Blitzik flipped to the back page of the folder. On the flat bit of cardstock there appeared to be a drawing of a small drawer with a handle. The goblin tapped his finger on the drawing and the handle popped out of the page. He pulled it and a drawer slid out with it. In the drawer was a key. He closed the drawer and it returned to looking like a drawing on paper, and handed the key over to Harry.

"Thank you. When I return with the address for my post box, can I just drop it off with one of the goblins at the desks?"

"Yes, that should be fine, Mr. Potter. Tell them it is for me and I shall get it arranged."

"I'll also need that address assigned to my Valerius accounts, now that I think about it. Braggok was the goblin who made the transfer, but I don't think I have a goblin actually handling my accounts yet. Could you be assigned to handle both?"

"I would be most honored, Mr. Potter."

"Good."

Harry and Blitzik finished up their business, which included Blitzik giving Harry a statement of his current total assets and then Harry was shown his way out. The first thing he did after leaving the bank was head directly towards the Owl Post Rental office in Diagon Alley. You could rent post owls there for single use to send out a letter or package, but you could also rent post boxes there.

He was about to walk in when it occurred to him that they would likely pitch a fit if he tried to rent a post box on his own. He was *five*. Five year old don't rent things.

He to a small detour and ducked into the space between the post office and the building next to it and then around to the back of the buildings. He stood there in the empty space beside some trash bins for a moment, trying to figure out what his options were.

He could pay someone else to set it up for him, but then that someone else would know about it. He could try to obliviate that person, but he wasn't sure his body could handle a spell that advanced yet. Mind magics always took a lot of energy and focus. Focus he had, but the ability to physically handle the energy he was lacking.

He would really rather not have to involve another person in this, especially since it was likely he would encounter this problem a lot. He needed a way to do this stuff himself.

One option was polyjuice potion. That would make him look like whoever he wanted, as long as he managed to get some hairs from someone. And it would even increase his size. Of course, he didn't *have* any polyjuice potion, and it was a controlled substance and as such, difficult to come by. Even more so for a five-year old. Plus, it only lasted an hour and made him look like someone else, specifically.

Glamours didn't immediately seem like an option since a glamour could only change your appearance to a set extent. It could slightly modify muscle mass, fat mass, coloration of

things, and cartilage. But glamours couldn't do anything to your bone structure, which meant he would remain as short as he was now.

Perhaps he could pretend he was some sort of halfbreed? Make himself out to be part goblin. Then it wouldn't be so odd that he was only three and a half feet tall.

That could work.

Deciding that it was the best option he had at the moment, he pulled out his wand and conjured himself a mirror and attached to the the back wall of the building he was standing beside, with a sticking charm. He spent the next fifteen minutes modifying his appearance and transfiguring his clothes.

He went with clothing styles similar to those he'd seen the goblins themselves wearing, while making his coat look like an actual wizard cloak.

When he was done he looked like a very short man in his late thirties, but with slightly pointy ears and teeth to give the hint of goblin ancestry.

He stowed his wand, re-shouldered his knapsack and left the small alley. He slipped into the post office and entered the queue for one of the service windows. When he got to it, he was too short to even see the shelf. He made a show of giving a disgruntled sigh as if he had encountered this problem a thousand times. He pulled out his wand and conjured himself a step-stool. A moment later he was high enough that he could rest his elbows on the little ledge of the window.

The witch behind it watched him with an air of apologetic amusement the entire time. When he gave her an annoyed look she appeared sheepish, cleared her throat and asked him how she could help him today.

"Yes, I just recently moved to London and I would like to arrange for a private post box."

"Alright sir. There is a monthly fee of five galleons for a space expanded post box slot. Packages up to two feet square can fit within it. For the larger parcel post box, it's a monthly fee of ten galleons a month."

"The standard size is fine," Harry said dismissively. "Can I arrange for auto payments from my Gringott's account, or do I have to come in person to may the payments?"

"We can arrange for automatic withdrawals from your account."

"Good."

The woman handed over a piece of paperwork and he grabbed an auto-inking quill from the desk and began to fill out his account information.

"What name is the post box account going to be under?" The woman asked as he wrote.

"Lucan Valerius," Harry replied easily. No one beside Tom and a very select few ever knew his real full name. As far as he was aware, Dumbledore had never known him as anything

other than Herakles Jude. He would still avoid use of the name Herakles, just to be safe.

After all of the appropriate paperwork was filled out and he had handed over five galleons for the first month payment, she handed him a small card with the address he could hand out to have post sent here. He had also gone with the option for an enchantment to be cast that would magically attract any owl with a package or letter addressed to 'Lucan Valerius' to this location, so even if the specific street address of this post office wasn't included on the package, it would still come here and end up in his box.

He thanked the woman for her assistance and left. He returned to Gringott's, not bothering to remove his glamours, went up to one of the desk goblins and left a note for Blitzik with his new address before leaving again.

He went to the Leaky Cauldron and got himself lunch. Afterwards he made his way to a robes shop – it looked like the most popular one on the alley at the moment was a place called Madam Malkin's. He got measured and ordered a few sets of appropriate sized robes and cloaks. The transfigurations he done on his clothes and his coat weren't permanent, and since he intended to come back to the alley again, he thought it would be best to get some wizarding clothing to lessen the amount to which he 'stuck out'.

He still drew the gazes of some people. Wizards who were most likely old purebloods looked down on him with disdain. He couldn't exactly blame them. As far as they could tell, he was some sort of halfbreed mutt. He'd be doing the same thing if he came across someone who looked as he did at the moment. Still, it was the best he could do with what he had. At least as a halfbreed he still got service and was able to buy things. As a five year old, he'd get chuckled at and then asked in some sickeningly sweet voice where his mummy was.

Sneers were preferable.

When he was done he stuffed his purchases into his space-expanded knapsack and left the shop. He paused to debate his options. He found himself curious about the house he owned in Godric's Hollow. He wanted to check on it in person to see what sort of state it was in. He would have liked a place he could escape to from time to time to get away from the Dursley's. If he was lucky, it wouldn't have any of those pesky monitoring wards cast around it and he'd be able to perform some rituals there.

Setting his mind to his task, he made his way to the Diagon Alley designated apparition point. He had to admit, as he reached the small courtyard where apparition was allowed, that he *was* a bit nervous about trying this particular method of wizarding travel. He was fairly confident that it wouldn't be a problem, but he also knew that if he were to do something stupid, like splinch himself, that he could end up in a real spot of trouble.

Huffing and pushing past his nerves he closed his eyes and focused on the picture of the backyard he remembered from his infancy, clearly envisioned in his mind. He called forth the feel of his magic and was suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling of being squeezed through a small tube. A small crack resounded and he felt himself land, even though he'd been standing on the ground already.

His small knees buckled slightly and he stumbled to the ground. A ground which was grassy and overgrown. He opened his eyes, blinking owlily at his surroundings. A small grin spread across his face as he recognized the backyard of his first home in his second life.

The grass had grown long and wild. The garden was a crazed mess of plants and vines. Harry looked around the space, using his Sight to examine the house and search for any wards. He walked to the gate in the fence that opened to the side of the house and walked around towards the front. As he walked he continued to observe every minute magical detail he could pick up.

It was obvious that there were spells cast over the house, but they weren't tracking or recording wards. From what he could gather, the most obvious ones were anti-muggle wards. It looked like it was an illusion spell. If muggles looked upon the house they would see an empty lot. If a wizard looked upon it, they saw the house.

Harry made his way around to the front and looked up at the house.

Blitzik was right about the house having sustained damage. From what he could tell a portion of the roof had been blasted out and caved in. Timber and beams stuck out while roof tiles sunk down into a gaping hole. He frowned. He could fix it, but it was still annoying and it would take a lot of magical energy that he would most likely have difficulty dealing with at this point.

Then his attention was drawn to a sign that was placed in the yard just beyond the front gate. He walked up and read it. It said that the house had been "Preserved in it's ruined state as a monument to the Potters and as a reminder of the violence that tore apart their family".

Harry glared at it balefully. Who, exactly, had 'preserved it in it's ruined state'? And what right did anyone have to do such a thing, anyway? It was *his* house.

The sign was also graffitied with names and messages, which both annoyed and bewildered him. People had left trinkets and flowers and notes all along the ground beneath the sign as well. Harry frowned as he bent down and picked up a piece of folded parchment that looked surprisingly recent.

He skimmed it, feeling even more bewildered than before and quickly picked up another and then another.

Quite a few of them were letters *to him* – although many of the people writing them seemed to understand the fact that it was unlikely that he would ever get them. Many of them were thanks to him for his defeat of 'You-Know-Who'. A few were letters from young children with remarks like 'Mummy said you're a great hero of the wizarding world and that you saved us from the bad wizard man', and some had crazier things like 'I heard from my friend that you're best friends with a unicorn and that you ride dragons! Is it true?'

Harry put the letters back onto the ground and pinched the bridge of his nose to slow the growing headache that was forming.

Great... they think I'm some sort of Light wizard savior. He grumbled sarcastically to himself.

He stood up and huffed in frustration as he looked out over the house again. As owner, he could do whatever he wanted with it, but it was obvious that people still came and visited the place fairly regularly, judging by some of the letters. If he fixed it up, people would notice. He could cast another layer of illusions, if he wanted. Muggles would see an empty lot; wizards would see the half-ruined house, and *he* would see it the way it really was. Obviously he would still want to erect wards that would prevent anyone from actually entering the house.

With that thought he grimaced, realizing it was likely the house had been ransacked inside. He wondered if the inside would have as much graffiti and as many letters as the stupid little sign had had. How irritating.

He turned around and looked up and down the street to see if anyone was out and about. He didn't see anyone and was about to head towards the house when he caught sight of a statue several blocks down the street that had a powerful magical signature to it.

He set off down the street, coming to the village square that featured the large statue in the center of an intersection on a round-about. It had another illusion spell cast over it. To the muggles, and to wizards from a distance, it appeared as a large obelisk, carved with the names of people who died in a war – probably the muggles first Great War. World War I. Upon closer examination however, the memorial morphed and changed into a statue of a family.

At first Harry just frowned at it in confusion, but his confusion morphed into dawning horror and mild disgust.

It was *his* family. It was his father, James Potter standing beside his mum, Lily, and in her arms was an infant. Him. Harry. They'd made a ruddy statue of them!

He looked down and noticed a small engraving at the base. It read:

James Potter, his wife, Lily Potter, and their son,

Harry Potter;

The-Boy-Who-Lived

The-Boy-Who-Lived? Merlin! They had a bloody crazed nick-name for him! Was he made famous or something by this whole idiotic mess?

His mind wandered back to Braggok's reaction when he'd said his name and he also recalled how the goblin's eyes had traveled to his forehead. Instinctively his hand went up and he fingered the lightening bolt-shaped scar that was currently concealed with glamours.

All of this because they thought he destroyed Tom? Were they *that thick*? He had been fifteen months old for Mordred's sake! How the hell could anyone honestly delude themselves into believing a fifteen month old baby had been responsible for the death of the most powerful Dark Lord to ever live? Merlin, when Tom came back he was going to be furious!

He was going to need to do some digging into this whole him 'being famous' thing. Quite a few of the letters from children had mentioned being told stories about him before bed. Was his encounter with Tom being distorted in to some sort of freakish bedtime story by wizarding parents?

Sick idiots.

He sighed and turned back down the road to return to the house. He went through the front gate, down the path and use a simple spell to unlock the front door.

He was surprised to find that there was no graffiti inside. No letters or teddy bears, or dead flowers. He realized that everything was layered with a powerful preservation charm. Suspecting what sort of spell it was, he walked over to an overturned end table and put it up right again. A moment later it fell back over in the exact same position that it had been in a moment before.

So this was what was meant by 'preserved in it's ruined state'.

Well, that wasn't a problem. He could get rid of the preservation spell easily enough. At least it had prevented people from nicking things or scrawling all over the walls.

The living room was just as he remembered it, except for a few turned over bits of furniture that likely happened during the very brief battle his father had had with Tom.

Harry made his way up the stairs and felt a breeze and smelled the musty stench of water damage. Mildew and mold filled his nostrils as he reached the portion of the house that was lacking a roof. Apparently the preservation spell cast over stuff didn't prevent water damage. Harry scowled in annoyance. If you're going to do a job, you'd may as well do it right. He sighed and shook his head. It didn't matter, he could fix it. It would just be a very exhausting process, considering his young body. Perhaps he would just stick to the first floor and ignore the upper level all together.

He came to a stop in front of the door to his nursery, reached out to grasp the doorknob and suddenly came to realize that his hand was shaking. On the other side of this door was the room where his second life had blown up in his face. Where his mother – the woman who had loved him utterly and unconditionally – had died by the hands of his lover.

Feeling a sudden flare of anger at himself for allowing his nerves to effect him he pushed forward and turned the door knob.

The room inside was a mess and almost all of the roof here was gone. He could still see the scorch marks on the wall from the splash damage caused by the the killing curse that mysteriously backfired.

There, on the wall opposite the door, was his crib. In the corner of the crib was the old stuffed dragon that Sirius had given him. The floor in front of the crib was completely unremarkable. Tom's robes were gone. There was no dead Lily Potter laying there. It was entirely eerie.

It made him wonder suddenly where his parents had been buried. He didn't know. Perhaps they were buried in this town? Godric's Hallow wasn't that big a village, so it was doubtful it had more than one cemetery. He would have to pay it a visit. He didn't consider himself a sentimental man, but he felt like he owed the Potters *something*. Some sign of respect. They had been his parents in this life. They had died for him.

He heaved a heavy sigh, turned around and quickly left the room. There was a lot of magical residue there that he would want to examine more closely later, but at the moment he wanted nothing more than to get out of there.

He made his way down the stairs and back out the front door. He locked it behind him, although it seemed like an almost pointless gesture since any first year Hogwarts student should know the spell *Alohomora*.

He returned to the street and began to walk back towards the village square since he was fairly sure he'd seen a church a bit further down the road. He continued on past the statue and saw that there *was* a church. He continued on to it and just beyond it was an old cemetery.

He went in a few feet and did a quick glance around the numerous old headstones. He pulled his wand out, rested it in his open palm and whispered "Point me, Potter's graves." The wand wiggled for a moment before spinning in his hand and coming to a stop pointing slightly to the right and forward.

He set out quickly, heading in the direction his wand had indicated. It only took him a minute to locate their headstone. A single, large, wide stone was shared between the both of them. James Potter and Lily Potter. Beneath their names and date of births and deaths was an inscription.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Huh... Harry cocked his head to the side, looking at the words carved into the stone. He knew it was a bible quote. It was from the King James Bible *1 Corinthians 15:25-26 'For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death'*

'Ah, the joys of a perfect memory and being raised by nuns.' Harry thought bitterly.

Still, it was odd. Not once during the year and three months with the Potters had he seen them partake in a single Christian denominational practice. They still did Christmas, but it had been a rather secular celebration. No church visit or anything like that. They had even celebrated Beltane in the spring – which hadn't surprised Harry since James had been from a very old pureblood family – Light oriented or not, they were still wizards and had been for over a thousand years.

So why the bible quote, and why one that seemed so contrary to Dumbledore's agenda? Honestly, the quote seemed more in line with he and Tom's beliefs. It was odd. Definitely something to ponder on. He wondered who had chosen to put it there?

Harry pulled out his wand and conjured a bouquet of wildflowers. He set it down in front of the headstone and lowered his head, giving his deceased parents a moment of silence in apology and in thanks.

With a final sigh he turned and left. Just as he was nearing the gate a rather large and exceptionally old looking tombstone caught his eye and he turned to examine it more closely. In the center of the stone, carved for all the world to see, was the symbol from the ring. The triangle, around a circle, with a vertical line running down the center of each. He blinked at it, stunned to be seeing it for the first time anywhere besides the ring Tom had made into a horcrux and given him.

He stepped closer and brushed a layer of moss and dirt off the old gravestone to reveal the name.

Ignotus Peverell.

Peverell? Where had he heard that name before?

Of course! The ring!

Well, that was obvious... He scolded himself sarcastically.

But he remembered that Tom said that Morfin had told him that the ring was bearing the mark of the Peverell family crest. That the Gaunts were descendents from both the Peverells and the Slytherins. The ring had been passed down through the generations from the Peverell line just like the locket had been from Slytherin's line.

Okay, so supposedly the symbol was the Peverell family's crest. But who were the Peverells?

Harry decided to keep it on the back burner. He had always been curious about the ring. He had long ago determined that it had some powerful necromantic power, and after some research and investigations of his own had determined that the black stone that was set into the ring was most likely a bit of dementor heart. Although how someone had managed to kill a *dementor* and then steal it's heart was truly a wonder to be pondered upon. Whoever crafted the ring had to have been an exceptionally powerful wizard.

But if the ring had been made by one of these Peverells, perhaps they were skilled necromancers?

Harry's endless and undying curiosity into the necromantic arts would most likely drive him to investigate this matter further in the future, but at the moment he simply didn't have the resources available to him to really accomplish anything.

With another sigh he decided it was time for him to return to his damn muggle relatives on Privet Drive. He had determined that one aspect of the wards created and placed there by Dumbledore checked to make sure that he was never gone from the house for more than two weeks at a time. It had a sort of counter built into it. It reset every time he re-entered the house. From what he could tell, if it ever hit the two week mark, it would most likely trigger

some alarm attached to an object that Dumbledore possessed. Harry planned to spend as little time at the house as possible, but he would still sleep there to keep the timer reset.

He decided that the next day he would return to Diagon Alley to buy some more supplies and then come back here and start making some of his fixes to his house.

With that plan in mind, he focused on the image of the Dursley's backyard and apparated away.

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Rebirth Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Another longer chapter. Quite a bit covered in this one. Trying to move things along.

----- Rebirth Chapter 10 -----

Harry's halfbreed wizard-goblin persona became known among the merchants of both Diagon and Knockturn Alley's during the next year. He was always on the hunt for obscure objects and interesting books to help pass the excessive amount of time he had to spend in the muggle world and he came by often. He also went there often because he had little else to do and needed some excuse to get away from his muggle relatives.

He returned to muggle primary school in the fall, but as soon as school let out each afternoon, he would apparate back to London, don his disguise, spend some time in the magical districts and then apparate back to Godric's Hollow to work on his house.

He had ended up ordering some specially crafted magical focusing stones to aid in his work. They were created as a tool for underpowered witches and wizards. You could feed your magic slowly into them over an extended period of time by wearing them around your neck or holding them in your pocket, and then use that stored up magic to cast spells more powerful than you would normally be able to cast on your own. Since Harry's body was still too young and weak to handle the full extent of his magic, he made use of these stones in order to cast the large illusion spells over his own, to remove the preservation spell, and to cast the wards that he erected around the house to keep people out of the actual house. He also used the casting stones to perform some of the more extensive repairs to the house's roof and walls.

At one point, during the spring before he turned seven, he attempted to perform one of the rituals that would summon Tom's bodiless soul to him, by using one of the stones. However something strange had gone wrong and the stone had ended up exploding. Harry had grumbled in frustration and had been in a terrible mood for several weeks after that, sending the Dursley's to act even more terrified around him than usual.

His time at muggle school was boring, but he made it a point to put on a convincing front with the teachers and other children should Dumbledore or any of his lackeys ever go questioning them about him. He had long ago guaranteed the Dursley's silence through a number of magical means. Initially he had simply threatened them into silence. Now he'd secured any and all of their knowledge regarding him through magical means.

At his muggle school, 'Prodigy' had become an official label for Harry. He'd been bumped up another grade, and was taken away for two hours a day to join a special class for gifted students. He was considered rather anti-social, and the teachers worried that he didn't have any friends and didn't seem interested in playing with any of the other children, but he assured them he was happy being left to his own devices with his books.

They explained his behavior and social difficulties away as a symptom of his advanced intellect. It was unfortunate, but perfectly reasonable, and he was always such a polite and respectful young man other wise.

Dudley never even *looked* at him when they were at school. In fact, if you were to ask any of the other children, and most of the teachers, they wouldn't have the faintest clue that the two boys were cousins, or that they even *knew* each other. Harry was fine with that, and Petunia preferred it that way. The less exposure her precious Diddikins had to the freak boy, the better. Not that she would ever dare say that in front of Harry.

During the past few years, Harry had also begun spending some of his afternoons and evenings at the London Magical Historical Society, sifting through their collections and documents. The Magical Historical Society kept copies of every issue of the Daily Prophet ever printed, and kept detailed information on all of the old magical family lines. He and Tom had made use of their genealogical archives a few times in their youth the summer just before they went after the Gaunts, and later on to research the Valerius family, so Harry already knew his way around the place.

He'd started looking into the family trees of many of the families he knew in his previous life, mostly out of curiosity to see what might have happened to them, and to see how many of them were still alive. He also figured it would be a good way to start guessing who alive today had been among the ranks of Tom's Death Eaters. He cross referenced the names of the sons and daughters of those who had been active followers back when Harry was still Heri, and checked to see if any of them were currently incarcerated at Azkaban for crimes of being a Death Eater. Several were, but quite a few others were not. He made note of which ones were likely candidates as followers of Tom's, but were clear and free.

He also noticed that quite a few members of the more wealthy and influential families had been found bearing the Dark Mark, but had been acquitted of all crimes because they argued they had taken the mark and committed the crimes while under the Imperius curse.

Obviously this was a bullshit line, and no doubt a lot of money exchanged hands during the whole process as well. Harry knew for a fact that the Dark Mark *couldn't* be taken while under the Imperius. Being marked required an honest willingness. You could not be coerced into it at all.

He made note of all those listed as being cleared of their crimes since they were absolutes. Anyone bearing the Mark *had* been a Death Eater. No doubt at all.

Still, even with his list of possible and definite Death Eaters, he wasn't about to go to any of them for help. He wasn't that desperate yet, and he honestly didn't trust any of them. Not yet. Sure, they had been loyal to Tom in the previous war, but they were all laying low now. Or living a life of comfort, having completely disavowed any past connection with anything *Dark*.

If any of them were *really* loyal, they'd be trying a bit harder to bring their Lord back. *But they weren't*. Bloody bastards.

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Another bit of research he started performing at the Magical Historical Society was on his own family. The Potters, rather. What he discovered actually shocked him. James Potter's parents were Charlus Potter and *Dorea Black*. While Harry had downright despised Charlus back in their school days, he'd been fond enough of Dorea. He'd only met her twice, as she was five years older than Lucretia and Walburga, and seven years older than he was, so she had already been out of Hogwarts when he started.

While Lucretia, Orion, Walburga, and Cygnus – the four Blacks that Heri had gotten to know best – were all cousins, Dorea was actually Walburga and Cygnus's aunt – the youngest sister of their father Pollux.

It was a weird, convoluted bit of relation, but the fact remained that now, Harry was related to the Blacks.

How the bloody hell Dorea Black had ended up marrying *Charlus Ruddy Potter* he couldn't even fathom.

Further examination of the Black tree gave him some sad news. It turned out that both Orion and Cygnus had died in 1979. Walburga, who in all honesty, Harry hadn't been all that fond of, had only *just* died the previous year, while Lucretia was still living. He was slightly tempted to try and pay the woman a visit, but had no idea how he would explain him knowing about her.

One more shocking realization that came out of this line of digging was that Orion and Walburga – cousins, mind you! – had *married!* Harry wanted to retch. How the hell Orion had ended up with his cousin Walburga was beyond him. He'd *liked* Orion! But no – that wasn't really the shocking thing. It was actually fairly common for Blacks to marry their cousins. The shocking thing was that they had two sons and one of them was Sirius. Harry's godfather.

Regulus Black, Sirius' brother, was listed as dead – once again, back in 1979. It made Harry wonder if they'd all died together. Orion, Cygnus, and Regulus – all dead in 1979. That must have been a very intense year for the war.

But back to Sirius...

It made Harry wonder if this was why his father had ended up being friends with the man. Harry had always wondered how his father – a *Potter* – had ended up best mates with a Black. Maybe this was why. Because they were sort-of-distant-cousins?

It was a possible explanation. But pondering on it really only made Harry wonder that much more as to why the ruddy hell he hadn't ended up with his godfather.

He set to searching through the Prophets again for any clues as to what had happened to the man, since he was listed on the tree as still living. It didn't take long for Harry to find it.

Sirius Black was in Azkaban.

Well, that certainly explained why the man wasn't looking after him, then. But what got Harry really angry was when he realized that Sirius was in prison because he had supposedly been a Death Eater and had betrayed Harry and his parents to the Dark Lord. It said that Sirius had been his parents secret keeper, and went on to remark how sad it was that the Potters had put their trust in the wrong person.

That part was right at least – they *had* put their trust into the wrong person, but it wasn't Sirius. Peter had been the secret keeper! Sirius was just a decoy!

And Albus *bloody* Dumbledore knew that! He knew it because he had been the one to cast the Fidelius charm around their house!

Harry set to researching his godfather's trial and went through a lot of frustrating loops as he attempted to request transcripts and Ministry records. He finally resorted to *actually using his name*, since they were obviously unwilling to hand any documents over to some uninvolved third party, but even *then* his requests were refused.

Finally, Harry managed to get a letter in response from a witch who worked in some records department at the Ministry who quietly admitted that she did some digging for him because she was just '*such a fan*', and as best she could tell, Sirius had never even gotten a trial. It was all very strange and it looked to her that someone had gone to a lot of trouble to push this all under the rug.

Harry fumed.

There was really only one person that Harry could think of that would have the power to deny his godfather a trial and get all of the proof of such a thing kept quiet. The Supreme Mugwump, himself. Albus Dumbledore.

It didn't take a genius to figure out *why*. With Sirius in prison, Dumbledore had magical guardianship over Harry, the ability to dictate who's custody he legally remained in, and control of Harry's vaults. Oh – and also the power to seal his parents will so no one could possibly question him on his choices for Harry's safety. If Sirius had been a free man, he could have tried to contest Dumbledore's actions. He could have fought for Harry's rights and for his safety. With him out of the picture, Dumbledore was free to do whatever he pleased with Harry.

Although Harry still couldn't fathom what reason Dumbledore would have for leaving him with the Dursley's of all people. Why muggles?

If Dumbledore wanted Harry to grow up loving and respecting muggles and their culture, he obviously picked the wrong damn muggles to leave him with. If Dumbledore were ignorant of how much the Dursley's hated him, this explanation could still be valid, but Harry was sure that Dumbledore knew just how shitty his treatment had been at their hands. He had a squib spying on Harry, after all. There was no way he *couldn't* know.

So why?

Harry didn't know.

But he kept his head down while on Privet Drive. He still made sure to return to the Dursley's house most nights, and still made sure that Mrs. Figg saw him from time to time. He even had Petunia ask her to babysit him every now and then just to keep up appearances.

Harry wondered if there was anything he could do for his godfather. The man was in prison for more than just 'betraying the Potters'. He had also been accused of killing Peter Pettigrew and twelve muggles in an explosion. The original reports made it out to look like Peter had perhaps gone after Sirius, knowing that Sirius had betrayed James and Lily, and Sirius had killed him. Harry knew it was likely the exact opposite scenario. Sirius was the only one, besides Dumbledore and Harry, that knew Peter had been the real secret keeper. He had no doubt gone after Peter in a fit of rage.

The dead muggles added a bit of confusion to the whole thing, though. Sirius had been an Auror, and during the year and three months that Harry had known his godfather he had gotten the impression that he was a rather Light wizard, as far as his politics and world-view was concerned. He *liked* muggles. Or at least, he thought they were interesting and entertaining. He fought for muggle and muggleborn rights. He rebelled against his parents over it. Harry had a hard time seeing Sirius killing off a dozen muggles, even if it was just splash damage.

In the end, for all Harry knew, Sirius really had killed Pettigrew and the muggles. At the very least, he undoubtedly *did* kill Pettigrew. So no matter what, he was stuck in Azkaban for murder. Even if Harry was able to get the man's name cleared of the charges of being a Death Eater and having betrayed the Potters.

And even if by some weird fluke, Harry got the man free – well, that wouldn't necessary benefit Harry any, would it? He had the Dursley's trained rather well at the moment. He was able to retreat to his house in Godric's Hollow as often as he wanted, and while glamoured, he could get anything he needed or wanted in the magical alleys.

Sirius would expect him to be a normal magical child. He would have to play a role to fit the man's expectations, and he'd have to follow rules. His freedom would be dramatically reduced. The Dursley's were just scared of him and let him do whatever he wanted.

So it really came down to the simple fact that having Sirius be his guardian really wouldn't benefit his current situation at all, and it wasn't worth the effort needed to clear him. Doing

something like that would also draw attention to Harry. Attention from people like Dumbledore and Harry still wasn't prepared or powerful enough to face that problem yet. Perhaps when it was closer to Harry being eleven he would address the issue – of course, by then, Sirius could be completely insane... only time would tell.

—

During all of this time, Harry continued nightly exercises with his magic. Pulling magic into his body, moving it about and slowly letting it out again. As more time passed, he slowly increased the amount of magic he pulled in, forcing his body to grow adjusted to it. He had to be careful though. He couldn't rush it. Every time he tried, he ended up making himself sick. Magical exhaustion was a very miserable feeling, and he absolutely hated it.

When he was seven, he felt like his body was beginning to reach a level where he *might* be able to attempt some more high level spells and he attempted another summoning spell, trying to call out to Tom's soul – but this time, without the stones. He hoped that performing the spell entirely with his own magic would get better results, but once *again* something weird happened and prevented his success. However, he was at least not left exhausted or sick from the attempt.

He tried again three weeks later and was met with the same wall. It baffled and bewildered him. He couldn't understand what was blocking him.

It was on his third attempt – an attempt that he made while keeping an especially close eye on what was going on with his magic – that he first began to suspect some of what was going on.

A weird magical force was blocking him, and he recognized that force. He'd seen it active in two other places before, and seen residue of it in a third. One active place was in the ward layer around Privet Drive that oddly enough, appeared to have been cast by Lily Potter, and the other was in the strange magical seal around the Dark magic trapped in his scar. The place where he'd seen residue of this magical signature was in the nursery on the second floor of his house in Godric's Hollow. Centered and focused around the very spot on the floor where his mother had died.

The magic preventing him from success at summoning Tom's soul was his *mother's* magic.

Powerful, mysterious magic that was somehow left inside him by his mother's sacrificial death, was preventing his summons, and it appeared as if there was nothing he could do about it.

He wanted to scream. The mountain of frustrated rage that this realization brought to him, was monumental.

It was this discovery that led to the subject of the next year's worth of dedicated research. After spending a month's worth of evenings and weekends focused solely on trying and failing to dismantle the strange Light magic that appeared locked in his very veins, Harry began researching a branch of magic that he had admittedly, severely neglected.

It was a branch of magic that had never interested him, and that he had always dismissed, but he now realized that he would have to learn as much about it as possible if he were ever going to free himself of this frustrating protective power that had been left within him by his mother.

Light magic.

The only really fortunate thing about his new focus was that it was very easy to research. There were no laws banning the study of Light magic. No one would look at you suspiciously for frequenting the – surprisingly small – section of various book stores or the library that held the books on the subject. No one suspected you of doing something shady if you asked for every book they had on the subject.

The funny thing about all this was that Harry quickly came to realize people's lack of concern about this branch of magic was clearly based entirely on ignorance of the subject matter. Light magic was far from harmless. Quite the contrary, actually.

The more Harry researched the branch of magic the more he realized how naive he had been for dismissing it in his youth. Or... rather, in his previous youth.

Light Magic was not the harmless end of the dangerous scale as many seemed to assume. People thought of Dark magic as the evil stuff while Light magic was the... not evil stuff? Well, in any case, it was an ignorant assumption. Light and Dark were merely two ends of a very large spectrum of magic. Two extremes.

At one point he mentally compared the two branches to the simplified muggle chemistry he was actually being subjected to in his primary school at the time. Dark and Light were, in a way, like acids and bases. Everyone knew acids would burn you, but people often forgot that strong bases were just as dangerous. Hydrochloric acid burned the skin horribly, but so did ammonia – a base. Yet put a powerful acid and a powerful base together and you get neutralization – you get water. The two could cancel each other out, given the proper circumstances.

It was the same way in that the powerful Light magic left from his mother was able to neutralize the mysterious powerful Dark magic left behind by Tom's failed killing curse.

Both Light and Dark could be equally dangerous and deadly, but they could also cancel each other out.

His research into Light magic was surprisingly fascinating. He knew he needed to focus on the protective side of Light magic since that was obviously what had been left in him, but there was a whole range of offensive Light magic to entice his curiosity.

It was so fundamentally different than anything he had ever explored before, and he had to admit that the challenge that posed to his thinking was intriguing.

By the time he turned eight he had two journals full of notes and theories, and finally felt like he'd developed enough solid ideas to start really poking at the protective magic his mother had left in him. He had been hesitant to simply try ripping it all down since it *was* protecting

him from whatever the hell that Dark magic was, and there was the very real possibility that if the protection came down, whatever it was would just kill him instantly. So instead he started by trying to pull the protection aside enough for him to try and analyze the Dark magic. If he could figure out what it was, exactly, he could prepare a counter to the curse, or figure out what steps would be needed to actually remove it, or seal it himself without the need of his mother's magic.

It was two weeks after Halloween that Harry finally succeeded in this regard and what he discovered was shocking beyond words.

It was a horcrux.

He had a bloody horcrux *inside him!*

It was a piece of soul, encapsulated, protected, isolated, and surrounded by a swirling vortex of protective Dark magic to prevent it being tampered with or destroyed, as any horcrux should be, only just outside the swirling Dark magic was a maelstrom of powerful, protective Light magic, sealing it up tight. The powerful Dark magics detected in his scar were those that would normally transfer to the horcrux's vessel to prevent it from ever being destroyed, in order to protect the soul shard contained within.

It appeared that the Dark magic within him wasn't actually a threat at all – if set free it would try to protect the vessel – *him* – not harm him. However, Harry had to admit that he wasn't entirely sure what would happen if the Light magic that was keeping the soul isolated was gone, and the soul shard was given free reign in his body. What would the foreign piece of soul within him *do*? What would happen to it? What would happen to *him*?

Only a few writings on horcruxes that he and Tom had read had ever even *considered* the possibility of using a living being as a vessel for a horcrux and even they had only been theoretical texts. No one had ever done it before, as far as anyone knew. It was obviously a bad idea, just on principle. The magics that protect a horcrux could only do so much when the vessel was a living, biological, being. It couldn't make the host impervious or immortal. If the vessel was destroyed – or if it *died* – the horcrux was *lost*.

More than any other concerns that Harry had at the moment, was the simple fact that he *needed* to find a way to get the piece of soul out of him and back to Tom without damaging it. If he died, this piece would be lost and he *refused* to allow that to happen! He had to protect the piece of Tom that he carried! Which also meant that he couldn't do anything to risk his own life until he figured out a way to safely remove it and get it back to Tom's central soul.

Tampering with his mother's protection was going to be even more tricky with all of this in mind.

He tried a few more times over the next two months to combine magics to pull back or suppress the Light protection, while simultaneously performing a summoning spell for Tom's central soul piece. The summoning part was actually an *easier* version of the spell, since he actually had a horcrux at his disposal – *himself* – however it still didn't work, and it left him utterly exhausted.

The protective Light magic was just too powerful, and it was fighting too hard to repel any contact or summoning of Tom's soul.

It was a few weeks later, while reading one of the texts he had kept in his vault on horcruxes, that he got an idea for a different approach to take.

It appeared that no matter what he tried, he could not call Tom's soul to him, however, since he had a horcrux *in him*, and since he was a damn powerful necromancer to boot, he still had access to a direct connection to Tom's soul. When he entered the proper trance he could actually see the tiny thread-like tether that connected his body to Tom's central core. It was sort of strange, actually; *having more than one astral tether attached to his body...* but it provided him with the perfect gateway for what he decided to try next.

He obviously couldn't bring Tom to him in order to help the man restore a body, but he could still help in another way. As a bodiless specter, Tom was no doubt near powerless. Weak, and unable to do little more than float about and perhaps possess very simple animals. Harry decided that he would help by feeding magic along the connection to Tom to use as an additional power source. Hopefully, with that extra magic at his disposal, Tom would be able to help himself.

Or at least, Harry hoped so.

In any case, it was the best he could come up with at the moment. So he began a daily routine where every morning as soon as he got up, every afternoon as soon as he was done with school, and every night before bed, he would sit, cross-legged on the floor, and meditate. He would suppress his mother's protection while focusing on the astral tether that connected his scar to Tom's central soul and feed magic through it.

It was probably the most strenuous and exhausting magical exercise he had ever endured. In the beginning he was only able to feed a relatively small amount of magic along the link, but as the months passed, the less difficult it became to send more magical energy without knocking himself out from exhaustion.

There were times he swore he could almost feel something trying to come back along the link. A feather-like touch at first, and then the slightest indication of curiosity. But whenever something attempted to come back to Harry along the link, that damned protective magic would flare up and fight it. Harry would try to hold it back, but by the time he had control over the protective magic, the touch would have retreated and he was left frustrated.

He kept up his efforts, and months and months passed with no obvious change or progress. Not that he had any idea what exactly he might be looking for as a sign of 'progress'.

Summer came and Harry spent almost all of his time at the Godric's Hollow house. He made sure to make appearances on Privet Drive from time to time for the sake of Dumbledore's pet squib. He only slept in his room at the Dursley's house once a week, and that was simply for the sake of resetting the ward that checked to make sure he wasn't gone for more than two weeks.

He continued his studies into Light magic, hoping for some breakthrough in regards to figure out exactly what the hell sort of magic his mother had used to guarantee his 'protection', but wasn't getting anywhere on that front. He kept up on wizarding news through a few different papers that were deposited into his rented owl post box every day, visited the Alley's frequently, and continued his three-times-a-day meditations to send magic to Tom's soul.

Harry had also been doing some more active managing of his money since he literally had no income and was slowly eating away at his savings. It wasn't a significant concern since his vaults had a literal fortune in them, but Harry had always been money conscious – it was an understandable result of growing up poor and hungry – so he made it a point to take an active role in how his old fortune was managed and invested in order to begin turning a profit. As a result of this, the only inhabitants of Diagon Alley that *ever* saw him as 'Harry Potter' were the goblins, and even when he went there, he remained glamoured until he entered his account manager's private office.

The goblin had been intrigued the first time he'd seen Harry come to him glamoured. He had no doubt suspected during their first meeting that there was clearly more to the young wizard than met the eye, but the obvious display of powerful magic from a small child confirmed any suspicions the old goblin might have had as to Harry being and knowing far more than a normal child should. He never questioned Harry, though, and they had a very good working relationship. Goblins valued client-privacy almost as much as they valued gold. And since Harry's account manager got a percentage of any of the investments that he assisted Harry make, as long as Harry was making profitable financial decisions, he didn't care who or what Harry was, and wouldn't betray his secrets.

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Harry turned nine years old without any notice or fuss from anyone, including himself. In the fall he returned to primary school where he continued to charm his teachers. He was an outcast among his classmates, but none of them were stupid enough to try and bully him. The teachers liked him, but were still observant enough to realize that certain children – the ones that tended to pick on the weaker children – seemed to be *afraid* of Harry, and thus, left him alone. None of the kids would ever talk about why they were afraid, of course. Those that did make accusations were dismissed because those accusations tended to be ludicrous or impossible. The teachers generally brushed it all off with the excuse that Harry was a prodigy and his intelligence intimidated his classmates.

Harry continued his meditation routine every day, even after returning to school. He had no idea if it was making any difference at all, on Tom's end. The link between them seemed to be growing stronger, and sending magic was easier – that much he could tell. The light touches from the other side began to occur more frequently as Halloween drew closer, and Harry always tried to catch them and hold the protections down, but never quite succeeded.

It was nearing midnight on Halloween – on *Samhain* – and he was in the sitting room of his Godric's Hollow house. He had gone there that night to get away from his relatives and the frequent visitors to their door for the ridiculous muggle tradition of going door-to-door to beg for free candy. Suddenly, and without any warning, his forehead *exploded* with pain.

His hand flew up to his scar and he yelped out in shock before struggling to stifle his vocalizations by biting down on his lip. He tasted blood in his mouth and realized that was probably not the best approach, but was too busy trying to hold back the tears that threatened to leak from his eyes as his head continued to pound horrifically with pain. It pulsed rhythmically and seemed to be growing in tempo and intensity with each passing moment.

He tried to steady his breathing and focused his magic on clearing his mind so he could make sense of what the hell was happening, but it was hard. Everything hurt *so much!* It was spreading everywhere and he could almost feel it all the way down to his toes.

He finally managed to gain enough control of his senses to realize that a great deal of the pain was actually being caused by that blasted protection as it tried to fight against a Dark magical force from the link. It was in overdrive, trying to throw up protective shields all around him and fighting furiously against some external force.

He gritted his teeth, growling out and pulling as much power to himself as he could muster and crushed the damned light magic back, forcing it into submission. As soon as he had it under control the pain reseeded considerably. He instantly caught what it had been reacting to. The link was active and there was a force at the other end of it sucking at his magic like a vacuum. It was a surprisingly *desperate* suction. Something *big* was going on, on the other end, and it needed power. *More power.*

Both excited and worried by what this could mean he quickly set to feeding magic along the link, and the force on the other end seemed to respond eagerly, soaking up everything he could give it.

Harry didn't know how long he had managed to remain conscious as he fed magic to Tom's soul. All he knew was that at some point he must have passed out because the next thing he knew he was waking with worst headache he could ever remember, and the warmth of sunlight beating down upon his face from the partially curtained window a few feet away.

He was laying on the floor, curled into a ball. He felt light-headed, and his clothes were damp as if he had been sweating profusely for hours. As he made to sit up, he felt exceedingly dizzy, and settled for laying back down for a few more minutes instead.

He spent several minutes regulating his breathing and trying to think past the headache that he decided was a mix between the worst imaginable hangover, and an epic-level migraine. Finally he forced himself to stand up, and wobbled on his feet slightly as he made his way out of the sitting room and down the hall to the first floor bathroom.

Upon looking at his reflection in the mirror, he saw that his scar was horribly inflamed and that it had *bled*. Which was... bizarre. But the evidence was obvious to see. Quite a bit of dried blood caked his forehead, dripping down to the side, to show that it had happened while he was horizontal and on the floor.

His Black Sight told him that the Dark magic around his horcrux scar was basically the same as ever, so that hadn't changed any.

He disrobed and climbed into the shower. The water went a long way to clearing his mind, and gargling copious amounts of water helped clear the cottony taste that seemed to have taken over his mouth.

As his head cleared his ability to think over what had happened the previous night grew. He had a few theories. The one he was hoping for was that Tom had managed something on his end. That he had intentionally done something, and maybe had succeeded. Tom could have a body back right that very moment, and that thought excited Harry – *a lot*.

Another, far more worrying possibility was that something had happened to Tom. That he had been attacked or something and the draw on Harry's magic had been in an attempt on Tom's half to try and defend himself.

In the end, Harry really had no way of knowing for sure *what* had happened.

He sighed heavily as he left the shower, wrapped himself in a towel and weakly made his way up the stairs to the master bedroom that he had claimed and fixed up as his own years earlier.

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Harry wasn't up to even *attempting* to send magic along the link for about a week. His own magical reserves had been utterly depleted and after resorting to using the Knight Bus to get back to Surrey and walking a few blocks to 4 Privet Drive, he could do little more than climb up to his bed and sleep. He'd stayed home from school for the week and told Petunia to call him in sick.

He was so weak during that time that he had no chance of suppressing the protective magic in his blood enough to even *try* to tap into the link. Finally, after suffering through magical exhaustion for about 9 days, he felt like he had enough power reserves to attempt accessing the link.

He left Privet Drive, since as a general rule, he refused to do *any* strenuous magical activity there, even if it didn't involve a wand, simply because it was better safe than sorry where Dumbledore's wards were concerned. He managed to apparate back to Godric's Hollow and settled into the sitting room of his house before entering a meditative state and suppressing the protective magics.

The moment he attempted to tap into the link he was rebuked. It was a sudden and rather forceful push and the strength to it shocked him. Someone was blocking him. A powerful wall of magic, protecting the person on the other end.

Shields. *Occlumency* shields!

Harry gasped as he jerked out of his trance and was filled with a sense of elation. If Tom was able to form Occlumency shields around himself, it meant he had a body! He had a body! He was alive again!

Harry jumped to his feet and let out an excited yell and did a ridiculous, childish little jig that he never would have allowed himself had he been in an adult body for fear of looking far too idiotic.

But he didn't care. Not at this moment. His plan had worked. He had helped Tom get a body back!

Now to figure out where the hell the man was and how to get in contact with him.

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Nothing. Bloody *nothing*. That was what Harry had found. Months had passed. Christmas had come and gone. Bloody *Valentines day* had come and gone, and he had found nothing.

He couldn't breach Tom's Occlumency wall at all, no matter how hard he tried. The tracking and scrying spells he had tried had all failed – not that he had honestly expected any of them to work. The super-long-shot attempt of sending an owl out with a letter addressed to 'Tom Riddle', and even another attempt with a letter addressed to 'Voldemort' and also failed. But he had honestly expected that. It was a stupid thing to try, but he'd been getting desperate.

He kept close watch on all of the papers, both muggle and wizard for any signs that Tom might be regrouping, but found nothing.

He was getting frantic. He *knew* Tom had a body back. He was sure of that fact. But how to find the man? Would he really have to wait until he had come out of hiding? He wasn't surprised with the idea of Tom trying to lay low. Rebuild his power. Regroup. Act in the shadows for a while until he was actually ready, and *then* announce his return.

But Harry wondered how he would get a hold of Tom, even after he knew he was publicly 'back'. He knew that even then, Tom would be a hard man to get a hold of.

—

It was March, and he was walking through Diagon Alley from the Post Office towards the apparition lot while in his halfbreed glamour when he caught *Sight* of a wizard walking down the street past him with a mass of blackish-purple energy dancing around his left forearm.

Harry barely held in a gasp as he realized what it was and turned and began to follow the man as subtly as he could manage. This man was a Death Eater. He wore Tom's mark upon his arm! But the most fantastic thing about this wasn't the fact that he'd found a Death Eater, it was the fact that the mark was active! Harry had caught glimpses of a few other marked wizards over the years as he made his way through Diagon Alley and especially through Knockturn Alley, but that had been before Tom had regained a body and the magic in those marks had been dormant. This mark was active.

Harry continued to tail the man, following him into Knockturn Alley. He realized a few minutes in, that the man knew he was being tailed, despite Harry's caution. Harry wasn't about to give up though and continued on his quest. Without any warning, the man ducked into the space between two buildings suddenly. Harry, knowing that he was walking into a

potentially dangerous situation decided it was time to bring out a few big guns. He dug deep into his magical core, grasping hold of his necromantic powers and whispering under his breath while his hands began to frantically fly through a series of complex hand positions. The power rushed through him and in a flash of deep sanguine red light, his body was engulfed in a strange translucent darkness. He was partially see-through, and an aura of necromantic power pulsed around him. In a flash of darkness, he was gone from the spot and seemed to simply reappear at the other end of the narrow alley, directly behind the wizard he had been following. A wizard who was standing, facing the entrance of the alley with his wand at the ready.

He hadn't even had the chance to acknowledge that Harry had appeared behind him, before he had been incapacitated.

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The man came to, an undetermined time later. He found himself in a dirty room with shuttered windows. He was bound to a chair in the center of the room, but it was hard to tell if there was anything else around him since it was so dim.

He swiveled his head around, pushing down the sense of panic that wanted to build within him at waking in an unfamiliar place.

"Don't worry..." a voice said from behind him, and his head twisted to the side as he attempted to get a look at the source. He gasped as his eyes laid upon the strange figure standing just to the side and behind him, and slowing walking around him towards the front.

The figure was pretty short; probably only about four feet tall, but the person's entire body was a silhouette of semi-translucent blackness, and it had nothing to do with the poor lighting. Swirling around the figure was a dark reddish aura, pulsing and swirling around it slowly and filling the room with a terrifyingly Dark magical presence.

"Who... what are you?" the man stuttered. "Why-why do you look like that?"

"I look like this because I walk with death," the figure spoke in a terrifying whisper. It was probably male, but the voice sounded strangely young. What was truly weird was that when the voice spoke, it seemed to have several echoes to go with it. Like distant whispers. Little voices in the background, speaking things he couldn't understand or quite make out. It sent a terrible shiver down his spine.

"What do you want with me?" the man whimpered. "I ain't done nothing! You can't do this to me!"

"I will not harm you," the frightening voice spoke – again, accompanied by the strange whispering echoes. "I simply desire information. Information I wish to get from you. Tell me what I want and I will let you go."

"I don't know nothin'!"

"Oh, I suspect you know *something*. Now tell me... how long ago were you marked by the Dark Lord?"

The man gasped and his eyes widened in horror.

"I don't know what yur talkin' 'bout! I ain't no D-death Eater! I ain't done nothin'!"

The strange dark figure seemed to give an exasperated sigh and waved it's dark hand, sending out a wave of the deep blood-red magical darkness. It struck the man and he was suddenly screaming. The scream cut off an instant later with another move of the dark figure's hand.

"I do not want to have to repeat myself," the figure hissed in low voice and the man whimpered and shuttered again. "Tell me. How long ago were you marked?"

"I... I..." the man shook and then swallowed thickly. "It was about ten years ago. Before he died."

"Died? Are you really so sure he's dead?"

"Well... I mean, that's what they all said, yeah? That... that he was destroyed by that brat. Potter."

"Yes, yes. Whatever. Your Mark. It's active. How long has it been that way?"

Again the man's eyes widened and then darted down to his left arm, bound to the arm of the chair and then back up at the strange figure.

"It... er... Halloween. It... it was getting clearer be'fer that though. Started getting darker durin' the summer sum time. But it burned on Halloween. Been like this ever since then."

"And has he called you to him?" the figure asked, and the man could hear eager anticipation in the figure's strangely youthful voice. Even more creepy, the whispery echoes sounded excited as well.

The man shook his head from side to side. "No. No, he hasn't. I ain't been summoned. Ain't nothin' happened since Halloween. Nothin's changed, nothin's called me."

The figure growled in frustration and the glow red misty aura flared angrily. The man flinched as he felt the powerful Dark magic lash out at him, but it did not strike.

"Have you spoke with any of the others? Other Death Eaters?" the figure asked after a moment.

"I... I only knew a few. I wasn't in the inner circle, ya see. But... well, I talked with the few I did know."

"And?"

"Nothing fer them either. None of 'em have been summoned."

The figure flashed and was suddenly standing directly in front of the bound man and his black, semi-translucent hand and arm reached out and grasped him roughly by the neck. The man yelped in shock and in pain as the red, steam-like magic swirled around the figure and licked at the bound man like flames.

"If you are lying to me, I will kill you!" the frightening figure growled and the whispers grew louder and angry.

The bound man gasped and shook his head violently, trying to squirm away from the tiny hand and it's surprisingly powerful grip.

"I ain't lying! I swears it! I ain't lying!"

The cloud of magic engulfed him and he screamed as he felt his mind being entered, forcefully. His mental shields were tossed aside as if they were nothing and images were flying through his minds eye.

A moment later the presence retreated and the bound man was left heaving heavy breaths and shaking violently.

The strange figure sighed and turned away from him.

"You speak the truth," the figure said, although it sounded entirely disappointed and annoyed with this statement. It paused a moment and then turned back around. "When you are finally summoned to him, tell him of this encounter. Tell him of me, and what happened here today. Tell him that Valerius is alive and searching for him. Repeat it."

"Whuh?"

"Repeat what I said! Valerius is alive and searching for him!"

"V-valerius is ah... alive and searching for him. Yeah?"

"Correct. You will tell him this for me?" the figure asked, and it was clearly not a question, but rather a threat.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll tell 'im. You... you really think he's back then?"

"Of course he is you fool," the figure spat before turned away, taking a few steps forward and seemingly disappearing in a flash of black and red vapour. The dimness of the room diminished almost instantly and the man suddenly found that his binds had disappeared.

He stood up, shakily and his eyes darted around the room for a moment before he checked his robes for his wand. It was in his pocket. Good. He hastily moved to the door and found it unlocked. He quickly ran from the building, thankful the strange incident had ended without anything worse happening.

Harry repeated this scenario three more times during the next five months. Every time he managed to come across a Marked wizard he would question them to see if they had been summoned to Tom's side. Strangely enough, none of them had. One of them had even been an inner circle member and he was a man who knew who all of the other inner circle members were by name, had spoken with all of them since Halloween, and knew that none of *them* had been summoned either.

Harry couldn't make sense of it. Why, if Tom had his body back, had the man not called any of his old followers out yet?

Harry had thought that Tom would be using this time to regroup and prepare in secret, but if he was he didn't seem to be preparing in the way Harry would have expected.

Was he unable? Was he trapped somewhere? Incapacitated in some way? The prospect of that was *not* appealing in the least. But another possibility occurred to him. Tom could have decided to do something before trying to regroup his followers in Britain. He and Tom had seemingly dropped off the face of the Earth a few times over the years for the sake of going abroad to search for some magical artifact, or research some obscure magic or theory. He could imagine Tom disappearing with the intent of acquiring something to try and make himself stronger. He would no doubt be wary, given how his body had been destroyed by an inexplicable magical backfire.

That was another possible theory. Tom could be searching for some explanation as to what the hell had happened that night when he shot the killing curse at Harry.

In the end, all Harry could do was theorize and guess. He had no way of knowing what was going on and he *hated that*. He hated being in the dark. He hated having to *wait*.

But he had no other choice. So he waited.

Every now and then he would test the connection again, but there was always a rock solid wall up, preventing him entry. Spring was in full force and the school year was almost over. One day in school, it was announced that his class would be going on a field trip to the local zoo and they were all given permission slips to get signed.

Harry had no problem getting Petunia to sign the blasted thing and returned it to his teacher with little enthusiasm. It was just another stupid waste of time. It was meaningless, but it was a way to pass the days. Perhaps – he told himself – once he was at Hogwarts he would have access to better information. Better sources. He could only hope.

His class loaded into buses later that week and were taken to the zoo. It was the first time Harry had been to one in this life. Or the last, for that matter. He'd *never* actually been to a muggle zoo before, now that he thought about it.

It was entertaining enough, as far as pointless distractions were concerned. The animals were... well, they were animals. They were all mundane, of course – no magical creatures in a muggle zoo – but quite a few of them were pretty or interesting.

His classmates were rowdy and annoying as ever and he tuned them out as his teacher led them all into a large enclosed building that turned out to be a reptile house.

Harry sighed heavily and made his way over to the snake aquariums while several of the boys from his class began to ogle a komodo dragon.

He ran his fingers along the glass cage of a boa constrictor and observed the beautiful, impressive serpent.

"You look almost as bored as I feel." Harry commented dryly to the animal. Surprisingly, the snake rose its head and focused on Harry.

The snake did nothing else, and Harry was about to just turn and leave, shrugging off the strange reaction when he heard a strange hissing voice.

"I sssuspect, youngling, that I am far more bored than you."

Harry blinked and did a double-take at the snake.

He stood there, probably gaping like an idiot for a moment before he gathered himself up.

"Did you just speak to me?"

"Yesss. But you spoke to me firsst."

"Did I?" Harry asked, pausing to pay closer attention to his own words. Tom had described to him on several occasions during their youth how strange parseltongue was for him since to him, it sounded as if he were speaking and hearing English. It had required Heri telling him otherwise for Tom to realize he was actually speaking a different language.

"I...*am I speaking snake language?*" Harry said, trying to listen closely to his own words.

"Obvioussssly," the snake said back.

And the snake was right. It was obvious now that he was paying attention. He could hear the strange breathy hissing quality to his voice.

"Bloody hell! I'm a parssselmouth!" Harry exclaimed in shock. How the hell had *that* happened? There was no way he was descended from Slytherin. He had Potter and Black blood and *neither* of those lines had any connection to Salazar Slytherin. And his mum was a muggleborn, so there was no chance of a connection from that end.

Could it be from the horcrux? It was pretty strongly sealed away, so it was hard to imagine the ability to speak and understand parseltongue had seeped through, but it was still possible. So he had inherited parseltongue from Tom's soul?

That was... fascinating. And it opened a whole world of possibilities. Especially once he got to Hogwarts! He could go down into the Chamber's library!

Of course, that was only possible if Dumbledore wasn't watching him, or the Chamber's entrance, but it had been fifty years, so surely...

It was something to ponder on later. He wished he had access to Tom's vault as well, since he knew he had stored almost every parseltongue book he'd ever found since leaving Hogwarts, in there. He could finally read those blasted taunting books! He would have let a delighted cackle escape his mouth had he not been somewhere so public.

This was definitely a development to explore further.

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Thanks!

Rebirth Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Another longer chapter. Quite a bit covered in this one. Trying to move things along.

— — — — Rebirth Chapter 11 — — — —

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Months continued to pass and summer came. With it came and went Harry's 10th birthday – once again overlooked and not celebrated by anyone. In the fall Harry dropped in on the inner circle member that he had questioned the previous spring and questioned the man again, but there had been no changes. Tom still hadn't made an appearance and still had not summoned any of his Death Eaters to him.

It seemed that quite a few of the old Death Eaters – especially those that had been inner circle numbers, were now aware of him on some level. Those that had been captured and questioned by Harry had warned the others. It was probably better this way, since now if Tom only went to one or two of them they would all be able to relay Harry's message. The sooner Tom realized that Heri had succeeded in his plan for rebirth, the sooner they would likely find each other.

The weeks continued to pass with no new developments. Harry was bored out of his mind and tried to keep his impatience at bay by focusing on his studies. It was a lonely existence that he led, and he was finding that it was really beginning to bother him. So much of his previous life had been lived in the constant company of another. He and Tom were almost always together, so even though Heri had never had a lot of people he would consider 'friends' he was rarely alone. But he'd been almost entirely alone for nearly a decade, now.

He had people he was acquainted to. Most of them knew him only in his glamoured form, and by the name Lucan. There were a couple witches from the local library and the magical historical society that he was friendly with, and while he wouldn't consider himself *close* to any, the simple act of being able to converse with other people was always a welcome reprieve.

Still... it wasn't Tom. He missed his Tom. *So badly...*

The hardest part at the moment was knowing that the man was out there, *somewhere*, alive and living, and Harry had no idea where he was, or how to find him. So very, very frustrating.

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Very little was accomplished that year. The only noteworthy things were a few extremely rare books that Harry had managed to acquire. There was a rare and antique books dealer who had a tiny little cubby hole in Knockturn Alley that had a lot of connections with a lot of the old families, and often helped people resell things from estate sales and the like. Harry had been paying him visits for several years now and it was during this year that Harry set him to the task of finding any old families that had any books in their personal collections that were written in parseltongue.

The book dealer had been surprised by the request but had set to his task quickly enough. By spring, he had managed to find two parseltongue books for Harry, and Harry had been more than happy to pay the rather outrageous price the families had been asking for, for handing them over.

Harry didn't mind – he could afford it.

One of the books was very very old, written on strange reed-paper and bound in tanned murloc skin. It was filled with quaint illustrations of snake children and he quickly realized that it was a collection of fairy tales, for Naga children. Harry was astounded by the historical value to such a text and even though it had no magical value to him, he loved it. The naga were a very ancient and powerful magical creature race, and they were also incredibly secretive. They tended to keep their distance from wizards, and British wizards had almost no interactions with them at all.

They lived mostly in areas of India, and had interacted with the wizards of that region some, many years ago, but a lack of understanding and a prejudice against magical creatures led to strained relationships.

Parseltongue was the language of the serpents and generally speaking, serpents did not have hands. They had no ability to write and as such, many people were surprised that parseltongue even had a written language. But it did, and it was entirely because of races like the Naga of India, the Gorgons of Greece, and the Yuan-ti of China.

The second book that Harry had acquired was more of a magical theory book though, and it seemed to originate from the Yuan-ti. It spoke of a lot of astronomical magic, and reading the stars, and some very old divination techniques. Not an area he tended to care a lot about, but an interesting read non-the-less.

He was fascinated with the way that the strange squiggles on the page seemed to slither into position where they would suddenly appear to be normal english writing. It was an intriguing magical language and he could see why Tom had been so fascinated by his ability to read and speak it.

In the spring he paid another visit to two of the Death Eaters he had questioned before – one of the outer circle members and the one inner circle member he'd questioned. Nothing new had come from either. There had been no change in the nature of their marks. They were still active and bright and the magic in them was very strong. Stronger than it had been the last time he'd seen either of them, in fact.

But neither had been called, nor had either heard even the slightest whisper about the Dark Lord returning.

As summer drew nearer, Harry felt his anticipation and anxiety level rising. He was turning eleven this July, which meant he would be getting his Hogwarts letter this summer and starting school this fall.

Harry was rather conflicted on this subject. Part of him wondered if there was even any valid point in bothering to go. He wasn't going to have access to more information at Hogwarts – if anything, he'd be more isolated and restricted since he wouldn't have free reign to visit Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley whenever he wanted.

He'd already done some light research on what other wizarding children would be at Hogwarts, and quite a few Death Eater's children would be there, but Harry doubted that getting close to them would make a significant difference in his hunt for Tom. Being at Hogwarts would likely severely limit his opportunities and time to search for Tom, and that annoyed him. But he knew that if he didn't go, people *would* notice. Albus Dumbledore, most notably, would notice. People would search for him. In the end, he'd be forced to go. He was the bloody *Boy-Who-Lived*. He was famous. There wasn't a witch or wizard in Britain who didn't know his name.

As long as they all expected Harry Potter to be secreted away in the muggle world, no one worried about him, but the wizarding world was expecting him to make his grand reappearance this year, and there really wasn't anything he could do about that.

But he knew he needed a gameplan for his official return to the wizarding world as Harry Potter. Would he play to their expectations, or would he be himself?

The world thought of 'Harry Potter' as a boy-hero. Savior of the Light wizarding world. Both of his parents had been Gryffindors and there was no doubt that the world expected the same of him.

Part of him severely doubted that there was any chance he could get into Gryffindor, even if he had *wanted* to... which he didn't.

But if he did, he could easily try to gain a following there. Everyone was already anxious and scrambling to meet and greet the famous Harry Potter. He'd learned that easily by listening in on some conversations in a few pubs over the last month as the shopkeepers got ready for the summer crowds and the school shoppers.

Tom already had his followers, and there was really no challenge in getting the Slytherins to follow them, but getting followers from the Gryffindors? Now that would be an accomplishment. A real challenge.

One that Harry wasn't even sure he could pull off. But he had to remind himself that he already had a name. He was already famous. So maybe it wouldn't really be that hard.

Still, Harry wasn't convinced he had the patience to endure Gryffindor house, or spending any time in the company of Gryffindors. He would much prefer to go to Slytherin house. But would Slytherin house want him? He was the one who had destroyed their Lord... how hostile would his house be to him, if that was where he ended up?

And of course there was the additional concern of *Dumbledore*. Harry was sure that if he got sorted into Slytherin, Dumbledore would be keeping a close watch on him. A very close watch. And that would be extraordinarily annoying.

But maybe he could get the best of both worlds? Aim for Ravenclaw instead. Slytherins tolerated the Ravenclaws more than any other house. Fraternizing between Slytherin and Ravenclaw was never frowned against. And, while Gryffindors were often academically intimidated by Ravens, they didn't instantly assume they were evil, like they did with the Snakes.

He had already had a lot of success working the prodigy angle in his muggle primary school. Playing up the bookworm angle could help explain his advanced magical knowledge. The more he thought about it, it was probably the best option he had.

He finally settled with knowing that he could make a hundred plans for any of the three different houses, but in the end, it would be up to the Hat as to where he ended up. He could *ask* the hat for Ravenclaw, but that was no guarantee. But who knew? Maybe it would work.

He knew all about how the hat worked. Tom had done a lot of research on it because it was a founders artifact created by Godric Griffindor himself, and Tom had, at one point, considered trying to use it to hold a horcrux. Contrary to popular belief, the hat couldn't actually read a person's entire mind. It could read your surface thoughts at the moment that it was on your head, and it could read your *personality*, but that was it. So it wouldn't know who Harry really was – or who he *used to be*. He was safe in that regard at least. It could tell if you were excited by books and learning, or if you were a hard worker, or if you were loyal, or cunning, or brave... but it didn't have any context to that knowledge. It couldn't access your memories or your knowledge. Apparently the founders had thought such a thing would have been too great an invasion of privacy – plus it would have been incredibly difficult to craft such an object.

In the end, he was probably going to end up in Slytherin again, but he would ask for Ravenclaw and see if it worked.

Whatever house he ended up in, he would make it work. He had always prided himself on being very adaptable.

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Harry endured Privet Drive for most of July out of caution. He didn't want to risk that his Hogwarts acceptance letter might get addressed to his house in Godric's Hollow. He knew that the letters were supposed to be penned automatically by a charmed quill, created by

Rowena Ravenclaw, but the chance always remained that someone might handle and make note of his letter, specifically, before it was sent on.

All of the letters intended for first year muggleborn students were automatically separated into a second pile so that a faculty member could pay them a visit in person. Seeing as how Harry was supposed to have been raised entirely in the muggle world by muggles, it was entirely possible that he would get a faculty visit. If they expected his letter to be addressed to Little Whinging and it was addressed to Godric's Hollow instead, that would likely raise some questions.

The Dursley's obviously noticed that something was going on since he was spending such an unusual amount of time in their house during a summer month. Just because he had to live in their house didn't mean he had to actually spend any of his time with *them* though, so he was caught off guard a little when Petunia brought his breakfast up to his room one morning – a rather strange event in and of itself, since she usually only brought him dinner and allowed him to simply prepare his own food the rest of the day – and brought with it, a letter.

She gave him a very tight scowl, glancing between his questioning gaze and the tray of food in her hands before she set it down and jabbed her arm out, thrusting the letter into his hands.

Harry blinked at her and then down at the letter, his eyes widened slightly and a small smirk turning up his lips.

"Does this mean you'll be leaving us now?" she asked stiffly.

Harry looked up and gave her a bored look. "Basically. I need to spend at least one night every two weeks here to keep the wards active. I'll probably have to do the same thing next summer, but I might make other arrangements."

"If you don't come back, what's going to happen to Vernon?" she asked coldly.

Harry shrugged. "Nothing. He's lost a few years off his life from past transgressions, but once I'm gone, I doubt I'm going to bother concerning myself with your husband again."

"And if you die? Does he die?"

"At the moment, yes. I don't have any plans on allowing myself to die anytime soon though, and once I'm seventeen, and I am guaranteed that I will never again have to deal with you or your whale of a husband, I'll sever the tie and he'll be free of me. Satisfied?"

She gave him a curt nod before spinning around and disappearing down the hall.

Harry rolled his eyes, moved the tray of food to his bed and sat down. He broke the seal on his letter and quickly opened it.

It was amazing how very little was different from his first acceptance letter. Only this one wasn't written by Dumbledore, but was instead written by Minerva McGonagall. He was mildly surprised that he hadn't gotten a faculty visit. He highly doubted, had he not taken control of the situation himself, that the Dursley's would have *ever* told him about wizards. It

was also odd that his letter had arrived with the normal post. He had no owl at his disposal for sending his reply. Perhaps the school owl was still out there...

He paused, climbing off his bed to look out the window. There, perched on the wooden fence between number 4 and number 5 Privet drive, was a brown barn owl. Well that answered that question. He opened his window and whistled to the owl. It looked up at him and cocked its head to the side, observing him for a moment before it took flight and came to rest upon his window sill.

Harry grabbed a piece of bacon off his plate and fed it to the bird while he went back to his letter.

The supply list was almost the exact same as it had been during his original first year, which was a true testament to how very little the wizarding world changed over the years, seeing as how it had been *fifty bleedin' years*.

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 1, was still going to be one of his primary textbooks, although he hoped it was a newer revision. It truly would be sad if it were the same bloody book. It wasn't like magic never advanced or changed. People crafted new spells all the time, and others were always making adjustments and improvements to existing spells, taking into account new discoveries, and making the magical draw more efficient.

Harry pulled out a muggle notebook with lined paper and used a muggle fountain pen to craft his reply. Since it was expected that he only had exposure to muggles, it would look odd if he used parchment, or wrote with a quill.

He sat at his desk and paused, wondering how he should approach this. Would it be odd if he didn't ask for confirmation, or ask questions about how to get to Diagon Alley? It was within reason to expect that Petunia had probably been to the magical district a few times. She had recognized where Harry had intended to go, when he was five years old and asked her to take him to Charing Cross road, so she obviously knew, at least vaguely, where Diagon Alley was. Still... his relatives were muggles, and he was supposed to be an eleven-year-old boy with no experience in the wizarding world.

He read over his letter and supply list again. The envelope included his train ticket for the Hogwarts Express, but no where in the letter was it explained how to gain access to Platform 9 3/4s. That would be a reasonable thing to ask for clarification. The letter also failed to even mention Diagon Alley.

He huffed out a sigh and began to pen his response. He started by accepting his place at Hogwarts with the proper enthusiasm of a young boy, just about to go to Hogwarts for the first time. He then asked the questions that he figured he would expect to be ignorant of. Where to buy his supplies, where he was supposed to get money to buy said supplies with, and how to get to this oddly numbered platform at the train station.

When done, he folded it up, wrote 'Head Mistress Minerva McGonagall' on the back and attached it to the owl's leg.

He huffed a little with the realization that he would need to stay at Privet Drive a few more days in order to receive his response.

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A few days passed without a response and Harry was quickly becoming rather annoyed. He had things to attend to before having to close up his Godric's Hollow house for the school year, and he was wasting precious time sitting in his room on Privet Drive. At least he had some of his books here, so he wasn't completely bored.

He was reclining on his bed, reading when his stomach reminded him that he had skipped breakfast and it was nearing lunch. He closed his book, stood from his bed and made his way out of the room and down the stairs. He had just rounded the bottom of the stairs and was heading towards the kitchen when a tremendous *thump* echoed against the door behind him.

Harry actually jumped in place, shocked by the unexpected sound and whirled around to face the door. Another *thump* echoed through the hall and the door shuddered as if it had been struck by some tremendous force. Again, it was struck and Harry finally jumped out of his stupor and scurried over to the door.

"What the devil is that racket?" he heard Vernon bellow from up the stairs and turned his head to glance up the stairs at the man who was looking down at Harry and the door with a mixture of rage and fear.

Harry's wand was tucked into the waistband of his pants at the small of his back, and his hand itched for it as he approached the door, but he knew using magic on Privet Drive now, when he was so near the finish line would be stupid. If it came to it, he could rely on his necromantic powers to defend himself against whatever the hell was beyond the door.

Another great *thump* echoed through the house again and Harry quickly reached and pulled the door open before it was knocked right off its hinges. The hulking figure he found standing on the other side was standing with his hand raised in a fist as if he were preparing to knock again. He was *enormous* – far taller and larger than any man had any right to be. His face was also engulfed in a huge mane of brown messy curls and an equally messy and curly beard.

Recognition dawned on Harry as he realized he *knew* this man, and he had to fight to keep the recognition off his face.

"Well 'ello there! Sorry 'bout tha door. Wasn't sure yeh heard me knockin'."

Harry blinked at the man. "We definitely heard you," he deadpanned. "Er... who are you?" he asked, knowing it was best to play ignorant.

"The name's Rubeus Hagrid. Grounds Keeper and Keeper of Keys at Hogwarts. You'll be knowin' what Hogwarts is ah'course."

"Oh... the school I got a letter from the other day?" Harry responded.

"You got tha' right."

"So er... Mr. Hagrid, do you want to come in?" Harry asked, trying to sound a bit timid.

"Jus' Hagrid. None uh this 'Mister' stuff fer meh. Thanks." Hagrid stepped inside, ducking under the door frame and closing the door behind him with a great *thack*.

Vernon's face was puce with anger, but he was holding himself perfectly still and not speaking a word. Harry had trained him well and he had to fight back a smirk.

"Come on into the sitting room, Hagrid. Can I get you some tea?"

"Nah, thanks, Harry. You are Harry, of course? It's been since ya were a babe that I saw ya last."

Harry gave him a surprised blink. "Have I met you before?"

"You bet yeh have. I knew yer parents, I did. Brought you here, in fact. That night... well, we dun need the talk 'bout that righ' now. So Professor McGonagall said yeh wrote her a letter askin' fer some help, so I'm here teh help!"

"Oh. Well, I wasn't really expecting someone to come in person. A letter would have been sufficient for a response. I just asked for some clarification on a few things. There was no need for you to go to all the trouble of coming here in person."

"Nonsense, 'arry! I dun mind a'tall and I'd be thrilled ta show ya 'round Diagon Alley and help ya wit yer school supply shoppin'!"

Harry had to fight hard to keep his expression blank. He *wanted* to scowl and snarl at the man that he needed no such help and would much prefer if the man would just leave, but he doubted he could do that and not call attention to himself so he conceded.

He partook in some small talk with the halfbreed giant for a bit while his relatives stayed as far away as they could manage. At one point Hagrid pulled a rather squashed looking package out of his oversized furry coat and handed it to Harry while remarking that he may have sat on it at some point. Harry had been bewildered by it, and was even more confused as he opened it and found that it was a cake. Or at least, it looked like it was supposed to be a cake. He'd looked up at Hagrid in confusion and the half-giant had beamed at him for a moment before wishing Harry a happy birthday. Harry had just blinked at the man for a few moments before he managed to recover his senses and thanked the man. Finally he and Hagrid left the house and Hagrid called the Knight Bus to them by sticking a ridiculous looking pink umbrella into the air, instead of a wand, as was normally needed in order to summon the bus.

Harry knew that back during he and Tom's fifth year, when Tom had managed to pin the whole Chamber of Secrets fiasco on Hagrid that the half-giant had had his wand snapped as punishment. Harry had a sneaking suspicion that he may have kept the remains of said wand and was still putting it to use.

The Knight Bus ride was as unstable and chaotic as ever. The pair were both relieved to disembark the insane bright purple triple-decker bus as soon as it had screeched to a stop in front of the Leaky Cauldron.

Harry frowned slightly at the thought of entering the Alley without any of his glamours for the first time since his very first visit nearly six years earlier. He really hadn't planned on making a public appearance in the alleys as 'Harry Potter' at all, but it looked like he had no choice now.

Hagrid made a brief explanation about how muggles couldn't see the pub at all as he ushered Harry forward. They entered the pub and Hagrid was almost instantly greeted by the barman, who asked him if he wanted the usual.

"Not t'day. On official Hogwarts business. I gotta show Harry here around ta get his school supplies."

The barman's eyes darted down to Harry and widened in what would have been comical if not for the reason *why* the man's eyes were widening. His gaze was leveled directly on Harry's forehead and Harry found his eyes narrowing in annoyance.

"Good lord, it can't be... is this?" the barman spluttered as he looked down, wide-eyed at Harry. "Bless my soul. What an honor. Harry Potter!"

As the words left the near-toothless man's mouth, the rest of the occupants of the pub instantly looked in their direction. Within a fraction of a minute, Harry was being completely overwhelmed by witches, wizards, and even a couple hags, all fighting for a chance to shake his hand and gush at him.

Harry fought against his urge to growl and snarl at them and endured most of it... for a minute, anyway. Finally he hit his limit and squeezed out from the group and went to hide behind Hagrid's massive form. The half-giant got the message and quickly started to shoo the bothersome witches and wizards away. He led Harry out the back door and into an empty courtyard and a brick wall.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief and fresh air while Hagrid took out that pink umbrella again and tapped the pattern away on the brick wall, causing it to fold in on itself, exposing the archway to the magical shopping district.

"Well, 'arry, welcome to Diagon Alley!" Hagrid said with a big beaming smile.

Harry made a show of acting appropriately awed. He gasped and gaped at everything while keeping a close eye on any crowds and trying to keep his forehead as covered as he could manage.

Hagrid started by leading Harry to Gringott's. He led them to a teller and fished out Harry's key that he had apparently gotten from Dumbledore. Harry shared a *look* with a few of the goblins as they made to acknowledge his presence there. It seemed that his silent plea was enough to get the proper message across because they all acted as if they didn't know him.

Harry couldn't help but take note that Hagrid never once mentioned a family vault, nor did he give Harry the key to his family vault. Harry wasn't about to think that it was actually Hagrid's intent to deceive him – he rather doubted the oaf would be capable of it – no, the most likely scenario was that Hagrid honestly didn't know. Dumbledore had only told Hagrid about Harry's trust vault and nothing about the other.

They were taken down to the vault by Griphook and Harry scooped up an appropriate amount of galleons. Dumbledore would likely continue to get the account statements, so Harry took out enough to buy all his school supplies and for spending money for the school year.

After they were done at Harry's vault, Hagrid took a detour to another vault, sighting 'Hogwarts business'. He apparently was doing Dumbledore a favor by fetching something for him. Harry hadn't actually been even the slightest bit interested up until the moment the goblin opened the large heavily warded door, allowing Hagrid inside, and Harry's Sight picked up a tremendously powerful bit of magic inside. He perked up, his attention locked upon a small grubby-looking package that Hagrid picked up off of a small pedestal in the center of the otherwise empty vault.

Harry gave a tiny frustrated grunt as the package was stuffed hastily into Hagrid's inner coat pocket, and out of Harry's view. He had no idea what the hell it had been, but it was clearly an incredibly powerful magical artifact. It's aura had spun powerfully of Light magic, and his Sight was pretty bad at deciphering the intricacies of that particular branch. He probably could have made some things out, had he the opportunity to actually look the object over and examine it with some spells, but as it was, it had been wrapped up, and quickly stowed away. Harry frowned in frustration as his powerful sense of curiosity was raging with frustration. He huffed quietly and tried to put the matter out of his mind.

The ride back up to the surface clearly didn't sit well with Hagrid and by the time the pair left the bank, the large man was green in the face. He led Harry to Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions and asked Harry if he minded if Hagrid headed off for a 'pick-me-up' at the pub while Harry was fitted for his robes.

Obviously, Harry didn't mind this at all. Hagrid headed back down the alley towards the Leaky Cauldron and Harry headed inside the the robes shop.

"Hogwarts, dear?" a squat, smiling witch asked him, once she spotted him.

"Yes ma'am," Harry said, giving the witch a polite, charming, smile.

"Well, come right over here. I've got another young man being fitted right now."

She led him into the back of the shop where a pale boy with a strangely familiar pointed face was being measured by another witch.

Harry was led to stand on a footstool beside the boy and Madam Malkin slipped a long robe over Harry's head and began to pin it to the right length.

He glanced over at the pale boy out of the corner of his eye. His facial features were strikingly familiar and Harry suspected that he knew the boy's parents or grandparents in his

previous life. He had the coloration of a Malfoy, but the eyes, jaw, and lips of a Black. He reminded Harry a lot of Cygnus when he was 11, actually.

"Hogwarts too?" the boy drawled.

"*Obviously*," Harry drawled in return, because – really? It was a pretty obvious question. He was being fitted for Hogwarts school robes for Merlin's sake.

"First year?"

"Yes."

"Same here. Although, my father's on the board of Governor's, and I was able to visit the school last year so it won't be the first time I've seen it."

"He's on the board?" Harry replied, suspecting more and more that his guess as to the boy's heritage was accurate. Both the Malfoy family and the Black family held inherited seats on the board of Governor's.

"Yes. Right now he's next door buying books and Mother's up the street looking at wands. Then I'm off to look at racing brooms. Don't see why first years can't have their own broom."

"I've never been particularly fond of flying to be honest. It can be enjoyable of course, but it's far from the most efficient means of transportation."

"For transport, *sure*, but what about Quidditch?"

"I suppose I was never much of a sports fan," Harry said with a dismissive shrug. The pale boy seemed to be looking at him with an air of disbelieving shock.

"What wizard doesn't like Quidditch?"

Harry smirked. "This wizard, I guess."

"You're obviously barmy and most definitely not the norm."

Harry choked out a laugh and shrugged. "I won't argue with you there."

"Well, *I* do enjoy flying and I can't understand why they wouldn't allow first years to bring their own broom."

"They don't trust eleven year olds with access to brooms whenever they want. They want to make sure that we can only take off into the air when supervised," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"Well, I think it's stupid. I've been flying for years and I certainly don't need a *babysitter*. I think I'm going to bully Father into getting me a racing broom and smuggle it in somehow."

"Just have your father shrink it and stick it in the bottom of your trunk. Have you already purchased your trunk?"

"Not yet."

"Well get one with a space-expanded false bottom. Stick it in there."

The pale boy's eyes lit up with excitement and then he grinned smugly. "I just might do that."

"So what's your name?" Harry asked, eager to see if he'd been right.

"Draco Malfoy," the pale boy said, extending out a hand.

Harry's eyes lit up and a smug grin spread across his lips. "I knew it. A Malfoy. Is your mum a Black, or related to them? Judging by the constellation name, I'm guessing I'm right on that front too."

Draco blinked as Harry accepted his hand and shook it. "You're right. My mother is Narcissa Black."

"Narcissa? Cygnus's youngest daughter, right?"

"That's right." Draco responded with a frown of confusion.

Harry laughed and took his hand back so that the witch could resume pinning his sleeve. "You and I are actually related, then."

Draco's eyes widened slightly before narrowing. "Related? How so?"

"I think it would be second cousin twice removed? Something like that... So your grandfather is Cygnus Black, yeah? His father was Pollux Black. My grandmother on my father's side is Dorea Black, Pollux Black's sister."

"You're related to the Blacks then?"

"That's right." Harry said with a nod.

"What's your name then?"

"Oh, sorry! That was rather rude of me. I asked you your name and never gave mine back. I apologize. I'm Harry Potter."

Draco looked like he was about to give some sort of snooty retort about Harry's 'rudeness' up until the moment Harry spoke his name. Then Draco's eyes widened dramatically and his jaw actually dropped.

"Harry Potter?" Draco exclaimed.

Harry noticed that even the two seamstresses had paused in their work and were looking up at him with wide eyes.

"You're going to catch flies if you keep that up," Harry said and Draco's jaw snapped shut.

Some sort of realization seemed to pass over Draco's eyes because they suddenly lit up even more. "I'm related to Harry Potter?"

Harry mock gasped, "I'm related to Draco Malfoy?"

Draco frowned at him in confusion before he apparently recognized Harry's sarcasm and glared for a moment. However, it passed quickly and the glare was replaced as a slew of different emotions seemed to pass through the pale boy's gaze. Confusion, elation, bewilderment, a sneer of mild disgust, and then elation again. Harry could almost see the cogs turning in his head as he went over every thing he thought he knew about Harry Potter.

"I didn't know the Potters had any ties with the Blacks," Draco finally said.

Harry hummed and nodded his head slightly. "I'm not really sure how it happened, but my grandparents are Charlus Potter and Dorea Black. It could have been an arranged marriage, but I have trouble believing that since Dorea's father never got on with the Potters, even if they were an old pureblood family..." Harry's voice trailed off for a moment before he shook his head and shrugged. "But who knows. Maybe Charlus and Dorea worked together and fell in love or something. Defying family politics and all that. Some sort of romantic drivel. Who knows."

Draco nodded his head slowly, but Harry got the feeling that the boy hadn't entirely followed all of what he'd said. Not that it mattered.

"So your father is Lucius Malfoy?" Harry asked, changing the topic some.

"Yes, that's right." Draco replied instantly as his back straightened and he seemed to puff up a bit in pride.

"I think I'd like to meet your father. I've heard a lot of great things about him. Out of curiosity, is your great aunt Astraea still alive?"

"Great aunt Astraea? Yes, she is. Why?"

"No reason. Just curious. So you said your father is buying your books? Will he be coming here afterwards?"

"Yes, he should be."

Harry hummed and nodded his head. "Would you be willing to introduce me? I've heard quite a lot about your father. He's a very powerful and influential man."

"Of course. I'm sure father would be very interested in meeting you as well." Draco smirked slightly and Harry smirked right back. Draco no doubt knew that his father would be *very* pleased with him if he managed to establish some sort of amicable relation with the Boy-Who-Lived.

A moment passed in silence as the seamstresses finished with the pinning, removed the fitting robes and took them over to magical mannequins to begin casting the spells that would automatically sew the hems.

"Good lord, what is that horrendous creature by the door?" Draco sneered and Harry's head popped up to look.

"Oh..." Harry said as he repressed a groan as he saw Hagrid come to stand just outside the shop door and peer inside. "That's my *escort*."

"*Your* escort?" Draco exclaimed in horror.

Harry snickered. "Yes, *unfortunately*. As I'm sure you know, I'm an orphan. My legal guardians weren't in a position where they could bring me to Diagon Alley. I was expecting the school to send a faculty member to assist me, but instead I got the bloody groundskeeper. I suppose it could be worse... well, I'll just keep telling myself that anyway. It's only for today, at least. I would have been perfectly capable of coming here on my own and tried to argue that when the big oaf came to pick me up, but he wouldn't hear it."

"That's awful. Having to go around being seen in public with, with... *that*."

Harry barely suppressed a snort. "Yes... but as I said, it's just a day. I'll live."

"That's ridiculous. You could simply come with us. Father and Mother would be perfectly happy to escort you around the alley. Father is on the Hogwarts board of Governor's so he's more than qualified to be your escort. More so than the ruddy *groundskeeper*," Draco finished with a sneer.

Harry chuckled quietly but shook his head as he leaned in closer to whisper to the blond. "Believe me, your offer is incredibly tempting. The thing is that I'm trying to attract as little attention as possible from one, Albus Dumbledore. As I'm sure you can understand, being who I am comes with a lot of strings attached. There are a lot of powerful people out there who want to get their grimy hands on me and Dumbledore is probably the most powerful of them all. Anything that happens here in Diagon Alley is sure to get reported back to the man, thanks to his pet giant over there.

"The man's gaze is already going to be lodged firmly on me, so I have to be cautious of what I do in public, and who I'm seen with. I also highly doubt that Hagrid would willingly leave me in your father's care, considering who your father is and the sort of opinion ignorant people like Dumbledore hold of him. But perhaps we could arrange to meet up at another time?"

Draco blinked but quickly recovered his proper mask and gave Harry a curt nod. "That should be possible. I'm sure Father would be more than happy to accommodate your desire for discretion."

Harry grinned. "I knew I could count on you to understand, Draco. The Malfoy's have always been a great family."

Draco puffed up smugly at that, clearly pleased with how he was managing to handle the situation.

Harry looked at the witch who was directing the hemming of one of his new school robes to match the first pinned measurements that had been taken earlier. The witch who had been attending to Draco was now doing the same thing.

"Do either of you have a bit of parchment that I could use? And a quill?" Harry asked the two witches.

One of them looked up and smiled at him. She swished her wand and a piece of parchment and quill flew from the purchase counter and he caught them. He jumped down off the small platform he'd been standing on and used a nearby counter to write down a quick note. He glanced over quickly to see Hagrid peering into the open doorway of the shop looking rather anxious.

Harry handed the parchment over to Draco, who took it and quickly read it with a small frown.

"A post box?" Draco asked, looking up.

"Yeah, I've had to resort to renting a private post box in order to get any mail. Dumbledore has a charm set to intercept any mail addressed to Harry Potter."

"He steals your mail?" Draco gasped, clearly affronted by the idea.

Harry's eyes narrowed in anger and he nodded his head. "Yes, he does. It's a rather sore spot with me, actually. But I haven't done anything about it because if I did he'd know right away and I don't want him to know that I know he's doing it."

"He has no right to do such a thing! Wait till father hears about this..."

"He's my legal magical guardian, so it could be argued that he *does* have the right. I'm sure he'd use some ridiculous excuse about protecting me from my fan mail, and the possibility of cursed letters. That sort of nonsense. He'd get away with it easily enough and it's a battle that I don't consider worth exposing myself over, so I've let it slide. Anyway, tell your father to write me at that address and I should be able to get the letter right away. I try to check that post box at least once or twice a week."

Draco nodded his head. "Alright."

"Perhaps we can arrange a visit to Malfoy Manor," Harry said with a grin. It had been a long time since he'd been to the great Malfoy ancestral home. He wondered how much of it had changed since Abraxas' time. "If you manage to convince your father to get you that racing broom, you can show it off to me," Harry concluded with a smirk that got Draco grinning snootily.

"I'll do that." Draco said with a smug grin as his nose tipped a bit into the air.

After another minute the seamstress witch had Harry's school robes and cloak ready, he paid, bid Draco farewell, and left the store. It wasn't until he got back out onto the street that he realized Hagrid was carrying a large cage with a rather beautiful white owl in it.

"What's that?" Harry asked, somewhat dumbfounded.

"An owl, a'course! Happy Birthday!" Hagrid said as he handed the cage over to Harry who had to struggle to grab it without dropping his bag from the robes shop.

"Birthday? But... but you already got me that er... cake-thing."

"Ah, now tha' was hardly a proper present, 'arry! 'Sides, I thought you could use a post owl! Tha' way ye can send letters back to yer relatives while yer away at 'ogwarts!"

Harry looked up at him with a blank expression for a moment before he sighed slightly and forced a smile onto his face. "That was really thoughtful of you, Hagrid. Thank you."

"Yer welcome, 'arry!"

Next, at Harry's suggestion, they went to the luggage store so Harry could get his school trunk, and have somewhere to stow all of his other purchases for the rest of the day. He went with a very basic standard trunk since Hagrid was there. It was safer this way anyway, since he could simply put his own expansion and security charms on it, but it would *look* like nothing more than the barebones model that most first years got.

The only charm he had the shopkeep put on it was one that made a pair of wheels grow out of one end of the bottom, while a handle grew out from the other end. It required the tap of a wand and since Harry still had to hide the fact that he already had one, he had Hagrid activate the charm with his pink umbrella. The two left the shop with Harry wheeling the trunk behind him; handle in one hand, while the owl's cage was in his other.

Next was the stationary store where Harry got parchment and quills and binders for organizing his school work. Next was the apothecary where he purchased all of his potion ingredients, a cauldron, scales, and crystal phials. The next store they purchased his telescope and a set of star charts. Finally they went to Florish and Blotts bookstore and Harry purchased a complete set of first year text books. Since he was planning to aim for a bit of an overachiever-bookworm image to explain some of his extra knowledge, he went ahead and purchased quite a few additional texts that would be appropriate for an eleven-year-old. Hagrid would likely give a full report to Dumbledore once he was back at the school, so Harry didn't buy anything that was actually *interesting*.

The last stop was the one that Harry was looking forward to the least. Hagrid led him to Ollivander's and Harry couldn't help but feel a bit nervous. The man had always creeped Harry out, and he couldn't help but suspect that the man was not entirely *human* seeing as how he had looked ancient when Harry had come here as Heri, over fifty years ago, and from the brief glances he'd caught over the last few years when he ventured into the alley, he appeared to look just as ancient *now*.

Hagrid came to a stop at the entrance to Ollivander's wand shop and ushered Harry. He followed, ducking to squeeze through the doorway and then looked around nervously for a moment before choosing to sit down in a rather spindly looking chair in the corner. Harry heard it groan in protest under the large man's weight, but that was it. He instantly decided

that it had to have been enchanted in some way to prevent it from simply collapsing beneath the man the instant he sat on it.

Harry turned his attention back to the seemingly empty shop. He knew it wasn't though. He could feel a shimmer of another wizard's presence in the shop, even if he couldn't see the man. Thousands of narrow boxes containing wands were piled right up to the ceiling of the tiny shop, on all walls, and the whole place had a thin layer of dust about it. His Sight was alight with all of the magic in the air. Wands always had a powerful magical glow about them and being in a room with so *many* wands was actually a bit overwhelming.

"Good Afternoon" a familiar voice suddenly sounded from just behind him. Harry sighed slightly in annoyance that the man had somehow managed to avoid his detection and worst of all, *get behind him* without him noticing. How the hell did he do that?

Definitely not human...

Harry turned slowly, absolutely refusing to show the man the shock and surprise he no doubt wanted to get in response. He smiled at the man politely although his gaze was a bit cold. Ollivander's bushy white eyebrows rose slightly for a moment before his lips quirked into an amused grin.

"Hello," Harry responded simply.

"Ah, yes... yes. I thought I'd be seeing you soon. You have your mother's eyes. It seems like just yesterday that she was in here herself, buying her first wand," Mr. Ollivander said. "Ten and a quarter inches long; swishy, made of willow. Good for charms work."

He moved closer to Harry, and Harry refused to react outwardly, even though the fact that the man had yet to blink even once *was* beginning to unnerve him, considerably.

"Your father on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand," the old wizard continued before spewing out the exact specifications of James Potter's wand. The man's bizarre perfect memory really only added additional weight to Harry's suspicions that the man was less than human.

As he spoke, Ollivander had continued to lean in closer and closer until the point that they were piratically nose-to-nose and Harry was quickly becoming *very irritated*.

"So that's where..." the man's voice grew quiet and his hand stretched out as if he were about to touch Harry's scar.

Harry jerked back, glaring at the weird old man, sharply. "I don't much like to be touched," he said in clipped tones while giving the man a withering stare.

"Ah, my apologies. Perfectly understandable," he said, standing up straight. "I'm sorry to say that I sold the wand that did it. Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Powerful wand. Very powerful. But in the wrong hands..." he shuddered a bit and sighed. "Well, if I'd known what that wand was going to go out into the world to do..." he shook his head.

A moment later Ollivander appeared to have suddenly noticed Hagrid's presence in the shop – which Harry found a bit hard to believe because it was damn near impossible to *not* notice Hagrid under any circumstances.

Ollivander went on to perfectly describe Hagrid's wand, only to then make note that it had been snapped. Hagrid – the big oaf that he was – mentioned that he'd kept the pieces of said wand, and Ollivander then gave him a rather reprimanding glare while curtly to confirm that Hagrid didn't *use* them, to which Hagrid quickly insisted that he did not. Harry smirked slightly as he noticed Hagrid shuffling a bit with his atrocious pink umbrella.

"Well now, Mr. Potter. Let's see..." Ollivander began as he refocused on Harry.

He asked Harry which was his wand arm, to which Harry extended his right. Ollivander's magical tape measure jumped to life and began measuring every inch of Harry's body while Ollivander went on to describe what types of wood and wand cores he used and how no two wands were alike.

He went around the room and began collecting boxes off of the shelves and finally came back with a fairly decent sized pile that he set down on the counter. He picked up one of the boxes, opened it up and presented it to Harry.

"Go ahead. Give it a wave," he said in an excited encouraging voice.

Harry looked at the wand with a growing sense of trepidation, truly unsure how this day was going to play out. He gave a small sigh and reached out his hand. Before he'd even grasped it, Ollivander had snatched it away and muttered quietly as he grabbed a different box.

Harry wanted to scowl at the man, but kept his face passive.

This continued on for far too long, as far as Harry was concerned. Ollivander did actually let him wave *some* of the wands, but most he just snatched away before Harry even got a chance.

As Harry's impatience grew, Ollivander's excitement rose.

"Tricky customer eh? No matter, we'll find the proper match here somewhere..."

More and more wands were tried out but nothing really connected with Harry quite right. He felt a couple that he probably would have been able to use just fine, but Ollivander had snatched them away too. He had been in the shop for just about an hour when Hagrid stood from the chair and stretched his back, having to duck a bit to avoid bumping his head into a shelf.

"Er, 'arry? Ye mind if I kip off fer a minute? I was just goin' ta grab a few supplies from a stop across the way." Hagrid asked, looking a bit apologetic.

"Oh, no, that's fine Hagrid. No need for you to sit here through all this."

"Yeah, well, I'll be just across the street if ya get done soon."

Hagrid ducked his head and made his way out of the stop and was quickly swallowed up by the crowd of people in the street.

Harry turned back and was actually startled a bit to see Ollivander piercing him those strange misty silver eyes, rather sharply.

"Tell me, Mr. Potter – how long have you had a wand?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about," Harry replied easily without missing a beat, despite his mild surprise.

"Oh, I'm sure you do. You mustn't worry lad. I don't hold well with the Ministry's stance on underaged magic use. If I thought it were a battle I had any chance of winning, I would fight tooth and nail against that ridiculous trace they put on my wands."

Harry continued to level Ollivander with a neutral expression while he debated his next words.

"Pardon my curiosity, Mr. Ollivander, but what exactly is it that makes you think I already have a wand?"

"There are a number of clues. You hold a wand with the experience of one who has handled it for many years. You know how to control your magic as it courses through a wand, even if that wand has not chosen you. You also have one tucked beneath your shirt at the base of your spine."

Harry's brows rose minutely into his forehead, but he realized that he really shouldn't be surprised. *He* could see the magical signature of a wand, even if it were tucked underneath clothing, and Ollivander could clearly *See* something in the way a young wizard's magic reacting with the core of his wands.

"If you've known I was carrying a wand with me all this time, why did you allow me to go through all this bother?"

"I did not yet know for sure if that wand had chosen you as it's master. There was still a chance that one of my wands would choose you instead. But I see now that is not going to happen. You are already master of a perfectly good wand, and all of my wands can see that clearly."

Harry blinked at the man, maintaining an otherwise blank face. "Okay..." he said slowly, feeling more and more curious about this man by the minute.

"I wonder if you would let me see it?"

"See what?"

"Your wand."

"Oh... No. I don't think so."

"You don't?"

"No. That's quite all right."

"Is it because it is one of mine?"

"What makes you say that?"

"I would recognize one of my own creations anywhere, even if I cannot fully see it."

Harry tilted his head slightly to the side as he observed the strange old wizard with curiosity. "If you were to discover anything strange about my wand, would you tell anyone?" Harry asked cautiously.

"No."

"No? Just no?"

"Why would I? It is not my business. I do not chose sides, Mr. Potter. I simply craft wands."

"Yes, but what if you could go back and undo selling that wand to the Dark Lord? You yourself said mear minutes ago *'if I'd known what that wand was going to go out into the world to do'* – Well, what *would* you have done? Would you undoing selling him the wand? Do you honestly think that would have even made a difference?"

"Ah, that *is* the question, isn't it? Would it have even made a difference... I honestly think not. Had he not gotten his wand from me, he would have gotten one from somewhere else. To answer your question, I would not undo it. As horrible as the things were that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did were, they were also great. Terrible. But *great*. To have one of my creations in the hands of one of the most powerful wizards to walk the world..."

Harry nodded his head slowly. "If I showed you my wand, would you answer me a question or two?"

"A question about what?"

"What are you? What sort of Sight is it that you use to see the magic of your wands?"

"Ah... quite interesting questions you have. It is a sign of your perceptiveness that you would even think to ask them."

"Will you answer them?"

"I suppose I can play to your curiosity if you will play to mine. I am three-quarters human wizard, however my maternal grandmother was a Dryad."

"Tree nymph," Harry said. "In additional to having a strong natural connection with base natural magics, and supernaturally long-lives, they are said to have divining powers and the ability to see the magical energy in most natural materials." Harry gave an impressed little nod. "Quite impressive lineage."

"Thank you. You are quite knowledgeable."

"I try."

"So do I get to see your wand?"

"Do you swear to speak of it with no one else?" Harry said giving the man a cautious but pointed glare.

"I swear it. Had I felt inclined to simply tell others about you having a wand I would have mentioned it in front of Hagrid."

Harry gave a little jerk of his shoulders in acknowledgement of the man's point. He reached up under his shirt and pulled the wand out from the waistband of his pants. His wand hummed warmly in his hand, as it always did. Perfectly matched with him and happy to have chosen him all those many years ago.

Harry presented the wand and Ollivander delicately picked it up. His eyes widened as he recognized the wand.

"Where did you get this?" he whispered as his fingers delicately danced over the wood, reverently.

"Does it really matter? The previous owner died. It chose me."

"This wand has only ever had one master..." Ollivander spoke, his voice still barely above a whisper.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "You see peculiar things, Mr. Ollivander."

"Oh, I wouldn't argue with that, dear boy." Ollivander conceded as he gently returned the wand to Harry. "I must say, Mr. Potter... it is *most curious*..."

"What is?"

"That *this wand* would chose you when it was it's brother in cores that gave you that scar..."

"Magic works in mysterious ways," Harry commented lightly, but there was a warning in his tone.

Ollivander's strange unblinking eyes remained locked on Harry as he nodded his head slowly. "Yes... mysterious..."

—

Harry was glad to have left Ollivander's shop shortly after that and made his way to the store opposite the street to find Hagrid. The man was *not* hard to find, given his massive size, and *finally* Harry was able to leave the alley for the day.

Hagrid escorted him back to the Dursley's on the Knight Bus and dropped him off at Magnolia Crescent, just at the turn-off to Privet Drive. Harry bid the giant oaf a farewell and waited until the Knight Bus had banged away before heaving an exhausted sigh and crouching down next to the owl cage and opening the door.

"Hello pretty girl," Harry cooed as he let his hand brush over the snowy owl's head. "I'm about to apparate, and I doubt very much that you would enjoy the experience so I'm going to let you fly there instead, alright?"

The owl snapped its beak lightly and turned its head a bit in response.

"Alright, now I need you to fly to Godric's Hollow, think you can do that?"

The owl made a high pitched sort of call that Harry took as an affirmative. "Good. You should be able to find me from there, right?" Another hoot of confirmation was all Harry needed to move out of the way and allow the owl to take flight. With the bird well on her way, Harry grabbed a tight hold on the handle of his trunk and on the bird cage and apparated to his family home, desperately relieved to be done with the Dursley's for what would likely be a great, long, while. Although he would have to drop by there briefly later to pick up the few books he'd left in his room. Nothing he couldn't do later. Right now – he was exhausted and wanted to take a nap.

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AN: I think I told someone in a review response that this chapter would be the start of Hogwarts, but it obviously wasn't. Diagon Alley ran longer than I expected it too, so you get Hogwarts next chapter, instead.

And, since I had so many people comment on it in reviews, I'll just point out that things will most likely not exactly follow canon very closely here. Voldemort was able to get something going on years earlier. In canon, Quirrell went on his travels abroad the summer that Harry turned eleven. Having already been a professor at Hogwarts, he was already aware, at that point, that the stone was going to be hidden at Hogwarts the following fall. I think that it was his convenient presence in the forests of Albania that summer; his position at Hogwarts as a professor; and the knowledge that the Philosopher Stone was going to be at Hogwarts that coming fall that enticed Voldemort enough to go to the trouble of possessing the man.

Tom, in this story, managed to get something going on more than a year and a half sooner than that, so it really is rather unlikely that he's possessed Quirinus Quirrell. When Tom was resurrected in this story, Quirrell was still working as the muggle studies professor at Hogwarts, and not anywhere near any Albanian Forests. Just food for thought. :)

—

Oh – and I have a **poll** up on my **author profile** in regards to this story for those that didn't see it after the last chapter was posted.

Rebirth Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Very LOOONG chapter. Longest yet. THIRTY PAGES. Could easily have been split into two chapters, but really? What would be the point of that? So here it is.

— — — — — Rebirth Chapter 12 — — — — —

The following afternoon, Harry dropped by the Dursley's house just long enough to get the last of his things and to tell Petunia he would be spending very little time there for the remainder of August, and then he'd be gone entirely for the school year. He would drop by twice over the next four weeks, and only long enough to ensure the wards that tested for his presence were reset.

Afterwards he went down the street and apparated back to Godric's Hollow. He donned his standard set of glamours, although since he'd grown considerably over the last few years, he was beginning to debate on creating himself a new look. He wasn't nearly as short as he had been, and a middle-aged half-goblin really shouldn't be getting taller. He decided that once he went off to Hogwarts to retire his temporary alter-ego and create himself a new one for later use.

But for now, he'd stick with it. Once all his glamours were in place, he apparated to the apparition lot in Diagon Alley and set off towards the Owl Post Office. He checked his box and found it rather full. He hadn't been in to check his post in about a week thanks to his extended stay on Privet Drive.

He took his collection of letters and papers with him and returned to the apparition lot and then back to Godric's Hollow. He sat down at his dining room table to sort through it all. He set all of the Daily Prophets aside in a pile to scan through later. He had a few statements from Gringott's, a few letters from correspondences he kept up, with rare item dealers and book sellers.

Finally he found the letter he'd been hoping for. Lucius Malfoy had written to him.

Mr. Harry Potter,

I was most pleased to hear from my son, Draco, that you and he seemed to get along quite well during your brief encounter Wednesday afternoon in Diagon Alley. I was quite disappointed to hear that I had only just missed you when I returned for him. Draco said that you expressed an interest in meeting me and I would be most pleased to make your acquaintance as well.

Draco said that you even expressed an interest in coming to visit our home, so I would like to extend an invitation to you to do just that. I understand you desire to keep our encounter outside the public eye and approve of such discretion and use of caution.

I would like to invite you to join us, at Malfoy Manor, for afternoon tea on this Saturday. If that time will not work for you and your guardians, please let me know and I will be most amicable to make other arrangements. If your guardians will be joining you, please let me know how many guests to expect.

I will open the floo for visitors Saturday at 2:30pm. Simply call out 'Malfoy Manor' and it will bring you here. If floo travel is not an option, inform me and we can work out an alternate plan.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Lucius Abraxas Malfoy

Head of House Malfoy

Member of Hogwarts Board of Governors

Holder of Malfoy Wizengamot Seat

Harry snorted at the list of titles and the extremely proper tone of the letter as he summoned some parchment and his favorite self-inking quill.

Dear Mr. Malfoy,

I graciously accept your offer and will be in attendance for afternoon tea this coming Saturday. Floo travel will be acceptable, so you can expect my arrival from that method. I will be coming alone. Unfortunately my legal guardians are muggles and they are not comfortable with the wizarding world. I also suspect that you would be less than comfortable with them. I think we can both agree that it's better this way.

I am glad that you understand and appreciate my desire for discretion. I am looking forward to seeing Draco again, but I think that you and I will have some interesting things to discuss as well.

Looking forward to finally meeting you.

Harry James Potter

Heir to House Potter

Harry finished the letter and sealed it into an envelope with a bit of wax and a rubber stamp he'd discovered years ago in his father's study with the Potter family crest on. He leaned out the kitchen window and whistled to call his new owl in. She came soaring in through the window almost instantly and he smiled at her fondly. He really did like the beautiful creature. He didn't have the highest opinion of Hagrid, but he knew the poor dumb oaf really only had the best of intentions. And it was rather kind of him to buy Harry the owl.

Harry realized that the owl was the first birthday present he had received since his first birthday with his parents. Well... there was that cake-thing from Hagrid too, but that hardly counted. Harry hadn't even eaten it, and honestly had no intention to.

Harry rose his forearm up and the owl came and perched on it instantly.

"You are such a pretty thing. I really do need to give you a name..." Harry hummed thoughtfully as he looked around the room, trying to come up with an idea. The books he'd purchased in Diagon Alley the previous day were strewn across the dining room table along with most of his other purchases. His trunk sat empty on the floor in preparation for the expansion and security charms he planned to set on the thing.

Harry let his eyes scan the pile of books, aimlessly as he continued to try and think of a name. *Hogwarts: A History* was sitting on the top and he flicked his wrist sending the book flying open to a random page. He leaned over and scanned it for the first name he might find.

His eyes fell upon the name 'Hedwig' and he made a little 'hmm' sound. He turned his attention back to the bird, perched on his arm. "What do you think of Hedwig? Seems a nice proper name for such a beauty as you."

The owl made a high pitched noise in response and seemed to approve of the name. Harry grinned. "Hedwig it is. Alright Hedwig, I have your first bit of post to deliver. Are you up for it?"

Hedwig hooted and snapped her beak at him as if to say 'of course, I am!'

Harry lowered his arm and the owl hopped down onto the table below. He then set to securing the letter to her leg.

"I want you to take this to Lucius Malfoy for me. He works at the Ministry in London, but he also has a large formal manor estate near Tiverton. You'll be able to find him, where ever he is, yes?"

Again the owl looked almost insulted that he might doubt her prowess and ended up pecking at his finger.

He chuckled, finding that he really was rather fond of the bird and let her back out the window.

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Harry woke up Saturday morning feeling the slightest bit anxious for the coming day, but mostly just impatient. He had finally come to the decision that he needed to confide certain details in at least *someone*, and was hoping that Lucius Malfoy might be that person.

He needed to find Tom. He was truly becoming desperate and the fact that he was about to go to Hogwarts would only leave him in an even worse position to search for the man than he was in now. He would have Dumbledore's watchful gaze on him, in addition to the whole bloody populace of the damn school.

The Malfoys had always been loyal to Tom. They were smart, cunning, well connected, and knew how to be discreet while working the angles to their best advantage. Tom had been quite fond of Abraxas, and Harry remembered hearing about when the man finally had his son. Abraxas was a strict man, but also a proper father. No doubt Lucius' mother wanted to smother him – she had been that sort of woman – but Abraxas would have raised him to be a proper Malfoy.

At least, Harry hoped so.

From the bits and pieces he'd dug up over the years, and from the information that he had garnered out of the minds of the Death Eater's he'd interrogated, he knew that Lucius had been very close to Tom. He had been one of the most trusted of the Death Eaters serving the Dark Lord during the last war.

Harry had, of course, also looked up Lucius' political record. The man had discreetly worked towards the goals of the old ways for years, and had no doubt sent a lot of money out to continue to propagate the Dark Lord's agendas as subtly as possible. From what he could tell, Lucius was a master Slytherin and Harry could see why Tom would come to favor the man. It looked as if he had not simply inherited his father's political savvy, but perhaps even surpassed it.

Harry had actually been considering approaching Lucius Malfoy for several months now, but had been on the fence about it. Running into the man's son while in Diagon Alley had simply presented far too tempting an opportunity to pass up, so Harry had finally decided to move forward.

He spent some time before the full-length standing mirror in the master bedroom, debating his appearance, before leaving for the afternoon tea. He'd purchased a fine set of designer robes. Not formal dress robes, but an obvious notch above casual wear, and clearly expensive. Malfoy's appreciated wealth, nobility, knowledge and power, and Harry would play to that.

Harry had been allowing his hair to grow out for the last year, and it was currently about half-way down his neck. He frowned at the mirror as he debated what to do with it. He could go ahead and get it cut short, but he wasn't really *feeling* the short look. His Potter hair tended to be rather wild and untamable when it was short, and his appearance reminded him far too much of Charlus Potter. Sure, he also looked like his father, James Potter, but he'd only known James for a year and a half, while he had hated Charlus for more than a decade. One left a far deeper impression than the other.

He was relieved that performing the ritual to acquire the Black Sight had also corrected his normal vision. He would look even *more* like Charlus if he had been cursed with wearing *glasses*.

He shuddered at the thought.

Returning his focus to the mirror, he decided to aim for something completely different. He was still a Valerius – even if only in spirit. He would aim for a more traditional Valerius look then the scruffy mop associated with Potters. He pulled out his wand and tapped it on his head and performed the incantation silently in his mind. A moment later his hair began to lengthen. He watched it in the mirror until it reached the top of his shoulder blades and tapped his wand on his head again, ending the growth.

He pulled out a hairbrush and combed it all back until it was as smooth as was possible and neatly collected and then used a small tie to secure a low ponytail at the base of his neck.

With all of his hair tied back, he looked rather proper, in an old world sort of way, but it also left his forehead completely exposed. His lightning-bolt shaped scar was there, just off center, plain as day for any and everyone to see. Part of Harry, deep down inside, felt the strong desire to cover it up and hide it away from the world, but he squashed the feeling down.

He wouldn't hide it. Most of the wizarding world saw it as a sign of his 'heroic actions' and 'miraculous survival'; for many years he had seen it as a painful reminder of the worst night of his life. But now he saw it for something else. It was Tom's mark upon him. Not only that, it was also where the bit of Tom's soul resided within him.

He didn't have Tom here with him, but he *did* have a small piece of him to keep and to protect. It wasn't much, but for now, it would have to do.

Finally satisfied enough with his appearance he made his way down stairs, bid farewell to Hedwig and apparated to an empty alley behind a muggle shop just off Charring Cross road in London. He got out onto the sidewalk and walked a half block down to the entrance of the Leaky Cauldron. He got a few odd looks from the muggles for his dress, but he ignored them. When he entered the pub a few looked up out of mild curiosity.

The barman made to greet him but froze as his gaze landed on Harry's forehead. His eyes widened comically but he also looked confused. Harry looked quite a bit different than he had several days earlier when he'd arrived with Hagrid with his messy hair loose and free, and wearing muggle jeans and a t-shirt.

Harry took advantage of the man's momentary shock and made his way straight to the floo. He dropped a knut into a can that sat on the mantle and then grabbed a pinch of floo powder. He wasn't waiting around long enough for a crowd to gather. He stepped into the fireplace threw the powder down and said as quietly as he could manage while still making it work, "Malfoy Manor".

Harry exited the floo into a familiar, grand looking, welcoming room. It was almost shocking how very little this room had changed since he had last entered it. There were a few different items of furniture, and they were in a different layout, but the paintings on the walls were the same as 30 years ago, and hung in the same places – although there were a few new additions. The fine, plush carpet was the same. The same off-white wainscot panels lined the lower portion of all the walls, and a pale green, vertically lined wallpaper took up the upper half. He only had a moment to take the room in before a house elf popped into the room and bowed low.

"Master's guest is expected. Master's guest should be waiting here and Dobby will be fetching young master," the elf squeaked, still having it's head bowed so low that it's floppy bat ears were actually dragging on the floor.

"I'll wait," Harry said easily.

The elf rose it's head and looked as if it were about to pop away when it's tennis-ball sized eyeballs took Harry in and seemed to widen even further – which Harry honestly thought shouldn't be possible. The little elf gasped and Harry could tell that it was staring straight at his forehead.

"Master's guest is Mister Harry Potter!" the house elf, Dobby, squeaked.

"Err... yes, I am," Harry replied hesitantly.

"Mister Harry Potter, sir, shouldn't be here! It is not safe for Mister Harry Potter to be in Master's home! Master is a very bad wizard!" the elf said in a terrified, pleading voice. Suddenly it looked horror stricken and scurried over to a table and began to beat its head against the side. "Bad Dobby! Bad! Dobby shouldn't speak badly about Master! Dobby will have to iron Dobby's hands!"

"Merlin's beard, are you mad?" Harry exclaimed as he watched the elf continue to work at giving itself a concussion.

"Oh, what nonsense is that stupid elf on about now?" a voice said from behind Harry and he turned to find Draco standing in the doorway that led off the welcoming room to the entry hall.

"I think your elf is a bit barmy," Harry said with a slightly amused look on his face as he looked back at the elf, who was now hitting itself over the head with a brass candle stick.

"Stop that, you stupid elf! If you damage those candle sticks mother will be furious!" Draco bellowed as he walked forward and grabbed the candle stick right out of it's hand, mid swing. The elf cowered down, shaking and looking utterly terrified. It's gaze traveled to Harry and it's eyes grew enormous and filled with tears as worry overtook his features.

"Harry Potter... *shouldn't... dangerous!*" Dobby whispered while shaking his head back and forth.

Harry frowned at him but Draco was muttering angrily about stupid house elves and having to tell father to punish this one again.

Draco then seemed to realize that *Harry Potter* was standing next to him and brought himself up, all proper. "I deeply apologize. Welcome to Malfoy Manor. My father is in his study right now, but he'll be down for tea in about twenty minutes."

"Thanks to you and to your father for inviting me. I've been looking forward to this since I got the invitation." Harry replied easily.

"Can I offer you a tour?"

Harry grinned and nodded. "Sure, that would be lovely."

Draco quickly swept into showing Harry around. Harry found himself mildly amused at the young boy's obvious attempts to act like his father. Trying so hard to act mature and grown up. Playing the perfect little gentleman and making a few amateur attempts at some social-political maneuvers. It was kind of cute... in a snooty, stuck-up, poncy-kid sort of way. But Draco was more entertaining than any of the moronic children that Harry had had to endure at his muggle primary school for the last decade, so he was more than happy to keep the kid company for his little tour and Malfoy family history lesson.

When Draco got to a stone patio off a large sitting room on the first floor, he pointed to a broom he had leaning against the doorway and grinned smugly. Harry chuckled.

"Ah, a Nimbus 2000? That's the best on the market, isn't it?" Harry observed as he walked over and got a closer look.

"Of course! Malfoy's always get the best," Draco replied with a proud smirk.

Harry chuckled. "Of course. So you managed to *bully* your father, then?"

Draco's cheeks tinged pink slightly but he quickly seemed to push aside his embarrassment. "I was able to convince him."

"Were you also able to convince him to shrink it down for you and let you smuggle it in your trunk?"

Draco's lips turned up in a smirk. "Of course."

Harry grinned and was about to say something else when that same barmy house elf from earlier appeared with a pop and informed the two that Mistress was calling them to tea.

Draco led Harry to a cozy breakfast room that had a mid-sized round table with four chairs, and four place settings. As they entered the room, they came upon Draco's mother, who Harry was stunned to note looked almost exactly like Druella Rosier, or rather, Druella *Black*. It was almost eerie, actually. Duella had been in he and Tom's year at Hogwarts back when he was Heri and not Harry. She had married Cygnus at some point during the years that he and Tom had been abroad, but Harry had visited Cygnus a quite often in the years after they returned to Britain, while Tom was gathering his followers, so Harry had seen Duella as she

aged. Harry supposed it shouldn't be at all surprising that Narcissa looked so much like her mother.

Blacks, as a general rule, almost all had very dark hair. Cygnus, of course, followed this pattern, but Druella had been a blond, and it seemed that Narcissa had inherited the hair color. She was tall, slim, quite pale as all Blacks tended to be, and had piercing blue eyes.

She came over and greeted Harry with surprising warmth and led he and Draco over to the table, saying that her husband would be joining them in a moment.

The moment she sat down, Lucius swept into the room, looking as proud and proper as any Malfoy should.. Harry was less surprised to see that Lucius Malfoy closely resembled his father. He'd already seen photos of Lucius from the Daily Prophet, so he'd known what to expect. Where Abraxas had preferred facial hair – always having a very neatly trimmed goatee, and large side-burns, Lucius was clean-shaven, but the similar facial structure was undeniable.

"I apologize for my tardiness," Lucius said as he walked over and stood beside the seat next to his wife. He extended his hand towards Harry and Harry stood from his seat and shook the offered hand. "Lucius Malfoy."

"Harry Potter. It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Mister Malfoy."

Lucius gave a nod of approval and the two released their hands and took their seats.

Narcissa called out to one of their house elves – a female one this time – and the little creature served them all tea and brought out little sandwiches and scones.

"Mr. Potter," Narcissa began, being the first one to speak once tea had begun, "I was quite surprised to hear that you would be visiting without an escort. My husband said that in your letter you mentioned that your guardians were muggles?"

Harry grimaced slightly and both elder Malfoy's noticed. Not that he felt at all inclined to hide such a reaction. "Unfortunately, yes. Although I will be staying with them as little as possible from now that I'm starting Hogwarts. I'm actually hoping to establish some alternate living arrangements from here on out."

"How exactly did you come to live with muggles?" she asked, and her nose scrunched up a bit in distaste as she said the word 'muggles'.

"That would be the doing of Albus Dumbledore. I hate to admit it – because they're absolutely abhorrent people – but they are my blood relatives, from my mother's side, of course. She was muggleborn, and it's her sister and family that I ended up with."

"Dumbledore's doing, you say?" Lucius asked, his lip curling slightly in obvious distaste.

"Yes. I can't prove this, since my parent's will has been sealed by the man, but I'm positive that my parents actually *specifically* noted that I was to never end up with these relatives of mine. They hate magic, and they hated my parents. My parents also rather disliked them. I

believe there was a long list of potential guardians listed out by my parents in their wills, but Dumbledore got their will sealed with the argument that it was necessary to keep me protected, and then he took his power as my defacto magical guardian and placed me with my muggle relatives."

Draco looked horrified. "Why would he *do* that?"

Harry sighed and shook his head. "I honestly don't know. I've got a few weak theories, but nothing quite adds together."

"The way you speak, Mr. Potter, would lead people to believe you aren't particularly fond of Albus Dumbledore," Lucius said, obviously fishing for information.

Harry gave Lucius a flat look and rose a single eyebrow, as if to say 'No, duh?'

"That would be an accurate assumption," Harry responded airily instead.

A glimmer of something flashed through Lucius' eyes and Harry smirked slightly. The elder Malfoy was no doubt making plans in his mind for ways to get on Harry's 'good side' in order to use the Boy-Who-Lived to derail some of the venerable Headmaster's power and influence. That was just the sort of person Lucius no doubt was.

Conversation flowed easily enough. The Malfoy's seemed appalled to learn that Harry had been forced to grow up almost entirely in the muggle world, even having to attend muggle primary school.

Harry told them about his skipping grades, and eventually being put into a special class for the gifted. Narcissa seemed quite pleased and Draco looked mildly impressed. Narcissa also pointed out how impressed she was with his manors and apparent knowledge of the magical world's customs, considering his unfortunate upbringing.

"Oh, Mr. Potter—" Narcissa began at one point later on, "When Draco came home on Wednesday, he questioned me about something you had told him while in the robes shop. Apparently you said that we were related through my family?"

"Yes, that's correct. Although I'll admit it's probably a fairly distant relation," Harry responded. "My grandmother was Dorea Black, Pollux Black's youngest sister. I believe that Polux Black was your grandfather, correct?"

"Why, yes! Dorea Black, you say? Now that I think about it, I do vaguely remember something about one of my grandfather's sister's marrying a Potter."

Harry nodded his head. "Yes, honestly I found it rather surprising when I first discovered it. I did some research at the London branch of the Magical Historical Society a few years ago and came across the Potter Family tree. When I saw that my grandmother was a Black I looked up the Black Family tree, too."

"Quite ambitious for such a young boy." Narcissa remarked with an approving nod.

"Well, I wanted to know more about my magical lineage. The only real exposure I had to any blood relatives were *muggles* – so I'm sure you can understand my desire to get a better picture of the other side of my family tree."

"Of course!" Narcissa said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "I must say that it's really very surprising, but not at all unpleasant, to discover another distant relation."

"Yes, Mr. Potter," Lucius cut in then, "and I would invite you to consider us an extension of your own family. A young wizard such as yourself needs to have ties to his heritage. It's important that you have a tangible connection to our world. Far more important than trying to maintain any regretful connections with the *muggles*."

"That's most generous of you, Mr. Malfoy. I truly appreciate such a kind and welcoming gesture. And please, feel free to call me Harry. That goes for all of you, of course."

Narcissa beamed pleasantly. Lucius gave a polite nod with an approving grin, but Harry could see an accomplished gleam in the man's eye. Harry had to fight the urge to chuckle. Oh, was he in for a surprise later...

As tea was drawing to a close, Narcissa called a house elf to come and clear the table. Dobby appeared again and snapped his fingers to vanish all of the biscuits and the tea. While he worked in the background, Harry focused again on Lucius.

"Mr. Malfoy, I was hoping that perhaps you and I could have a conversation in private. Would that be alright?"

The elf, Dobby's, head popped up and he shot Harry a terrified look. His tennis-ball sized eyes darted from Lucius to Harry and back again and he began to furiously shake his head. He seemed to be trying to warn Harry off, silently – then pausing to take a fork off the table and stab his own hand.

Harry cringed at the elf for a moment before turning back to Lucius. Lucius, however, saw the movement and before he responded to Harry he turned his attention back to the elf.

"Mad elf. I do apologize, Harry, he's a bit difficult to control at times. What were you saying?"

"I was hoping we could speak in private."

"Ah yes. That would be fine. Shall we retire to my study?"

"Sounds fantastic," Harry said with a cheshire-grin. Dobby continued to shake his head and tears welled up in his eyes. Harry ignored him and quickly followed Lucius out of the room after telling Draco that he would meet up with him again after speaking with his father.

Moments later the two were entering Lucius Malfoy's private study. Lucius sat down in a finely crafted, leather upholstered office chair behind a desk and Harry was offered one of the semi-plush seats opposite it.

Lucius threaded his fingers together, resting his elbows on each of his arm rests and pierced Harry with a curious look. "So, *Harry*, what was it that you were wanting to discuss with me?"

Harry leaned back in the chair, getting comfortable for a moment before he gave Lucius a calculating look. He nodded to himself, having decided that he needed to do this, and Lucius seemed his best candidate.

"I want to confide something in you, Mr. Malfoy. Something I haven't confided in a single other person since I was born to this life. You see, I need someone that I can rely upon. Someone I can trust with this secret, and I think that you are the best option I have."

Lucius leaned forward in his chair, his face remaining mostly blank, but his eyes glowing with hunger for knowledge.

Harry continued. "You see, I'm not exactly *who*, or *what* people think I am. I know you were one of the Dark Lord's most loyal followers. That your father and aunt were loyal to him. That he *trusted* you. I wish to do the same thing now. Can I trust you, Lucius?" Harry asked, lowering his voice a bit and drawing out the S's in a bit of a hiss, like he knew Tom would.

Lucius' eyes widened and his face actually paled a bit. "You can trust me," Lucius whispered.

"Good," Harry said smoothly. "Did your father or any of the Death Eaters that you knew of the older generation, ever mention a man named Herakles Jude?"

Lucius' eyes widened with recognition and Harry's grin widened. "Ah, I see that someone did mention him. Do you mind telling me what you were told about him?"

"I don't know what things you think you know, Mr. Potter, or what you *think* you know about me, but –"

"No, don't try to deny things. It will just waste both of our times. Please, just answer the question. I'm not here to try and trap you into admitting something incriminating. If anything, what I intend to inform you is incriminating to *me*. Please, Lucius."

Lucius hesitated for a moment, as calculating cogs turned behind his eyes. Finally he seemed to come to a decision and sat up straighter. "Herakles Jude was said to be a Necromancer. One of the most powerful wizards in Britain – second only to the Dark Lord and debatably, Dumbledore. He was also the Dark Lord's lover. However he was killed during a battle when I was quite young – I believe I was only a first year in Hogwarts when it happened."

Harry nodded his head. "Correct. He died in January of 1966. He took a killing curse for the Dark Lord. Jumped in the way of the spell. Do you know who shot off that spell?"

"No..." Lucius whispered.

"Albus Dumbledore. He shot off the killing curse, with practiced ease – something that, no doubt, most people would never believe. But before he did it, he used some other spell to trap

the Dark Lord in place. Had Herakles Jude not jumped in the way, the Dark Lord would have been the one to take it."

Lucius' eyes widened slightly. "I had never heard that."

"I doubt many have. You want to know why *I* know?"

Lucius gave a curt nod, but said nothing.

"Because it was *me*. I was Herakles Jude. And you were right about the Necromancer bit. I still *am* one, in fact," Harry said, as his lips spread into a rather vicious grin. "I crossed barriers and wielded control over the magics of death, lost for hundreds of years before me. I also managed to work my own special flavor of immortality. Not the same sort that the Dark Lord has, but my own personal *brand*. You see, I rigged it so that I would *never* forget anything. Souls almost never die, Lucius. They are recycled again and again. I managed to arrange it so that every time my soul is reborn, I retain everything that makes me, me. I will always remember all of my knowledge, skills, and experiences from every life I have ever lived. While my body can still die, my soul will go on and be reborn, again and again. And I will *always* remember."

Lucius looked shocked. Harry made special note of the image because it was a rare thing indeed for a Malfoy to display such an expression.

"The Dark Lord did not realize that it was me when he came after the Potter's child. Had he realized who I was, I'm sure things would have played out very differently. And I was still too young to do anything to stop him. I couldn't even properly speak yet, so there really was no hope. I knew he was coming. I had heard the Potters talking about it and of course, we went into hiding. For a while I only knew that the Dark Lord was after us for some reason because my parents tried to keep their discussions about it away from me, but I did finally manage to over hear enough to piece things together. Apparently there was some sort of prophecy made, and they all figured it was about me. No doubt it was misinterpreted due to lack of information or understanding the bigger picture... or it was just *fake*. Do you know of it? The prophecy?"

"Yes..." Lucius rasped with a small nod.

"Do you know what it says?" Harry asked eagerly, suddenly more curious and excited.

"Only the first three lines. Even the Dark Lord was never able to discover the rest... Only Dumbledore knew all of it."

Harry blinked at the man. "Are you serious? He never even heard the whole bloody thing and he... oh never mind." Harry sighed, shaking his head. "I'm guessing that something in the first three lines was enough for him to consider the Potter's child a threat, yes?"

"*The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches,*" Lucius recited.

Harry rolled his eyes. "That would do it," he huffed. "I suppose it's not so untrue either... I probably am the only one with the power and the knowledge to actually kill him..." he trailed

off, thoughtfully. "Not that that *means* anything because I never would," he ended with a disgruntled growl. "But it's besides the point... he didn't know that the Potter's child was *me*. Whatever the hell happened that night was some sort of insane fluke. I honestly didn't do *anything* to cause it. I did nothing to defend myself – not that I even could, considering my body was only fifteen months old at the time.

"The best theory I can put together to explain what happened that night is that it was some sort of cosmic karma. I took a killing curse for him, and when I finally manage to come back, less than a year and a half passes before he comes to kill me with the same curse. Honestly the whole thing has frustrated me beyond reason for the last decade. I was ready and willing to take his stupid curse because I knew I could just be reborn *again*. I also knew I could make it happen a lot faster this time. But *nooooo*... karma decided to intervene and bite me in the arse..." Harry huffed again in frustrated annoyance.

"I'm sorry," he said with a sigh. "I'm unloading on you. I honestly haven't had a single soul to tell any of this to in *years*, so it's sort of a relief to finally say it. Anyway, getting back on track... A bit over two years ago I started feeding magic directly to the Dark Lord's disembodied spirit, using some old necromantic techniques. There were rituals that I had originally planned to use that would have called his soul directly to me so I could directly assist him in restoring his body, but there were complications and I was unable to get any of them to work. Being in the body of a child certainly didn't help matters... So feeding magic to him, long-distance, was the best alternative I came up with. It apparently worked because on Halloween 1989, he was able to get himself a body back."

Lucius' jaw dropped minutely and his eyes flashed with recognition of the noteworthy date.

"I'm sure you noticed the change in your mark?" Harry asked, rhetorically. Lucius nodded his head. "Yes, well, he's got a body back. I'm sure of that now. However, for some reason, he has not contacted any of his old Death Eaters. I cannot, for the life of me, figure out what the hell he might be doing, or where he might be. I've been *trying* to track him down for more than a year and a half, but I've had no luck. I've been limited in my resources, and my options, by this body, my age, and the fact that Dumbledore has my muggle prison warded to hell and back with tracking charms and magical logging spells. I've managed to question quite a few Death Eaters over the last year, but none of them had any useful information..."

"Valerius!" Lucius gasped.

Harry smirked. "Correct."

"That's you?"

"Yes. I assume you've spoken with Caradog Jugson, then?"

"That's right. Jugson came to me in secret immediately after the first time he was... *abducted*."

Harry snickered.

"He had quite a fantastic tale to tell... a rather frightening figure made of black and red mist who spoke with echoes of whispers..." Lucius remarked with obvious curiosity in his voice.

"Would you like me to demonstrate? A bit of visual proof, if you will?"

Lucius' eyebrows rose into his head and he seemed to be at war with himself. His caution battling with his curiosity and his hunger for power. "I... would appreciate a demonstration," he finally conceded.

Harry gave a curt nod before standing up. He dug deep into his necromantic magic and quickly began to perform the complex hand motions while quietly speaking the words to activate his Black Shadow Form.

With a flash of black and red his entire form was engulfed in darkness. His body shifted to a pure black silhouette, but semi-translucent, with deep red mist swirling up around him.

Lucius stared in shock for a moment. "Incredible," he whispered hoarsely and Harry could see a shiver run through the man at the powerful amount of Dark magic that Harry was emanating.

"Yess... quite. I've always been rather fond of this form. More than any other reason, it's because it's just so intimidating." Harry said with a chuckle. Lucius shuddered again, clearly a bit creeped out by the strange whispers that followed along with Harry's youthful voice.

With another flash, Harry returned to normal. "Satisfied?"

Lucius nodded his head.

"Now, I assume that you haven't heard from the Dark Lord, either?"

"No. I have received no word from him."

Harry sighed and sunk back down into the chair with a slight air of disappointment, even though he had expected this. "I figured. Well, basically all I'm asking is that you keep your eyes and ears open, and let me know the moment you find something. I *know* he's back. I know what I did worked. I just don't know where the hell he is or what the devil he's up to. I *have* to go to Hogwarts because if I don't, Dumbledore will hunt me down. I'm his precious prophecy child, after all, and I suspect he knows that the Dark Lord is anything but dead. He probably has all sorts of ridiculous hopes about me vanquishing the Dark Lord for him.

"The barmy old bastard already killed me once, and I have no intention of letting him do it again, so I have to avoid any excess suspicion from him. While I'm at Hogwarts I'll be completely unable to continue my search for the Dark Lord, as well as be completely cut off from my information sources. I see little point in randomly kidnapping Death Eaters and questioning them when it would be far easier if you could just keep me up to date, should anything turn up. Are you willing to do that?"

Lucius' jaw floundered for a moment before he managed to collect himself. He paused with a calculating gaze before piercing Harry with narrowed eyes.

"How do I know that I can trust that you really have no ill intentions to the Dark Lord?"

"I'll give you my magical oath, if that would satisfy you?" Harry offered with determined conviction.

Lucius' brows rose into his forehead. A magical oath was a serious thing. Not quite as serious as an Unbreakable Vow, but to some wizards, it was just as bad, if not worse. If you break an Unbreakable Vow you *die*. If you break a magical oath, you lose your magic. And to live without magic, was considered worse than death by many.

"I will take your oath," Lucius said.

Harry nodded his head, reached up into his robe sleeve and pulled out wand. He held it in front of him and closed his eyes, focusing on his magic.

"I, Harry James Potter, also known as Herakles Lucan Valerius, do swear on my magic, that I have no desire or intention to harm or kill the Dark Lord Voldemort, also known as Tom Riddle. I am searching for him with the intention to stand by his side, not hurt him."

A light flashed from his wand and then encompassed him before dissipating.

Harry sighed as he felt the magic take hold and then leave him. Finally he opened his eyes and rose his eyebrows in question at Lucius.

"Satisfied?"

"Yes.." Lucius said.

"Good. So – will you help me? I guarantee that the Dark Lord will not be angry with you having chosen to assist me, upon his return. If anything, he will reward you for helping me."

Lucius nodded his head slowly before collecting himself and sitting up straighter in his seat.

"I will help."

Harry grinned. "Good."

—

Harry and Lucius spoke for some time longer, discussing specifics and making a few loose plans. At one point Lucius called in a house elf inform Draco that it would be a bit longer before Harry would be joining him. It ended up being the same barmy elf from before, and he continued with his attempted subtle warnings to Harry. Harry sighed and rolled his eyes as the elf reluctantly popped away.

"I worry about that elf..." Harry said hesitantly.

"Hmm?"

"Your elf. Dobby, I believe?"

"What about him?"

"He is clearly not very loyal to you. When you have a house elf in your service that only follows you by fear and no respect, they will go to great lengths to find loopholes in your commands. It's a dangerous gamble."

"In what way?" Lucius asked, pinning Harry with a hesitant look.

"Well, earlier when I first arrived and that elf showed up, he recognized who I was and promptly warned me away, saying that 'master is a bad wizard'. Of course he then proceeded to beat himself over the head with a candle stick. He's bound to you, but that won't stop him from going against you in any ways that he can."

"Your suggestion I put him down?"

Harry shrugged. "Well, you *could* do that. Or you could just sell him. At least then you turn a profit off it."

"I cannot risk that. He has been exposed to too many family secrets."

Harry hummed and nodded. "True. Although, *I* could buy him off you... although, now that I think about it, that might not be the wisest idea since the little thing seemed entirely off his rocker... but it would be useful to have an elf that could run errands for me while I'm stuck at Hogwarts, and we could keep the transaction out of any records so Dumbledore would never suspect that I have a house elf in my services."

"Would you like to buy him?" Lucius asked, apparently a bit shocked by all this.

Harry pondered it for a moment while his eyes focused on a tree just outside one of the windows. Finally he hummed and nodded his head. "Yes... yes I think I would. What would you want for him?"

They made the appropriate arrangements and signed the necessary documents to transfer ownership of the elf Dobby to Harry. It was approaching dinner time when they were finally finished talking and Harry was invited to come back to Malfoy Manor the next day to spend some time with Draco. It was decided that Draco would *not* be informed of the details of Harry's true identity. He was only a child, after all, and children are rarely the best people to hold dangerous secrets, even if he *was* a Malfoy.

Harry informed Lucius that he would be returning via apparition, so that he could avoid having to deal with visiting the Leaky Cauldron to use their floo. Lucius said that he would arrange for one of their elves to meet Harry at the manor's gate the following day at 2pm, to let him in.

—

To say that Dobby was ecstatic to learn that he had been bought by *the* Harry Potter, would be an understatement. It quickly became obvious to Harry that the elf had some sort of bizarre hero complex about him. The fact that Harry had 'rescued' him from the Malfoy's

really only added to it. Harry found he had to make some of his orders *very specific*, but at least the little elf seemed eager, and extraordinarily pleased to be in Harry's employment.

He set the little elf up with his own room in the Godric's Hollow house, ordered him to take charge of buying groceries and preparing meals, and to never *ever* mention to *anyone* under *any circumstances* that he was owned by, or even *knew* Harry Potter.

Their working relationship was smoothly enough. Harry ordered the little elf to stay out of his hair as often as possible, but also ordered him to stop punishing himself. He said that if he ever saw a reason for punishment that he would deal it out himself and that he would be very angry if the elf did it to himself.

The reality was that he had never seen any value in physically beating one's house elves. They were a lot more loyal if they *liked* you, then they were if they *feared* you.

—

During the rest of August, Harry visited the Malfoys a total of three additional times. He spent about half of his time there with Draco forming something resembling a friendship with the boy. He had his uses, and Harry knew that those uses would only expand once he was at the school. Being a Malfoy, he would have power over the other members of Slytherin House – and really, there was *no doubt* that the boy would end up in Slytherin.

If Harry did end up sorted into his old house, things would likely be a bit unsteady at first. He was The-Boy-Who-Lived. *Vanquisher* of the Dark Lord. No doubt, there would be some considerable animosity from the other students, especially any older ones. Having Malfoy on his side would help smooth things over.

And of course, if he managed to get into Ravenclaw, Draco would provide a connection back to Slytherin for contacts and information.

It was win-win no matter what.

Harry rarely even considered the possibility of trying to get into Gryffindor anymore. It would be too frustrating, and Hufflepuff wasn't even up for consideration.

The month passed quickly enough with some of his spare time spent skimming through his text books, refreshing his mind on the elementary spells he would be forced to pretend he was learning for the first time. He also finished up all of the expansion and security charms for his trunk and his belongings.

The morning of September first arrived and Harry left instructions with Dobby to stay at the house unless called, keep the house relatively clean, stay out of his stuff, and make sure none of the people who regularly came to drop off little notes, letters, and nick-knacks by the front of the house, ever tried anything stupid, like breaching the wards.. The only regular task that Harry had for Dobby was to collect the mail from Harry's rented post box one a week and bring it to Harry at Hogwarts.

He was ordered to only ever appear in front of Harry if there was *no one else* around. That went for delivering his post, as well for any emergency situations where he needed to alert Harry of things.

Finally satisfied that he was ready, Harry let Hedwig out with instructions to fly to the Hogwarts Owlery, before shrinking her cage down and stowing it into one of the compartments of his trunk. Then he shrunk the entire trunk down to the size of a matchbox and stowed it into his pocket.

He bid Dobby farewell, went into the back garden, just beyond the anti-apparition ward and disapparated. He reappeared down the street from King's Cross station and took off towards the railway hub at a brisk pace. He was early still, and he'd had breakfast – Dobby was very insistent – but he wanted to stop by a stand or two and pick up a sandwich and some crisps to take with him for lunch on train.

He entered the bustling terminal and made his way through the crowds. There were shops and little stands selling papers, vendors with souvenirs, and electronic signs *everywhere*. Kings Cross had changed a lot since the last time he'd set foot in the place, but he was still able to make his way around easily enough. He came across a little cafe that sold coffee and had some wrapped deli sandwiches in a small refrigerated display case by the counter. He bent over, looking at the various options, trying to decide what would keep best during the trip when he felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up on end, and heard a sudden *gasp*.

He turned around and nearly gasped himself.

"Moony!" Harry exclaimed in surprise. He caught himself a moment too late, realizing his slip and cursing himself for it.

The man standing next to him was staring down at him with stunned eyes and a gaping mouth.

"H-harry?" the man asked in an unsure voice. Then he frowned. "How did..." and then his eyes got huge and something akin to fear flashed over them. "How do you know that name?" he whispered.

For a moment Harry was bewildered by the man's reaction almost as much as his presence. Surprise would be expected if someone you hadn't seen since they were a baby was able to recognize you, but fear? But then the gears finally clicked into place and Harry knew precisely where the fear had come from.

He had called him '*Moony*', not Remus, or Lupin. *Moony* – the nickname that only Harry's father and and Remus' other trusted childhood friends knew him by. People who knew what Remus was and what the significance of the name meant. People who knew he was a werewolf.

"How?" Harry echoed back with mild confusion in his voice. "Well, that's what dad always called you, right? I... he and Padfoot. They always called you Moony. But... well, Mum called you Remus. Right?" Harry said, trying to play up the innocent act.

Remus looked down at Harry with less fear, but bewilderment and curiosity had taken over his features. "You remember?" he asked.

Harry ducked his head sheepishly and shrugged. "I remember lots of stuff. The special teacher at my school told me I have an eidetic memory. That, that was why I could remember so much."

"You remember..." Remus said again, in a disbelieving whisper.

Harry shrugged and toed the ground as if he were nervous. After a moment of silence he looked up again. "So what are you doing here? I... I never thought I'd see you again. I wondered what had happened to you. I figured, after I got dumped with the *Dursley's* that you all must have died too. There was no other way I would have ended up with them. Mum *never* wanted me to be with them..."

"You were with Lily's sister?" Remus gasped and his face suddenly hardened and his eyes flashed golden with a deep fury.

Harry blinked up at the man and the tiniest hint of a smirk curled his lips before he repressed it. Maybe he could work this. It was obvious why he hadn't ended up with Remus to begin with – the man was a werewolf and any attempt on his behalf to claim Harry would have failed outright. But Harry was older now, so maybe he could make it work. But why was Remus here?

"Er, yeah, I did end up with them. They're awful too..." Harry said, "they hate me... they hate magic and anything to do with it."

"He said you were somewhere safe!" Remus growled, mostly to himself. "He *insisted* that..." he trailed off and huffed slightly before sighing and rubbing his hand over his face. "I'm sorry, Harry. This is just a bit of a shock. Even more so, seeing as how you actually remember me. I hadn't expected that..."

Harry shrugged. "Like I said... I remember just about everything."

Remus gave him a piercing, yet hesitant look, suddenly. "Do you... do you remember that night?"

"The night they were killed?" Harry said, looking down at his feet and stuffing his hands into his jean pockets to appear nervous. He shrugged his shoulders while not making eye contact. "Yeah... I remember," he whispered.

"Oh, Harry... I'm sorry. That was a very callous thing for me to ask. I had no right."

Harry shrugged again. "S'okay. I'm likely to get a lot of it now. I'd may as well get used to it." Harry sighed and looked back up. "Well, *you're* apparently alright. What happened to Padfoot? Why didn't he take me?"

Remus' eyes hardened suddenly and he clenched his jaw. "No one ever told you?" he asked coldly.

"Told me what?"

"Padfoot... Sirius, he was the one..." he choked slightly, and took in a slow breath to center himself. "He betrayed you. James and Lily... they trusted him. He was what's called a 'Secret Keeper'. The secret of your home was hidden in his soul and it could only have been taken from him willingly. The fact that You-Know-Who found you..."

"But he wasn't!" Harry said, suddenly. "Padfoot wasn't the secret keeper! It was Peter! I remember the argument mum and dad had over switching. They decided that Sirius would be a decoy. Dumbledore should know all this! Why didn't he do something?"

"Dumbledore?" Remus asked, looking horribly confused and shocked.

"Yes! He performed the Fidelius! I remember it clearly. He performed it and Peter was there, and mum held me the whole time, propping me up on her hip while they cast the spell. I got to watch the whole thing. Sirius wasn't even there! Doesn't the Secret Keeper need to be there when the spell is cast?"

He was showing a bit more knowledge than could be reasonably explained, but Remus seemed to be a bit too shocked by all of it to call him on it.

After a stunned moment of gaping like a fish and shaking his head slowly Remus finally found his voice. "I don't know what to think. I mean... Harry, can you really be sure you even understood what was happening? You were barely a year old when your parents went into hiding. Surely you've made a mistake. If Dumbledore knew, he would have done something. And Sirius..."

He trailed off, shaking his head slowly. He ran a hand through his lightly graying hair and huffed a bit. "I'm sorry. Why don't we talk about this another time. I'll need to look some things up, alright?"

Harry nodded. "Sure."

Remus paused and took a moment to take a good look at the young boy standing before him. The son of his best friend... His eyes shone with emotion and he blinked rapidly for a moment, after collecting himself. "This is really quite a surprise Harry... I... I wasn't expecting you to remember me."

"You said that," Harry said with an impish grin.

Remus chuckled weakly. "Yes, I guess I did. Do you... how much do you actually remember.. about... *me*?"

Harry looked at him innocently. "You mean, do I remember that you have a *furry little problem*?"

Remus blinked at Harry in shock and sputtered lightly before it shifted into weak chuckles. "Merlin, it's been so long since anyone called it that..." he sighed sadly. "Yes, Harry... I guess I was asking if you knew... about *that*."

"Yeah, I remember. I won't tell anyone, if that's what you're worried about."

Remus looked surprised but smiled gratefully. "Thanks, Harry."

"So what are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"Ah, actually... well, I'll be joining you and your fellow students on the Hogwarts Express for the journey to Hogsmeade. I could have floored, but I was already in London, and I thought it might be fun – for old times sake, I suppose – to take the train."

"You're going to Hogwarts?" Harry asked, somewhat bewildered.

"Yes. I've been offered the post of Defense teacher for the year. It was somewhat of a last minute deal. Professor Dumbledore had apparently been expecting the old muggle studies teacher, Professor Quirrell, to be returning this fall to take the Defense post, but he's gone missing. So he owl'd me a couple weeks ago and asked if I would please fill the post. I agreed, and so, here I am."

"You're going to be one of my professors?" Harry exclaimed.

Remus chuckled and shrugged. "It would appear so."

Harry smiled at the man, and it wasn't even faked. "That's brilliant."

—

Harry proceeded to purchase both he and Remus some wrapped sandwiches and some crisps. Remus's clothes were rather ragged, and there was little doubt the man did not have a lot of money on him. He had protested Harry's charity, but Harry wouldn't hear it and did it anyway.

They sat at one of the tables and chatted lightly for a bit, dancing around any of the heavy subjects and sticking to mostly safer topics. Harry did tell Remus about his advancement in his muggle school, and eventual placement in the gifted courses. Remus was properly shocked and impressed, and remarked that Lily had always been such a brilliant witch, and he clearly took after her in a lot of ways.

At ten o'clock the pair made their way to the platforms. Harry played ignorant and allowed Remus to lead him through the barrier and onto Platform 9 ³/₄. The pair boarded the train and settled into a compartment towards the back. Remus told Harry that he didn't have to sit with him, but Harry insisted that he wanted to. Truth was that the company of an adult was always preferable to the company of a child, in Harry's book. Plus Remus had a treasure trove of information about James and Lily, and Harry had to admit to himself that he honestly did want to know more about them.

The pair spent the next couple hours in the compartment as Remus told Harry stories of James and Lily from their school days, and some of the antics that he, James, Sirius, and Peter got up to. Those stories were fewer though, since they clearly bought up tender

memories for him. It also appeared that Harry's earlier comments had got Remus' mind all befuddled on the 'Sirius issue'.

They were deeply embroiled in their conversation when a knock came on the compartment door and a bushy mane of hair popped in. The bushy hair seemed to belong to a young girl with overly large front teeth, who was most likely a first-year, given her size.

"Have either of you.. oh, hello," she paused, looking at Remus with an air of surprise. Harry suspected he was the only adult she'd encountered so far, aside from the trolly witch who sold sweets.

"Hello, young lady. Can we help you with something?" Remus replied kindly.

"Yes, I hope so. I was wondering if either of you had seen a toad? Neville's lost one."

"Neville? Longbottom?" Harry asked, remembering his first birthday party and the discussion that his mum and her friend Alice had had about a prophecy.

"Yes, I believe so," the bushy-haired girl replied.

"Just wondering. No, I haven't seen a toad. We've had the compartment door closed this whole time, so I doubt it made its way in here," Harry said.

"Oh, well thanks then." she said, and turned with a determined air to continue her search.

"Has he tried summoning it?" Remus asked before she had a chance to disappear.

The girl turned back and looked at him blankly. "I don't think so, no. We don't know how."

"Well, if you bring him here, I can help."

She gave a bright smile and nodded before saying that she'd go get him, and then taking off down the hall.

It took a minute before the girl returned, now with a chubby, round-faced boy in tow.

"This is Neville, he's the one who lost a toad," the girl said, pushing the boy through the compartment door and then following him in.

"It's a pleasure to meet you Neville, and you too miss..." Remus said, trailing off expectantly.

"Oh! I'm Hermione Granger," the girl supplied quickly.

"Pleasure to meet you, Ms. Granger. I'm Professor Lupin."

She let out a small gasp and her eyes practically glowed with excitement. Harry found her behavior almost amusing, if it were for the fact that it was also slightly annoying.

"I'm Harry," Harry said, sticking his hand out in offer to Neville first, since he was the closest.

The girl turned her attention to Harry and her eyes slid up to his exposed forehead, apparently taking note of the scar for the first time. She gasped.

"You're Harry Potter!" she exclaimed.

Neville, who had just finished shaking Harry's hand, suddenly looked stunned and *his* eyes flew up to Harry's forehead.

"Er, yes I am," Harry replied flatly.

"I've read all about you!" she exclaimed before going off on a rant about all the different books she had read about him in, which was quite a lot. Harry had only actually read *one* of those books, but he knew that the supposed history of him included in it was far from accurate. He told her so, and she appeared scandalized at the mere suggestion that a book contained incorrect information.

During the course of her little impromptu speech, she let slip that she was the first witch in her family, and how they were all so shocked when she got her letter.

Ah. A muggleborn who think she knows everything about the wizarding world just because she read a few books. Lovely... Harry remarked sarcastically in his mind, but kept a genial enough expression on his face.

Finally the girl stopped talking – *a miracle!* – and Remus then proceeded to summon Neville's toad. Neville was practically in tears, he was so thankful.

The two children stuck around a bit longer, during which time Hermione rattled off a slew of questions to 'Professor Lupin'. After a bit, she turned her attention back to Harry and Neville, who had remained silent ever since getting his toad back.

"So what house do you suppose you'll be in?" she asked, looking mostly at Harry. Before he got a chance to respond, however, she continued right on. "I think I'd like to be in Gryffindor. It sounds the best to me. I read that Professor Dumbledore was in Gryffindor, but I suppose Ravenclaw would be nice too."

Harry waited a moment to make sure she was actually done talking before he responded.

"I suspect I'll end up in Ravenclaw, personally," he said with a nonchalant shrug.

Remus looked a bit surprised but didn't remark.

"Do you?" Hermione said. "Weren't your parents both in Gryffindor? I'm sure I read in *Modern Magical History* and *Great Wizarding Events of the 20th Century* that they were both from Gryffindor House."

Harry shrugged. "They were, but it's not like personality traits are totally hereditary. I've always been of the mind that one's personality is formed more by the treatment one receives over the course of their life at the hands of others, and one's environment, more than who their parents were. While I do recall a bit of the time I had with my parents, most of my life was spent with my muggle relatives. I suppose in that regard, I'm more of a 'nurture'

supporter, than 'nature'. Although I will concede that there are some traits that are likely passed down biologically. I just don't think that personality is necessarily one of them."

Remus looked a bit impressed. Harry knew he wasn't talking like an eleven-year-old should, but he found it difficult to tone himself down. It would make sense for him to have grown up fast in his living conditions, right? Plus his supposed 'gifted' status could explain away some of it.

"I suppose that makes sense," Hermione conceded. "So you think you'll end up in Ravenclaw?"

Harry shrugged again, "Either that, or Slytherin."

Remus' eyes widened now, and Neville coughed, as if he had just choked on his own spit.

Harry ignored them.

"Slytherin?" Neville squeaked, looking a bit slack in the face.

"Sure. I don't see anything wrong with that. From what I've gathered there seems to be some ridiculous stigma that Slytherins are evil, but they're just children, so that's stupid. It's a list of personality traits, that's all. Besides, when you grow up in the environment that I had to, your options are to break and submit to the oppression, or become cunning enough to survive despite it." Harry said in a flat, somewhat annoyed voice.

Remus frowned, deeply.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked, also frowning, but mostly in confusion.

Harry gave a dismissive shrug. "My relatives were muggles, but they knew I was a wizard, and they hated me because of it. Magic scared them. My uncle hoped that if he beat me enough, he might '*beat the magic right out of me*'. By the time I was five years old, I'd dislocated my shoulder numerous times by him pulling my arm too hard, had several concussions by being thrown into the wall, cracked ribs from being punched in the chest where the bruises wouldn't be visible, and fractured bones in my forearms from him grabbing me and twisting. My uncle was a very large man. A violent, angry, large man. I did not have a very pleasant youth."

The other inhabitants of the compartment were all deathly silent.

"I suppose, in a way, one could argue that it takes a lot of courage to survive in that sort of situation, but I would say that it was cunning and subtlety that helped me the most. If I had tried to stand up to my uncle, as a small, defenseless child, I likely would have ended up dead. I had to use trickery, and to be blatantly honest, *blackmail*, in order to gain the upper hand, and put a stop to his violence. While reading the descriptions of the traits generally associated with each house, I think that for me, out of all of them, Ravenclaw and Slytherin are the closest match. Ravenclaw because of my thirst for knowledge, and Slytherin because of my strong sense of self-preservation, and cunning. If I were sorted into any other house, I would only end up surrounded by kids I had nothing in common with.

"I'm too smart and booky, and too inclined to step back and plan my steps with caution for the Gryffindors. A Gryffindor would be more likely to brashly jump into action and deal with problems head on. I'd likely end up an outcast in my own house if I ended up there." Harry ended with a shrug, as if what he'd just said *wasn't* stunning to everyone in the compartment.

Hermione took on a contemplative look then as she mulled over his words thoughtfully.

One glance at Remus and Harry knew the man was angry. Terribly angry. However, he was also clearly trying to reign in his temper and keep his expression passive.

"What happened to your uncle, Harry?" Remus asked in a harsh, quiet, voice.

"He hasn't hit me in more than five years. You don't have to worry Remus. I think I managed the situation quite masterfully for a six-year-old. Quite a feat, really." Harry grinned smugly and Remus rose a curious eyebrow.

"Do you two know each other?" Neville asked then.

Harry looked at him. "Yes. Professor Lupin was a close friend of my father's. Actually, Neville, technically, you've met him too. You were both at my first birthday party. I remember your mum leaving you with me on the floor while she and my mum went off to talk in the kitchen."

Neville's eyes went wide and his face slacked in surprise.

"That's not possible! How could you possibly remember your first birthday?" Hermione exclaimed.

Harry shrugged. "I have a really strange memory. I remember most everything. The teachers at my school said I had an eidetic memory, but I think it probably goes further than that, since I remember things from when I was so young, and even that's not really common with eidetic memories. No doubt it's some crazy magic thing. There's probably an explanation for it somewhere. I have every intention of raiding the school library at my earliest convenience." Harry grinned.

Hermione's eyes lit up. "Oh, me too! Although, obviously not for the same reason as you. But I'm ever so excited to see the school's library. I've been looking forward to it all month!"

Harry gave her an amused look and chuckled. "Are you really sure you're fit for Gryffindor? The more I hear you talk, the more and more you sound like a Ravenclaw."

The girl blushed and ducked her head slightly, mumbling something about liking books under her breath.

Conversation went on for a bit longer before Hermione and Neville left the compartment to return to where their own trunks were stored. Hermione gave Harry a reminder that he should change into his robes soon since they'd be arriving in Hogsmeade in about a half hour, before disappearing out into the hall.

Harry hesitated in pulling his trunk out of his pocket since Remus was still there, but he needed to get changed. He mentally shrugged and pulled his matchbook-sized trunk from his pocket and set it on the bench opposite Remus. He tapped it with his wand and silently *finite'd* the spell, causing the trunk to instantly expand to its normal size. To Remus it would look as if Harry had simply had an automatic shrinking and enlarging charm cast on it. It was an expensive feature offered by most luggage dealers, but Remus probably knew that Harry was anything but hurting for cash.

Remus didn't remark on it, although his eyebrows did raise a bit into his forehead when he saw the trunk return to its normal size. Harry changed into his school robes with gray inner lining, and plain black tie. All Hogwarts school robes and ties were charmed by the dress maker to instantly change to match your house the moment you were sorted. It was a convenient little feature, actually, and sort of added to the 'magic' of the whole experience.

Harry and Remus slipped back into conversation that lasted until they arrived in Hogsmeade station. After disembarking, Harry heard Hagrid's familiar bellowing voice calling out for 'Firs' years!' and he said goodbye to Remus who would be heading up to the castle in the carriages drawn by Thestrals.

As Harry joined the group of gathering first years he heard someone call out for him and turned around.

"There you are! I was looking for you on the train!" Draco exclaimed, as he ran up to him.

Harry grinned at him. "Hey Draco! Sorry I didn't find you, I ended up running into an old friend and sat with him during the trip."

"Well, you could have brought him with you," Draco said with a pout that made Harry want to snicker.

Hagrid led all of the children over to the edge of the lake where dozens of small boats lined the shore. Hagrid called out 'No more than four to a boat!' and everyone began to pile in.

Harry ended up in a boat with Draco and two rather large boys that were introduced as 'Crabbe' and 'Goyle', and nothing more. Once the boat had pushed off from the shore line Harry actually asked the two boys what their first names were. Amusingly enough, both looked surprised and confused by the question. Finally *Draco* responded by saying their names were Vincent and Gregory, respectively.

Everyone oo'd and awe'd as the castle first came into view. Harry looked upon it with mixed feelings. He felt nostalgia, and a sense of homecoming, but he also looked upon it with a strong sense of trepidation.

The boats reached the other end of the Black Lake and everyone got out and proceeded to trek across the grounds towards the front entrance. Draco whined about being made to walk, unnecessarily, to which Harry poked him and told him to suck it up. Draco stuck his nose into the air and muttered something about Malfoys being above unnecessary walking and wishing he could pull out his broom.

At the door, Hagrid handed them all off to a witch that Harry instantly recognized as Minerva McGonagall. She led them inside through the entrance hall, towards the large double doors that led into the Great Hall, but instead went to a small anti-chamber to the side.

She gave them all a lecture that included summaries of the four houses, what house points were, and how the punishment system worked for those that misbehaved. It was clear to Harry that she had grown into a very strict woman. He could easily see how the head girl that had driven Tom barmy in their school days had grown into this woman. It was almost humorous to see her, so many years later, but then again, he was going to have to endure her as a teacher now. He wondered what she was like as a teacher...

McGonagall left the anti-chamber for the Great Hall and told them all to clean themselves up and wait. Harry looked around and snickered as a significant portion of the kids gathered shrieked or squealed like pigs as the room was invaded by a bunch of ghosts. He listened as a red-head and a kid with an Irish accent began to theorize as to what was involved with the sorting. It seemed the ginger was convinced he would have to battle a troll to prove he was brave enough for Gryffindor.

Harry snorted and turned away. Draco had apparently been listening too and he and Harry shared a look and snickered quietly.

Finally McGonagall returned and they were all led into the Great Hall and lined up down the center while she set a small stool at the head of the room and placed a dirty old hat upon it. The children looked at it with confusion and anxiety, and quite a few jumped as a rip appeared in the hat and it began to sing! Harry tuned it out – there were really only so many variations the thing could come up with on the same subject, and the song rarely changed much.

The sorting quickly got underway and Harry listened to every name that was called out, watching for anyone noteworthy. Crabbe went to Slytherin, as did Goyle. An Anthony Goldstein went to Ravenclaw – Harry had known some Goldstein's in the past and wondered if he was related. Hermione apparently didn't get her wish, because when she went up there and placed the hat on her head, it sent her to Ravenclaw. Immediately after Hermione was sorted, came Daphne Greengrass and she was sent to Slytherin. The Greengrass' had been silent supporters of Tom, mostly lending financial support to his war efforts.

Neville ended up in Gryffindor, which Harry found mildly surprising. Neville obviously found it *profoundly* surprising because he looked about ready to wet himself when the Hat called out its verdict.

Draco sat down and the hat had barely even touched his head when it called out 'Slytherin!' loud and clear. Draco gave a smug grin and swaggered over to the Slytherin table as if he already owned the thing. Harry snickered but gave the boy an approving nod.

A Theodore Nott went to Slytherin – Harry knew his father was an inner circle death eater – and after him a Pansy Parkinson followed him there. The Parkinson's were also loyal to Tom. Another one to get close to, although the girl looked rather annoying as she saddled up close to Draco and started to hang onto him. He sneered at her and shook her off.

A pair of twins named Patil got split – one going to Ravenclaw while the other went to Gryffindor. Then a Sally-Anne Perks went to Hufflepuff.

"Potter, Harry!" McGonagall called out and a hush fell over the hall for a moment before whispers erupted from every table. Harry pointedly ignored them and walked easily up to the stool and sat down. McGonagall placed the hat upon his head until it sunk down over his eyes.

"Hmmm... difficult..." the voice of the hat spoke directly into his mind.

"Ravenclaw! Ravenclaw! Ravenclaw! Please, Ravenclaw!" Harry quickly began to chant, hoping to catch it before it made up it's mind.

"Ravenclaw? Well, you certainly would fit well there. You have a powerful thirst for knowledge. A tremendous curiosity, and a desire to master as much magic as you can. But what ambition! You desire great things for yourself, Mr. Potter, and you have the cunning and drive to attain your goals at any cost. You would do well in Slytherin."

"Not Slytherin! Not Slytherin! Put me in Ravenclaw!"

"Well, if you're sure..."

"I'm sure! Please! Ravenclaw!"

"If you're sure, then I guess it'd better be...RAVENCLAW!" the hat called out aloud for the hall to hear.

A loud disappointed grown could be instantly heard from the Gryffindor table, that had, no doubt, gotten it's hopes up. The Ravensclaws began to cheer and clap loudly for him.

Harry removed the hat and handed it to McGonagall with a polite nod that she returned curtly, and quickly strode towards the Ravenclaw table. As he did, his eyes went to Draco, sitting with the other Slytherins, who gave him a conceding shrug. Harry had told Draco of his intentions to try and get into Ravenclaw in order to stay under Dumbledore's radar, and the boy understood, but Harry knew he had still been hoping that Harry would get sorted into Slytherin.

As soon as Harry sat down at the Ravenclaw table, his robe's inner lining turned blue and the Ravenclaw house crest appeared on the chest. His tie also changed from solid black to blue and bronze striped.

Those sitting around him whispered welcomes to him, but the table quickly quieted down for the rest of the sorting. When it was finished, Dumbledore stood from his place at the center of the Head Table and gave a *very* brief welcome before saying a few random, nonsensical words, and summoning the food to the tables from the kitchens directly below.

As his fellow housemates loaded up their plates, Harry took a moment to look up to the Head Table. Dumbledore was speaking with McGonagall and smiling genially. Remus was sitting a few seats further down and their eyes met. Remus smiled at him warmly and tipped his

goblet up in a toasting gesture, most likely as a sign of congratulations and Harry smiled and nodded his head back.

Sitting beside him with a look of utter distaste on his face was a wizard with greasy-looking black hair that hung in a curtain around his head, a strong hooked-nose, and..." Harry nearly gasped, but held it in. The man had the Dark Mark! One of his *teachers* was a Death Eater? Harry would have to write Lucius and ask him about this man. He needed to know if he was to be trusted or not.

Harry turned to one of the older students that was sporting a prefect badge on her robes and asked her who the teacher was. She said he was Professor Snape, the Potions Master, and head of Slytherin house. She also called him a biased git who only favored Slytherins. Harry smirked.

The feast came and went with little that was noteworthy. Once the puddings had disappeared from the tables, Dumbledore stood again and the hall fell silent.

The man welcomed everyone to another year at Hogwarts, and welcomed the first years to their first. He rambled a bit about some nonsense Harry didn't care about, introduced Professor Lupin as the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, and Professor Charity Babbage as the Muggle Studies teacher taking over for the post that Professor Quirrell had apparently vacated the previous year before going on his trek across Europe to study magic abroad.

He covered some rudimentary rules like not casting magic in the halls and staying away from the Forbidden Forest. What he said next, however, caught Harry off guard. He told everyone that this year the third floor corridor on the right-hand side was off limits to anyone who did not wish to die a most horrible death.

Harry blinked up at the head table, wondering if the man truly had gone senile.

Whatever the hell was up there that would guarantee instant death, really ought not to be announced to the whole bloody school. He was just asking for some stupid children – most likely Gryffindors – to go on some ludicrous 'adventure' to discover what was so special and deadly on the third floor.

Harry sighed with slight annoyance, knowing that he would need to investigate it, himself, in order to discover what the hell it was, and whether or not it would be useful.

Maybe it was that thing that Hagrid grabbed from the Gringott's vault for Dumbledore?

Oh, now *that* was tempting. Harry had been intrigued by the powerful magical signature the object had had for the brief moment he had been able to see it.

Harry shoved his curiosity down as he sat through the remainder of Dumbledore's welcome speech. Then he was subjected to a true horror. A school song. Headmaster Dippet had never done anything as utterly ridiculous as this. The worst part was that the students were encouraged to choose their favorite random tune and sing the lyrics to it. The cacophony of noise that filled the hall was ear piercing.

Harry cringed through the whole thing and rolled his eyes as a pair of identical twin gingers from the Gryffindor table drug the damn song long by singing it to a funeral march.

Finally they were dismissed and Harry followed along with a group of first year Ravenclaws as the prefects led them up through the grand staircase to the fifth floor, down the western wing, and up to Ravenclaw Tower. The entrance to Ravenclaw was at the top of a spiral staircase. It was a door without a doorknob or keyhole, but instead featured only a bronze knocker in the shape of an eagle. In order to enter the room, a person would knock it, and then be presented with a riddle, or a logic puzzle of some sort. If it was answered correctly, they were allowed entrance. If not, they would have to sit around and wait for someone else to come and get it right. Harry had actually been in the Ravenclaw common room a few times during his first life, so he had already known all of this, and tuned it out as the prefect explained it to the group.

Upon entering, they were presented with a wide, circular room with midnight blue carpet, arched windows hung with blue silks, and a domed ceiling painted with stars. The room was furnished with an assortment of tables, chairs, and bookcases lining most of the walls. They were led over to a door and told it led up to the dormitories. Beside the door was a tall statue of Rowena Ravenclaw made entirely of white marble.

Through the door was a short hall that came to a T-junction. To the left was the girls dorms and to the right was the boys. They were led up a flight of stairs that curved around and up the tower with doors every ten feet, the lowest being for the first years. Harry and his new room mates entered the room to find that all of their trunks had been brought up by the house elves – all except Harry, who had actually re-shrunk his and kept it on him during the feast. He unshrunk it and placed it beside the only bed without a trunk already set beside it.

Harry's new room mates were Terry Boot, Micheal Corner, Anthony Goldstien, Kevin Entwhistle, and Garrick Tait. That made six of them total, three beds, each with a desk and a wardrobe, to each side of the large circular room, with a grand, freestanding fireplace in the center for heat.

Harry dug into his trunk and pulled out some sleep clothes and his bathroom supplies. After some quick ablutions in the bathroom he returned, changed his clothes and crawled into bed. He was exhausted and would deal with things in the morning. For now, he wanted nothing more than to sleep.

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AN: Harry's at Hogwarts! And for those of you going on in the reviews about how you can't wait for him to find Tom... well, you're likely in for a wait, because it's not anytime soon. Tom is busy doing some rather devious things right now and won't be back for a while. ;)

Rebirth Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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----- Rebirth Chapter 13 -----

The next morning Harry got up leisurely. Most of his dorm mates were scrambling frantically around the room, trying to get prepared and worrying about being late for breakfast, and then late for class. One of them, Corner, kept worrying endlessly about getting lost in the insane maze of a castle, and missing all of his classes.

Harry ignored their scramble and left after all of them, and yet he still made it down to the Great Hall first. Of course, this was entirely because he knew every shortcut the castle had to offer after having spent most of his years at Hogwarts searching every corner of the castle for the Chamber, while the other boys didn't have a single bloody clue where anything was.

Harry got his schedule from his head of house who was amusingly enough, a *half-goblin* wizard named Filius Flitwick. Although it was possible he was a quarter goblin... Harry really didn't know or care. What was obvious was that he was very short.

Harry and the other Ravenclaws also had Professor Flitwick for their first class of the day – Charms. It was an exceedingly boring class since it was nothing more than introductions, but Harry controlled his urges to yawn, or zone out. It was all theoretic discussion about the most basic, fundamental ideas behind charms magic. Basically, right where you would expect to start with a bunch of eleven-year-old's who aren't supposed to have ever performed magic before in their entire lives.

All of Harry's other classes followed the same pattern, but he never outwardly displayed his incredible boredom, or the cynical little remarks he had on constant loop in his mind as he silently snarked about his classmates, the professors, the textbooks, the utterly stupid approach so many people took to understanding magic simply because they were too thick-skulled to actually *feel* any of it and have to fall back on pathetic little crutches and tricks.

No – outwardly he was the model student. He was polite and charming. He answered a lot of questions, but never came off as a no-it-all. He didn't raise his hand in an obnoxious, over-eager way... like that ridiculous muggleborn girl, Granger, with her barmy hand-waving, and

her inability to keep her bum in her seat. Really, who was really so eager to answer these stupid, simple questions, to literally jump out of their seat and flail their arm around like a lunatic? Granger was, apparently.

At the end of Harry's first day, he sent a letter off with Hedwig to Lucius, asking his opinion on Severus Snape. Harry had no plans of confiding everything to the man, like he had with Lucius – Lucius was special. He was a Malfoy. He was smart and well connected. Harry had been researching, watching, and carefully debating the Death Eaters he knew about for *years* before he had finally made up his mind to trust Lucius. So no – he wasn't going to confide entirely in Snape, but he still wanted to know if he should consider the man a threat or not.

Lucius' response came with Hedwig in the following morning's owl post. Harry removed it from his owl's leg, fed her some bacon, and quickly stowed the letter away to read when he was somewhere more private. He didn't have potions until the next day, so he figured he was safe.

Lucius' letter suggested caution, in regards to 'Severus'. According to the elder Malfoy, Severus had been a member of the inner circle during the last war, and he and Severus had been quite close. They had been good friends during Hogwarts, and had stayed so for many years, afterward. He had even made the Potions Master the godfather of his son Draco. He trusted Severus about as far as he ever trusted anyone... which probably wasn't really that far, in all honesty.

However, despite all of this, Severus had been under Albus Dumbledore's thumb for the last decade. He also knew that Dumbledore had kept Severus out of Azkaban, stating that while Severus was a marked Death Eater, he had been a spy for Dumbledore's Order, and had been aiding in taking the Dark Lord down.

Lucius was not entirely sure what to believe. Severus had insisted that he was playing double-agent, and keeping himself in a useful position for if the Dark Lord ever returned, while taking advantage of the situation to stay out of prison and secure himself a comfortable job.

It was no wonder the man was Head of Slytherin house. He was the quintessential Slytherin.

Lucius included as a post script that he was fairly sure that Severus held a personal grudge against Harry's father, and would likely not treat him well.

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When Wednesday's Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw Potions class arrived, Harry came to the conclusion that Lucius' addendum was a tremendous understatement. The level of open, hostile, disdain, that Severus Snape showed to Harry, was almost shocking. Harry wondered what the hell his father had done to this man to garner so much seething rage.

Harry almost instantly decided to take a passive-aggressive approach with the man. The class had started amusingly enough. Snape had exploded into the previously silent, creepy, dungeon, with his black robes billowing behind him all dramatic-like. This alone was enough to get the Hufflepuffs shaking in their boots.

The Ravenclaws weren't honestly that much better, but at least more of them looked more wary than scared. Harry just sat in his seat and watched the man's antics with a blank face. During roll call, Snape had paused at Harry's name, sneered disdainfully, and remarked on Harry's 'celebrity status' with an obvious layer of thick, gooey, sarcasm. Again, Harry merely blinked at the man, blankly. He saw no use in giving the man what he wanted – which was to get under Harry's skin. He no doubt was trying to get him riled up.

He and Snape held each others, cold, empty gazes for several long seconds. Surprisingly enough, Snape faltered first. Some emotion flickered into his eyes and he quickly looked away and resumed the roll.

About a minute into an introductory lecture, that Harry was positive was rehearsed in front of a mirror, and probably the exact same with every class of first years the man ever taught, Snape struck at Harry like a snake.

"Potter! What would I get if I mixed the powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Harry blinked up at the man and rose a single eyebrow with a look that seemed to ask 'Really?' with a mild air of amusement. Snape's eyes narrowed and he was about to sneer – no doubt remarking that Harry didn't know, when Harry spoke.

"I believe that would be the Draught of Living Death, Sir."

Snape's mouth shut slowly and he looked honestly surprised.

"Ah, yes. I mustn't forget I'm dealing with a Ravenclaw here. Fine, Potter. Where would you look if I asked you to find a bezoar?"

"A goat's stomach."

Snape's eyes narrowed slightly further. "What is the antidote to the swelling solution?"

"The deflating draught."

"Name one potion armadillo bile is used in!"

"The wit-sharpening potion – *Sir*."

"Alright, name two other ingredients used in that potion."

"Ginger root and ground scarab beetles."

"Are you cheating, you little brat?" Snape snapped.

Harry still just looked at him with a blank face, blinking innocently up.

"I can't imagine how I could possibly have cheated on such a random assortment of questions. The explanation as to how I answered them is actually rather boring and simple."

"Is that so?" Snape replied in a condescending voice.

"Yes, sir. You see, I have an eidetic memory. I simply memorized the textbook."

Snape's eye twitched in irritation. "Yes, well memorized facts will not make up for an utter lack of talent. Lets see where this *perfect memory* of yours takes you during practical classwork; shall we?" Snape spoke in a deathly quiet, threatening sort of voice. Harry didn't bat an eyelash. He merely held the man's gaze with an unfaltering stare of his own.

Snape's eyes narrowed as they stared into Harry's brilliant green depths. And then Harry felt it. A subtle, flutter, against his mind. The corner of his lips turned up, but he managed to squash any other outward reaction. *So the man was a Legilimense, hmm?*

Harry allowed him entrance to his mind without the slightest fight. After all, it would be odd for an eleven year old to have powerful Occlumency shields, wouldn't it? Of course, what Snape would find there was actually even more odd than that, but Harry couldn't quite find it in himself to care.

He observed as Snape slipped inside his mental scape and came up short upon discovering it totally and utterly... *empty*. There wasn't a single thought there. Not a single memory stored. Nothing. It was likely the same sort of thing one would come across if they tried to use Legilimency on someone who had been kissed by a Dementor. Of course, the reality was that Harry simply didn't use his 'normal' mind to do all his thinking. It ran the standard operations of his body, but not any of his conscious thoughts. Harry found that it was too inefficient to rely on the bio-chemical brain of his human body to try and process the mountain of information that his astral mind was able to store with perfect clarity. So his thought processes also took place in his astral mindscape. Without a filter separating his astral and physical bodies, there was nothing keeping him from doing so. It was something he'd started doing early on in his previous life, once he'd removed his filter.

It had the added bonus of preventing any mind arts from ever affecting him. He was immune to any and all memory charms – even the most powerful *Oliviate* couldn't touch him, because the magic was aimed at the bio-chemical memories of a human mind, not the astrally-stored memories that he used. Compulsion spells were another branch of magic that he was immune to since it also attacked the physical mind. It was a brilliant side-effect that he hadn't even intended for, but was grateful for nonetheless.

Snape's presence retreated from Harry's mind and Harry watched as the man stepped back, his brow furrowed in confusion. Harry couldn't help the widening of his smile. The cheshire-like grin that found its way onto his face, was probably a dead give away that he had been aware that Snape had been in his mind, but using Legilimency on someone without permission was illegal, and using it on a minor was doubly so. It wasn't like Snape could call him on it without revealing what he'd just done. Snape's eyes widened before narrowing dramatically in suspicion.

Snape finally snapped out of his stupor and turned his venom on the rest of the class for a moment before waving his wand to bring a set of instructions to the black board, and barking at the students to turn to page five and begin brewing a boil removing potion.

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Harry was establishing a cordial relationship with his Ravenclaw year-mates, but wasn't making any efforts to get close to any of them. They all quickly came to respect his intelligence and professional manor in their classes. They were all Ravenclaws, after all, and they could all appreciate someone who was serious about their studies.

The Ravenclaws had Charms with the Slytherins, and they had the class twice a week – Monday, and Thursday. On Thursday, they were to do their first practical lesson and were told to pair up. Harry went over and sat with Draco, earning him some incredulous stares from just about everyone in the room. Harry acted oblivious to the attention and focused on Draco and the classwork. Draco just grinned, smugly, at some of the gaping mouths.

—

The Ravenclaw Prefects posted notices on the common room bulletin board for organizing study groups with the new first year. It was apparently a Ravenclaw tradition that the Prefects help the younger students get into groups and get into the habit of studying with their classmates. Harry ended up in a study group with Su Li, Terry Boot, and Padma Patil. They worked out a schedule to meet twice a week in the Library. Harry asked them how they'd feel if he were to invite a couple students from other houses. They'd been a bit surprised but none had protested.

At the first meeting they held during the second week of school, Harry invited Draco Malfoy, Theo Nott, and Daphne Greengrass from Slytherin to join them. Nott and Greengrass hadn't exactly been eager, but Draco had insisted and that was apparently enough.

The Ravenclaws were hesitant for the first few minutes, with the unexpected introduction of tge Slytherin students, but once classwork was started, they refocused on their tasks and forgot all about their earlier apprehension. Su Li and Daphne even got along pretty well. Harry had lucked out in that his study group of Ravens didn't include a single muggleborn. The Slytherins would have no doubt put up more of a fight if it had. Su and Padma were both from old pure-blood families, while Terry was a half-blood. None of the Slytherins commented on his supposed 'lesser' blood status – after all, Harry himself was a half-blood, and it was obvious that Draco had told Nott and Greengrass to play nice with Harry.

They probably thought it was all some political scheme on Draco's part. No doubt, they were under the impression that Draco's father was having his son get close to the Boy-Who-Lived for nefarious reasons. It didn't matter what they believed, in order to get them to start coming. The important thing was to start getting some more contacts.

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Friday morning of the second week of classes, the moment after sitting down to breakfast, Hedwig flew in along with the rest of the post owls and landed on the table in front of Harry. She extended her leg in offering and Harry removed the small note that was attached there. He fed her a slice of ham and unrolled the note.

It was from Hagrid. He was inviting Harry to tea that afternoon, after his classes. The thing was that Harry actually had his first Flying Lesson that afternoon. Not that he needed it – and the class wasn't mandatory either – but it would look odd if he knew how to fly but never apparently learned how.

He pulled out a piece of parchment and quickly wrote a note on the back to Hagrid, apologizing and saying that 'Today won't really work. I'm sorry, but I've got Flying Lessons today. Do you suppose we could do it next week?'

He attached the reply to Hedwig's leg and told her to take it back to Hagrid as soon as she was done with her breakfast.

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Harry had Defense Against the Dark Arts, and History of Magic that day. Defense was bearable enough, since Remus was actually a very good teacher, even if it was all incredibly elementary subject matter – at least the man kept the class mildly entertaining – however History was utter rubbish. Harry had been astounded to learn that Binns was *still* teaching the class. Only now he was *dead*.

That's right. His History teacher was a bloody *ghost*. Binns had, apparently, died one day while sitting at his desk, and not actually realized it. He'd stood up from his body and kept right on teaching... *as a ghost*. Being a ghost wasn't what Harry didn't like about the man. What he didn't like was that Binns had been a terrible teacher when he was still alive. Now he was down-right dreadful. The class was horrifyingly *boring*, and damn-near impossible to stay awake through. He quickly began the habit of bringing books to class with him, to read.

The Ravens shared History with the Snakes too, and Harry and Draco walked together as they left class that day, both moaning and bitching about how intolerable the class was. Mostly Draco was the one moaning and bitching while Harry grumbled his agreement. Draco often whined about how he was going to 'have his father do something about that ruddy ghost.' Harry honestly hoped that Lucius *would* do something. He was on the board. Surely the man could put forth a motion at the next meeting to have the ghost sacked. Obviously he wasn't drawing a salary since he was *dead*. Surely the school could actually afford a real, living, breathing, professor?

Harry told Draco that he would be going out to the school's grounds for his first flying lesson, which instantly got Draco into a smug rant on his own flying lesson the previous afternoon. Apparently the Slytherins and the Gryffindors had had a bit of excitement. Neville Longbottom had managed a premature lift-off, and his broom had shot into the sky, and out of his control. It had tossed him off and sent him falling to the ground to land on his wrist.

The flight instructor, Madam Hooch, had to take him off to the hospital wing since his wrist was apparently broken. Draco had then managed to find and claim Neville's RememberAll. Some sort of idiotic, immature little confrontation then erupted between Draco and the Weasley boy – Ronald, or something. Draco took off into the air on his broom and Weasley had followed.

Even Harry had heard the Weasley kid boasting all week about his impressive antics on a broom during his youth. Tales about flying around and narrowly escaping hang-gliding muggles had been told enough times that Harry could almost repeat it word for word. As such, Harry found it humorous when Draco informed him that, while attempting to pursue Draco and retrieve Neville's trinket, Weasley had managed to fall off his own broom, ended up in the hospital wing, and got a detention and a significant point reduction for ignoring Madam Hooch's command to keep his feet firmly planted on the ground.

Harry did ask Draco what he'd done with the RememberAll, to which Draco responded by pulling it out of his pocket and smirking. Harry rolled his eyes and chuckled with a sigh. Poor Neville was probably never getting that thing back. It was a pretty lame little trinket though. Practically worthless, really. Not much of a loss. He and Draco parted ways and Harry made the rest of the trek out onto the grounds where the Hufflepuffs, who had had a free period, were already gathered in a nervous, anxious group.

—

Nothing especially noteworthy outwardly seemed to happen during the Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw flying lesson. No one fell off their broom, or broke any bones. No in-air battles occurred over stolen magical trinkets. However, something of significance *did* happen to Harry.

He discovered that he bloody *loved* flying.

It was so surreal. He'd flown *thousands* of times in his previous life, but it had never felt like this. Never had it felt so *right*. So *easy*. So natural. As if he and the broom were one. He just *knew* exactly how to maneuver to get the broom to do exactly what he wanted. It was like an extension of his own body. He almost had a subconscious connection with the very currents of the wind. He knew how and where it was going to blow or shift and how to bank the broom just right to get just the effect...

It was amazing.

He was going to buy a broom. That was all there was to it. He would smuggle in his own Nimbus, or something. He didn't care. But the school's brooms were pathetic, and he wanted to try out this new found ability with a *real* racing broom.

It did get him thinking, though. This was obviously *not* a skill he had ever had before. He'd been reasonably passable on a broom before – as in, he flew well enough not to fall off, but he certainly would never do it professionally. But now he was a natural at it. He knew that James Potter had been a very talented Quidditch player, from what he'd read, and some memories he had of his father flying above their yard, or talking with Sirius about brooms and Quidditch. A few questions to Remus was all he needed to confirm the fact. James Potter had apparently been good enough that right out of Hogwarts he had been approached by a number of professional Quidditch coaches with offers to join their teams. He had declined, however, since he was planning to become an Auror.

So, was his natural talent on a broom, something he had biologically inherited? Would he keep it in any future lives, now that he had experienced it and the knowledge was locked into

his perfect memory? That would be rather neat. He could continue to acquire more and more naturally inherited skills over his many lives... He wondered if he would keep the parseltongue ability in any future lives...

It was something he was curious about, but in absolutely *no hurry* to find out, since it would require dying and being reborn again. *Definitely something that could wait.*

—

Third week of classes passed easily enough. Harry's Slytherin-Ravenclaw study group was running smoothly. Draco had done well with picking Nott and Greengrass. They were both rather studious, booky sorts and could easily have been Ravens themselves, if not for their more cunning qualities. They got along well with Su, Boot, and Patil. They only met twice a week in the library, but Harry made it a point to be seen with his Ravenclaw study-mates more often in other public situations. Terry Boot was quickly becoming very close with Anthony Goldstien, and Micheal Corner. Harry found Corner tolerable, but Goldstien was very... annoying. Something about him just rubbed Harry the wrong way.

Despite this, Harry sat with the tree during breakfast every morning. During Lunch he usually sat with Padma, Su, and Sarah Fawcett. Dinner he would alternate some. He was debating the merits of sitting with Kevin Entwhistle, Lisa Turpin, and Granger – the three muggleborns who had sort of banded together in Ravenclaw. In general, Harry found Granger's antics a mix between amusing and annoying. Most of their housemates found her annoying. She was a bossy know-it-all among know-it-all's. She often butted head with people when she thought they got their facts wrong because it didn't exactly match whatever book she could quote from.

Harry had realized quickly that Granger had an eidetic memory. Only she had the real thing. A normal, bio-chemical eidetic memory, like Tom had when they were younger. Only Tom had never been so obnoxious or naive about his ability to memorize things from books. Granger had a real problem with having absolute trust in authority figures and in the written word. It was actually rather irritating.

On top of that, she was a muggleborn, and while Ravens were rarely as openly disdainful of muggleborns for their blood status, the stigma was still there. It was old and deeply bred into their culture. The pure-bloods and more well-off half-bloods had all grown up together. Many of them had attended the same primary schools, or had the same tutors. They'd attended the same social gatherings with their parents who worked together, or knew each other from their own school days.

The social clicks had already been formed, and so the muggleborns were naturally outcast to at least some degree. It was only natural, really.

That being the case, befriending them would be easy enough. And Harry was becoming ever more aware that Dumbledore was watching his behavior and his associations in the school. Was it worth the annoyance of spending time in the girl's company to deflect some of the old git's suspicions?

If Harry socialized willingly with muggleborns, it would look like he was an open-minded child who was willing to spend time with anyone, no matter what others said about them. That he wasn't judgmental, or something. The same went for the Slytherins. That Harry was willing to judge Nott, Malfoy and Greengrass on their own personality and behavior and not on whatever stigma existed about their house or families.

It was a sound idea in theory, but it also meant Harry would have to occasionally hang out with a group of mudbloods, and he wasn't honestly all that hung-ho on the idea. Thursday morning he came to breakfast a little late and his spot with Boot, Corner, and Goldstein was already full, while the spot across from Granger, and next to Turpin was open. Harry gave a resigned sigh under his breath and decided to bite the bullet. He walked over and stood beside the open spot for a moment, waiting for the three to look up from their plates.

"Mind if I sit here?" He asked, giving them a hesitant, but charming smile. Turpin actually blushed and nodded her head while Granger gave him a small frown but motioned with her hand for him to sit.

Harry struck up some aimless conversation about an essay they all had due for Defense that morning. A few minutes into breakfast, Hedwig showed up with a note attached to her leg. Harry removed it and gave her some bacon while he read it. It was from Hagrid, asking Harry again, if he was interested in tea that afternoon. Harry had nothing scheduled this time so he wrote back that he would love tea, and would be there at 3pm, after his last lesson of the day.

The three muggleborns were all in love with Hedwig and even Granger, who had been oddly icy towards him since he sat down, softened up a bit and reached out to hesitantly pet her. None of them had gotten personal post owls since their parents had been too unsure or worried about what sort of care would be needed for looking after an owl.

Harry asked how they were keeping in contact with their family then. Apparently some rather ingenious man down at the post office in Hogsmeade had started up a side business at some point where you could send a school owl with your letter down to him, and once a week he would make the trip to a muggle post box and send off any letters that needed to go to muggles. The muggles could also write back through normal post to a specific post box and the man would collect them once a week and then send post owls up to the school with the letters.

There was nothing stopping them from sending school owls directly to their parents, but not everyone could be home when the owl showed up to drop off the post, or lived in a place where having an owl show up at your door was actually okay. Kevin Entwhistle's family, for example, lived in an apartment building and both his parents worked odd hours. So he was taking advantage of the letter forwarding service. Lisa Turpin's first two letters home had been through a normal school owl, but her parents were having trouble getting letters back with the owls, so she had sent them the address of the muggle post box and intended to start using it as well. Granger hadn't actually heard about these options until Harry had brought it up with the other two, and seemed disgruntled to realize she'd been out of the loop on something.

While all this conversing was going on, Harry had glanced up at the head table a few times and noticed Dumbledore looking down at him with that infuriating twinkle in his eyes and a

wide, approving smile.

Harry wanted to wretch, but he kept it off his face and let his eyes move fluidly over to Hagrid where he smiled and nodded his head, as if that had been his reason for looking up at the head table all along.

—

Classes passed as mind-numbingly boring as ever. At lunch he had sat with Su Li and her friends. His afternoon classes were the worst since it was Herbology – which he didn't care about *at all* and History of Magic, that had become the unofficial nap-time of about half his class.

Afterward all his classes were done, he made his way out, across the grounds, and down towards the little wooden and stone shack that the groundskeeper called home. He knocked on the door and heard the bellowing of a dog from somewhere within. The door opened to Hagrid trying to squeeze into the door frame and push a huge boar-hound out of the way.

The dog, which was apparently named 'Fang', was finally subdued to some extent and Harry was invited in. He sat down in a huge, oversized, chair, in front of an equally huge table. Hagrid sat down opposite and began to pour tea from a kettle, and offered Harry a plate of something he called 'Rock Cakes'. Harry hesitantly tested one and instantly set it back down, deciding that maintaining the structural integrity of his teeth was more important than trying to eat Hagrid's cooking.

The pair engaged in small talk. Hagrid asked Harry about his classes and how he was settling into the school. Asked him how he was liking Ravenclaw, and made an observation that he'd seen Harry speaking with Professor Lupin several times. He remarked that Professor Lupin had been friends with Harry's father and Harry replied that he already knew that and was quite fond of his Defense professor.

"The headmaster really is an... interesting character," Harry said at one point in their conversation.

"Oh yeah. Headmaster Dumbledore is a great man. Great man, 'e is." Hagrid said with a beaming smile.

"Some of the students seem to think he's a bit barmy. That bit during his welcoming speech about the third floor corridor being off limits to anyone who didn't want to die a horrible death? What was that? I mean, he's either joking, and really bad at it, or he's actually got something there that's deadly dangerous, which is incredibly irresponsible in a school full of children."

"Now 'arry, it's best not to try and second guess what all the 'eadmaster has goin' on. And he's most certainly not joking. Don't you even tink of goin' near tha corridor; ye hear? Is not safe."

"My point exactly – the whole school is a maze. It's three weeks in and some of my housemates still get lost on the way to classes. Anyone could accidentally stumble upon the third floor corridor and end up hurt, totally on accident.

"Nah, they couldn't. There are precautions in place, 'arry! There's always sum'on 'round that part of the school keepin' an eye out for people. Makin' sure no students accidentally come on the place. Dumbledore wouldn't be doin' any ah this, or taking any unnecessary risks if he didn't have a right good reason ta do in."

"But what reason could he possibly have that was good enough to warrant putting students at risk? What is he hiding there that's so dangerous? You know, don't you Hagrid?"

"Now, 'arry, don't go askin' me questions about such things. It's none of yer business."

"If you ask me, it's not only my business, it's the business of every student or parent of a student in this school. If Dumbledore is doing something that's putting us all at risk, I want to know that there's someone keeping tabs to make sure he's actually not taking unnecessary risks."

"None ah ya are in danger, Harry! Now stop this. What's going on down the third floor corridor is between Professor Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel and nobody else's business."

Harry's eyes went wide and he felt his heart stop for nearly a fully second before it started up again; beating *wildly* in his chest.

Nicholas Flamel!

Hagrid suddenly seemed to realize what he'd said and rubbed his hand over his face roughly and groaned slightly. "I shouldn' a said tha. Ferget I said that."

--

Hagrid's little 'slip' gave Harry a lot to think about. Nicholas Flamel was a world renowned alchemist who, Harry knew, actually taken Dumbledore on as an apprentice in the venerated wizard's youth. Flamel was over 600 years old, and his old age was attributed entirely to his most famous creation. The Philosopher's Stone. The crowning achievement, and most desired goal and sought after magical artifact of alchemists across the globe.

The stone could produce the elixir of life – a substance that could keep a person alive even if they were on the brink of death; cure most any disease; and completely stop the aging process. Not only could possession of the stone give one eternal youth, but it could also be used to transmute lead into gold, so it also offered the prospect of endless wealth.

He and Tom had researched the stone decades ago during their studies into immortality. Both of them already had their 'solutions' well into the works at the time, but neither horcruxes or Harry's removal of his astral filter were perfect solutions. They'd never really stopped looking into other options.

The philosopher's stone was one of the objects that Tom had *always* wanted. He had tried, on multiple occasions, to acquire it, but Flamel kept it so perfectly protected that he and Tom had finally just given up on it.

There really was only one object that matched the size and the magical signature that Harry had seen from the grubby little package Hagrid had taken from Gringott's, that was associated with Nicholas Flamel, and that object was the Philosopher's Stone. Knowing that Flamel was involved in this left Harry absolutely convinced that the Stone had to be what Hagrid had collected from Dumbledore. But that opened a world of other questions.

Why have Hagrid collect it? Something *that* important... it seemed to be something far too important to leave it to Hagrid without some reason. The fact that it had occurred in front of Harry seemed potentially noteworthy. Did Dumbledore *want* Harry to see Hagrid collect the package? Did he *want* to entice Harry's curiosity?

Harry also knew that there had to be a monumentally important reason for Dumbledore to convince Flamel to lend the stone to him. It would take a *very* important reason for Flamel to remove the stone from its already incredibly secure hiding place and put it somewhere so risky and public as a *bloody school filled with children*.

So what reason could be that important?

It was bait. Harry was sure. Dumbledore knew that Tom wasn't dead. Harry had no proof, but he highly suspected that Dumbledore suspected just what it was that was lurking inside Harry's scar, and if Dumbledore knew he was holding one of Tom's horcruxes, then he knew Tom wasn't dead.

Dumbledore was trying to lure Tom out into the open. He wanted Tom to expose himself, and the only way he knew to do that at the moment was to bait him out into the open with something he knew Tom wanted. The Stone. Harry doubted it was a coincidence that it happened during his first year at Hogwarts. Sort of a double temptation. The Boy-Who-Lived and a stone that granted eternal youth. Pretty good bait, if you asked Harry.

But would it work? Would Tom come to Hogwarts? How would he even hear about all this, to know to come? Harry wanted Tom to show up because he damn well wanted to find the wanker. He was getting endlessly frustrated with getting nowhere in his search for Tom. But he also didn't want Tom to fall into some stupid trap set by Dumbledore.

He would have to keep his eyes open. If the Philosopher's Stone was really hidden at Hogwarts, Harry wanted to know for sure. He also wanted it. It *wanted* that bloody stone if it was the last thing he did. There were a number of reasons that were already brewing in his head, and the more he thought about it the more giddy he became knowing the incredible opportunity that Dumbledore had given him without even realizing it. As far as Dumbledore was concerned, Harry's only part in all of this was probably to play bait. But little did Dumbledore know that Harry had every intention of getting that stone for himself before the year was out.

He had his own uses for it, but it could also be a gift for Tom for whenever he finally found the bloody bastard.

But he needed additional information. The Stone itself wasn't dangerous so the deadly threat of the third-floor corridor was no doubt from the protections that they had in place to guard Flamel's Stone. He would have to find out what was protecting it. He also needed to know

who Dumbledore had 'watching' that corridor, when their shifts were, when they switched, and who was the least reliable.

His best source of information was Hagrid because the big dumb oaf was pants at keeping secrets. But he couldn't milk the man again so soon. He would have to give him some time before trying to get more details out of him.

This would require a delicate touch, a lot of cunning, and a good share of patience. But he *would* succeed. That Stone would be *his*.

Rebirth Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: I'm aware that the last chapter – and probably this one too – have more typos than usual. I'll have a beta pass done on them later with some clean-ups, but right now I just want to get it posted and I don't have the freetime available to me during my 'holiday' to do a decent proof reading pass. Sorry, I hope you can forgive the weird mistakes that I make when I type too fast and don't re-read it to catch them all.

----- Rebirth Chapter 14 -----

By the fourth week of school, all of the Ravenclaws seemed to have accepted and stopped caring that Harry tended to socialize with a number of Slytherins in classes and in the library, and the Slytherins that Harry socialized with had long given up the notion that they were tricking naïve little Harry Potter into liking them. No – they knew just how secretly devious Harry was, and Daphne Greengrass, and Blaise Zabini – another Slytherin that Harry had spent some time with in classes – had both remarked their surprise that the hat hadn't sorted Harry straight into Slytherin. He had responded by smirking and asking them what made them think that it hadn't wanted to? Draco had then commented that it took the most cunning Slytherin to dodge suspicion by intentionally getting himself sorted into the wrong house.

Blaise pointed out that if Harry wanted to completely dodge suspicion, he probably shouldn't be hanging out with Slytherins at all, but Harry said that he refused to spend *all* of his time with only the other Ravenclaws, and if anyone ever confronted him on his socializing with Snakes, he could claim he was being open-minded and refused to judge people by the actions of their parents.

Most of Slytherin house were still under the impression that Harry really was some naïve kid and Draco was just using him for his name and his fame, and also because Draco's father had told him to. Harry was fine with people believing that. It helped give him an extra layer of deniability should anyone question his motives. He had no problem pretending to actually *be* naïve and unaware if it would benefit him. Promoting this misconception also helped Draco since it gave him more to boast about inside Slytherin house – manipulating and deceiving the Boy-Who-Lived – and having bragging rights was always very important in the snake's

constant, unending game of one-upsmanship. Harry had given him permission to continue to propagate the idea to those outside of Harry's trusted circle of Slytherins.

Harry still spent plenty of time with his fellow Ravenclaws, though. Meals were, of course, spent in their company, and he had continued to alternate who he sat with, becoming companionable acquaintances with all of his year mates. He was seen as friendly with all, but close-friends with none. He had also continued to occasionally join the muggleborns at meals and acted friendly and helpful enough in classes.

Harry had very little that he could connect with any of these children on an emotional level since they were all *children*, and he was not. As such, when he spoke with them, it was almost always in reference of classwork, and since he honestly knew so damn much more than any of them, he had the tendency to slip into a bit of a teacher mode.

He tried to stop himself from doing it too often, but it always sort of slipped out despite himself. It really was the only way he knew how to be nice to any of these people, and he knew he needed to play nice if he was going to avoid suspicion from Dumbledore and the other teachers.

While most all of the students that Harry tried to help were grateful for it, oddly enough, Hermione Granger was *not*. If anything, whenever he tried to help her with something, she would get annoyed with him. Not outwardly, but he could see the anger in her eyes. Frustration and irritation would turn her cheeks pink, and he would swear that in those moments her hair actually became *frizzier*.

Harry quickly realized that Hermione was not accustomed to being second best at anything. Even given the academic nature of most Ravenclaws, Hermione Granger was still easily the top in the class... second to Harry.

She had continued to be rather cold to Harry even as he repeatedly sat with her and the other two muggleborns and kept all of his conversations friendly and light. He had wondered for a while what her problem was since his charms were working perfectly on everyone else. But Harry finally determined that it was probably just academic jealousy. At least, that was the best he could figure. She was always giving him these calculating looks and these carefully concealed glares.

And yet it was still preferable to the openly hostile glares that he was often receiving from the Gryffindors in his year. Most of them had seemed confused by him for the first few weeks, but by the third week, they began to look at him with hateful glares, and he wasn't really sure what exactly had brought it on.

Harry certainly wasn't a stranger to having Gryffindors glare hatefully at him, but he wondered what exactly could have caused the shift from confusion to open disdain, and also wondered if he needed to do any damage control before something he didn't approve of reached the wrong ears.

In addition to his continued social interactions with his peers, he had also taken up a habit of spending some of his afternoons in Remus' office. In the beginning, they just talked about Harry's parents, and their school years, but eventually Harry offered to assist Remus with some of his grading work. Remus was hesitant, but allowed Harry to help grade some of the multiple-choice worksheets he had the second and third year students doing.

Harry found he was really enjoying his time with Remus. The man was extremely smart, and had a quiet yet quick wit to his subtle humor that Harry could really appreciate. It was also nice to actually spend some time in the company of an *adult*, rather than nothing but eleven-year-old children.

An additional bonus was all the information about, not only his parents, but some of the wizarding world's more notable events from during the time that Harry had been dead. He had first introduced the subject by complaining to Remus about how worthless his history class was, thanks entirely to Binns, but also complaining about how none of the recent history books gave any decent information on the war that Harry's parents had died in. Remus had been hesitant to talk about the wizarding war, since it was such a heavy and touchy subject, but Harry had finally started to get some information out of him.

Between talk of the war, and talk of 'the Marauder's' school days, Harry had learned quite a lot of interesting information. Especially in regards to his Potions professor. But Harry hadn't let any of his knowledge show in the man's presence. Remus had asked him not to, and Harry wasn't going to betray that trust.

—

It was Tuesday afternoon. Harry had been in his Ravenclaw/Slytherin study group that afternoon since both houses had a free period during their last class block of the day. The Ravenclaws had left the study group a little earlier than usual because that day was the first practice for the Ravenclaw Quidditch team and they had wanted to watch. Harry may have now had a new appreciation for flying, but he still didn't give a damn about the sport, so he stayed behind with Draco, Daphne, and Theo.

They chatted easily for another thirty minutes before the Slytherins had to pack up and head down to the dungeons to prepare for dinner in a half hour. Harry sat there for another five minutes before stretching his arms over his head and packing up his books. He had no need to go back to the common room before heading to dinner and figured he could take advantage of this time to slip into an alcove, throw up a disillusionment spell, and scope out the third-floor corridor again.

He'd been making regular trips to the area over the last week. The teachers rotated patrols to guard it, but most of the time, during the days, it was left solely up to Filch to guard it, since the professors were busy teaching their classes. This was obviously a flawed plan since Filch was a *squib*, and he was only one man. He was the caretaker of the whole bloody school, and even with the assistance of his creepy-ass cat, he still couldn't watch the whole school all the time *and* watch the third floor corridor.

The man had some magical detectors hidden around the third floor though, that notified him if anyone approached it. Harry could see them with his Black Sight and they were easy

enough to get around. Harry had identified the door at the end of the third-floor corridor as obviously being what was being guarded. He remembered it from he and Tom's search of the school during his first youth. If it was the same as before, the room itself would look like any other boring room, except it would have a trap door in the floor. Immediately below the trap door was a long corridor that tilted downwards. After it was a large room, then another small hall that continued downwards, then another large room... it continued on like that. He and Tom had never figured out what the hell had been intended when the space had originally been built into the castle. When they'd gone exploring it in their third year it had been full of junk.

Harry suspected that there was more than junk there now, but hadn't yet ventured past the first door to check for himself.

Harry left the library and instantly became aware that someone was trying to follow him. He continued down the corridor, pretending he hadn't noticed and turned a corner leading towards a part of the castle that held class rooms that would be empty this time of day. He caught sight in the reflection of a suit of armor as three small boys tried to scurry from one alcove, or statue, to the next, as they attempted to follow him. Harry's eyes narrowed as he spotted an obvious mop of red hair on one of the three boys.

Harry turned into an empty classroom and shuffled to the side, slightly behind the partially opened door. The three boys poked their heads through and instantly felt themselves pulled inside. They crumpled into a heap on the floor and heard the door close before any of them could manage to stand back up.

Once they did, they found Harry Potter standing there, looking at them through narrowed, suspicious eyes, with his wand drawn in one hand and... three other wands clutched in his other hand?

"Hey, my wand!" Weasley bellowed as he suddenly began to pat down his robes, to confirm that his wand truly was not where it was supposed to be. The other two boys quickly made similar confirmations. The other boys, in question, were Seamus Finnigan and, surprisingly enough, *Neville Longbottom*. All Gryffindors.

"Why were you following me?" Harry asked.

"Give me back my wand!" Weasley demanded.

"Answer my question," Harry retorted right back.

Weasley's face went red and he scowled at Harry, angrily. After a moment he looked down to scowl at his feet instead and grumbled something under his breath.

"What was that? Couldn't quite hear that." Harry said, coldly.

"We were spying on you, okay?" Weasley spat.

"Why?"

"I wanted to know what you were up to!"

Harry gave him a flat, disbelievingly annoyed look. "What? Why? I was working on my homework. What the hell do you think I'm 'up to' that warrants me being spied on?"

"I don't know what you're up to, but I'm sure you're up to *something*! You're always hanging out with those slimy Slytherins in the library! You've turned your back on the Light! You were supposed to be a Gryffindor! Not some snooty Ravenclaw that's always hanging out with snakes!"

Harry gave him an incredulous look. "Are you serious? Do you even realize how utterly ridiculous you sound?"

"I'm not ridiculous! There's something wrong with you! *You're evil!*"

Harry burst out into laughter and had to clutch at his side with the hand holding onto their wands. His laughter subsided into chuckles and he wiped away a tear from one of his eyes as he gave an amused sigh. "Oh, that's funny... you really think..." Harry snorted, rolled his eyes.

"Shut up!" Weasley yelled indignantly.

"Okay, well, maybe what Ron said *was* stupid... we're not all saying that we think you're evil," Finnigan said, earning a scowl from Weasley. "But maybe they've got you under a spell or something. You should have professor Dumbledore look you over to make sure. My cousin was hit with this really powerful Confudus spell once..."

Harry shook his head in amusement and tossed the wands onto the floor so they could roll towards the boys. "Look, I'll be friendly with whomever I want to be friendly with. Spending time with some kids who just happened to get sorted into Slytherin house by a bloody talking hat is not a sign that I've been *imperio*'d or that I'm actually evil incarnate disguised as a child. I judge people on their actions towards me, not what their parents may or may not have done a decade ago, and not by whatever political affiliation their family stems from. I don't care about that shit right now. They are their own people. They're not defined by what house they got sorted into. Besides, we're all only *eleven years old*."

Harry turned on the spot and opened the door. Just before stepping through it he turned to look over his shoulder. "Oh, and Weasley?"

Weasley looked up at him, looking annoyed and embarrassed. "Yeah? Whut is it?" he spat.

"I don't like being ambushed. Try it again and I'll string you up by your ankles and dye your hair green for a week."

With that he turned and slammed the door shut behind him.

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That Friday, Harry entered the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom to find an unwelcome surprise. Severus Snape was sitting at the head of the classroom, glowering out over the room with a rather smug look on his face. Harry frowned and his pace slowed as his

mind tried to whirl over what reasons there could possibly be for Snape to be there instead of Remus.

The class gathered and settled down after Snape snapped at them all for dallying. Snape instructed them to jump forward to chapter ten in their text book. Hermione's hand instantly was in the air and before he had even called on her, she was informing him that Professor Lupin had only just assigned the class chapter three. Snape sneered at her and ignored her comment, instead reiterating that they should turn to page four hundred and seven.

Harry opened his book and instantly knew why Remus was absent.

The chapter was on werewolves. The previous night must have been the full moon!

Snape went on to quiz them all on werewolves, even though none of them, save Hermione, of course, had even read that far ahead in the text book. Snape also covered, in depth, what exactly a person needed to look for to spot a werewolf. Harry gave Snape a deeply hateful glare, which was far more expression than Snape had ever gotten out of Harry before that.

The contrast in intensity caught the man off his guard when he met Harry's gaze at one point. Snape pulled himself together an instant later and continued on with his lecture. At the end of the class he assigned them all a two foot essay on werewolves and dismissed them. Harry lingered behind, waiting for the room to clear.

Snape was gathering some things off of the desk into his arms and turned to find Harry still standing there, much to his surprise.

"What do you want, Potter?" Snape asked sharply.

"Do you intend to do that in all of his classes that you sub for?"

"What are you blathering on about, brat? What makes you think you have the right to question *me*? Fifteen points from Ravenclaw, Potter. Now get out of here."

Harry held his ground and his icy glare only intensified. "I'm aware that you and my father had a shit history together. I get that you feel the need to vent the frustrations of your miserable youth on me because I'm his son and you hated him. I'm the personification of your shitty school years. The boy that pranked and humiliated you, and ended up getting the girl you fancied. Fine. Take your misery out on me. Whatever. But from what I've gathered, the only bad thing Remus ever did to you, was stand aside and let my father and Black make you miserable. Sure, he should have stopped them, but he didn't exactly have a lot of friends he could rely on given his unfortunate situation. Why the *fuck* do you think it's okay for you to try and pull this *immature bullshit* on a professional colleague?"

"Why, you impertinent little BRAT! HOW DARE YOU!" Snape bellowed, as he set his books and papers back down on the desk with a thundering clap and began to stalk over to Harry in what was probably a rather intimidating display to anyone that *wasn't Harry*.

"No, *how dare you!*" Harry shot back, striding forward angrily and coming within inches of the dark wizard who was considerably taller, and now towering over him. Harry's hand was

up and his index finger was extended as he jabbed it forcefully into Snape's chest. "You're just hoping that one of these thick-headed little dunderheads will put two and two together and send a letter home to mummy and daddy complaining about their *halfbreed* teacher. You're intentionally trying to get him sacked!"

"Of course I am! He has no right being here! He shouldn't be allowed anywhere near children!"

"And neither should you, you bloody *Death Eater*! How many people have *you* killed? I bet you've killed more than he has! Hell, Remus probably hasn't killed *anyone, ever*! Can you claim such a clean record?"

Snape jumped back as if he'd been hit. His face was deathly pale and slacked in shock. "How do you know about that?" he whispered.

"I know for a fact that you're at least *indirectly* responsible for two deaths, and almost mine! You and that bloody prophecy! Fucking arse!" Harry continued on, not missing a beat and totally ignoring Snape in his stunned state. "If you hadn't repeated that stupid fucking thing to the Dark Lord he'd still be here, and my parents wouldn't be dead! And I wouldn't have been left in the care of muggles who got their jollies off by beating on a five-year old!"

"How do you know this!" Snape yelled, but his voice wasn't filled so much with fury as it was fear.

"I know a lot of things, *Severus Snape*. I told you already, remember? Eidetic memory. I remember *everything*. From the day I was born, I remember every thing I've ever witnessed or overheard. I remember Dumbledore coming to visit my parents. I remember my mum holding me in her arms and rocking me, thinking I was asleep, while she and my dad discussed that damned bloody prophecy."

"The headmaster never told them that it was me. He wouldn't have told them that it was I who..." Snape's voice was back to being weak and unsure and Harry could see confusion and disbelief in the man's eyes.

"Can you really be so sure about that? Why? Just because he *told you* that he hadn't told them? I already know for a fact that Albus Dumbledore is a filthy bloody liar with his own motives and his own twisted little agenda. That man was the one who cast the fidelius charm over my parents house when we went into hiding, and he *knows* that the one that *he* designated as the secret keeper was *not Sirius Black*, and yet he's allowed my godfather to get sent to Azkaban without a trial and has left him there to *rot*! Why? Because with Sirius in prison, *Dumbledore* retained magical control and guardianship over me. Power and control! He's driving all of this from the shadows, and I don't trust that bastard one tiny bit!"

Harry stopped to catch his breath. He realized that he was panting, he was so upset. His emotions were unstable and he knew he was going to regret some of the stuff he was saying, but he was just *so angry*.

"And I don't trust *you*," Harry finally hissed out in a deathly quiet voice. "I don't know what the hell Dumbledore thinks he's doing having you here. A Death Eater in a school, teaching

children! I don't know whose side you're really on. Dumbledore's side, the Dark Lord's side, or maybe you're just on *your* side, and simply teetering on the edge, ready to slide down one side or the other once it becomes clear which side has the better chance of winning. And while I can't disagree with that ideology, I can't stand for it in this case. Self-preservation is one thing, but *loyalty*..." Harry ground out through his clenched teeth, but stopped himself from saying what he really wanted to.

Snape was standing stock still, looking down at Harry with a stunned expression, still clearly unsure what to do or say.

Harry pulled in a slow breath, trying to calm his racing heart. Finally, his head rose and his cold green eyes met Snape's with a piercing intensity that caused the man to flinch.

"I've grown quite fond of Remus Lupin. If your actions result in him getting sacked, you *will* regret it."

Anger returned to Snape's eyes. "You would *dare* to threaten me, you little whelp?"

Harry's hand fisted around the collar of Snape's robes and he yanked down with a surprising amount of force for someone so small. The force, combined with the powerful magical well that erupted around the pair of them sent shock and fear back into Snape's eyes. Harry's teeth were clenched tightly and he sneered dangerously up at the man.

"You'd better believe that I would *dare* to threaten you. You do not know what you are dealing with, Severus Snape. Use some of the Slytherin self-preservation and change your fucking lesson plan, or you're going to find yourself *deeply* regretting your choices."

"And what exactly could a child like you hope to do against me," Snape bit out through clenched teeth of his own as he tried to mask the fear that was welling up inside him.

"Dumbledore may have kept things quiet and protected you from Azkaban ten years ago, but do you think he could do that again if you had the Boy-Who-Lived calling for your case to be re-opened? Or exposing your participation in the prophecy thing? The Potter's death? And what about the parent outcry? What would the parents of the students think if they knew that they had a marked *Death Eater* teaching their children? Even Lucius won't protect you if I ask him not to. You'll be gone from this school so fast..."

Snape barked out an incredulous laugh and sneered down at Harry as he pulled himself free and stood up.

"You honestly think you'd have any influence over the Malfoy's? You are being played, Potter. They merely want you for your name and your influence! Draco is not your *friend*, his father is simply having him get close to you because he wants your trust!"

"And which one of the two of us has more influence and power, hmm? Which one of us would be more valuable to Lucius in the long run? The Boy-Who-Lived, or the Death Eater who turned spy for Dumbledore? When the Dark Lord returns, and your questionable loyalties and potential spying for the Order comes to light, which do you think the Dark Lord would approve of more, as far as Lucius is concerned? Earning the trust of the Boy-Who-

Lived, or staying true to a turn-coat and a spy? Lucius will turn against you without a moments hesitation because that is what would please his Lord. Do you think that Dumbledore would stay true to you if he thought he could earn my trust if he turned on you? Which one of us do you think is more important to *him*? His spy, or his *weapon*? He could get another spy, and he'll have to since the Dark Lord will never really trust you again, but *I'm* the only one prophecised to vanquish the Dark Lord."

Snape's eyes widened and he looked at Harry with a mixture of dawning horror, and intense confusion.

"Right now, the worst I can do is *crush* you, but someday I'll be in a position to do much, much worse," Harry said in a deathly quiet whisper. "If you value your life, I recommend you try to redeem yourself in my eyes, Severus Snape, because right now? I *really* don't like you."

With that Harry spun on the spot and stalked out the door, still fuming.

Harry skivved off History of Magic to spend the afternoon with Remus in the hospital wing. The matron, Madam Pomfrey, had been surprised to see Harry there, and was even more surprised when it became clear that Harry was in-the-know about Remus' 'furry little problem'.

Harry was still angry from his confrontation with Snape. He didn't mention it to Remus though. He wasn't sure exactly what sort of fallout there would be from the encounter. It was entirely possible that Snape would go straight to Dumbledore and Harry would have to scramble to redo all his plans. If that happened, then he'd deal with it. It wasn't like he hadn't known everything could blow up in his face at any minute. Part of him probably hoped it would all blow up so he would have a valid excuse to get the hell out of that damned school and all of the children in it. Maybe if he wasn't restrained by trying to stay under Dumbledore's radar he could just leave the country and start a legitimate search for Tom. Because at this point he was almost positive that Tom was abroad. He wasn't even sure *why* he was so convinced of such a thing, he just was.

But he still wanted the Stone. Maybe if things blew up, he could just tear through the protections – he *was* fairly sure he could manage it, no matter what the hell was in there – and then take off. Leave Britain and start looking for Tom...

Harry shook his head of such daydreams as Remus asked him some question, worrying about Harry missing a class. Harry dismissed his concerns, reminding him that he was missing Binns' class, and it was unlikely that the dead teacher would even notice. He never took roll anyway.

Despite his concerns, Harry honestly doubted that Snape would run to Dumbledore with what had happened. He knew he'd gotten to the man with that bit about which of the two of them was more valuable to Dumbledore. He was also fairly sure he was right about Snape being on 'Snape's side' and not really being on anyone else's side. The man would wait until it was clear who was winning before he actually picked a side. The quintessential Slytherin, just like Harry had first pegged him.

Harry hadn't come out and said it, but Snape would have to be an idiot to not wonder about where exactly Harry's loyalties would lie in the coming conflict. If The-Boy-Who-Lived abandoned the Light, they were doomed, according to that stupid worthless prophecy, and it seemed that Dumbledore was putting a lot of his energy behind it. If Snape was smart, he would keep what he'd learned today to himself until he was better able to piece things together and make some sense of things.

Harry would just have to wait and watch. See where things went from there.

Harry turned his attention back on Remus. The man was pretty torn up, but his wounds were healing quickly and would be gone by the end of the day. Werewolves without a pack tended to tear themselves up pretty bad during the actual transformation. Fortunately the day of, and the day after the transformation they had an accelerated healing factor.

"Hey Remus?" Harry asked after a lull in their conversation.

"Yes, Harry?"

"You mentioned that my dad, Sirius, and Peter – they became animagi so that they could keep you company in the shack during full moons, right?"

"That's right."

"How long did it take them? I mean, it took a while before they figured out about your problem, and *then* they still had to learn the transfiguration – which is supposed to take years even under the guidance of a transfiguration master. When were they finally able to start keeping you company?"

"Ah... it wasn't until sixth year that they perfected their transformations. You're right – it did take them quite a while, but they did it impressively fast considering they were doing it without proper instruction. They started trying to learn it in third year."

Harry nodded his head thoughtfully. Part of him actually wanted to be able to offer the same assistance to Remus, that his father and friends had offered. But Harry hadn't even *attempted* to do an animagus transformation yet in this life. He had seriously doubted that his body could handle it. You weren't supposed to even attempt it until you'd already reached your magical maturity since it caused a tremendous magical strain and required a *lot* of magic to perform and maintain.

Then again, he'd already pushed his body much further and forced it to adjust to magic far beyond what a normal eleven-year-old body could usually do. It was possible that his body *could* handle it. But would he have to learn it all over again? Would it actually take him a full two years to master it again, or would he be able to do it faster since he already knew how, he'd just have to learn his new form... assuming it was even different...

"Was there something else, Harry?" Remus asked, pulling Harry from his thoughts.

Harry looked at Remus for a moment, debating. The only person who had ever known he'd become an animagus was Tom, and Harry was the only one who had known of Tom's form in

return. They had become animagus together in their early thirties mostly to see if they could. One of Tom's followers was an animagus and the man's skill had been extremely beneficial on several occasions. It had taken the two of them just under two years to master their transformations. Tom had actually been rather annoyed at that. It was slightly shorter than most, but Tom would only have been happy had he done it in less than one. He was a magical prodigy after all – he *should* have been able to do it faster than that.

Harry had snickered at Tom at the time. Teasing his lover by pointing out that he was 'pouting'. It had gotten the response he'd expected. Tom had been furious at the mere suggestion that he had 'pouted' in response to anything, ever.

Harry squashed the smile at the memory and shrugged at Remus. "Nothing really. Just wondering, was all."

"Harry, I think I see what you might be thinking about but you shouldn't even try it. You're too young to become an animagus. I really appreciate the thought, but I'm fine on my own for the full moons."

Harry smiled at Remus and shrugged. "I didn't say anything."

"Right..." Remus responded in a slightly disbelieving tone.

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That weekend Harry called Dobby to him and told the elf to go to the apothecary in Diagon Alley and purchase a list of ingredients for him. The elf returned twenty minutes later with everything he had asked for and Harry thanked him before sending him back to Godric's Hollow. Harry then made his way to the Room of Hidden Things and asked for a space to brew a potion.

Before he could even consider relearning his animagus form, he needed to know if his animal form had changed at all, and in order to learn that, he needed to brew the animagi revivium potion.

Brewing took about three hours, but when it was done Harry was very satisfied with his efforts. The potion had turned out perfectly. He bottled as much as he would need and asked the room for a large pillow-cushion on the floor. He sat down, cross-legged, slowed his breathing and cleared his mind before downing the potion.

The potion would put the imbiber into a trance where they would have a vision of themselves in their animal form. They were to memorize what it felt like. How their animal moved, breathed, felt, saw, etc. How their mind worked as their animal form. When an animagus was in their animal form, their thoughts and reactions lowered a bit closer the more instinctive nature of the animal they assumed, but they still maintained their own intelligence and consciousness for the most part.

The room remained completely silent for several long minutes while Harry sat there, seemingly doing nothing. Suddenly he gasped and his eyes flew open as he woke from the trance.

A wide, feral grin spread across his lips. It hadn't changed. His form was the exact same as it had been in his previous life.

Brilliant. Now to see if I can even still do it.

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Severus Snape was still shaken by his encounter with Harry Potter even a day later as he reluctantly made his way to the teachers conference room for the first staff meeting of the school year. It was the end of September and the time of year that they always gathered to discuss the little runts that were left in their charge ten months out of the year.

Severus had not yet told anyone about his encounter the previous day and wasn't sure he would – at least not any time soon. The boy had given him too much to think about. Too many puzzle pieces that didn't match up. Potter was a conundrum wrapped inside a riddle. Harry Potter had been anything but what Severus had expected since the day he had arrived.

The first shock had come when Potter was sorted into Ravenclaw. Severus had honestly expected the boy to go straight to Gryffindor where his father and every other blasted Potter before him had gone. But he had instead been sorted in with the Ravenclaws.

The second surprise had come when he first saw the boy socializing with several of his Slytherins in the halls and in the library. The third shock had come with his first class teaching the little brat. His inexplicable knowledge had been bewildering, but the boy being a book worm did at least explain how he'd ended up in Ravenclaw instead of Gryffindor. But it also seemed that it was impossible to get under Potter's skin, no matter what buttons Severus tried to push.

But far more confusing and shocking was what Severus encountered when he'd tried to slip inside Potter's mind and found absolutely nothing there. Severus had seen a great many mental defenses before, but never before had he encountered someone's conscious mindscape that was so utterly devoid of anything. He had no idea what to make of it. It *should* have been impossible. No one could blank their mind that much. Potter had to have been hiding his mind somehow, but to accomplish such a thing so perfectly he would have to be a master Occlumens. And *still* it should have been impossible!

An additionally infuriating aspect to the boy's bizarre perfect recall was that it came with perfect potions performance. He couldn't even dock the boy for poor brewing. He hadn't messed up a single potion. He'd even taken numerous extra intricate steps that only an experienced brewer would know to take, in order to ensure his potions were perfect. It was infuriating.

He had continued to hear tales of a few of his Slytherins socializing with Potter, but the majority of the house saw it for what it obviously was – a power play. Draco was no doubt under orders from his father to befriend Potter and gain his trust. The fact that Draco and some of his friends had accomplished it so easily without Potter suspecting it, only seemed to confirm to Severus that Potter was still a gullible, naïve little boy, after all...

But all of Severus' preconceived notions and beliefs revolving around the boy were blown away by one altercation with him that day covering for that blasted wolf. One confrontation with Potter, that had shattered every assumption he had ever made of him.

Severus didn't even know where to start. Potter clearly wasn't simply being *used* by Draco. He even seemed to have some sort of relationship or understanding with Lucius. Had Potter met Lucius? It seemed that, not only was he *not* being used by Draco, he might even be the one doing the using.

And what was with Potter calling the Dark Lord... *The Dark Lord*? It was entirely odd. Only followers of the Dark Lord ever called him by his proper title. Everyone else used one of those ridiculous hyphenated monikers, except for Dumbledore who was the only one with the audacity to speak the name *Voldemort*.

Learning that Potter's bizarre perfect memory stemmed all the way back to his infancy was also a huge shock. Was that even possible? Well obviously it was, because there was no other explanation for how Potter could possibly know what he knew. In any case, he knew far more than anyone would have ever expected, and far more than he should in regards to Snape, Dumbledore and the prophecy.

Did Dumbledore have any idea that Potter knew about the prophecy already?

Severus deeply doubted it. And he wasn't even presently inclined to fill the man in on that little tidbit. He felt far more inclined to sit back and observe things a bit longer. He knew the Dark Lord was coming back. He'd known it ever since his mark had started to clear up two summers ago. He'd been expecting to be summoned at any time ever since his mark had burned so fiercely that Halloween night... but nothing. Nothing had happened since then and it left him a bit bewildered.

Lucius had claimed that he'd heard nothing since, either, but could he be lying?

Of course he *could* be, but Severus doubted he was. He was sure that the Dark Lord would call him, when he chose to finally make himself known to the other Death Eaters. Severus had wormed his way into Dumbledore's trust and he would be valuable to the Dark Lord there. He was convinced that he could work the situation to his advantage no matter how things turned out... or at least, he *had* been sure until Harry Potter had been introduced into the equation.

Now he really didn't know what was going on.

Severus entered the staff room and sat down in his usual seat at the large rectangular table between Minerva and Filius. Lupin entered a minute later with a small limp and looking haggard.

That was another thing to think about. Potter's connection to the wolf. For a month he had tried to push Potter's buttons in class. Trying to get some reaction out of the boy; searching for one good reason to give the little bastard a detention, or a worthy point reduction; but nothing. He never got a real reaction out of Potter until yesterday. It seemed that Potter didn't

care if he was personally attacked, but the moment Severus had done something to threaten Lupin, Potter had struck like a venomous snake, hidden in the reeds.

The fact that Potter already knew that Lupin was a werewolf seemed like a near meaningless revelation now, in light of everything else he'd discovered Potter knew.

"Ah, good. It looks like we're all here now," Dumbledore said genially as he smiled at everyone from his spot at the head of the table. "Let's begin with the reports from the heads of the four houses. How are your new first years adjusting to school life?"

Minerva started and Severus mostly tuned her out. They were all petty concerns. Homesick students, trouble-makers, the standard one or two kids who came in illiterate because their parents couldn't afford a private tutor, nor spare the time to personally home school them, and yet also refused to send them to a muggle primary school.

Severus kept his report standard and short. He rarely shared much information on his snakes in these meetings. If there were problems within Slytherin house, they were dealt with behind closed doors. Slytherins did not air their dirty laundry in front of others – least of all Gryffindors or Hufflepuffs.

Discussion shifted to the first years class performance. Who was having the most trouble, who was excelling, etc.

Potter's name came up a lot here. They had all noticed his advanced intelligence. The other teachers had only glowing praise to say about the boy. He was smart, kind, charming, helpful... always eager to assist his fellow students if they were having trouble with a spell. Dreadfully bright, but also modest. Always gets his practical spells within the first few tries and often spends the rest of the lesson helping his classmates, no matter if they're in his house or not.

It was as if Severus seen an entirely different person then they had.

When Severus was asked his opinion of the boy, he kept his comments to a minimum and grudgingly admitted that his potions were passable.

Lupin informed the group that Potter had been in a program for the gifted at his muggle primary school and that he had an eidetic memory. Dumbledore seemed shocked to learn all this. Hadn't the man been keeping tabs on the boy? His precious chosen-one? Surely he had some idea... but maybe he didn't. Potter had clearly managed to hide his less public-friendly persona from all of the rest of them. Even Lupin seemed ignorant to Potter's darker side.

It seemed that once discussion on Potter had started that none of them could quite shut up about him – a fact that Severus found entirely irritating.

It was pointed out by Madam Pince, the librarian, that Potter had been spending a awful lot of time in the company of Malfoy and Nott, which brought about a number of quiet, concerned, murmurs from the teachers and several loaded looks between McGonagall and Dumbledore. The headmaster was frowning and nodded his head slowly. He noted that he was aware of

Potter's study-group and was keeping an eye on it. That it *did* concern him some, but that it seemed entirely innocent so far.

Everyone at the table knew that both Malfoy's and Nott's fathers were Death Eaters. Both had managed to escape Azkaban by claiming to have been under the Imperius curse when they were marked, but none present at this meeting were stupid enough to believe such an excuse.

Lupin came to Potter's defense then, no doubt repeating something that Potter himself had said to the wolf. Claiming that Potter refused to judge eleven-year-old children by the supposed actions of their parents a decade ago. That he would judge the kids on their own merits, not who their parents or family were.

Severus had to fight off the urge to scoff, loudly. It was such an obvious and ridiculous lie, but Dumbledore smiled brightly and nodded in approval at the remark. Severus wanted to roll his eyes. The man was such a gullible old fool sometimes. Always wanting to see the best in people.

But then again, if it weren't for that quality, Severus himself would be in Azkaban right then, so he couldn't exactly be upset with the man for it.

Finally discussion moved onto other subjects and Severus felt he could relax a little.

He would have to continue to remain vigilant and keep his eyes open and trained on Potter. He also thought it might be a good idea to get in contact with Lucius again and find out if he'd had any contact with Potter outside of Draco. He would floo his old friend that afternoon.

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Rebirth Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN:

Happy Birthday Tom Riddle :)

Chapter posted December 31st 2010

Again, I will apologize before-hand for what is most likely a typo-filled chapter. I'm on my 'holiday' from work, which means I'm home with the kids all day and have next to no time to actually write – where as when I'm at work, I have my lunch break to get my writing done.

Because of this, I haven't had time to do a thorough re-read of this to catch all the weird, stupid things that my fingers do when I type too fast. I tend to hover between 90-110 WPM, and it usually results in idiotic typos.

----- Rebirth Chapter 15 -----

The weeks continued to pass after that without any confrontation between Harry or Snape. As far as Harry could tell, Snape had *not* told Dumbledore about their encounter. He had received a letter from Lucius informing him that Snape had contacted the elder Malfoy to inquire about Harry. Lucius had mostly held his tongue, but he had apparently warned Snape not to mess with Harry Potter if he knew what was good for him, and that he *highly* recommended trying to mend their relationship for the sake of Snape's future health. Lucius had also admitted to Snape that he and his family had encountered Harry during the summer and it was discovered that Harry and Narcissa were cousins of a sort and Lucius had invited Harry to consider the Malfoy's as extended family. He had also admitted that he and Harry were still occasionally in communication, but that he would appreciate if Severus did not pass that bit of information along to Albus Dumbledore if he could help it.

A Malfoy's word was his honor, and by offering a familial bond with Harry Potter, he was not only gaining Harry's loyalty, but also promising his own. If it came down to a choice between Severus and Harry, he would choose Harry because to a pureblood, family always comes

first, even over friends. It was an ideal excuse that Lucius could fall back on without having to use his loyalty to the Dark Lord as an excuse for his actions regarding Harry Potter.

As the days passed, and the end of October drew near, a few things became clear to Harry. The first one was that Hermione Granger was a jealous, annoying, stuck-up little know it all, and he was getting sick of her attitude. She *hated* being outdone. She seemed to have decided that Harry was her academic rival, and she was going to do anything and everything in her power to out perform him in classes. She also took the ridiculous point system far too seriously. Anytime Harry was awarded points for something, Hermione seemed to go mad until she'd earned the same amount, or more.

At first, he had just ignored her. Then he was mildly amused at her tenacity. *Then* he started to get annoyed. She was constantly bickering with him on the most inane of subjects. She relied too much on perfectly quoting textbooks, but Harry's memory was even better than her's and he had no qualms with quoting the words of other wizards if it would get her to shut up. He'd read a hell of a lot more books than she had, and had a much bigger mental library to draw from.

However, every time he quoted from a book that she didn't have access to, it only seemed to infuriate her, and drive her on a quest for finding the same text, or another one that countered what Harry had said. The Ravenclaw common room had it's own private library filled with volumes that had been donated by Ravenclaw alumni, and thanks to it, there were even more books to reference from there, then in the school library alone, but Harry really only found that more irritating as far as Hermione Granger was concerned. She would go on these mad research sprees, desperately trying to prove that he was wrong, and her bloody elementary textbook was right.

The problem was that people dumb things down for eleven year olds. That was the simple fact of the matter. Children just weren't ready to fully comprehend the immensity that was pure magical theory. That's why all these hundreds of stupid, specific, spells existed. The less in-tune you were with magic, and the less you understood how to actually *feel* it, and manipulate it, the more you had to rely on very specific, crafted spells. One spell that did a very specific thing and had a very specific incantation. That spell had been crafted *just* to do that, and as long as you knew that spell and it's proper wand movements and could do it just as the textbook told you to, you could get the desired effect. Whether you actually had any understanding or control over your magic, or not. That was the sort of rubbish they taught first years.

Of course when you got more advanced, you didn't need a spell for each and every damn thing you wanted to do. In fact, doing it that way was absolutely stupid since you'd end up having to memorize thousands of incantations and wand movements.

It was like all those stupid transfiguration spells they learned in first and second year. A specific spell to turn a match into a needle. A different specific spell to turn a pin cushion into a porcupine. It was stupid. For someone who actually had control of their magic, they didn't need *any* specific spells to transfigure one thing into another. They just needed to know how to properly manipulate their magic, and know how to correctly visualize the transfiguration process.

But none of the first, second, or even third-year level text books covered that stuff because it was just too advanced for young children. And as far ahead as Hermione had read, she hadn't read *that* far ahead yet.

When you're a child, they teach you one way to do it, but when you get older, they teach you the *right* way to do it.

It was stupid, but it was how it worked.

But Hermione Granger wasn't the only person that Harry had determined was exceedingly annoying. No, second place easily went to Ron Weasley from Gryffindor.

Harry had learned a bit about the Weasley family during his time at Hogwarts. First and foremost, they were hypocrites. They were a pure-blood family going back dozens of generations. They almost never even married halfbreeds, and there wasn't a single instance of a Weasley marrying a muggleborn. They had even hidden away a squib born a generation back. And yet, publicly, they claimed to be pro-muggle rights, pro-equality, and very very pro the supremacy of Light magic, and the suppression of the *evil* Dark.

Draco called them filthy blood traitors, but Harry felt that hypocrite was a more suiting term. They also apparently believed that it was their duty to help grow the Light wizard population of Britain, single handedly. The family was outrageously enormous. There were four of them currently in attendance at Hogwarts, but there were two others that had already graduated, and one more still waiting to get in.

They apparently bred like rabbits. *How quaint.*

Despite Harry's warning the last time that Weasley had gotten it into his head to try and follow and corner him, the stupid little ginger git hadn't learned his lesson. He had enlisted the help of a reluctant Longbottom and Finnigan again, one more time. Harry had made good on his threat and ended up using a spell called 'Levicorpus' on all three of them – stringing them up by their ankles. While they hung there, wailing to be let down, Harry then proceeded to cast a spell on each of them that dyed their hair green with silver stripes. He then layered another charm over top of it that would prevent it from being removed for a week. He doubted even the hospital matron could remove it after the precautions he took.

Ron spent the rest of the week glaring hatefully at Harry from across the hall, or in any classes they shared, while Longbottom and Finnigan looked appropriately abashed and terribly embarrassed.

Draco, Daphne, Theo, and Blaise all found Harry's spellwork utterly brilliant and they all asked him to instruct them on exactly what he'd done.

After the hair dying incident, Finnigan and Longbottom seemed less inclined to help Ron with his quest to prove that Harry Potter was evil, so all of Weasley's subsequent attempts to follow or spy on Harry were solo attempts. Harry wouldn't have given a damn about any of Weasley's idiocy if it weren't for the fact that he was putting a damper in the time that Harry had to observe the third floor corridor, and had, thus far, made it impossible to try to pay a visit the Chamber.

It wasn't like it was *hard* to loose the stupid little git. Nor was it hard to detect when the boy was trying to follow him, but Harry couldn't do anything *too* obviously above the level of a child, so he had to be cautious in what he did when escaping Weasley's notice.

He had taken to 'pranking' the ginger git whenever he tried to follow him. As long as he kept his responses seemingly innocent and childish, and reasonably within the skill range of an adolescent, it wouldn't bring down too much concern or attention from on high. So far Weasley's skin had been turned blue for a day once; his hair had been charmed so it flashed every color of the rainbow another day; his robes had been charmed to randomly turn invisible for thirty seconds at a time another day; his teeth had been engorged so that they were even larger than Granger's were... the list went on. By the third week in October, Harry had even started to get into it, and spent his History of Magic classes trying to think up new and more creative things to do to the stupid little boy the next time he dared to try and follow him.

It was at this point that he was first approached by the ginger git's identical twin older brothers. When Harry had first realized that the Weasley Twins were following him as he made his way down an empty corridor one evening as he was leaving the library, he became rather cautious. As best he could figure, the two boys were likely there to try and avenge their younger brother.

At first he decided to just try and lose them, rather than take them head on. He'd heard some rumors about the Weasley twins, and knew that he would likely have to use some more advanced spells to counter what they could pull off, and he didn't want to reveal too much advanced knowledge if he didn't have to.

But his attempts to lose them were quickly proving ineffective. No matter where he went, they were able to track him down. They were also a lot better at being stealthy than their worthless younger brother.

Harry had to admit, he was impressed with both their in-depth knowledge of the school and it's secret passages, as well as their ability to keep tracking him, while dodging Filch, the Bloody Baron, and Peeves – all three individuals who he had tried to lead them into while he was attempting to get away.

Finally he went into an empty classroom and turned to face the door with his wand drawn. He was sick of trying to run from these two and would just face them head on.

The door slowly opened and two identical mops of red appeared, looking into the room cautiously. They spotted Harry and wide grins appeared on their freckled faces.

"Looks like he finally stopped running, George!"

"That, he did, Fred. Almost disappointed, I am. That was quite a romp through the castle!"

"Quite a romp, indeed! Never would have expected to find an ickle firstie who knew even more about this castle than us!"

"Nor did I, brother o' mine! That passage behind the tapestry on the fourth floor was a total mystery! That one isn't even on our fancy little guide!"

"I know! Totally shocked by that one!"

"Shocked, indeed!"

Harry narrowed his eyes at the two as they spoke cheerfully to each other as if he weren't standing there, aiming his wand at them.

"What do you want?" he asked in a cold, sharp voice.

"Oh, no worries, ickle Raven. We mean you no harm."

"We come in peace."

"Offering a white flag."

"Throwing a flock of doves into the air."

"In fact, we come baring a proposal of cooperation!"

Harry raised a single brow into his forehead, looking at the two as if they were insane... which they clearly were.

"Riiight... so you're *not* here to get revenge for all the stuff I've done to your brother?" Harry asked, skeptically.

"Oh, no. Not at all."

"We thought all that stuff you did was –"

" – Absolutely *brilliant!*"

"Masterful, even."

"Genius."

Harry blinked at the pair, feeling like he was watching a tennis match as the two bounced back and forth with their words.

"Yeah... oh-kay..." Harry said slowly, still feeling a considerable amount of trepidation, as he stood in their presence. It was at that point, however, that something that one of them was carrying caught his attention. Sticking out of the pocket of one of their robes was a bit of folded parchment. To the common eye, it wouldn't look the least bit extraordinary, however to Harry's Black Sight, it was glowing with an incredibly powerful array of charms.

But that alone wasn't what was really catching Harry's attention. It was the magical signature attached to those charms that was drawing him in. They were very... *familiar*.

Remus' magical signature was *all over it*. That one was obvious. It was especially easy to pick out since he saw Remus' magical signature every week in class. However, there was another signature in there that, while Harry had never actually seen it before, he had *felt* it. It took him all of thirty seconds to search his memory to try and pinpoint exactly where he knew it from.

It was his father's magical signature.

"Where did you get that?" Harry blurted out before he could even realize what he was saying.

The two twins, who had continued on with their bizarre twinspeak stopped mid tennis volley and looked at him in confusion for a moment before looking down to where he was pointing. They realized he was pointing at the parchment that was sticking out of one of their pockets and their expressions instantly became guarded.

"Got what?" one asked, innocently.

"That parchment in your pocket," Harry replied. "It's got my dad's magical signature on it."

"You're dad?" the other twin echoed with surprise. Then his eyes widened and he looked over at his brother, who also looked rather wide-eyed.

"What do you mean, it's got his 'magical signature' on it?"

Harry shrugged. "It's a thing I can do. I sort of see magic. I also have perfect recall. I remember people's magical signatures like some people remember people's faces. My dad's magical signature is all over that bit of parchment sticking out of your pocket. So is Professor Lupin's, for that matter."

"Professor Lupin?" the both echoed, simultaneously.

"Yeah. That's right. So where'd you get it?"

The twins turned to look at each other, and seemed to have a silent conversation between them before they turned back to Harry.

"We nicked it –"

"From Filch's office –"

"Our first year here."

"It was in his confiscated contraband drawer," they volleyed back and forth.

"So what is it? I can see it's powerful. It's got a mountain of charms cast on it," Harry said, almost whispering the last part to himself as his eyes remained locked on the parchment.

"You can really *see* magic?" one of the twins asked with a bit of awe in his voice.

Harry shrugged, acting as if it were nothing. "Always have. Was born with it, I guess."

"That's wicked."

"No wonder they're all saying you're some sort of prodigy."

"Yeah, right... soooo... the parchment?" Harry prodded, getting impatient.

"Right!" one exclaimed.

"The parchment!" the other added.

Harry gave them a flat, slightly annoyed look.

The one with the parchment in his pocket pulled it out and held it out in front of them. Harry leaned in closer, looking at it more closely. It appeared, for all the world, to be nothing more than a blank piece of parchment.

He saw the bit of magic left in it from his father reacting to him and his eyes widened. Suddenly text began to appear on it. The twins apparently weren't expecting this, because they just gaped at it.

Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs

Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers

Have detected the blood of one of their own

Who is this new prankster who handles our map today?

The three boys stood staring at the parchment for a moment. Harry suddenly barked out a bit of a laugh.

"The Marauder's," he whispered with an oddly sentimental smile on his lips at the thought of finding this object that had belonged to his father and his friends.

The twin's heads shot up and they gaped at him. "You know about the Marauder's?" one of them asked.

"Are you saying that you dad was one of them?" asked the other.

"Yeah, my dad's nickname was Prongs," Harry said, pointing to the word 'Prongs' on the map. "Professor Lupin was Moony. You could ask him about it all, if you really want."

The two Twin's shared a stunned, and yet *elated* look.

"You mean to tell me that one of our *professors* was a Marauder?" one twin gasped.

"Do you know who the other's were? Are they still alive?"

Harry frowned slightly. "Well, Padfoot was Sirius Black," he said, and the twin's paled considerably. "Wormtail was Peter Pettigrew. They were dorm mates back when they went to Hogwarts. But anyway, what else does it do? The parchment, I mean?"

"Right, right!"

"I think he deserves to see it."

"And I concur."

With that, the one holding the parchment brought out his wand, tapped it against the parchment and said "I solemnly swear that I'm up to no good."

The text from earlier disappeared, and the parchment was suddenly filled with an incredibly complex, animated *map* of the entire school. But even more interesting, was the fact that every single person in the school was labeled on the map with a little animated set of footprints that went where ever in the school that they went. Harry even found the classroom that he and the twins were standing in with three pairs of static footprints, labeled Harry Potter, Fred Weasley, and George Weasley.

The next twenty minutes was spent with the three sitting at one of the tables in the classroom, examining the map, and discussing what Harry knew about the Marauder's. Harry discovered that the twins had not come after him with malicious intent, but rather, they were planning to recruit him, or enlist him as their student. He obviously did not have anything to learn from them – if anything, he could teach them a thing or two about pranking, and pranking had never been his thing.

The more Harry saw about the map, the more intrigued he was. He doubted that the twins would hand over their copy, straight up, but he still wanted it. The three made plans to meet in Professor Lupin's office the following day after classes had ended to discuss the map. The twins wanted to do it so that they could get some stories out of Lupin. Harry wanted to do it so that he could get some details out of Lupin on how the map was constructed. It was obvious that the majority of the charm work in the map had been done by Remus – which made sense, since he knew that in their school days, Remus was the most studious of the group.

The following day they met up and Remus was obviously overwhelmed, both by the twins, and by the sight of the map. He got all nostalgic about it, and the twins easily got their stories out of the man. While Remus reminisced, and the twins soaked up tales of the Marauder's and their pranks, Harry sat to the side, examining the map with his Black Sight, as well as a number of advanced charms used for reverse engineering complex spells. He had a piece of parchment and quill and was making notes as he went. The others were distracted enough that they didn't pay him any mind.

Over the next week, Harry borrowed the map from the twins a few more times for additional study. They seemed to think he was using it to perform some covert pranks, and wished him luck. They continued to attempt to persuade him to join them in their own pranking efforts, but for the time being at least, he refused.

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It was the day of October's full moon and Harry was making his way to Remus' office. It was still light outside, but the sun would be setting in a few hours, and Harry knew Remus was

responsible enough that he likely locked himself away far earlier that was absolutely necessary.

He knocked on Remus' office door and let himself in after hearing the man call out from within.

The man looked up from his desk with a tired grin on his face.

"Harry..." Remus said in a quiet voice as he set his quill down and sat up straighter in his seat. "What brings you here today? Don't you usually have your study group on Thursdays?"

Harry shrugged. "They know I won't be there tonight. I would much rather spend this time, keeping you company."

Remus looked touched, but ducked his head a bit. "You don't have to do that, Harry. Besides, I'll be heading out in about forty minutes, and you can't go with me, after that."

"Why not?" Harry asked simply.

Remus looked up and blinked at him. "Harry, you know why you can't come. It's too dangerous. Even with the Wolfsbane potion, having a human nearby could aggravate Moony."

"But what if I wouldn't be there as a human?" Harry replied with a smirk.

Remus' brow furrowed for a moment in confusion before he chuckled and shook his head. "Harry, I don't know what you're suggesting, but it's not —"

"I'm an animagus."

Remus stopped mid word and gaped at the young boy still standing opposite his desk. "Harry, that's impossible. There's simply no way —"

"I did it accidentally when I was younger. I don't know how, but I did it. Several times. Obviously, the first time it happened was pure accidental magic, but I was sort of a weird kid. Every time I did accidental magic, I would practice and practice and practice until I could make it happen on purpose. Obviously, I had no idea what an animagus was, when I was a kid, but after hearing your description of them, and doing a lot of reading, I've come to realize that's what I did. I trained myself as one, and I can do it on purpose, whenever I want."

"You've got to be kidding me," Remus choked out, looking utterly disbelieving. "You're only *eleven!*"

Harry gave him an unapologetic shrug. "What can I say? I'm a freak among freaks?"

"You're no freak, Harry. You're incredible! I can't even begin to imagine how... accidentally learning to be an animagus? It's just... It shouldn't be possible! I don't believe it!" he shook his head, incredulously.

"Do you want to see?" Harry asked, giving his best, excited, innocent, child face.

Remus just nodded his head.

Harry closed his eyes, pulled in a slow breath through his nose and then let it out through his slightly parted lips. Suddenly his body began to shrink and morph, and in the blink of an eye, where once stood a young boy, was now a very small, dark black-ish-brown, furry bat, clinging to the stone floor.

Remus choked out a startled sort of noise and stood up. He walked around his desk cautiously, never taking his eyes off the small bat on the floor.

"Merlin's beard, I don't bloody believe it," Remus whispered. "A bat?" he asked after a moment.

The small bat, maneuvered around, extended his wings and then flapping them and taking flight. He flew up and sort of hovered in the air, directly in front of Remus' face. His wings were about 18 inches wide from tip to tip, but his body was only about 6 inches long from head to tail.

His wings were highly articulated, and the thin, flexible membrane covering his joints made for a tremendous amount of control of his flight. He stopped hovering and quickly flew around the room a few times, before clinging to the wall, and scaling up it, as if gravity were not issue at all.

Then he pushed himself off the wall, flew back over to hover in front of the still dumbstruck professor, and flawlessly transformed back into his human form.

"This shouldn't be possible," Remus muttered dizzily.

Harry just shrugged and grinned at him with a rather smug expression on his face. "It's magic," Harry said, as if that were enough to explain everything. And honestly... it was.

—

Harry made Remus promise not to tell anyone about what he could do. Part of Remus had wanted to run to Professor McGonagall and gush in all his intense shock and awe, but Harry was adamant that no one could know. Harry had no intention of registering his animagus form, and didn't want the attention that would no doubt come with being the youngest wizard to ever accomplish the animagus transformation.

That night, Harry slipped out of the Ravenclaw dormitory after telling his dorm mates that he was feeling under the weather, and sealing the hangings on his bed shut with some privacy wards. Then he flew down to the shrieking shack and kept Remus company, all night long.

He'd seen werewolves before, but he'd never personally witnessed the transformation to and from before, so it was actually rather fascinating for him. Thanks to the Wolfsbane potion, Remus retained all of his mental faculties during his transformation, instead of turning into a snarling, bloodthirsty, monster. However, the fact remained that neither could actually

converse with the other while they were both in animal forms. Still, they managed to keep themselves entertained, and come morning light, when Remus transformed back into himself, Harry helped him to the Hospital wing where he left the man in Madam Pomfrey's care, while he made his way back up to the Ravenclaw dormitories to sleep the day away. He didn't give a damn about his classes, and had told the matron that he was sick and had gotten permission to skiv off his classes.

--

Halloween came and went with no apparent fuss. The feast was overdone and had way too many muggle influences as far as Harry was concerned. The following day, he received a letter from Lucius stating that the previous night, his mark had burned slightly, but there had been no summons. He had been in contact with several of the other inner circle members, and a few outer circle members, and all reported the same. A slight burn, but no summons.

Harry's frustration only grew from this news. It was confirmation that Tom was active and up to *something*, but he still had no idea what it was, or how to track the man down. What was even more annoying was that his scar hadn't even reacted to whatever had happened, even though the Marks did.

He tried slipping along the tether that connected he and Tom together, but was once again met with a solid, impenetrable, Occlumency wall.

He replied to Lucius, thanking him for keeping him informed, and then went to stew in the Room of Hidden Things, and continue his work on his copy of the Marauder's map. Not only did he *need* to continue it, but it was a good distraction, and he at least felt like he was doing something productive towards his goals.

He planned to make use of the damned thing to steal the Stone. His version of the map was even more complete than the one his father and his friends had made. For one thing, it included the entrance to the Room of Hidden things on it (although it could not include the room itself, since it was undetectable by the school's wards). His version also included numerous hidden passages and several secret rooms that the Marauder's had failed to discover.

He had also managed to include the room at the end of the third floor corridor, and the string of secret rooms extending from the trap door in the floor. He was only able to map out the general location and size of the rooms, since he had no idea what was in them now, or if anything had been moved or changed in the fifty years since he and Tom had explored the rooms.

The original map created by the Marauder's worked by tapping into the castle's wards. Everyone in the castle was registered and tracked constantly by the wards, from the moment they set foot within the Hogwart's protective wards. Some of the places in the castle, however, were unplotable even by the castle's own wards – the Room of Hidden things was one of them, and the Chamber of Secrets was another. Fortunately, the set of secret rooms leading from the third-floor corridor were *not*.

Harry had managed to link his map into the wards in the same way, and was just about finished with it. He'd managed to subtly question Remus on a few things that had confused him or when he'd hit some road blocks. He could tell that the man had been a little confused by Harry asking some fairly advanced theoretical charms questions, but he'd come to expect Harry to act considerably beyond his age would normally dictate, and had fortunately shrugged it off.

By the first weekend in November, Harry had his map functioning, and he started using it to observe the third-floor corridor and the room leading to the set of secret rooms. Interesting enough, there was a name listed as always being inside the room on the third floor that Harry knew had the trap door in it. Judging by the name, and the fact that the name was *always* in that room, he suspected that the owner of the name wasn't human. The name was 'Fluffy'.

Since his first tea with Hagrid, Harry had dropped by for additional visits twice. Harry already knew from his previous life that Hagrid had a ridiculous tendency to acquire dangerous creatures and keep them as pets. From his additional visits these last two months, he learned that Hagrid's tendency had only grown in the fifty years that had progressed. As a part of his job as grounds keeper, Hagrid was in charge of the Hogwarts stables. He tended to the herd of Thestrals the school kept, as well as assisting the Care of Magical Creatures teacher, Professor Kettleburn, tend to all of the animals used in class.

With this knowledge, Harry figured it was probably safe to assume that Hagrid probably knew *something* about 'Fluffy'. His assumptions were only solidified when, late one Saturday night, he saw a dot labeled 'Hagrid' making his way through the third floor corridor, greeting Professor Flitwick who was currently on guard duty, and then making his way into the room where he was greeted by 'Fluffy'.

Two days later, also late at night after curfew, Hagrid came again, but this time he was accompanied by Professor Sprout, the Herbology teacher. Hagrid went in first and spent a few minutes doing whatever it was he had to do to subdue 'Fluffy'. Then he stepped out, and Harry assumed he was calling Professor Sprout in. She went in, and her dot stopped in the center of the room, right over the trap door and disappeared from the room. The dot labeled 'Pamona Sprout' then reappeared in the room that was directly below. She spent about twenty minutes in there before climbing back out. She and Hagrid left the room and Filch appeared to take up the post of guarding the corridor.

Taking what he'd observed, Harry figured it was safe to assume whatever was in the second room, was some sort of dangerous magical plant.

In all the time that he spent over the next few weeks observing the map, he never saw anyone go any further than that second room, so it was likely that whatever protections existed beyond the first two were self-sustaining and did not require any maintenance. It made sense for the *live* obstacles to be the first two, but Harry highly doubted that they were the *only* protections down there.

—

During the third week of November, when he went into Remus' office after his classes to help the man with his papers and to chat, as he had been doing for months now, he was caught off

guard when he looked upon the man and saw a surprisingly *devastated* expression on the man's face.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, instantly put somewhat on guard by the man's posture and face.

"Ah... Harry... I," Remus hesitated and ran a hand through his slightly graying hair before heaving a very heavy sigh. He picked up a folded letter from his desk and pushed it towards the end nearest Harry. He made his way over, picked it up and sat down in the chair opposite the desk.

Harry's brows rose slowly into his forehead, but he didn't show any other outward reaction on his face.

"So what does this mean, exactly?" Harry asked flatly, not looking up.

"It means that Sirius never got a trial. He was never even *questioned* after being apprehended," Remus said with a heavy sigh as he sank back into his chair looking far older than his years.

"I already told you that he wasn't the secret keeper," Harry said, still not looking up.

Remus nodded his head slowly and kept his eyes lowered. "You did. And... well, the more I've gotten to know you and the things you can do – the things you can remember – I came to believe it more and more, it's just that..."

"At the same time you *didn't* want to believe it," Harry finished for him. "It would mean that Dumbledore let him stay there and rot without a trial. It would also mean that your friend really wasn't guilty of betrayal, but you hadn't once tried to contact him, or fight for him, in a decade."

Remus' face crumpled in despair and he brought his hands up and buried his face in them. "What have I done, Harry?" Remus whispered in a hoarse, broken voice. "I was his *friend*... I should have been there for him! But I just..."

"You trusted Albus Dumbledore. You certainly wouldn't be the first one to blindly follow that man. To believe that you could rely on him to do what was right. What was just. That's his line, right? He's supposed to be the good guy. He's the one with the power, and the high moral ground, and the desire to fight for what is good and right in the world. You allowed yourself to have blind faith in one man. That's your only crime, Remus."

Remus shook his head furiously. "No. Sirius was my friend!"

"And so were my parents. You believed that Sirius had betrayed them. Everything that you knew at the time, *and Albus Dumbledore*, said so. You were hurt and angry. You felt betrayed and you had just lost *everyone*. You lost my parents, you lost Peter, and you lost Sirius, all in one swoop."

"I hadn't lost you..." Remus whispered. "But I didn't fight for you. I should have... I should have at least made sure you were okay. I should have checked on you."

Harry looked away, choosing not to respond right away. "You couldn't have saved me from them, Remus," he finally said in a quiet voice, and he knew that Remus knew exactly who 'them' were. "If you'd tried to 'rescue' me, Dumbledore would have acted against you, just like he acted against Sirius. He probably would have exposed your condition to the public, just to guarantee that you could never legally be allowed near me."

Remus looked up at Harry with an expression that seemed to shift between denial, horror, anger, and fear. Harry knew that Remus didn't want to believe that Albus Dumbledore would do something like that to him, but at the same time, he also probably realized that Albus Dumbledore *probably would* have done just that, if Remus had tried to claim custody of Harry.

"What does he want you for?" Remus finally asked, as his brow furrowed with confusion and anger. "What could be so important that he thinks it's okay to destroy people's lives? You're life. Sirius' life..." Remus shook his head, and his expression was slowly shifting back to the devastated look that had covered it before.

Harry paused, going over in his mind what possible scenarios might unfold if he told Remus what he knew about the Prophecy. What gains he could get out of it, if he played his cards right, and what could possibly go wrong if things didn't go smoothly. He decided that the risks were definitely there, but the possible benefits made the option viable.

"Remus... did my parents ever tell you why we had to go into hiding?" Harry asked.

Remus looked up at Harry and frowned slightly before shaking his head. "Not... exactly. They said that You-Know-Who was after them... well... *you*. That, for *some reason*, he wanted you dead."

Harry nodded his head, looking thoughtful. "You know how I can remember things, even from when I was a baby?" Harry asked, rhetorically and Remus nodded his head. "Well, obviously none of this stuff made sense to me then, but I can look back at those memories now that I have all this knowledge about our world and magic and people, and I can put the things I heard back then into context. If I go back and re-examine my memories, they *mean* something now, where before, it was just nonsense."

Remus' eyes flashed a bit with understanding. He no doubt had wondered about this, and Harry's explanation finally made some things seem a bit more logical and plausible.

Harry continued, "It's like the Peter being the secret keeper thing – obviously I didn't understand what any of that meant back then. Dumbledore casting it; Sirius being a decoy; the '*fidelius charm*'. None of that *meant* anything when I was a child, but I still remember it. And now, when I look at those memories, they mean something. Well, there was another thing that I overheard when I was a baby..."

Remus sat forward on his chair, looking at Harry with anxiety and trepidation all over his face.

"There was a prophecy," Harry said in a low voice. "Some seer made a prophecy and Dumbledore heard it. Apparently one of the Da... one of Voldemort's followers heard it too, and told him, because Voldemort knew what the prophecy said to... or maybe he only knew what a portion of it said. I'm not really sure. Anyway, I never actually overheard my parents say the entire prophecy in my presence... I think they were trying to avoid talking about it around me when they knew I was awake because they didn't want the stress they were under to be too obvious to me... which is ridiculous, because I could tell that something was wrong, even then..." Harry sighed and rolled his eyes slightly before refocusing. "But I did hear the first few lines. Apparently the first line says 'the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches.' The next two basically give clues as to who this 'one' is, and both Dumbledore and Voldemort agreed that those clues pointed right to me and my parents."

Remus' face was slackened with shock. But then he frowned and shook his head as if he were internally arguing with himself. "But that doesn't explain why he's still trying to control your life like this! You already 'vanquished' You-Know-Who! He's gone! Why not leave you in peace? Why leave you with those horrible people? Why leave Sirius to rot without a trial and with a soiled name?"

"That's just it, Remus. Voldemort isn't gone. He's going to come back, and Dumbledore knows it. He needs me under his control so that he can *properly prepare* me to fulfill this stupid ridiculous prophecy when Voldemort makes his return. I don't know exactly how or why he thought leaving me with abusive muggles would help him in that department, except that maybe he expected them to beat me into submission. To *break* me, so that when I came back here, I would be more malleable or something. I don't know. It seems incredibly illogical to me, but I've come to realize that using logic in regards to Albus Dumbledore is a pointless affair. Also, I'm sure that he wasn't expecting me to be anything like I am. I'm sure the fact that I actually *remember* all of these things is far outside any of his plans, and I worry what he'll do to try and recover from his mistakes when he realizes that I know what he's done."

Harry huffed and pushed some loose hair strands that had escaped from his low pony-tail, back behind his ear. "As for why he would leave Sirius to rot without a trial... you know, I've actually been thinking about that a lot lately and it's got me wondering... basically, if Sirius had gotten a trial and they'd actually put him under veritaserum, they could have realized that he didn't betray my parents and that he wasn't a Death Eater, but he still would have ended up in Azkaban because of the murders of Pettigrew and those muggles – right?"

Remus nodded his head slowly.

"In that scenario, I still would have been under Dumbledore's control because my godfather still would have ended up in prison. *What if*, getting a trial would have shown something bigger? What if Sirius is completely *innocent*? What if he didn't kill *anyone*? A trial would have shown that, and he would have gone free. The only motive that Dumbledore has for making sure that Sirius never got a trial, is if Sirius was *innocent*. *Totally and completely innocent*. And Dumbledore *knew it*."

Harry suspected that if Remus' eyes had gotten any wider in that moment, his eyeballs would have fallen right out of his skull. Remus started to shaking his head slowly side to side as if

he were trying to deny the potential truth behind the words, but Harry could see the cogs turning behind the man's yellow-gold eyes and knew that the man couldn't really deny it.

Harry and Remus spoke for a while longer after that, quietly trying to decide what to do with their revelations. Harry hadn't been entirely convinced that trying to get Sirius out of Azkaban would legitimately benefit him in the long run, except to potentially have another adult ally. The magical guardian issue was likely to eventually rear its head in a negative way, though, so there was a potential value in exploring this avenue. Remus was on his side, but the man had no legal standing to stand up for Harry if anything should go wrong. And the fact that Remus was a *werewolf* only left his standing that much more shaky and unreliable.

Harry also realized that Remus *needed* to try exploring some options to free his old friend. So in the end, Harry decided, internally, that he *would* try to get Sirius Black's name cleared. But he would have to be careful how he did it. He emphasized to Remus how desperately imperative it was that Dumbledore not start to have any suspicions about Harry; his behavior, his intelligence, and especially, about what he was doing in regards to Sirius, until it was at a point where it would be too late for Dumbledore to do anything about it.

It had only taken two months, but Harry was satisfied in how easily he had totally crushed Remus' unwavering faith in Albus Dumbledore. He was positive that the man was far more loyal to him, than the old man, and he hadn't even had to lie much at all to gain Remus' trust. He had obviously left out a lot, and twisted a number of other things around, but generally speaking, he'd only told Remus variations on the truth. And that had been more than enough.

Harry decided that he would try and contact someone with a lot of power and influence in the Ministry and see if he could get something started in regards to Sirius' case, while keeping it all as quiet as possible. Initially, he thought that he might try contacting Lucius and getting a name of any Death Eaters who had managed to get themselves into a powerful position in the Ministry, but he instantly tossed that option aside. He couldn't risk an actual Death Eater being associated with trying to clear Sirius' name, since they were trying to prove that Sirius *wasn't a Death Eater*.

Remus' suggestion was that Harry should try contacting Amelia Bones. She had been friends with Sirius and Harry's dad – they were all Aurors together, and now Bones was the Head of the DMLE at the Ministry. Remus said that she was a good woman. Trustworthy, and strong willed. In addition, she was a strong proponent of making sure that Justice was served.

Harry said he would consider it, but actually had another alternative in mind. His mind was brewing up a scheme, and while it was potentially risky, he was fairly sure that he could make it work. He didn't explain any of it to Remus, and the man hadn't exactly liked that, but Harry had insisted that he needed to work through his ideas more before he shared them.

Rebirth Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: 14 page chapter. I've got writers block on Breeding Darkness right now, which is why I'm making so much progress on this one. lol... No worries though, I just don't want to force myself to write on BD and end up with a chapter of crap. I'll get back into it in another week or so at the most. So instead, you get more of Rebirth. Enjoy.

----- Rebirth Chapter 16 -----

A few days later was another full moon and Harry, once again, joined Remus for the night in the shrieking shack, in his animagus form. The following morning, which was fortunately a Sunday, the two sat talking quietly in the hospital wing with a small privacy ward around them. Remus had asked Harry more about his form, since the man found the whole animagus thing rather fascinating. The most widely accepted theory behind an animagus' form was that the animal you were able to assume the form of was somehow representative of you as a person.

When people took the animagus potion and experienced the vision of being in their animal form, not everyone was able to instantly know exactly what they were. They would be seeing through their eyes as their form, and wouldn't necessarily be in any sort of position to see themselves. So many animagus texts spent a good portion of the start of the book going over animal symbolism to help the wizard try and figure out just what sort of animal they were. It was necessary, after all, to know *what you were*, in order to change into that thing.

Harry himself had taken a bit of time to figure out exactly what sort of bat he was. In the end, he had determined that he was a 'Greater Noctule Bat'; the largest bat that was actually native to the United Kingdom. But it wasn't any symbolism books on animagi that had helped him to finally make this determination; it was a muggle book on bats.

The foundation behind the idea that the symbolism descriptions would be helpful was that you would already have the gist from the visions – as in, 'I was some sort of feline, I think?', or 'I was able to fly and had feathers and talons.' From there you would look at the cats, or the birds, and see which one's symbolism fit you.

Heri and Tom had both scoffed at that portion, since it was all relative and up to interpretation, anyway. And yet, despite this, Harry couldn't help but find it amusing that in the magical world the bat was most widely seen as symbolic of rebirth. He had to admit, that it was fitting. Just the same, no matter what animal he might have possibly ended up being able to turn into, he would have likely been able to find *something* in its 'symbolic description' that could fit him.

There was also the fact that each and every culture had different descriptions for every animal. Some shared similarities, but many were different. To most orientals, bats were seen as good luck and bringers of peace and happiness. That one made Harry snort. To the Japanese, the bat symbolized chaos and unrest... that one generally made him smirk. The Finish believed that bats were the form the soul took when people's bodies were asleep. Many alchemists, a thousand years ago, had believed that bats were in some way related to dragons... which Harry *really* didn't get, aside from the webbed wings part. And of course the many popular notions that bats were symbolic of desolation, the Underworld, hypocrisy, melancholy, revenge, or wisdom... *wisdom? Really? Talk about a one-eighty from all the death and decay.* Every time Harry read about all the different symbolism theory behind animal forms, it really only served to amuse him.

In the end, Harry honestly doubted that what animal a person turned into had much significant meaning at all, aside from whatever significance you gave it yourself.

But he knew that no matter what, he would *always* be amused by what Tom's form turned out to be. It was certainly not something that he or the other wizard had honestly expected. Harry knew for a fact that when Tom had first realized exactly what his form was, he had honestly considered not even trying to achieve the transformation at all. But it was a challenge and he was set on proving that he could and *would* do it. Especially since Heri had every intention of pursuing his own form. Tom's pride was at stake and he wasn't about to let Heri accomplish a magical challenge without him.

Just the same, even after Tom had succeeded, he almost *never* actually assumed his form. He claimed that he saw very little value in it, even though Heri had thought it had *a lot* of potential value. He knew that the real reason Tom refused to take on his animagus for was because of one simple fact.

Heri had told him that he was cute, and Tom simply could not abide by such a thing.

Heri's form at least had all the stigma of desolation, death, rebirth, and all that. Tom's form didn't *exactly* have that sort of stigma among wizards. Harry had been quick to point out that many cultures *did* actually consider Tom's form a bad omen. It was believed that seeing one was bad luck. They were associated with *devils and demons*. However, it was mostly *muggles* that saw his form in that way. Among wizarding kind, his form was incredibly *common*, and even quite well liked. It was, in fact, the most *common* magical pet, outside of owning an owl. That was actually why Heri had thought it had a lot of potential value. There were just *so many* of them, that it would be easy to go about unnoticed in his form.

Tom's form was a small, black, *cat*. The only thing about him in his animal form that stood out as unusual, was that his eyes were blood red. Other than that, he looked like any other pet

cat. Short, midnight black, hair; a long tail, a very common cat face. But he was also relatively small for a cat. Not kitten-small, but a small-ish adult cat, just the same.

For a *very* long time, after Tom had achieved his transformation successfully, Heri had taken to calling him Tomcat in private. He'd even played with the pet name of referring to the other man as 'kitten' from time to time in bed, and *boy* had that pissed the man off!

Thinking back on that time still brought a smile to Harry's face and a small snicker to his lips.

And then he would sigh, and slip back into a self-imposed moody stupor and he wondered for the millionth time, where the hell Tom was, and when he would find the man again. Sometimes, when he was feeling especially melancholy, he would wonder *if* he would find the man again.

But he would quickly shove that thought away. He knew that Tom was still alive, and as long as Tom lived, he would eventually come out into the public eye again. Tom was far too ambitious to disappear and live a quiet life somewhere.

He *would* come back. Harry *had* to believe that.

And so he stayed focused on the things that he *could* do at that moment, instead of stewing over the things that lay beyond his sphere of control.

For the last month, he had been observing and recording the precise comings and goings of professors and staff to the third floor corridor. They had a set schedule and it was all obscenely predictable – which was nice. Hagrid came at the same time every week to feed whatever was in the first room. Hagrid *and* Professor Sprout came the same time three days later, every week so that Professor Sprout could do whatever maintenance was necessary on the plant in the second chamber.

Harry did not think it would be wise to make a move on the Stone this early in the year, but he didn't want to go in there blind at the last minute either. He wanted to know what the beast was, exactly, and what it was the Hagrid did to disable it. He also wanted to know what plant it was, so he could come prepared later.

It was the last night of November – a Friday – and Harry had decided to make a move towards these two goals. It was the day that Hagrid and Sprout would be going into the room at the end of the third floor for their maintenance. Harry chose an empty classroom on the fourth floor, conjured a mirror on the wall, and created a disillusionment area effect circle. He quickly transformed into his noctule bat form and flew into the circle before it dissolved away. As soon as he had entered the circle, the spell took hold of him, and he felt the familiar sensation of having an egg cracked over his head.

He flew over to the mirror and saw only the faintest shimmer of distorted light as he flapped his wings, but nothing else. For all intents and purposes, he was invisible. If someone was looking straight at him, they might be able to tell that *something* was there, but chances were slim that they would ever guess what he was.

Since he was so small, the disillusionment spell would last even longer than it would on a full-sized human, so he knew he had several hours before he had anything to worry about. And even if it wore off, he was a *bat*, inside an ancient magical *castle*. It really wasn't that rare. Hogwarts had anti-pest charms all over it, but many of them were old, failing, or had gaps in them. When you had as many students with pets as Hogwarts had, pests, vermin, and escaped pets were inevitable and unavoidable. There were *always* rats, toads, insects that were there to *feed* the rats and toads, cats, various kinds of birds, small non-poisonous snakes, oh... and *bats*, all over the castle, all the time. It was one of the most convenient things about his form; flight, and the ability to blend into the background.

He flew out the door that he'd left partially open for his own convenience and made his way to the third floor corridor. He flew all the way down to the end, and perched himself on a stone gargoyle not far from the door at the end. There he sat and waited patiently for Hagrid and Sprout to make their appearance.

It took about twenty minutes for them to show up with Filch in tow, muttering and grumbling under his breath, like he always did. He unlocked the door with a key, which made Harry internally snort. Even professor Sprout looked a little impatient as the man fumbled with the ring of keys he carried with him. No doubt, she wanted to simply pull out her wand and cast an *alohomora* and do it the quick and easy way, but didn't for fear of angering the stupid worthless squib. Then Hagrid shuffled a large sack of his shoulder and pulled a small flute out of his pocket to make sure he had it and then slid it back in.

Harry flew over and clung to the rough stone wall just above the door and slowly climbed down to the outer door frame. Hagrid pushed the door open, ducked, and shuffled his way through the doorway. Harry quickly followed, climbing up onto the stone wall above the doorway, only now he was *inside*.

He twisted his body and head and got his first look at 'Fluffy' and nearly fell off the wall with his shock.

It was a bloody *Cerberus*! An enormous, monstrous, *three-headed dog-beast*! It was chained to the opposite wall, and unable to actually get to Hagrid, but it had full range of motion around the trap door, and could no-doubt rip anything that got too close to shreds.

Hagrid was cooing at the snarling monstrous beast as if it were some sort of cute little puppy as he fumbled with the bag and began to pull out large slabs of meat. The three heads were apparently each picky in different ways because one head got a huge chunk of boar, another one got what Harry assumed was a sizable portion of a cow, while the third was apparently partial to turkey.

Being fed was obviously not the way to calm the beast down because it seemed to be in a near frenzied state after that. Harry knew from his time observing the map that Hagrid tended to take about fifteen minutes before Sprout was directed to come in, so Harry sat back and waited patiently. Finally all the meat was gone and nothing but bones were left. The three-headed beast returned its full attention to Hagrid and the snarling and growling resumed in full force. It was at that point that Hagrid brought the small wooden flute out of his pocket again and up to his lips. He began to whistle out a tune that was clearly intended to be some sort of lullaby.

Shockingly enough, the beast's eyes began to droop and within a minute, it was sound asleep on the floor beside the trap door.

So music soothes the savage beast. Harry snorted internally. He flew down silently to land on the floor beside the door and slowly made his way across the floor and came to a cautious stop next to the trap door, keeping his attention split between Hagrid and the enormous beast that was snoring just a few feet away.

Hagrid was still playing the little flute but stepped back to the door and tapped it with his foot before standing aside. The door slowly opened and Professor Sprout poked her head through, looking around alertly. She came in, closed the door behind her and used her wand to levitate the heavy wooden trap door open. Harry quickly slipped inside, but took to hovering almost instantly and stayed just beside the opening of the door. Sprout used her wand to create a bright ball of magical blue flame and lowered it down the hole. She then used a higher level levitation charm to lower herself down the trap door and safely onto the floor, about fifteen feet below.

But Harry realized that what she landed on, almost couldn't qualify as 'floor'. It was an enormous mass of soft springy tendrils and vines that were wriggling along the floor and trying to wriggle their way away from Professor Sprout and her bluebell flame.

Harry grinned internally as he realized what it was. Devil's Snare. How simple.

Harry flew around the room to get a better viewing angle and Professor Sprout began to tend to the plant. He realized that she never actually canceled her levitation charm, nor did she actually land on the plants. Where ever she was hovering above, the vines were trying to get away from her feet and Harry realized that as they parted he could see an opening beneath them.

A swoop around the room and Harry came to the conclusion that there were no doors on any of the walls, so it was most likely that the only way out was through the plant. His Black Sight didn't work particularly well as a bat, but it was still there to some extent. In compensation for his lessened magical sight, however, he gained a rather powerful sense of echo location. He was hesitant to use it since it required making some noise, but Professor Sprout seemed rather lost in her work, and the plants were making quite a bit of writhing noises of their own, so he decided to chance it.

He sent out some waves of high pitched sound and bounced it off the mass of vines directly beneath the Professor. As he suspected, he could tell that some of the sound passed straight through to another chamber below them.

Harry hesitated, debating with himself how idiotic he would be if he pressed on. Sprout's tending to the plants always took about a half hour and it had only been about two minutes, so if he was quick, he could scout out the next room.

Resolved to at least try, he swooped down and dived through the mass of vines that were trying to escape the witch's magical blue-bell flame and found himself in a downward sloping passage. About twenty feet of passage continued on before the passage opened up into a large

chamber *filled* with tiny flying objects, soaring and flitting all around the ceiling. On the far end of the chamber was a large wooden door.

Harry flew through the room, narrowly avoiding several of the flying objects as they nearly ran into him. As they got closer, he realized that they were charmed keys with tiny little wings. He eyed them curiously for a moment but decided to press on to the door first.

He got there and landed on the floor in front of it. He hesitated for a split second, knowing that if he shifted back into his human form it would cancel his disillusionment spell. Coming to the conclusion that he could simply cast another one on himself, he shifted back into his human form to find himself sitting on the cold stone floor, blinking owlishly as he regained his equilibrium.

After a moment to sort his bearings out, he stood up and looked the door over. His Black Sight told him it was locked with an extremely powerful locking charm – one that could only be unlocked with the proper key spell. He pulled out his wand and cast several detection and revealing charms to see what other spells and alarms might be cast upon the door.

There were several rather powerful spells on it that he would have to work around before he dared mess with it. One was obviously an alarm that would alert the caster – undoubtedly Dumbledore – the moment the door was opened, whether one used the appropriate key spell or not. He made mental note of the magical signature of all the spells so he could spend some time figuring out exactly how to dismantle them without setting them off and then turned his attention to the mass of flying keys.

He smirked and chuckled inwardly as his Black Sight set one of the keys alight with a bright purple glow, while all the others simply shimmered blue. That key was charmed to unlock the door, it was obvious.

A glanced around the room and Harry sat that there were several brooms lined up along the wall. He blinked at them with dumbfounded shock and confusion. What the holy hell was the point of putting *those* there? Obviously, flying and trying to catch the key by hand was one valid option, but only an idiot who didn't know any better spells would sink to such an option, and *why the hell* would they provide any options that would make it easier to catch the key and open the door? It was like they were trying to *help* whoever it was who came to steal the damn stone. *What the hell?*

At that thought Harry frowned deeply. Another thought struck him and he realized that Professor Sprout had actually been discussing Devil's Snare only two weeks prior in his first year Herbology class. She had *told them* exactly how to deal with it. Fire.

The dog was obviously the only legitimate threat so far... that and the fact that opening the door would set off an alarm.

What kind of ridiculous 'protections' were these? What was Dumbledore playing at?

Harry shook his head, deciding that he would need to ponder on this further, and do some more digging. He made a sweep of the room, checking for any magical detection spells and was glad to find none. He cast another circle of disillusionment, transformed back into his bat

animagus form, and flew into the circle to activate the spell on himself. It dissolved from the floor and he flew back out of the chamber, up the hallway, and managed to dart up through a small gap in the Devil's Snare underneath a still-levitating Professor Sprout. He flew right up through the still open trap door and clung to the wall above the door to the room. Hagrid was still in there, still playing his flute.

About eight minutes later Sprout came back up, they closed the trap door, and left the room with Harry flying directly behind them.

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The next day was a Saturday, and it was also the day that Ravenclaw's Quidditch team had to play against Hufflepuff. By this time, all of Harry's dorm mates were more than aware that Harry didn't give a damn about Quidditch, so they weren't the least bit surprised when he expressed no interest in going to the game.

Once everyone had left and his dorm room was properly empty Harry decided to *finally* make a move on his goal to visit the Chamber of Secrets. Having had such success with using his animagus form to get into the third-floor passage so easy, he decided to go with that again this time. He opened one of the windows a bit, transformed, and flew out.

He soared around Ravenclaw tower, reveling in the glorious feeling of the wind in his wings and the absolute exhilaration of flight. He realized that with his new intuitive skill in broom flight, his ability and agility with winged flight was also improved. His instincts with the wind and the air currents transferred over, and he found he enjoyed his bat flight even more now than he had in his previous life.

Finally, he forced himself back on task and flew down until he spotted an open window on the second floor that he knew would be fairly close to the girls bathroom there. He flew into the open, empty room, and right out into the hallway, grateful for his luck, that the door to the room had been open. He flew down the corridor, not once even coming across a single person, and finally came up to the bathroom that he and Tom had ventured into so many times in their youth.

Sure that no one was around to witness it, and that any portrait paintings near by were asleep, he transformed back into his human form and quickly pushed the door open and slipped inside. He wasn't worried about there being anyone in there since he'd come to learn over the last couple months that the bathroom was never used anymore. Apparently the stupid, unfortunate, mudblood that Tom had killed all those years ago had taken to actually *haunting* the damn loo as a ghost.

Harry turned and looked around the bathroom with hesitant trepidation. He *really* didn't want to have a run in with Myrtle's ghost if he could help it. A tense moment passed before he had scanned over the whole room with his Sight and determined that there was no ghost in there. He sighed and finally took in his surroundings more.

The bathroom was in considerable disrepair, in comparison to the last time he had seen it. It's wooden cubicles were worn and ill-maintained. Even the stone sinks were chipped and grimy. Said sinks formed a row along one wall under a large cracked and spotted mirror. Harry

walked over to the sinks and his eyes landed immediately on the one that he knew hid the entrance to the Chamber.

He bent down and saw a tiny snake was scratched into the copper tap and focused on that image before speaking in a quiet, hissing voice, '*Open*'.

The word successfully came out in parseltongue because the sink suddenly began to drop down out of sight to expose a large pipe leading down into darkness. Harry knelt down and hissed '*Stairs*' into the darkness, causing the smooth pipe to transfigure into a long, steep set of stairs. Harry cast *lumos* with his wand and used it to illuminate the way as he quickly began to climb down the stairs. As soon as his head was clear of the top, he hissed '*Close*' and the sink slid back into place, blotting out all light from the tunnel, except for the glowing light on the tip of his wand.

Harry had ended up spending several hours in the Chamber's library. It was nostalgic in a way that even being back at Hogwarts hadn't been. The Chamber was something that he had only ever shared with Tom. It had been *theirs* and theirs alone. Some of Tom's things were even still down there. Nothing terribly important, but some notes were scattered about, along with some quills. An essay that Tom had started and then stopped half-way through, and left there. He had probably rewritten it on another sheet of parchment since this one appeared to have a large blot of ink staining the bottom.

Harry had run his fingers reverently over the old, dusty, piece of parchment, feeling sick with loneliness as his eyes trailed over Tom's familiar elegant scrawl.

For obvious reasons, Harry did not approach the basilisk in any way. He was no doubt it was in a magical slumber at the moment, and Harry had no reason, and absolutely *no desire* to wake the beast. It could continue to sleep for another thousand years for all he cared. The library, and the books within it, were all that Harry cared about.

The temptation was *significant* to take some of the books out with him so he could read them elsewhere and yet he was hesitant to get caught with anything written in parseltongue. In the end, he decided it was worth the risk and that he would just have to be smart and cautious. Plus, he knew that he'd be taking and *keeping* quite a few of the books. Tom had always regretted not having more opportunities to make off with some of his ancestor's library. As far as he was concerned, they were his by inheritance, and he had every right to keep them, but after the fiasco with Myrtle, Dumbledore's watch on the bathroom where the girl had died had been so strict and constant that they'd had a very hard time getting back down there at all, let alone enough to start hauling up books.

Harry sifted through the books and found it incredibly difficult to narrow down his selection to just a few since they all looked so damned fascinating. He had *dreamed* about being able to read these books, but had accepted that it would never happen... and now it had.

Once he knew his time was running out and he was preparing to leave, he put the books he had chosen into a small knapsack and then cast a shrinking charm on the knapsack and slipped it into his pocket. He left the library and made his way back out, down the tunnel to the stairway-pipe.

Deciding that climbing all those stairs would be incredibly annoying – he remembered it *vividly* from his youth – he decided to try *flying* up and transformed back into his bat form. Once he'd reached the top, he transformed back, re-opened the entrance with a hissed '*open*' and left. He was relieved to see that Myrtle was still missing in action, and wondered how long he could successfully continue to dodge that bullet. He propped one of the windows to the bathroom open and cast a spell to prevent it from being shut along with a small charm that would prevent too much wind, rain, or snow from getting in and potentially drawing someone's attention to the open window. He transformed back into his bat form, flew out and made his way directly up to the Ravenclaw Tower and into his dorm room.

The window was still open and the room still empty. In the end, he decided that his little trip had worked out incredibly well and decided to repeat it as often as he could manage without drawing attention to himself.

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As the end of term drew near, Harry had to decide what he was going to do for the winter break. Draco invited him to come and visit him for the three weeks they had off from school, but Harry knew he had to decline. While it was apparent that Dumbledore was willing to sit back and watch Harry develop a friendship with the Malfoy heir, Harry knew that Dumbledore would never remain silent if he thought there was a chance that Harry would be spending significant time in a Death Eater's home.

Although, Harry did think that arranging such an event would force Dumbledore to personally confront Harry in order to put a stop to such an arrangement. If Dumbledore came to him with objects to Harry visiting the Malfoys, Harry would have an opportunity to ask him *why*. To personally *question* Dumbledore, and ask him *why* he didn't want Harry to visit the Malfoys. He would be interested to see what sort of excuses Dumbledore would give him.

Despite the curiosity of all this, Harry knew it would not be the best idea. He would be too tempted to go on the offensive, and that would put Dumbledore on his guard, far too early.

And so, Harry put his name down on the list of students who would be staying over the winter holidays. He could have just 'gone home to the Dursley's', and then spent his winter break back at Godric's Hollow, but willing going home to the Dursleys would be highly odd to several people since Harry had made it no secret that he did not have a positive home life. He didn't *usually* go out of his way to flaunt it unless he had a specific goal in mind, but he didn't hide it either.

It wasn't like he was *ashamed*, as he had been in his youth. Back then he had been ashamed of the fact that the weak, pathetic muggles at the orphanage had been able to wield such power of he and Tom. Disgusted with his own weakness, and his lack of ability to fight off his abusers. Now he knew damn well that none of his treatment at the hands of the Dursley's during his first five years there was something that he should feel the need to hide. It certainly wasn't *his* fault, it was *Dumbledore's* fault.

One day, during the tail end of his Transfiguration class while everyone had been practicing some simple transfigurations after an hour long lecture, that a group of muggleborns had gathered towards the back and having a potentially interesting conversation. One of them had

recently learned of some political issue from an older muggleborn in Ravenclaw, and was now sharing it with the others. Apparently Lisa Turpin had recently been reading up on some of the history of wizard-muggle relations, and the prejudices that propagated in wizarding society in regards to muggle inferiority. The older muggleborn had noticed this and shared some current-events with the girl that she thought seemed related.

Harry noted that McGonagall was hovering to the side, watching with a bit of anxiety on her face. It was a tender subject, and there were a few purebloods in the class who were also discreetly listening in, who were clearly wary of the topic the muggleborns were discussing quietly.

However, all those involved had already successfully completed their assignment, so at the moment, McGonagall had no excuse for ending their discussion.

Apparently there was some legislation currently in the works in regard to identifying magical children at an earlier age than was currently standard. As things currently worked, a child was identified around age ten, just before they would receive their Hogwarts acceptance letter. The old spells for identifying magic in children only worked once the magical core had finally begun to stabilize – which happened around ten. However some new spells had been developed in recent years that could identify a child with magical potential at the first incident of accidental magic.

Harry had to admit that he had not heard such an advancement had been made, and was intrigued.

The group of muggleborns – made up of Ravenclaws Kevin Entwhistle, Lisa Turpin, and Hermione Granger, and two Hufflepuffs, Justin Finch-Fletchly and Addison Reid, were mostly talking about how nice it would have been to have known what they were at a younger age. To have had someone come, when they were much younger, and explain about magic, so that their bursts of accidental magic wouldn't have been so scary or confusing.

As they were talking, they were suddenly interrupted by Susan Bones – a Hufflepuff. "Yes, but you *do* realize that there are those in the Ministry that would want to use this legislature to take muggleborn children from their families – right?"

The five muggleborns turned and looked at her with varying degrees of confusion, and shock.

"What do you mean by that?" Addison Reid asked.

"Well, there are many who don't like that muggleborn are growing up in the muggle world and bringing in your traditions to our world once you come in for your magical education. They would want you all raised by magical families instead." Bones said.

"But they couldn't do that!" Lisa Turpin exclaimed.

"That's not the worst part," said Ernie MacMillan, eagerly jumping into the conversation as well. "There are some that say that Dark wizards would make use of the spell to find young muggleborn children and then kill them, or put magical blocks on them when they're still

really young so that their magical core could never develop far enough to become a full-fledged witch or wizard!"

"That's just stupid paranoid conspiracy nonsense!" exclaimed Casandra Moon. "No one would do that! Besides, the spell to identify muggleborns at the first sign of accidental magic is controlled by the Ministry. Not just *any* Dark wizard could do it."

"And you just trust the Ministry with something like that?" MacMillan responded haughtily and folded his arms over his chest.

Moon responded by rolling her eyes and turning away from MacMillan as if he weren't worth her time.

"What were you saying about children being taken from their homes?" Granger asked Bones, now that the other two seemed to be finished with their interruption.

"Oh, well there are those that thing that once a child with the potential for magic is discovered that they should be removed from the muggle world and put into a magical family home instead. That a magical foster system should be put in place to take in children. But there are others that don't like the idea of approaching them at all, because not all children who may be identified at an early age are guaranteed to have full magical potential. So if we approach them when they're still really young and tell them and their family about the magical world, and then they end up not turning out to be a witch or wizard, we've just exposed our world that much more for absolutely nothing." Bones explained.

Granger and the other muggleborns frowned and looked thoughtful. Harry opted to join in the conversation at this point, seeing it for a potential opportunity – especially since McGonagall was listening in so intently.

"I still think they should do it," Harry said, not looking up from the book he had on the desk directly in front of him. The others looked over at him with slight surprise since it didn't look like he'd been listening to their conversation.

"What exactly do you think they should do?" Granger asked.

"All of it, really..." he said absently before closing his book at looking up at them all. "I think they should identify children as early as possible, and that there should be home visits. Inspections to make sure that nothing bad is happening to the children in response to them being magical in a muggle home. And if they're being mistreated, then they should be taken from the muggles and placed in a magical foster home with an approved family."

"Why would you think they'd be mistreated?" Turpin asked, looking confused.

Harry shrugged. "Fear. It's human nature to fear something you don't understand, and muggles don't understand magic. It's outside their sphere of what's reasonable and what's not. Muggles could easily see accidental magic as 'devils' work'. I heard of a boy once who was raised by muggles who forced him through an exorcism because they were so scared and confused by what he was able to do. They were scared of him, and so they hurt him. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to violence." Harry smirked and rolled his eyes

at himself for using a bloody Star Wars quote. He'd spent far too damn much time with muggles during the last decade of his life.

Kevin Entwistle apparently caught the quote because he snickered.

"They put him through an exorcism?" Granger asked, looking appalled.

Harry nodded. "A proper home visit could have caught it. I know I wish someone had come and checked on me."

"But you're not muggleborn," Bones said.

"No, but I was raised by muggles. After my parents died, I was dumped on my muggle aunt and her muggle husband's doorstep. They actually knew about magic, and hey they were still afraid of me. They hated me with a fiery passion. They hated my 'unnaturalness' and my 'freakishness'. My uncle thought that if he tried hard enough, that maybe he could 'beat the freakishness out of me'. By the time I was five, he'd dislocated my shoulder several times, fractured the bones in my forearms, probably cracked a couple ribs, and given me several concussions. I certainly would have appreciated a Ministry official showing up on our doorstep to put a stop to it. To take me away from those people. But no one ever came."

Several gasped and Harry noticed quite a few of the other students that had been pretending not to listen, suddenly looked up at him with widened eyes. Harry pretended not to notice them, or the look of angry fury that was quickly glowing in Professor McGonagall's eyes.

"Your aunt let him do that?" MacMillan replied appalled. "But she's your blood relative, right? How could she let that happen?"

Harry scoffed bitterly. "She hated me just as much, if not more, than her husband did. She hated my mum. Hated that my mum was magic and she wasn't. She was bitter and angry, and even more angry that she'd gotten landed with me after my parents died. Muggles aren't like witches and wizards. You almost never heard of a wizard family who abuses their own. Family and blood lineage is everything. Your heirs are so important that the idea of causing them physical harm is just beyond our culture. But it's not like that with muggles. Besides, my uncle didn't see me as his blood. He just saw me as a freak. But we're getting off track. I mean, the point is muggleborns and their family right? I'm curious..." Harry paused and turned his body so that he was completely facing the group of muggleborns. "Tell me, have any of you had any negative reactions from your family members in regards to your magic? Both before you found out about the wizarding world, as well as after?"

Several of them looked thoughtful. Turpin was the first to speak.

"My... my cousins – they don't know about the wizarding world because we were told that we couldn't tell any extended family... just me, my parents, and my younger sister know – but when I was younger and I did some accidental magic in front of my cousins they were... they were really scared. Called me lots of names, and every time they came over to visit, the oldest one – Joshua who's four years older than me – he would... well he'd usually throw rocks at me or... yeah..." her voice trailed off and she ducked her head.

Granger was frowning and looking away as she chewed on her lower lip. Kevin Entwhistle had an unreadable expression for a moment before he spoke up. "My mum and dad got a divorce when I was little. I live with my mum and step-dad most of the time now and they're both great about the whole wizard thing but my dad, who I see during some holidays... he got real angry when my mom told him. He kind of trashed our living room and threw a right fit. He said some things... well, it wasn't pretty. In the end, someone from the Ministry said that it was necessary that he be oh-obl..."

"Obliviated?" Harry offered.

Kevin nodded. "Yeah, that. They made him forget. Said he couldn't handle the truth and that we shouldn't try telling him again."

Harry nodded. "So even with blood family, the chance will always remain that the whole magical thing won't be taken very well. That's why I think that home visits should be set up. An observation system or something. Just to make sure that they aren't getting beaten or abused because their family thinks that they're freaks." Harry shrugged and turned back forward in his desk. "Just my opinion, anyway."

Discussion was quiet for a few moments before it picked back up again. Harry could tell that quite a few of his classmates had been given some things to think about, but more than anything else, he could tell that McGonagall was just barely containing her raging fury until the end of class.

Harry distinctly remembered the adamant warnings that McGonagall had given to Dumbledore about the Dursley's being the 'worst sort of muggles' that night they left him on their doorstep. Despite the woman's hard exterior, he could tell from the soft glances she sent his way, and the small, proud, smiles she gave him during lessons that he had succeeded at making the woman quite fond of him. Several murmured comments about his 'father's skill in transfiguration', and his 'mother's cleverness' had also caught his notice. He knew that the woman would hold Dumbledore accountable for his choices regarding Harry having been placed with abusive muggles and never being checked on.

His assumptions were proven correct the very next day. Clearly, McGonagall hadn't wasted any time in confronting Dumbledore with what she had overheard, because the following day while Harry was walking down the hallway with Draco, they walked past Dumbledore and just as Harry and the Headmaster were facing each other from only a few feet away, Harry felt a compulsion enter his mind. Harry's Sight told him that Dumbledore's wand was in his hand, but discreetly hidden by his long sleeve of his robe hanging down low, but the fact that the man had cast the spell so easily and without it being at all obvious to anyone in the crowded hall, was a true testament to the man's skill.

Harry managed to keep walking without reacting in any way; giving no sign that he had noticed anything had happened. All the while, he put up walls around the compulsion so that he could examine it later before it had a chance to dissipate in the emptiness of his physical conscious mind.

Once they were completely clear of Dumbledore, Harry suddenly claimed to have forgotten something in his dorm and split off from the Slytherins. He quickly made his way to

Ravenclaw tower and sequestered himself up in the first year boys dorm, which was fortunately empty. He sat down cross-legged on his bed and slipped inside his vast, empty, physical mindscape to examine the compulsion spell the headmaster had attempted to use on him. It only took him a moment to pull it apart and identify all the different layers to it. It was a very high level spell – again, a sign of the blasted old coot's immense power level and skill. The compulsion spell had several subliminal suggestions implanted within it. The most prominent was that Harry should feel the powerful need to *hide* what the Dursley's had done to him. That he should *never* tell anyone.

Within that was an emotional seed that would have grown over time. The emotion it was supposed to plant was *shame*. The feeling that he was less than human for allowing muggles to beat him down. As long as he felt ashamed, he would do whatever he could to hide his past, even lie.

Another suggestion placed in him was the idea that he needed to speak with McGonagall and any other teachers he might have told, and retract or 'clarify' his earlier statements. That he needed to dumb them down, or admit to having exaggerated earlier.

Harry scoffed angrily. He already had a profoundly deep hatred for the venerated old wizard, and had been sure that he couldn't possibly hate the man anymore than he already had.

Clearly, he was wrong.

Harry wondered for a moment if Dumbledore would have gone so far as to try and implant the subliminal compulsion into McGonagall as well, but the fact that Dumbledore's compulsion spell had included that Harry should go to those who he had told and retract his statements suggested that he hadn't. Besides, it was unlikely that Dumbledore could slip a compulsion spell past other adult wizards as easily as he assumed he could with Harry – a supposedly untrained child.

Harry had easily noticed the spell being cast on him, and he would have noticed the effects even if his mindscape wasn't empty and immune to such spells. Witches and wizards of a certain skill level would notice such a spell being cast upon them, and Harry knew that McGonagall was probably of such a level.

Still, he was left wondering what to do with what had happened. Even with his advanced skill level, it wouldn't make sense for an eleven-year-old to be able to tell he'd had a compulsion spell cast upon him, and impossible for one to fight off the effects of one cast by someone as powerful as Dumbledore was. So trying to accuse the man of what he'd done was pointless. Not to mention, there was no proof.

He also wasn't about to follow the spells instructions. There was no way he was going to go to McGonagall and deny what he'd said. If Dumbledore became suspicious as to why his spell hadn't worked... well, Harry would just deal with whatever came of that. For now, he would just continue on as planned.

Rebirth Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

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AN: Another chapter. Originally posted Wed Jan 5th, 2011. 16 pages long. No beta reader, typos are likely.

— — — — — Rebirth Chapter 17 — — — — —

The week before the winter holiday break began, Harry received an invitation from the Malfoys to their annual Yule Holiday Party. It was to be held on the 22nd, a Sunday, and Harry saw it as a legitimate opportunity to set his plans regarding Sirius Black in motion, since the person he wished to speak with would be at the party. With plans quickly forming and solidifying in his mind, he sent a response back, accepting the invitation to the party.

If Dumbledore, or any of the other professors approached him about his attendance, he would deal with it then, but he knew they couldn't reasonably stop him from going. It was only for one evening; he wouldn't be spending the night; and there would be enough influential people from the Ministry in attendance that no one could reasonably argue that Harry would be in danger.

The only potential problem that Harry could imagine arising from the situation was the whole transportation issue, and getting permission to leave the castle.

When he did get a solution to that problem, it was not exactly what he had expected, and he wasn't sure if it was even appreciated...

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Severus Snape scowled with annoyance as he made his way up, through the Grand Staircase, towards the seventh floor corridor. He had received a summons from the Headmaster when he was in the middle of a delicate brew and did not appreciate the interruption.

He came upon the gargoyle that guarded the headmaster's office, spoke the password – 'peppermint humbugs' – and made his way up the revolving staircase. The headmaster bid him enter before he could even knock on the door and he pushed his way inside.

"You wanted to speak to me about something, Headmaster?" Several drawled as he came to stand beside the headmaster's desk.

"Yes, Severus. Please, have a seat," Dumbledore said smiling up at the glowering potions master.

With a barely concealed sigh of annoyance, Severus Snape sat down in the chair, crossed one leg over the other and threaded his fingers together on his knee. He gave the headmaster an impatient look when he didn't instantly begin.

"Sherbet lemon?" Dumbledore asked, motioning towards the bowl of candies on the edge of his desk. Severus rolled his eyes and declined as politely as he was honestly capable of. Dumbledore smiled genially back, making no outward acknowledgment of the man's eternal rudeness or his obvious irritation at having been called up.

"Tell me, Severus – do you still receive an invitation to the Malfoy's yearly holiday party?" Dumbledore finally asked.

Severus kept his face blank of any reaction and answered with disinterested ease. "Yes, I received the invitation two days ago."

"Ah, good. It has come to my attention that Mr. Potter has also been invited this year."

Severus rose a single brow. "Did he?"

"Yes. I fear that Lucius Malfoy may be taking advantage of the friendship that Harry is forming with young Draco Malfoy, to draw Harry into his home," Dumbledore said with a grave expression on his face.

"Of course you realize that it would be impossible for Lucius or anyone else to bring any harm to Potter in such a setting. There will be far too many prominent figures in attendance. Even the Minister will be there."

"Yes, I realize this, but I still feel rather uneasy allowing Mr. Potter to attend such an event unchaperoned. If I could, I would prevent him from going all together, but I doubt I would be able to do so."

"What is it that you're suggesting?" Severus asked, not liking where this was going.

"I would like for you to keep an eye on Mr. Potter at the party. I do, of course, intend to try and convince Mr. Potter not to go at all, but if I am unable to prevent it, I would feel better knowing that a member of staff was there to watch out for him. Seeing as how you already have an invitation, I saw it as the ideal opportunity."

Severus sneered. "Of course you did," he drawled sarcastically.

"I would also appreciate it," Dumbledore continued, "if you could keep me informed after the end of the party, of any attempts at discussion that Lucius Malfoy or any other *former associates* might make towards Mr. Potter."

Severus' eyes narrowed slightly, but he curtly nodded his head in acknowledgment of the headmaster's request.

"Mr. Potter will likely be needing help getting to the party. I rather doubt he's very familiar with most forms of wizarding travel, seeing as how he was raised in the muggle world. Perhaps you could offer him assistance in that regard. You could escort him down to Hogsmeade and the two of you could take the Floo from the Three Broomsticks."

Severus grimaced. "Is there a reason that we cannot simply Floo directly from the school?"

"You would invite Mr. Potter into your private quarters?" Dumbledore asked with an air of mild disbelief.

Severus' grimace deepened. He would honestly rather not, but there wasn't any serious harm that could come from it. He could give Potter permission for entry for that evening, and then revoke it immediately after the party. And the idea of walking down to Hogsmeade in the snow was very unappealing. Especially in dress robes.

"I will allow it. It is preferable to walking."

Dumbledore nodded. "Fine. I expect you are capable of approaching Mr. Potter and making arrangements?"

Severus looked as if he had swallowed something especially sour, but he merely nodded in response to Dumbledore's question. He was definitely *not* looking forward to this.

The two finished up their meeting and Severus left the headmaster's office trying to work out in his mind exactly how he would approach his latest task.

His encounters with Potter since the 'incident' after the first class he substituted for the wolf, had been strained and yet not. He had been tense around the boy, and yet the boy had acted around him as if nothing had happened at all. In class, Potter had easily slipped back into treating Severus exactly as he had the first month of school.

He was polite, performed his classwork to near-perfection, answered questions in class when called upon, and turned in flawless essays. He presented to Severus the same mask that he presented to the rest of the staff. The difference was that Severus had seen the *real* Potter... or at least, he was convinced that what he had seen was closer to the real Potter than what he showed the rest of the world.

Severus had been watching Potter closely, and he knew Potter was aware he was watching him, and yet the boy had given no outward acknowledgment of it. The Ravenclaw was clearly skilled at creating false personas because Severus had noticed the boy took on several different personality guises depending on who he was with. Around teachers he was a fiercely bright, polite young man who came off as slightly shy and bashful when it came to praise or being called upon in class, and yet also confident when it came to his studies and his intelligence.

Depending on which students he was with, he often came off as very different person. He acted one way around the children of the old-magic families of moderate political standing, and another way around the muggleborn students, and another way entirely around the old purebloods where he often slipped into the haughty, confident, superiority that many of them often carried. Severus suspected the closest to his 'real' personality that ever showed to anyone at school appeared when he was in the company of Draco Malfoy and his small group of Slytherin 'friends' where he occasionally let some of his more devious tendencies show.

Many of Severus' snakes were still convinced that Potter was just being used by young Draco, but Severus knew now without a doubt, that wasn't the case. And Draco clearly knew it too.

Despite the numerous things that Severus had seen through his close observations, he also knew that no one else had noticed. Even the headmaster had remained completely oblivious to Potter's hidden persona. Severus had been in on quite a few staff meetings and been present for several chats where his colleagues had discussed Potter and it was obvious that none suspected anything was amiss with the boy.

In fact, it seemed that Minerva had gotten into quite a heated row with Dumbledore over Potter's home living accommodations. Apparently Potter's muggle relatives were violent? Severus vaguely recalled Potter making reference to something along those lines during his confrontation with the boy, but hadn't quite known what to make of it, and had been overwhelmed by all of the other things Potter had said at the time to fully process what had been said. Even now, the fact that Potter had clearly *wanted* Minerva to overhear him and to *know* about his 'living situation' made Severus wonder what the motives were, and how much of what had been perceived of his living situation was true.

He was convinced that Potter wouldn't let something like that out unless he had a reason. Some ulterior motive or hidden scheme behind it. And then he realized what it was. It quickly became clear what the intent had been. He wanted to plant the seed of doubt in Minerva's unwavering faith in the Headmaster, and it had clearly worked. Not only for her, but for Filius as well, since Minerva had gone to him with her concerns since he was Harry's Head of House and the two had both been speaking quietly one day about how horrified they were to think that Dumbledore could allow anything of that nature to continue to go on unchecked. It appeared that even after the row, Dumbledore had continued to insist that Potter to back to his relatives and that had only infuriated Minerva further.

Potter was a devious one. Brilliant... and frightening.

It was with considerable trepidation that the following Wednesday, he asked Potter to remain after class. Potter had given him a mostly blank, expression that came off as innocently curious to anyone who didn't know any better. His eyes held caution, but also warning.

As soon as the room had completely cleared and Severus and Potter were the only ones left in the room, Potter turned a suddenly cold, calculating gaze on Severus and waited.

Severus almost flinched from the intensity of those familiar green eyes as they glared at him with unhidden dislike. He very much hated that Potter had *those eyes*. It just wasn't fair... But when was life ever fair?

"The headmaster is aware that you have received an invitation to the Malfoy's Yule party. Since I have also been invited, he has asked me to offer to accompany you," Severus said, deciding to get straight to the point.

Potter's eyes widened before narrowing again, but this time his hateful gaze was no longer zeroed in on Severus.

He heard Potter mutter something angrily under his breath about '*still intercepting my bloody mail*'.

"He has asked that I... keep an eye on you, while at the party," Severus continued. "There will be people there who could potentially pose a threat to you."

Potter snorted. "Yes, I'm sure that he's doing this entirely because he's concerned for my welfare," he said, his voice thick with sarcasm.

"Quite a few of Lucius' associates were followers of the Dark Lord, and they will be in attendance. The concerns are valid."

Potter turned and smirked up at Severus. "I'm not worried about any Death Eaters. The only wizard who legitimately poses a threat to my continued good health is the headmaster of my school, and I don't have a chaperon here, do it?"

"You believe that the headmaster wishes you harm?" Severus asked, unable to completely hide his curiosity. "Would you not say that the Dark Lord would pose a greater threat 'to your health' than Dumbledore who has sworn to protect you?"

Again Potter turned that infuriating smirk on Severus. The one that said 'I know something you don't know', and managed to come off as superior and smug and powerful all at once. Severus felt his eye twitch and his lip start to curl in response.

"Why should I sooth any of your curiosities, Severus Snape?" Potter asked after a moment, letting his expression shift towards a disinterested boredom and lazily walking around one of the workstations, trailing his fingers along the surface. "I'm already sure that your loyalties are only to yourself. You've improved my opinion of you, marginally, by not revealing our last encounter to Dumbledore. You also heeded my advice and never once brought up werewolves again in any of the classes you substituted for Remus. I also appreciate that you came right out and were honest with me about this 'accompanying me' to the Malfoy's party thing, but what guarantee do I have that you won't still go to Dumbledore in the future?"

"You don't."

"Exactly," Potter replied with a grin. "I don't have *any* guarantee at all. You could just be biding your time and waiting until you think you've got enough evidence to stand on... of course, the question still remains as to whether or not anyone would really believe you... but even if Dumbledore didn't believe you right off, you pointing it out would draw additional scrutiny to me, and that would be inconvenient. So, why should I give you even *more* evidence by answering any of your questions?"

"Perhaps, if you answered my questions, it would persuade me to continue refraining from telling him," Severus said with a smooth, disinterested tone.

Potter gave him a crooked grin. "Perhaps it would. Perhaps it wouldn't." He paused and looked thoughtful for a moment before the crooked grin returned. "How about you and I play a game? I'll answer one question of yours, absolutely truthful, if you answer one of mine."

Severus' eyes narrowed. "What question would you ask me?"

Potter paused and pulled out his wand. He began to wave it in several complicated gestures that Severus recognized as some surprisingly high level security wards. On top of that, the boy never spoke a single word, so he was casting them non-verbally. Finally he finished up, faced Severus head on, and spoke. "Why did you switch sides?"

"Excuse me?" Severus exclaimed, glowering angrily at the child who was still looking up at him with that smug superiority that was quickly becoming totally and utterly infuriating.

"What part of the question did you not understand? Why did you switch sides? You have the Dark Mark. One can only take it when they have complete willingness and loyalty to the Dark Lord in their hearts. Anyone with overwhelming ulterior motives, disloyalty, or trickery in mind who tries to take the mark will be rejected by it. It's possible to change your mind *after* you've taken it, and then it's too late because it can't be removed – but *when* you took the mark, you had to be loyal to the Dark Lord. What changed? Why did you go to Dumbledore?"

"You impudent little brat! You have no right to question me of such things!"

Potter shrugged and looked bored. "Fine by me. Then I won't be answering any of *your* questions either."

Severus' jaw clenched and his eye twitched as he fought down the rush of anger that had filled him when the brat had the nerve to ask him such a question. He tried to clear his mind of the rage and force himself to think rationally. He couldn't let his temper hamper this opportunity. His curiosity revolving around this child had been driving him mad for months and the chance to finally get some answers to his questions was far too great to pass up.

He pulled in a slow breath through his nose as he reentered himself. He opened his eyes and locked them on the smirking child standing before him. Damn the brat. He knew exactly what he was doing, and the fact that he was clearly good at what he was doing only made him that much more infuriating.

"Your mother," Severus bit out through clenched teeth.

Potter frowned and took on a curious expression.

"My mother?" he echoed. "Lily Potter? What about her?"

"When I knew her she was still Lily Evans. We were... *close*, when we were younger."

"You cared about her," Potter stated rather than asking.

Severus nodded jerkily.

Potter's eyes took on a calculating look as he looked across the room at nothing in particular as his mind went to work. Finally he looked back at Severus with the look of one who had just figured out a puzzle.

"You fancied her. A mudblood?"

Severus shot him a furious glare and practically snarled at him. "Don't say such a filthy word about your own mother!" he spat.

Potter's eyes rose into his forehead with an obvious look of surprise, but it slowly shifted into a broad, accomplished grin.

"You loved her. That's why you hate my father so much. Not just because he tormented you with pranks, but because he got the girl."

Severus sneered and was about to bite out an angry retort, but Potter interrupted him by continuing on. "When you overheard the prophecy you had no idea who it might be about, and you took it straight to the Dark Lord... you went to Dumbledore because the Dark Lord determined that the prophecy was about *Lily's* child. You wanted to warn them. To save her. You felt guilty because by telling the Dark Lord the prophecy you had basically signed her death warrant." Potter smirked. "I'm right, aren't I?"

Severus grimaced and a pained expression flitted across his face for a moment before he quickly looked away. "I asked the Dark Lord to spare her but... I knew he wouldn't. She was muggleborn and the mother of... of *you*."

Potter's face suddenly shifted to mild surprise and then dawning comprehension. "So *that's* why he did that!"

Severus looked back at Potter with a furrowed brow. "Did what?"

"The Dark Lord tried to spare her! He told her to stand aside. He told her that that she didn't have to die; that he was only there for me! But she refused to move. She just stood there, *unarmed*, begging him to take her instead. To spare me."

Severus' eyes widened and his face slackened.

"I always wondered why he would do that..." Potter continued looking thoughtful. "It seemed rather out of character... he must have liked you, to try to honor such a request. Especially considering that she was muggleborn."

Severus looked dumbstruck as he attempted to process what Potter had just said. Finally he shook his head and looked back down at the small boy, wishing desperately that he could understand what was really going on with this child.

"Liked me?" Severus echoed, latching onto the last thing the boy had said. "You say these things sometimes... you make it sound as if you actually knew the Dark Lord. But that's impossible."

"You answered my question, Severus Snape. I'm good for my word. I'll answer one of yours. Better make it a good one because I make no guarantees that I'll be interested in playing this game with you again any time soon," Potter said, suddenly.

Severus snapped his jaw shut, not having even realized that his mouth was hanging open slightly and scowled that his mask was slipping so easily in front of this brat. He had his opportunity and he needed to make the best of it. But what to ask? What question would have the best chance of getting him the most answers?

"Earlier you suggested that you had more to fear from Dumbledore than the Dark Lord, yet I know for a fact that the Dark Lord wanted you dead, and Dumbledore wants you alive so that you can fulfill the prophecy. So why would you feel that Dumbledore was a greater threat?" Severus asked.

Potter smirked. "That's a very big question."

"Are you going to back out on our deal?" Severus asked while narrowing his eyes.

Potter just chuckled and shook his head. "No. I'm good for it. I'm more inclined to let you in on some things now that I understand why you switched sides. You didn't leave the Dark Lord's side because you lost faith in the cause or changed your political ideals, you did it for love. I can appreciate that. Doing the wrong things for the right reasons. I've done that plenty of times over the years."

Severus watched with narrowed eyes as Potter went over and pushed himself up so he could sit on one of the workstation tables and let his legs swing back and forth in front of him as they dangled from the table.

"I'm not worried about the Dark Lord being after me because I know that once I'm able to talk with him, I know he'll change his mind. He didn't realize who I really am when he came after me the first time. All he knew was that I was the child of a Potter, and that the three lines of some prophecy he'd heard said I had the potential to be a legitimate threat to him. I can certainly forgive him for jumping the gun and coming after me. It was an act of cautious self preservation. Obviously, it backfired..."

"As for Dumbledore, if *he* found out who I really am, he would likely try to kill me. So you see – it's a complete role reversal. Tom finds out who I am and he'll want me alive. Dumbledore finds out who I am, and he'll want me dead. Dumbledore already killed me once, actually, and I don't intend to give him a second chance. But if he does, I'll just come back again. I'll always come back. And he won't. So I win." Potter gave a bright, smug and yet also strangely devious smile and chuckled.

Severus just blinked at him, trying to make some sense of what the brat had just said.

"That doesn't make any sense. What do you mean, 'who you really are'? You're Harry Potter. Who else could you be?"

Potter tilted his head down and looked up at Severus through his long black eyelashes while giving him a surprisingly scary, Cheshire-cat grin. "You know... I think I might just tell you."

Alright, Severus Snape. Since you asked, I am a reincarnated necromancer. In my last life, I underwent a ritual that has allowed me to retain all of my memories, knowledge, and powers from my previous life. It's my own personal brand of immortality. Every time I die, I'll be reborn, and with every new life I will retain everything that makes me who I am. So while my bodies may die, *I* never will. I will always continue.

"So while it is true that I am *Harry Potter*, I'm also someone else. Seeing as how I spent forty years in my previous life, and have had just over eleven in this one, I still tend to think of myself as my old self more than 'Harry Potter'. Although, by a rather amusing fluke, my name is quite similar, so it hasn't been a dramatic adjustment."

"Reincarnation?" Severus whispered as the enormity of what the boy claimed hit him.

"Yes. And in my previous life I personally knew both the Dark Lord *and* Albus Dumbledore. As I said before, Dumbledore was actually the man who murdered me. I do intend to repay him for that at some point... just not yet."

Severus leaned against his desk, trying to steady himself from the sudden weakness in his legs. This changed *everything*.

He looked up, meeting those playful green eyes and the devious curl of those lips and shuddered. "You were one of his followers? The Dark Lord?"

"No."

"No?" Severus echoed in confusion.

"I wasn't one of his followers, I was his lover."

Severus blanched and felt his knees buckle for a moment as he was hit with the sudden realization of just *who* it was that Potter was claiming to be. "Herakles Jude," he whispered.

Potter's face brightened. "You've heard of me!"

A stunned, shuddering breath escaped Severus' lips as he stared in shock at the small boy sitting opposite him. *Necromancer*. That's what he'd said. That he was a *necromancer*. He should have realized it the second the boy said it. Necromancers were incredibly rare, and those that did practice the arts almost never became publicly known for it. It was a banned art. It was forbidden to even *study* it. The last man to be known for having become a powerful Necromancer was the Dark Lord's lover and right-hand man. The man who had helped him form his initial army and stood by his side... up until he was killed in a battle at some point in the late 60's.

Harry Potter was the reincarnation of the Dark Lord's dead lover? But Potter was prophesized...

"The prophecy..." Severus said with uncertainty.

Potter rolled his eyes and sneered. "Fucking divination. Nothing but rubbish, if you ask me. But even aside from that – how much of the prophecy do you know? I've only heard the first

three lines."

"That's all I am aware of as well."

Potter huffed and folded his arms over his chest. "Yes, well, without knowing the whole thing, I can't really argue against most of it, but the first line is easy. It says that the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches, right? Well, honestly... its probably *true*. I'm willing to bet that I *am* the only one with the knowledge and power to actually kill him. But guess what? I'm not doing it. Ha. So there. Dumbledore can go stick a pencil up his arse, because I'm not vanquishing any Dark Lords. Now, or ever."

A breath escaped Severus that was something between a shocked cough and almost a laugh. He didn't know how to feel at this revelation. He had all but given up on the cause of the Dark sect. He still preferred it, and his own personal convictions were far more in line with it, but he had accepted that the chances of the Dark winning were slim-to-nothing. With the prophecy in play; Dumbledore's control over the chosen child, and the fact that it already seemed to be in play with the temporary defeat of the Dark Lord that Halloween night ten years ago... Severus had all but given up any hope that the Dark could ever win. It was why he had convinced himself that continuing to remain by Dumbledore's side was for the best. That, and his guilt. Guilt and anger that the Dark Lord had taken the life of the only woman he had ever...

Of course he'd lost Lily long before then. Lost her to *Potter*.

Potter.

He had been so ready to despise this child because he was Potter's son. But he wasn't really a child, was he? And he was only *barely* Potter's son at all. Mostly, it was an association by technicality.

Merlin! This was insane! And it truly did change *everything*. The savior of the Light was no savior at all! He was a vicious, insane, murdering monster who had personally slaughtered entire villages and reanimated their corpses to join his own army of infiri! He was Herakles Jude! The child that Dumbledore had placed all of his bets on would never, *ever*, fight for him! He had a personal grudge against the man! And it seemed fairly clear that this boy had every intention of trying to *kill* Dumbledore at some point!

"I need to sit down," Severus mumbled weakly as he shifted around his desk and sunk down into his chair

Potter gave Severus a moment to sit and try and sort his hectic thoughts out, and Severus was grateful for that. He finally looked up when he heard Potter's stomach rumbling. The child who wasn't really a child at all looked down at his own stomach with wide eyes before chuckling and shrugging.

"Sorry 'bout that, but you are making me miss lunch for this."

"My apologies," Severus rasped weakly. He'd heard stories of Herakles Jude from his mother. She had practically worshiped the man. Said she'd never seen a more merciless and

dangerous dark wizard in all her years, second only to the Dark Lord himself. This... this *child* was that man, reborn? He still had difficulties wrapping his mind around such a notion.

One thing was for sure... Dumbledore was screwed. Assuming that he remained ignorant, and Severus... well, he really didn't know *what* he felt at the moment. He was just too overwhelmed. But he did know that he did not feel the slightest inclination to go running to the old man and fill him in. Severus valued his own life too much to do something so stupid. Dumbledore was a powerful and dangerous man in his own right, but this boy... this boy had the potential to be far more dangerous. Not to mention the fact that this boy brought with him hope. A genuine chance that the Dark's cause was not lost. They could... Merlin, they could *win!*

The Boy-Who-Lived was...

Oh, this was going to be big.

"Who else knows... about you?" Severus asked once he'd found his voice again.

"Only Lucius. No one else. I've been *trying* to find the Dark Lord, you see. I managed to assist him in getting a physical body back, but I had to do it long-distance and I don't think he realizes he was *me* who was helping him. I have no idea what he's doing right now... honestly, that part is incredibly frustrating. I finally enlisted Lucius' assistance because I was fairly sure that when the Dark Lord finally makes his return to Britain that he'll be contacting his inner circle first and Lucius would be one of the first to hear from him. Still – nothing yet. Quite frustrating, actually."

"You helped him get a body back?" Severus asked, feeling somewhat bewildered by how that would have worked if Potter hadn't been able to get into direct contact with the Dark Lord.

"Using some of my necromantic powers, I was able to form a magical connection to his disembodied spirit and send him energy through it," Potter said with a shrug as if what he had just said were something that was *simple* and anyone could have done it. "But like I said, I don't think he realizes he was *me* who was sending the energy. I don't know what exactly he ended up doing in order to get himself a body, but I'm positive that he's got one. One more mystery is what he's been up to since he got his body back. It's been more than two years at this point. I'm fairly convinced that he's abroad... just sort of a gut feeling, I suppose. But I have no idea what he's doing." Potter huffed out a frustrated sigh and scowled in annoyance at the wall.

Severus nodded his head slowly. "So Lucius knows... does Draco suspect anything?"

Potter looked up and his mouth twisted slightly in thought. "I'm not really sure what Draco suspects, exactly. Obviously, there's next to no chance he could ever guess the *truth*. A person would have to have a rather wild imagination to just *come up* with the truth," he smirked. "But he obviously knows that I'm doing things with his father in secret." Potter paused for a moment. "And he's more than bright enough to have picked up on the fact that I'm less than fond of Dumbledore." He shrugged.

Severus almost snorted, but just barely refrained. Suddenly a thought crossed his mind. "What about Lupin?"

Potter shook his head. "No. No, he has no idea. Honestly, I have no idea how he'd take it if he got even a vague indication of the truth. But he knows that I don't trust Dumbledore, and I've got him seriously questioning his own faith in the man. I'm trying to disconnect myself, legally, from Dumbledore's 'guardianship'. Remus, being what he is, could never gain magical guardianship over me, however, if I can get Sirius Black out of Azkaban, I can easily get it arranged so that he recovers the guardianship that he should have gotten originally. Then Dumbledore will no longer have any legal say over me at all."

"Wait, get Black out of Azkaban? How exactly do you intend to do something like that?"

"He's innocent. At least, I know for a fact that he didn't betray my parents to the Dark Lord and I'm fairly positive that he was never a Death Eater. Peter Pettigrew was the secret keeper on our Fidelius Charm, and Dumbledore knows that because he cast the spell."

Severus frowned. "You did say something like that before, didn't you?"

"Right. So anyway, I was thinking and I realized that the only reason Dumbledore would have for preventing Sirius from ever getting a trial is if the trial would prove that he was wholly and truly innocent of all the crimes he was accused of. If he had killed Pettigrew and those muggles, a trial would only prove that he wasn't the secret keeper or a Death Eater. He still would have ended up in prison for the murders and Dumbledore still would have gained custody of me. So the fact that Dumbledore allowed Crouch to stuff Sirius away in Azkaban without a trial and then assisted in burying the paperwork, just lends credence to the idea that Sirius was totally innocent. If I can get him out, I get out from under Dumbledore's legal thumb. As long as I'm a minor, and he's my magical guardian, that man has a potential leash around my neck and I don't like that. Remus is helping me in getting Sirius free. Although the biggest step for my current plan is actually going to take place at the Malfoy's party."

"At the party?"

"Right. I'm planning on having a nice little chat with one of the guests," Potter said with a smirk.

The topic shift reminded Severus how this entire thing started and he tried to shake the overwhelmed foggiess from his mind. "Yes... the party. I intended to continue... Dumbledore suggested that as a way to persuade you to accept my accompanying you was to offer assistance to you in getting to Malfoy Manor. Have you already made other travel arrangements?"

"No, I haven't. Are you saying that we can use your Floo?"

"That is correct."

Potter smiled brightly. "Brilliant. I was afraid that Dumbledore was going to try and forbid me from going by refusing me use to any Floos and insisting that I not leave the school grounds."

"He did say that he was going to attempt to persuade you to reconsider attending the party."

Potter nodded. "I expected as much." Potter jumped down off the desk and rocked back and forth from the balls of his feet to his heels, swaying his body with the movement in a strangely uncharacteristically youthful gesture. Severus was still reeling from all the things he'd learned and seeing this wasn't helping his still overwhelmed mind. "Well, this whole encounter has gone better than I'd expected," Potter said cheerfully. "I've decided that I don't entirely hate you anymore. We might even be able to work well together. Assuming you don't do anything stupid."

That managed to shake Severus from his stupor and he sneered in annoyance at the brat and was about to bite out an angry retort when his brain kicked in enough to remind him *who* it was he was about to snark at and he managed to hold his tongue at the last moment.

"Are you so sure that being under the guardianship of Sirius Black will be much better than being under Dumbledore?" Severus asked instead.

Potter shrugged. "Oh, I'm sure it'll be better. Although I do have to wonder whether Black will still be sane enough to assume custody after a decade in Azkaban. My efforts may be pointless in the end, but it's keeping me busy which is better than sitting around and doing nothing but bloody *schoolwork*. And if Black does still have enough of his mind left, I'm sure I can get him on *my side* rather than Dumbledore's, easily enough, considering that Dumbledore left him to rot when he could have gotten him out at any point during the last ten years. I get that he sided with the Light wizards during the last war, but he's still a Black. I've always been rather fond of the Blacks... well, in general, anyways. Walburga was a bitch... but Lucretia, Orion and Cygnus were all nice enough company. And I'm finding myself growing fond of Narcissa."

"Sirius Black is *nothing* like the other Blacks," Severus spat.

"I do recall that from the year and three months I got to spend with my parents before they died. But he was an enjoyable enough person. A bit boisterous. *Obviously* a Gryffindor."

Severus made a derisive snort at that comment.

"Still," Potter continued, "preferable to being under Dumbledore's legal control. I'll take whatever sanity is left in the man and run with it."

"What do you intend to do to try and get Black freed?" Severus asked.

Potter grinned. "What happened the Halloween night where the Dark Lord lost his body was a bizarre fluke, and while I can't say what caused it, I know it wasn't me. Despite that fact, the rest of the wizarding world is convinced that it *was* me, and as a result, I've got all this unearned fame floating around my name. All this potential political weight just sitting around going to waste. I figured, I'd finally try making use of it. What good is it being the Boy-Who-Lived if I don't at least take advantage of what I've got available to me?"

Potter grinned widely and Severus felt his eye twitch again. He didn't think he was going to like this...

Term came to an end and the majority of the students went home to spend the winter holidays with their family. All of Harry's Slytherin 'friends' went home, and all of the Ravenclaws in Harry's year also left, although there were a few Ravens from other years who had remained behind.

The Weasley's had remained in the school for the holidays. Harry didn't know why, but he honestly wished they'd left because Ronald clearly thought it was his duty to keep an eye on Harry now. The twins had told Harry that they would help him keep their brother occupied a bit, though. Hopefully they'd succeed.

Harry was certainly capable of dodging the ginger git easily enough though, so it wasn't honestly that big of a concern. He spent more time in the chamber of secrets, going through some more of the books. He also spent some of his now copious amounts of freetime in the Room of Hidden Things working on figuring out the quickest and most effective way to dismantle all of the wards he had observed on the door in the room filled with flying keys.

His notes were rather thorough and he was positive he had them all worked out now. It really hadn't been that terribly hard. Tom had cast tougher wards to dismantle than that while he and Harry were practicing their ward breaking techniques decades ago. Harry would ward something and Tom would ward something else and they would each then try to work out exactly how to break each other's protections apart. Harry was fairly sure that if he had really needed to, he could have dismantled the wards on the door right then and there, but he knew that caution was the better route to take when one had the option.

He was debating the merits of making another trip down the third floor corridor passage in a few weeks when Hagrid and Sprout made their weekly visit, and seeing what might be in the room beyond the keys. The problem with that was that, while he could easily dismantle the wards Dumbledore had placed on the door, putting them back and hooking them back up exactly as Dumbledore had originally constructed them, would be time consuming and he likely wouldn't have the time to do that before Sprout was done tending to the Devil's Snare.

Instead, Harry decided that he would wait to try going beyond the key room until the time he was confident he could try and make it all the way to the stone. And for that, he wanted to wait until Dumbledore was out of the castle... and ideally, closer to the end of the school year so that Harry wouldn't have to be around the school so long with the stolen Stone in his possession. The longer school was in session with the Stone missing, the more time Dumbledore and the other professors had to try and figure out who might of taken it, or how.

Harry managed to add another feature to his version of the Marauder's map that he considered it's most valuable aspect. He added a spell that could track and record things that happened on it, depending on a set of specifications. He had a few copies of the charm running, actually, each copy linked to a specially charmed quill and parchment. One was to record any activity that happened in any of the rooms stemming from the third floor passage. Whenever someone entered it, their name, along with the time was logged. Their footprints were also recorded and Harry could replay it at a later time to try and extrapolate what they could have been doing.

The other charm he had active wasn't on a room, but on a person. He had it tracking everything that Dumbledore did. Obviously this resulted in a lot of filled parchment. It wasn't terribly detailed. Mostly just the time and date, and recording what rooms Dumbledore went to and how long he remained there. Of course it also made note of who was in what rooms with him and when. Still, Harry intended to pour over the information for patterns in the man's movements and habits that he could possibly use to his advantage.

Harry made it a point to attend breakfast and dinner every day of his winter holiday so far. He showed up for lunch now and then, but not as consistently, since he tended to work through lunch. Since so few people were left in the school, the four house tables had been condensed down to a single table that held *all* of the students. Weasley tended to sit somewhere near him and glower at him from across the table. Harry completely ignored him.

Dumbledore did finally make a move in regards to trying to prevent Harry from attending the Malfoy's party, but he didn't do it in the way Harry had expected him to. Instead of approaching Harry directly, he tried to do it through Remus.

He spoke with the werewolf about his concerns upon having learned that Harry planned to attend a party at Malfoy Manor in the company of so many people that they had suspected of being Death Eaters or sympathizers of Voldemort, and that he was worried about Harry's safety in such an environment. He asked Remus to speak with Harry and try to convince him that it would be far safer to remain in the castle.

Remus had apparently done an admirable job of responding to Dumbledore as expected and then spoke with Harry later that evening about his own concerns. Obviously, he didn't exactly like Dumbledore sticking his nose into Harry's private matters, and yet he also couldn't help but worrying a bit about the sorts of wizards that would be attending the party.

Harry assured Remus that he knew exactly who would be there, and that no one would be able to try anything malicious because there would be too many witnesses. He also pointed out that he intended to set his plans regarding freeing Sirius in motion that night and needed to attend.

When having Remus do the work for him had failed, Dumbledore finally tried approaching Harry himself. He did it one evening after dinner as Harry was leaving the Great Hall to return to the Ravenclaw common room. Dumbledore had tried the genial, wise old grandfather routine, and expressed his concern for Harry's safety. Harry played his part perfectly, despite the intense desire to try and call the old man on his lies and attempts at subtle manipulation.

He insisted to Dumbledore that he really truly wanted to go. That he was very excited to attend since it was the very first Yule party he had ever been invited to, and he was looking forward to seeing Draco, Daphne, Blaise, Vincent, Greg, and Theo there.

Then he dropped the bombshell. With innocent excitement, he expressed how much he was looking forward to speaking with his *cousin*, Draco's mother Narcissa, again, since he hadn't seen her since summer.

It was terribly difficult to keep a straight face and stay in character at the expression on Dumbledore's face. The old man had actually sputtered a bit as he tried to recover from his surprise. He had then asked Harry what he meant, at which point, Harry had gone into a story about how he had gotten the book 'Nature's Nobility: A Wizarding Genealogy' during his first visit to Diagon Alley over the summer because he wanted to see if it had the Potters listed. Through that, he had seen that his grandmother was Dorea Black, and then he'd gone to the Black's section and seen Narcissa listed there. Apparently Harry's grandmother, and Narcissa's grandfather were siblings, making them cousins-once-removed. When Harry had met Draco in one of the shops, he had realized he was Narcissa's son and that made them actually related.

Dumbledore was flummoxed, but managed to partially mask his reaction and pretended to be cautiously happy for the seemingly gleeful young man who appeared elated to have found *family* in the wizarding world that he could connect with. Harry then explained that this connection was why he and Draco had grown to be such good friends so quickly, despite being sorted into different houses.

Dumbledore finally made a move and took on a grave, worried expression. He expressed to Harry that he was happy for him, but that Harry needed to be cautious in regards to the Malfoys. That Lucius Malfoy had been suspected of being a Death Eater – one of Voldemort's loyal followers – and that he might wish harm upon Harry.

Harry was quick to defend his cousin's husband, looking indignant and properly offended. He insisted with seemingly honest concern that there had been no proof of any willing wrongdoing and that poor Lucius had been under the Imperius curse! He had been cleared of all charges, and it wasn't far to continue to hold it against him all these years later!

Dumbledore had heaved a heavy sigh and given Harry a look that was clearly intended to give Harry the impression the old man was disappointed in him, but Harry maintained the stubborn air of an offended eleven year old and held his ground.

Dumbledore finally conceded the argument by simply insisting that Harry stick close to Professor Snape during the evening, and to remain cautious and vigilant.

Rebirth Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Long chapter. 19 pages long this time. Originally Posted Jan 7th 2011.

----- Rebirth Chapter 18 -----

It was the day before the Malfoy's party and Harry was sitting cross-legged on his bed with his improved copy of the marauder's map on his lap, and his charmed auto quill and parchment over on his desk, jotting down notes about Dumbledore's movements. He usually kept the auto notes going in an extra expanded compartment he'd added to his trunk so that no one would see it working away constantly, but since his dorm was empty for the holidays he hadn't felt the need to keep it hidden away.

He was eating a sandwich he'd grabbed from the kitchens earlier and letting his eyes lazily roam over the map in his lap at the sparsely scattered names and moving footprints. With the school mostly empty, there were a lot fewer names to sort through and everything was considerably less cluttered.

It was probably because of this lone fact that he noticed a name on the map that he'd never really noticed before. A name that most certainly shouldn't have been there because it was the name of a man who was supposed to be *dead*.

Peter Pettigrew.

Harry froze with the sandwich halfway to his mouth and his jaw hanging slack as he saw the tiny footprints attached to the name moving around in the Gryffindor common room. The name scurried across the room and then came to a stop directly next to the name *Ron Weasley*.

A shocked gasp escaped Harry's mouth and suddenly his hand came up and violently smacked his forehead.

"*Merlin's beard!* I'm a *bloody idiot!*" he screamed out to the empty room.

A *rat!* A bloody effing *rat!* He *knew* that Weasley had a pet rat! He'd even seen the blasted thing several times in a few of their classes, and heard the git complaining about how his rat was always running off and disappearing whenever he was going to go to Defense so he was never able to bring him to that class! The rat was dodging Remus! Granted, whenever Harry had seen the rat, it had always from a distance, but he *had* seen it, and thinking back... *yes...* Yes, it looked just like Wormtail. Weasley's pet rat, was Peter *fucking* Pettigrew!

The revelation required total revision of his plans. Pettigrew *wasn't dead* and he could prove it! There goes one of Sirius' charges, right there! And if Peter wasn't dead... maybe *he* was the one who had killed those muggles! Harry had to step back and rethink his strategy completely. In fact... this really would made things easier. At least, theoretically. Of course it meant he had to actually catch the animagus first, but that really shouldn't be that hard.

But how to approach things now? Initially, he had just planned to use the political power of his name as the Boy-Who-Lived, and promise favors, interviews, and public statements in exchange for help getting Sirius' case revisited, but now he could have tangible proof that Sirius was innocent. His earlier plan would have meant showing more of his Slytherin tendencies to a few key figures and risk word of it getting back to Dumbledore. Now, however, the potential had appeared that he could accomplish his goal while still playing the role of an innocent child.

But no... he would still at least partially stick with some of his original plan. For the party, at least. Although, with Pettigrew captured, Remus' suggestion of going to Madam Bones had some actual potential. Perhaps he would bring her in on things afterall. Additional support, and all that...

He didn't have much time to plan things though, since the party was the following evening. If he was going to use Pettigrew, he needed to guarantee that he had the man, so he needed to capture him right away.

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Harry was perched on the window sill of one of the high windows on Gryffindor Tower, peering into the common room. He was in his bat animagus form, observing the garishly red and gold room from high above, debating his plans. None of the windows in the common room were open, and from his quick flight around the tower, it didn't appear that any of the windows in any of the rooms were open either.

Harry knew where the entrance to Gryffindor Tower was – it was a portrait of some obese woman who would ask you what the password was. But that was the problem. He had no idea what the password was, so going through the front would be difficult. Still, with the windows closed and latched, going through one of them was just as difficult.

He considered the merits of flying down to the owlery, transforming, and attaching a letter to one of the twins to an owl's leg and then just following the owl. It would tap at a window and someone in the common room would let it in. But what would he write in the letter?

He was growing impatient and was about to take off from the window and commence his plan when the fates suddenly decided to intervene and make his job easy for him. *How rare.*

A barn owl flew to the tower and began to tap on one of the windows that were lower, and within reach of someone standing on the floor.

Harry actually blinked down at the owl, perched on the ledge of the window with dumbfounded shock for a moment before the movement of someone in the common room standing up and heading towards the window shook him from his stupor and he quickly flew down. It was actually Ron Weasley who had gotten up and opened the window. The owl flew in and across the room to land on the back of a chair by one of the twins. Harry flew through the open window a moment later, endlessly grateful that Weasley hadn't closed the window the moment the owl was through.

Harry found a dark corner high in the common room where he could easily latch onto the wall and still observe those in the room and waited.

One of the twins exclaimed something about a Christmas card from 'Angelina', and the other came over and read over his shoulder as they both looked at the card. Ron Weasley seemed to pout, huff loudly, and flop back down on the sofa he'd been sitting on earlier with bored indignation. The rat, who he had moved onto the couch beside him when he stood up, was quickly grabbed and put back onto his lap.

Harry stayed there, clinging easily to the wall and observing the group as they talked, joked, and passed the time with mindless activities. Ron attempted to join in on whatever the twins were up to a few times, but they were clearly in the middle of scheming for some prank and weren't interested in involving him. He then tried to get them to join him for a game of wizard's chess, or exploding snap, but again – they were busy. One of them suggested that Ron work on some of the homework that was assigned over the break and Ron looked absolutely affronted by that suggestion.

Finally, it seemed that Ron had become fed up with his boredom and stood up, grumbling under his breath and said he'd be back in a few minutes – that he was going up to his room to get a book. The twins waved at him to show that they'd heard him, but didn't care, and the youngest of the Weasleys present stormed up the stairs, leaving his pet rat sleeping soundly on the couch.

The window had been left open even after the owl had left, which Harry was grateful for as he looked down at the overweight rodent and debated his options.

It's important to understand something about Harry's animagus form that separated him from most other bat breeds common to Europe. The Greater Noctule Bat of Europe is a carnivorous predator, and one of the only breeds of bat in the United Kingdom known for 'hawking' of its prey. Meaning that the Greater Noctule is known for swooping down on its prey and flying off with them. Prey that is usually made up of birds and *rodents*. The Greater Noctule is even known for catching birds while said bird was still in *flight*. The Greater Noctule bats are agile, powerful, and fast.

But even with all this in mind, Harry's body was still only marginally bigger than Pettigrew's rodent body. His wing span obviously made him larger over all, but he still wasn't entirely convinced he could carry that rat and not drop him, considering how fat he was. It would be even more difficult when the rat woke up and struggled. Of course, Harry would be carrying

the rat in *his mouth*... with his rather sharp teeth. He knew he could do this without killing the rodent – although the man *would* be injured by it, but the injuries would help keep the bastard from struggling, and Harry could always heal him afterwards.

Harry focused some of his magics through his body and strengthening his jaw. He was fairly sure he could do this without any serious complications and he didn't want to wait any longer.

He jumped down from his perch, swooped through the air effortlessly, and snatched the slumbering rat up in his wide mouth, filled with sharp teeth. Without even the slightest deviation in his flight path, he was flying back up. He pumped his large, powerful wings and saw as the Weasley twins looked up with absolutely *stunned* expressions as they watched him fly right out the window with the rat in mouth.

He would have snickered if he had been able to do such a thing as a bat... and if he didn't have a mouth full of now fully awake and squirming rat-animagus.

The rat, however, stopped squirming once he realized just how *high* up in the air the two were. Obviously, he realized that if the bat dropped him, he would be dead upon impact with the ground and decided to wait until the bat landed before making his escape. Internally, Harry smirked.

He flew around and entered an open window that he had prepared earlier. The room on the other side was warded tightly, and there was no way in or out except for the window, which snapped shut behind Harry automatically as he flew inside.

He opened his jaws and let the rat go flying. He hit the ground hard and rolled, leaving a scattered trail of blood from the large puncture wounds caused by Harry's fangs. The rat squealed in pain and shock, but quickly began to right himself and darted around, obviously searching for something to hide under, or escape through. But the room was empty. The rat spotted the door and ran for it. Just as he was about to try and squeeze underneath it, he was thrown back after impacting an invisible barrier ward.

Harry transformed back into his human form and landed on his feet with fluid grace and instantly had his wand out and aimed it at the rat that was now scratching frantically at the barrier, keeping him from escaping beneath the door. A flash of red light later and the rat lay on the floor, unconscious.

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Harry came to a stop in front of the door to Snape's private quarters. He was wearing a pair of snug black pants, tucked into calf-high boots, a black silk dress shirt with high buttoned collar. Over the shirt was what, from the waist up, looked like a form fitting vest that was very trim, emerald green, and made of fine velvet. However at the waist it continued down and flared out as dress robes that hung to just below his knees.

He had found he was quite fond of some of the newer wizarding fashions that had sprung up since his previous death. He liked that modern dress robes finally looked more masculine and less like the frilly mens dresses of his youth.

He knocked on the door and waited a moment in the cold dim dungeon hallway before the door was wrenched open and he was faced with the glowering face of his potions professor. Snape's dress robes were all black – *shocking!* – and a bit more traditional than Harry's, but at least there were no frills – *now that would have been amusing*. They were form fitting and cut to hug his upper torso, but hung down and billowed from the waist, all the way down to the floor. The sleeves were wide and draped down over his hands, while the collar was high and trimmed with a very dark forest green along the top, coming down the center of his neck and down his chest. The threading, upon close inspection, looked like tiny snakes, and gave the illusion that they were slithering along the seams.

"My, professor. Don't you look spiffy?" Harry said with a cheeky grin.

Snape's eyes flashed with momentary annoyance and Harry had to fight the urge to laugh at the man's reaction. Clearly Severus Snape didn't take compliments well.

"Just get in here," he muttered and spun around to leave the doorway open for Harry to follow.

The pair made quick work of traveling through the floo, and Harry managed to exit into the Malfoy's welcoming room without stumbling out the floo like an idiot. A quick wave of his wand and his robes were cleared of soot and ash.

"You're out side of Hogwarts, now; you shouldn't use your wand," Snape said, curtly.

"Don't worry, my wand doesn't have a trace on it," Harry said as he dismissively waved away Snape's comment.

"That may be true, but a personal trace is cast upon every first year student who comes to Hogwarts the first night there, to act as a supplement to the wand-trace in case a hand-me-down wand is used by the child.

Harry froze and turned to look at Snape with hard, cold eyes. "A personal trace?" he asked in a very quiet hiss.

Snape flinched slightly from the intensity of Harry's sudden anger, but quickly recovered.

"Yes. I imagine the wards around the Malfoy's manor have prevented your trace from alerting the Ministry of your use of magic, but I would recommend caution when casting spells outside of school anywhere else."

A terrible fury could easily be seen behind Harry's eyes. How had this happened without him noticing? The idea that a spell could have been cast upon him and he hadn't realized it was truly infuriating to him.

"Do you know what's necessary to remove it?" Harry asked in a tightly controlled, deathly quiet, voice.

Snape's eyes widened with uncertainty for a moment and Harry could see the muscles of his jaw flex as he clenched his teeth. "I... do not."

Again, another flash of anger could be seen behind Harry's fierce green eyes. The small child who looked far too frightening for his size and age pulled in a slow breath and closed his eyes. When he opened them again the anger was gone and he looked calm.

"I've got time. I'll figure it out," he said with absolute confidence in his voice.

Just at that moment, the door to the welcoming room opened and Narcissa Malfoy walked in. She quickly greeted them, apologizing for them having to wait – all of the elves were busy making sure everything was ready for the party, and she had been directing them all because they were far too incompetent to get it right without her.

Harry grinned, slightly amused at how the proper elegant woman was clearly a bit flustered by all of the preparations.

Draco showed up a moment later and happily greeted them. He called Snape 'Uncle Sev' and Harry barely refrained from laughing. The dower potions master sent him a withering glare and Harry just looked up at him with an amused glint to his eyes and a very small smile.

Harry and Snape had arrived to the party quite early so they were the first guests there. Draco dragged Harry off to his room to show him some things, while Snape went off to speak with Lucius. He *needed* to speak with the man. Even now that a few weeks had passed since his shocking discussion with Harry Potter, he was still *reeling* from what he'd learned.

Severus found Lucius and after a quick whispered request the blond aristocratic man lead him to his private office. Lucius sat down in his own high backed leather chair behind his desk and motioned for Severus to take the chair opposite.

"You wished to speak with me, Severus?" Lucius asked.

"Yes. Potter told me... he said that you were the only other person that he had confided in about his... true history."

Lucius quirked a single brow. "Told you, did he? What exactly did he tell you?" Lucius asked cautiously, knowing that it was not beyond Severus to try and squeeze information out of him by leading him to believe he already knew it.

"This room is secure?" Severus asked.

"Of course."

Severus nodded his head and fixed Lucius with his piercing black eyes. "Herakles Jude. Reborn."

The corner of Lucius' lips turned up into something resembling a smile. "Ah, yes, so he did tell you. I must admit, I am curious as to how that actually come to pass?"

"I'm not even honestly sure, myself. Dumbledore wanted me to keep an eye on Potter while he's here at the party, so I had to hold him after class to discuss our travel arrangements. During that time, he offered to play... *a game*," Severus sneered the last word and rolled his

eyes. "Said that if I would truthfully answer a question for him, he would answer one for me."

"You must have asked a very good question. What did he ask you?"

Severus diverted his eyes for a moment with the slightest indication of discomfort. "I would rather not discuss it."

"Well, whatever he asked you, your answer must have pleased him if he decided he could trust you with the truth of his identity."

"I suppose," Severus said with a grimace. "How long have you known?"

"Since August, so not very long."

"Do you really believe him? Everything he claims?"

"He has demonstrated his powers and his knowledge to me and I can say that, at the very least, he most unquestionably *is* a necromancer of significant power. He also knows things about the Dark Lord that next to no one knows. Did you ever hear about what happened to Judgson, Bole, Simmons or Fairfax last year and over the summer?"

"The interrogations?" Severus asked, caught a bit off guard. He *had* heard, and he'd been rather surprised that anyone had successfully managed to catch all of those wizards off their guard to abduct and question them – and he had been even *more* surprised to hear that several of them had been caught *more than once*. It wasn't terribly surprising with Simmons or Fairfax, and even Bole for the first abduction, but Judgson was a very skilled wizard. He'd been in the Dark Lord's inner circle for a reason...

"Yes. Well, that was Potter." Lucius said with a smirk.

"Potter?" Severus blanched in disbelief. "How is it that he wasn't recognized?"

"Ask him to show you some time. It's quite a sight to see," Lucius replied with obvious amusement in his eyes.

Severus paused and looked thoughtful for a moment. "Jugson said that his assailant told him to tell the Dark Lord that 'Valerius was looking for him', correct?"

"Yes, apparently Valerius is his true family name, not Jude. However very few people knew that. The Dark Lord being one of those few."

Severus gaped slightly. "Herakles was from the *Valerius* line? I suppose that makes sense... they *were* known for producing quite a few necromancer's. But I thought that line had gone extinct centuries ago."

"Yes, I believe that many had assumed that. Although, I suppose one could say that it *has* gone extinct since he no longer carries Valerius blood since his rebirth in the body of a Potter."

"True," Severus said with a grimace. "Are you aware that he's attempting to get Sirius Black out of Azkaban?" Severus asked after a moment's pause.

"He mentioned that, yes. He intends to speak with the Minister tonight."

"The Minister?" Severus blanched, surprised that Potter intended to go directly to the top. "But that man is an incompetent fool!"

"Yes, but that only makes him easier to control and predict," Lucius replied with a feral grin. "His motivations are easy to manipulate. Power and influence. If Potter attempted to go behind the Minister's back with this he would only get himself on the man's bad side and likely have to fight against him at some point. The Minister would try to put a stop to it all in an attempt to save face and avoid getting blamed for something he had no control over. This way, Harry can get the Minister's full support and avoid conflict. The Minister can look like the one man who stood by the poor orphan Potter's side and helped him get justice," Lucius chuckled darkly.

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The party was being held in a large formal ball room. It had a large open section dedicated as a dance floor and a small string quartet playing classical-sounding music. The other portion of the ballroom was filled with a spattering of small-ish round tables with fine table clothes and place settings adorning the top. At the far end opposite the dance floor was a larger rectangular table that had Lucius at the head, his wife Narcissa and then Draco beside them. After Draco was Harry and then Snape. On Lucius' other side was the Minister for Magic and his wife, followed by several more powerful political figures and their spouses.

Harry acted politely bored, as a child his age would be expected to when so much 'uninteresting' political talk was going on. Draco attempted several times to draw him into discussion, but Harry would shush him – something that clearly irritated Draco. *He was not used to being 'shushed'*. Despite appearances, Harry was actually paying close attention to the discussions and waiting patiently until the open mingling portion of the party would commence so he could get the Minister alone.

Harry was engaged in conversation by a few different people and he responded politely, charming them with relative ease. Lucius also imparted the story to those at the table about Harry Potter's familial relationship with his wife Narcissa. Several there expressed their surprise, stating that they'd never realized that the Potter's had connected with the Blacks like that, while another older gentleman chuckled and recounted his memory of the scandal it had produced among the old families when young Dorea ran off with Charlus Potter. Her family had, apparently, not entirely approved of it. The fact that Charlus was from a wealthy old pure-blood family was the only reason that she hadn't been disowned for it. She had apparently run off with Charlus when her father had attempted to force her into an arranged marriage with an older political ally of her father's.

Harry was honestly interested in this story since it was something he had always been eager for details about.

After the meal had officially been concluded Lucius stood while tapping his gold knife on his crystal goblet to get everyone's attention. He gave a small speech that was fit for a smooth, cunning, politician of Lucius' caliber, and then welcomed everyone to dance and mingle.

Draco dragged Harry off to the side of the ballroom where their 'friends' had gathered, but he kept his eyes keenly trained on the Minister, watching for the best opportunity to approach the man. It took nearly twenty minutes before he saw his chance and excused himself from Draco and the other children.

Harry walked casually across the portion of the dance floor that people were mostly using for mingling and 'casual' discussion about politics and current events and came upon the Minister just as another man was leaving.

"Excuse me, Minister Fudge?" Harry asked with innocent, child-like voice. The Minister turned around and upon catching sight of Harry his eyes went wide. They also instantly traveled up to Harry's forehead that was clearly exposed since his long hair was tied, neatly back, in a low ponytail.

"Ah! Mr. Potter!" Fudge exclaimed as his expression went bright and happy, although Harry could also see the slightest sign of greed in the man's eyes. "I was hoping that I might get to speak with you at this evenings party."

"Really?" Harry replied with innocent, surprise, tinged with the slightest bit of awe, as if he were truly shocked that such an *important* figure could possibly wish to speak with him.

"Oh, yes. Quite so. You are quite a name, you know. *Harry Potter*. The *Boy-Who-Lived*. But surely you're used to such things by now."

Harry ducked his head, appearing bashful and shrugged as he toed the floor. "Not really. It's hard to get used to something like that. I've really only been aware of it since the end of July."

"What's this, now?" Fudge asked, sputtering slightly.

Harry shrugged and hesitantly met the Minister's eyes. "I was raised by muggles, you see. They don't like magic much. For that matter, they don't like *me* much. They never told me about the wizarding world, or any of it. They even told me my parents were drunks and they died in a car crash. While I actually knew they were lying about that, I still really didn't know anything about all this *Boy-Who-Lived* stuff until I got my Hogwarts letter and visited Diagon Alley for the first time, just this last summer. I suppose that's the biggest reason I started looking into some things, and the reason that I wanted to speak with you. Could I have a few minutes of your time?"

"Oh, of course, Harry. Do you mind if I call you Harry?"

"No, of course not. That's fine with me, Minister."

"Good, good. Shall we find some place a bit more private?"

"That would be great, Minister." Harry said, beaming up with bright, innocent eyes.

Harry led the Minister to the long wall of the ballroom that had tall glass doors and floor-to-ceiling glass windows lining it. Beyond the doors was a wide balcony and the pair made their way out onto it. A look from the Minister was all that was needed to evict the few people that were gathered out there.

"Perhaps you could throw up a privacy ward?" Harry asked, looking hesitant.

Fudge's eyebrows rose into his forehead a bit but he nodded, pulled out his wand and with an obviously well-practiced set of wand movements, threw up a fairly high powered privacy ward. Harry had no doubt that the politician's greatest strength lie in his privacy wards and listening device detection spells. One simply couldn't become a high ranking politician without them.

"Thank you very much for coming out here to speak with me, Minister. I truly do appreciate your willingness to hear me out because I'm about to make a very large request of you. However, I truly do feel that if we proceed cautiously, this can work out for the best for both of our interests," Harry said, suddenly dropping the innocent child act, but maintaining the proper politeness.

Fudge clearly sensed the shift because he gave Harry a shrewd look but nodded for him to continue.

"Are you aware, Minister, that Albus Dumbledore is my magical guardian?" Harry began.

Fudge nodded his head slowly. "Yes, I am aware of that."

"As my guardian representative in the magical world, he has a powerful say over my life, and I must admit that I don't particularly appreciate the power he holds over me. Did you know that I've never once in my life given a single interview to any journalists or reporters?" Fudge looked a bit surprised, but Harry continued without waiting for a response. "The reason for that is because I've never received a single request for an interview from anyone. I've never received a single bit of fan mail. Not even a single solicitation. When I re-entered the magical world and learned of the scale of my fame, this realization made me wonder – why? I discovered that Dumbledore – for my own safety, of course – has a powerful charm in place so that all mail address to me is rerouted to him. He then sorts it, decides which things are appropriate for me to see and which are not, and sends on only that which he approves of, or thinks I would notice were missing; thus realizing what he's doing. Of course, as my guardian, he has every right to do this, so I can't exactly make a big fuss about it.

"This is just one very small thing, among many, that he's done to me that I don't particularly appreciate, but I mention it because I want you to know that if you and I can come to terms on what I wish to discuss with you that I will be more than eager to give my first public interview with any reporter you deem most fit, stating my endless gratitude for your assistance, and my whole hearty support of you and your office. I also have access to a great deal of the Potter family wealth and would be eager to make any campaign donations for your next bid at reelection."

Fudge's eyes widened and that hungry gleam made itself known again for a moment before the shrewd calculating glint took over. "I'm listening."

Harry grinned.

"What would you say, if I told you that I have undeniable proof that the man currently incarcerated for my parents betrayal, and several murders, was innocent, and that he was locked away without even being questioned, let alone receiving a trial?"

Fudge's eyes went wide and his face paled. "What sort of proof?"

"I've caught the man who actually did it. The man who *actually* betrayed my parents to the Dark Lord. The man who was *actually* a Death Eater, and who was responsible for the deaths of nearly a dozen muggles on a London street. Sirius Black was never my parents secret keeper. He was a decoy. *Peter Pettigrew* was the secret keeper, and the only one who knew was Sirius Black. The reason he went after Pettigrew was because he wanted revenge. He knew that Pettigrew had betrayed my parents to the Dark Lord. But Pettigrew managed to turn the whole scene around, placing the blame on Sirius and then blowing up the street to make it look like he'd been killed and his body destroyed. He cut off his own finger to add validity to the whole charade.

"What no one realizes is that Pettigrew was an unregistered animagus. His form was that of a rat. He transformed immediately after causing the explosion and escaped unharmed. At that time, Barty Crouch was getting himself lined up to make a bid of his to own to run for Minister of Magic – wasn't he? He was the one who apprehended Sirius, and he's the one who had him sent straight to Azkaban without a trial. He wanted the fame and notoriety that would come with having captured the Dark wizard responsible for betraying the Potters, so he didn't want to risk anything going wrong with the capture.

"You weren't even Minister yet, back then. Because of his capture of Black, Crouch probably would be here, right now, if it weren't for the scandal that happened with his son later that year. None of what happened back then can be blamed on you, Minister, so there is no need to try and bury the fact that an innocent man has been rotting in Azkaban for a decade without ever having received a trial. Crouch made sure to bury his dirty work, quite well, I'm sure.

"What you'd be doing now is righting a terrible wrong. Bring about justice, and helping the boy who lived free his godfather. What's even better, *I've caught Pettigrew*. Three drops of veritaserum and he'll spill the whole story. He betrayed the Potters. He killed those muggles. It's so perfectly clean, it couldn't possibly be any easier. This is a total win for both of us. You get the public praise of helping me, serving justice, and you get to put another blemish on Crouch's already sullied record, and I get my godfather back and out from under Dumbledore's legal thumb. I may also ask that you help make sure that Sirius is able to successfully reclaim his rightful guardianship over me, but that's not much to ask for."

Fudge looked utterly stunned and clearly overwhelmed by everything Harry had said, but he recovered admirably fast. He suddenly looked thoughtful and frowned. "Black has been in Azkaban for a decade... I have to visit that awful place every year, Mr. Potter. I doubt anyone could be there for that long and still be sane. The public outcry that an innocent man could be left there and have his mind utterly destroyed by the negligent actions of the Ministry –"

"But that's not *your fault*. That was *Crouch's* doing. You're righting his wrongs. And if we're lucky, Sirius will still have some of his sanity left."

"And if he doesn't? He can't become your guardian if he's completely lost his mind," Fudge pointed out, looking at Harry shrewdly.

Harry nodded his head. "I realize this. Actually, my fall-back plan is to see if the Malfoy's can attempt to claim custody of me. I know Dumbledore will fight tooth and nail to prevent it, so I only want to go down that road if it's absolutely necessary. Narcissa *is* my cousin, and they would make far more suitable guardians for me than magic-hating muggles."

Fudge puffed up his chest a bit. "Well, I would say so! Magic-hating muggles you say? How the devil did you end up there?"

Harry couldn't hold back the sneer that curled his lips. "Dumbledore. I'm fairly positive that my parents had actually specified in their wills that I was to never end up with my muggle aunt because my mum knew how much she would hate me, but Dumbledore needed me to be with a blood relative for the protective magics he cast to take hold. Because of this, he ignored my parents wills and put me there anyway. And to hide his wrong-doing, he had their wills sealed, claiming that if the public could get to them, they could potentially find me and I would be in danger. Perfect for him, of course."

Fudge's eyes narrowed and Harry could see the Minister's dislike for Dumbledore, plainly written across his face. Harry knew from his talks with Lucius just how much Fudge both hated and feared Albus Dumbledore. Despite that, Fudge also respected the power Dumbledore had and was almost constantly sucking up to the man, or asking his advice in order to better keep tabs on him. Lucius said that Fudge was convinced that Dumbledore would eventually go after the position of Minister, and of course Fudge knew he would never stand a chance against the *Great Albus Dumbledore* in a political race.

Finally, Fudge turned his now curious gaze back on Harry. "You say you've captured Pettigrew? How is that possible?"

"Like I told you, he's a rat animagus. He's been masquerading as the pet of a wizarding child for years and I spotted him. Remus Lupin is the Defense professor at Hogwarts right now. He, Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and my father were best friends when they were younger, and Professor Lupin has been telling me all about my father and their school days since the start of term. I saw Pettigrew in his rat form with one of my classmates on several occasions and I finally recognized him from the professor's description.

"I was able to capture him, put him under a heavy sleeping spell, and inside a cage with a stasis charm. I've identified that he *is* an animagus and he *is* Peter Pettigrew."

"And you're really sure about all the rest of it? That Sirius Black wasn't the secret keeper and that he really wasn't a Death Eater?"

"I am sure, but you can certainly have everything done quietly up until everything is absolutely proven for sure. Keep it all hidden away from the press until the final verdict is sealed. That way there's no chance that Crouch or anyone else could try to interfere to

prevent word from getting out, about what really happened here." Of course, in reality, Harry was far more concerned with *Dumbledore* catching wind of the proceedings, and didn't honestly give a shit if Crouch heard. His career was already in the toilet.

Fudge's face revealed that his mind was fast at work, probably playing through all the different plans and potential political repercussions that would come from all of this. Finally he nodded, seemingly to himself and returned his focus to Harry. "Alright, Harry. If you can bring me Peter Pettigrew and a representative from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement can prove through use of Veritaserum that he is who you claim and that it was *he* that was responsible for the crimes Sirius Black has been accused of, I will have Black secretly retrieved from Azkaban and he will receive a trial."

Harry grinned widely. "Brilliant. When is best for me to get Pettigrew to you? I can have my house elf deliver him whenever is best for you."

"I will need to make some arrangements and contact some people who owe me some favors to prepare for all of this..." Fudge said hesitantly. "With Yule coming up so soon..."

"But that's probably the best time, in all honesty," Harry said. "A lot of people will be taking their vacation time. Fewer people will be paying attention to little things like this because they'll be too preoccupied with the holiday season. It might be easier to slip things under people's noses without notice if you do it soon."

Fudge nodded his head slowly as he debated Harry's words. "Yes... you're probably right."

"You can always contact me when you're ready for Pettigrew, if you'd prefer that. Obviously, you cannot sent me a letter by owl, though, since it'll be intercepted by *Dumbledore*. You can get in contact with me by contacting *Lucius*. I've instructed my house elf to respond of Mr. Malfoy calls for him with any letters for me, and the elf can get those letters directly to me."

Fudge's face brighten a bit. "Ah, yes. That sounds like a good plan, right there. I'll try to get things set up and in motion right away and contact *Lucius* to inform you when I'm ready."

Harry grinned. "Great. Sounds like a plan."

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Two days passed before Dobby appeared in front of Harry in the Ravenclaw common room with a letter from the Minister informing him that he was ready for Pettigrew to be delivered later that afternoon. Harry dug the small cage out of one of the extra compartments in his trunk and began removing the numerous layers of security charms that he'd put on it that were keyed directly to him. He also removed the stasis charm since it was considerably higher level than any eleven-year-old should be able to cast. He knew that with it off, the rat would wake from the sleeping charm within the hour, but by then it would be in the custody of Aurors, so it wouldn't matter.

He handed the cage to Dobby and reiterated instructions that he'd already given the elf three times, just to make sure the little thing was perfectly clear on what to do. Dobby insisted with

great enthusiasm that he would not fail his master. He took the cage in his spindly little arms and popped away.

The little house returned five minutes later to inform Harry that he had successfully delivered it to the Minister of Magic's office and that an wizard named Dawlish had been there, and they had quickly taken the cage and gone into an interrogation where another wizard in Auror robes was waiting, at which point, Dobby had been told he had to leave.

Harry nodded his head, letting out a breath to try and calm himself. He *hated* that everything was so outside of his control and that he was having to rely on the assistance of others to get what he wanted accomplished. But he knew that this was the only real option he had at the moment and he would just have to sit back and wait.

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Christmas morning dawned and Harry found himself waking annoyingly early as one of the school's house elves stacked his received presents in a neat pile at the foot of his bed. He got up grumpily and shooed the little creature away as he went over to examine the pile.

There was quite a bit more than he would have expected. He'd gotten gifts from a great number of his classmates, and he realized it was probably because he'd been helping most of them in classes an established a firm 'friendly acquaintance' relationship with almost everyone in his year that he shared a class with. He made quick work of opening all the little boxes from his classmates and wasn't the least bit surprised to find that most of them were sweets and chocolates. Maybe he could barter all of the Chocolate Frog cards with Terry Boot since the kid was so damned obsessed with them.

He'd gotten books from most of his Ravenclaw-Slytherin study-group 'friends', since they actually spent enough time with him to have some vague idea of what he might want. Draco, however, had given him *a broom*. It was shrunk down and placed inside a stylish case, and it was a Nimbus 2000. Harry had laughed with amused delight at the broom and debated the merits of sneaking out to take it for a ride at some point later that day.

From Remus he got a photo album with some pictures from the marauder's school days. Harry had given Remus a specially charmed box that had twelve individual compartments, each with their own powerful stasis charm. Inside each compartment was a single dose of the Wolfsbane potion that Harry had brewed himself. With it was a note suggesting that Remus hold onto it until the summer since Snape was providing him with Wolfsbane while Remus was teaching at Hogwarts. He still had no idea how the werewolf would take the gift, but it had been the most practical gift he could think of that he knew Remus couldn't refuse it. He had considered just giving the man money because he clearly needed it... but he also knew that Remus would never accept 'charity'.

Harry picked up a small package with a tag attached noting that it was a gift from Hagrid. He pulled it open and sat there, frowning in confusion at the fit for several long moments as he tried to work out the meaning of it.

It was a small hand-carved flute. Very much like the one that Hagrid used to sooth Fluffy to sleep.

Was it just a coincidence? Was it just that Hagrid was using his flute regularly, so he thought of making one for Harry just for the heck of it? Or had Harry been given a flute specifically so that he could use it to get past Fluffy? Harry doubted very much that *Hagrid* wanted Harry to go anywhere near Fluffy, and yet he also couldn't put it past Dumbledore to plant the suggestion into Hagrid's mind.

But still... why? *Why why why?* He just couldn't understand what the hell Dumbledore was doing, *giving* Harry the tools needed to get to the Stone. It was totally illogical and very disturbing.

And then Harry had come across a box that had no tag on it at all. He opened it up and out came a silky pool of translucent shiny fabric and a note. Harry's eyes went wide and he gasped as he ran his hand under the material, watching it disappear beneath it and instantly knew what it was. It was a cloak of invisibility! But it wasn't like any invisibility cloak he'd ever seen before! His Black Sight was going crazy as he let his eyes trail over the cloak. He stood up and held it in his hands, examining it and trying to determine exactly what it was he was looking at.

A normal invisibility cloak was woven from the hair from a Demiguise. Of course, being *hair* it would eventually degrade and lose its invisibility in patches. This was *not* made of Demiguise. He was sure of that. It was something else, entirely...

Harry sucked in a sharp breath and he dropped it in shock as he realized what it was. He knelt down slowly, picking it back up and running his hand over it again.

"Lethifold skin," he whispered in awe.

The Lethifold (also known as a Living Shroud) was a carnivorous and highly dangerous magical creature that's appearance resembled that of a black cloak roughly half an inch thick – although it would appear thicker if it had recently *eaten someone*. In addition to being black, it could also appear *invisible*. The only normal spell that could actually hold off a Lethifold was the Patronus charm. It was a very *very* dark creature. Wizards – even *Dark* wizards – were almost helpless against them. They could push them back with a Patronus and then run, but they couldn't kill them.

The only wizards who had ever managed to control, or effectively banish Lethifolds were very powerful *Necromancers* who could wield the powers necessary to manipulate the beasts.

The idea of someone actually successfully *skinning one* was just *stunning!*

Harry then noticed the note that had fallen to the floor and bent down to pick it up. He unfolded it and *instantly* recognized the long slanted writing as Dumbledore's.

'Your father left this in my possession before he died. It's time it was returned to you. Use it well.'

The note was unsigned, so he wouldn't have had any way of knowing who the 'gift' had come from if it weren't for the fact that he recognized the handwriting.

Once again he had to take pause and wonder why the hell Dumbledore was giving him these things. He hated that he couldn't understand Dumbledore's motives for doing these things. He knew that Dumbledore had some scheme in mind – some *plan* – and he was doing these things to try and *guide* Harry to following that plan without even realizing that he'd been guided. That was how Dumbledore worked.

He tried to manipulate people from the shadows to do exactly what he wanted without them ever realizing that they were being manipulated. Harry really *really* hated the idea that he could somehow end up playing right into Dumbledore's plans by simply failing to figure out what the man was doing.

Despite these significant hesitations, he couldn't help but look back down at the cloak with awe, and a *thrill*. It was *his* now. An artifact that had belonged to James Potter, and was most likely crafted by a wizard with powerful necromantic powers.

His mind wandered back to the last mysterious artifact he had found that was most likely crafted by a powerful necromancer. The Peverell ring that Tom had turned into one of his horcruxes. Harry had eventually become convinced that the stone set into the ring was actually a crystallized bit of Dementor heart, although he'd never determined what the ring was intended to do, only that it was very powerful.

He couldn't help but wonder if the same necromancer could have crafted both objects. Both of them were made from bits of extremely dark creatures that were normally considered impossible to restrain, let alone kill, and then use their bits to create powerful magical artifacts from them.

Harry paused suddenly as he remembered the last time he'd encountered anything to do with the 'Peverell' family. The headstone in the cemetery of Godric's Hollow, just a bit away from the spot where all of the Potters had been buried. The Gaunts had had an ancestral connection to the Peverell family. What if the Potters had as well?

It seemed like a leap, but his mind couldn't help but connect the dots and wonder.

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For the sake of maintaining peaceful associations and assuring that he would continue to avoid being on the receiving end of any of their pranks, Harry had given the Weasley twins a pretty sizable collection of products from Zonko's Joke Shop. When he entered the Great Hall that evening for the 'Christmas Dinner', he was rushed by the pair with gleeful gratitude. Their elder brother, Percy Weasley, who was one of the Gryffindor Prefects was frowning in disapproval, while their younger brother Ron was scowling at Harry the same as he always did. The only difference was that he now also appeared to be glaring at his twin brothers in annoyance and seemed to be pouting with jealousy.

Harry managed to brush the Weasley twins's thanks off and made his way up to the head table to speak with Remus. The man in question almost instantly set to insisting that Harry shouldn't have gotten him what he did because it no doubt cost him a small fortune. In reality it actually *hadn't* cost much at all, since Harry had done almost all of it himself, but no matter how much of a prodigy Harry was, he still shouldn't have been able to brew Wolfsbane with

only one term of potions instruction, nor should he know how to, *or be able* to cast such advanced stasis charms, so Harry allowed the man to go on believing that Harry had purchased the potions for him, rather than the truth. It wasn't like he couldn't afford to have purchased it, he had just wanted to make it himself. Again Harry shoved off Remus' words and instead thanked him for the photo album.

Harry turned and found Severus walking through the Great Hall towards the Head Table and hesitating slightly before grimacing and walking stiffly over to Harry. Remus looked confused, but Harry just smiled up at the glowering man.

"Thank you," Snape said in a forced, curt tone that only seemed to amuse Harry further.

"For what, sir?" Harry asked in an innocent voice, that only made the man's scowl deepen.

"For the gift," Snape said through clenched teeth.

Remus' eyes widened considerably and he looked down at Harry with surprise. Clearly, Remus had not expected Harry to give Snape a gift for Christmas.

"Oh, well I'm glad you like it, professor," Harry then responded, smiling brightly.

"Might I inquire as to where you got it?"

Harry's eyes darted around quickly before coming back to meet Snape's. "Ask me again some other time, and I might tell you."

Snape gave a very small nod, indicating that he understood it wasn't something to be said around others and walked away from Potter and around the table to take his normal seat.

McGonagall looked at Snape as he sat down with a rather stunned look on her face. Harry heard her lean in and quietly ask the man what Harry had given him. Snape replied simply by stating that Harry had managed to find some rather rare potion ingredients for him.

Dumbledore looked almost as surprised as McGonagall and Remus by the idea that a student who wasn't in Slytherin house – let alone a *Potter* – having given Severus Snape a Christmas present, but Dumbledore also seemed rather pleased and his eyes quickly began to twinkle.

Harry had the urge to walk up and ask the old man if the cloak that he had 'gifted' to Harry was actually the family heirloom that had been *stolen* from his trust vault when he was two years old, just so that he could crush that damned twinkle, but managed to squash the urge and instead turned back to Remus who was asking him what he'd given Snape.

A moment later Harry turned with the intention of heading over and sitting down in his own seat. As he was turning, he met Dumbledore's eyes and flinched as he felt a compulsion spell hit him. It was a miracle that he didn't instantly scowl in anger, but instead managed to maintain a passive expression as he continued to turn away and made his way to his seat.

As he sat down, he constructed walls around the compulsion to hold it together until a time where he could go into his empty mindscape and examine what the barmy old coot was trying to trick him into doing now.

Harry had to wait until the small feast was over before he could race up to Ravenclaw tower and examine the spell. It turned out to be fairly simple compulsion and actually had no long lasting effects to implant or emotions to attempt to alter. It was merely a spell urging Harry to use his new cloak to explore the school after curfew, and another more subtle layer over top that would try to lure him towards a specific room on the fourth floor.

As much as Harry utterly *despised* the idea of knowingly doing anything that played into Dumbledore's plans, he also knew that he would have to go visit that room and find out what it was that Dumbledore wanted him to find there. And so, with great trepidation, Harry slipped the new invisibility cloak over his shoulders and pulled the hood over his head, and left his dorm just after curfew.

By the time he made it to the fourth floor, he knew that Dumbledore was following him. The man was using a very advanced disillusionment spell himself, so if it weren't for Harry's Sight, he probably wouldn't have realized the man was there. The fact that Dumbledore was having no trouble tracking Harry at all, made him take a moment to examine his cloak for any hidden charms outside of it's own latent magic. He quickly identified a very subtle tracking charm and sneered. He would be removing *that* as soon as he got back to his dorm room.

He wandered around a bit, making it look as if he had gotten lost and that he *accidentally* came across the intended room, since that was what the compulsion had wanted him to do. He slipped inside and looked around.

It took less than a second to know exactly what it was he was supposed to find there.

It was an old unused classroom with a small heap of junk – broken desks, chairs, and assorted furniture – stacked against one wall. In the center of the room, however, was a large, ornate, magical mirror.

Harry walked up to it slowly, scanning the area cautiously with his Sight, checking for any spells of possible malicious intent and finding nothing. He came to a stop, a good ten feet from the mirror and took a moment to examine it.

Along the top of the mirror were words.

It said '*Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*'

Harry frowned as he wracked his brain, trying to figure out what language it was when he suddenly cursed his own stupidity.

Erised. This was the Mirror of Erised! He'd heard about it... well, a long damn time ago, but he *had* heard of it. What he knew of it also helped him to figure out how to read the message. It wasn't another language, it was a puzzel. Erised was '*Desire*', spelled backwards. It was a mirror that showed you what you wanted. Realizing that Erised was simply spelled backwards, it was simple to see that the rest of it was as well.

"I show not your face, but your hearts desire," Harry spoke quietly to himself, knowing that Dumbledore had slipped in the room behind him and was now standing against the wall watching him.

Harry lowered the hood of his cloak, which resulted in his body remaining invisible, but now leaving a disembodied floating head visible. He pulled out his wand and cast a few very entry-level detection charms, making a point to speak the incantations aloud. While he did that, he also threw in a silent spell to sooth his own cautious curiosity. From what he understood of this mirror, you could only see what *you* desired when you looked into it, but he wanted to make sure that Dumbledore hadn't found some way to charm it so that he could also see what Harry saw.

When he was convinced it was acceptably safe, he took several steps closer and came to stand in front of the mirror. A tiny breath escaped him and he felt his chest tighten as he looked into the mirror and saw himself – aged several years so that he was probably somewhere around 20 – standing there directly beside Tom with his handsome, human face restored. Tom wrapped his arms around Harry's shoulders from behind, leaning down slightly and resting his chin on Harry's shoulder as he turned his head and gently kissed Harry's neck.

Harry sighed and tilted his head reflexively, exposing his neck more to the reflection Tom that wasn't really there. Harry closed his eyes and if he imagined hard enough, he could almost feel Tom's strong arms wrapped around him, and his smooth, velvety lips, caressing the column of his neck.

A lone tear escaped his closed eyes and he sighed heavily as he opened them again and looked at the deceptive reflection.

"You're not real," Harry whispered coldly at the mirror before sighing heavily and pulling the hood up back over his head. He'd seen enough, and as far as Dumbledore was concerned, his compulsion spell had apparently worked and Harry had seen what he'd wanted him to see. Harry turned and left the room, intent on never coming back.

The vision he saw in the mirror would only become reality if he *made* it happen. Standing in front of a lying, deceitful mirror, would not make anything happen.

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Rebirth Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Since I had a few make note of it in reviews of the last chapter, I'm pointing out that Auror John Dawlish is an wizard shown in cannon as being loyal to Fudge. He was often Fudge's personal security Auror. He is never listed in cannon as having any loyalties to Dumbledore. The confusion is easy to make since Fudge usually had two Aurors with him – Dawlish, and Shacklebolt. Obviously, Kingsley was secretly loyal to Dumbledore, but Dawlish was not. Google John Dawlish and I think the first result will be to the HP Wikia page on him, for confirmation.

Also, I hate to disappoint, but Tom will not be making an appearance for a while still. I don't imagine it'll take too much longer, though, since I manage to get a lot accomplished per chapter, since I'm writing this story more 'telling' than the far more lengthy 'showing' approach. It's a conscious choice on my part, and I'm aware that 'showing' and writing out the details of every scene is often more interesting, it's also far more time consuming and fills far more pages. It's why it took me more than 200 pages to cover 2 months in Breeding Darkness.

Maybe the next story I write, I'll find a better balance between the two. Until then, I intend to continue the pace for this story for a while longer.

----- Rebirth Chapter 19 -----

One week later, the night before the students would be returning to the school via the Hogwarts Express, Harry was alerted by his charm tracking the movement within the third floor secret corridors that Dumbledore had entered the passage. Harry watched his version of the Marauder's Map as Dumbledore made his way through the room with Fluffy, the room filled with Devil's Snare, down the long slanted corridor and into the chamber filled with flying keys, *through the door* into the next large room, where he spent about four minutes before making his way into the room after that, where he only remained for about a minute before going one room further, and straight on one more. There he stopped and spent twenty minutes doing... something. Harry had no way of knowing what exactly Dumbledore had

done down there, but Harry was fairly sure that the room Dumbledore had spent all that time in was most likely the room where the stone was being kept.

Harry went to the parchment where all of Dumbledore's movements were constantly being recorded by the charmed quill and read over what Dumbledore had been doing before finally going to the third-floor passage. What he discovered did intrigue him. Just before going to the third floor, Dumbledore had gone back to the room on the fourth floor where the Mirror of Erised had been kept the week prior.

If Dumbledore was somehow using the Mirror in one of the protections around the stone, it fit the pattern of him giving Harry clues or the tools needed to get past them. It would explain – at least, partially – why he had used a compulsion to guarantee that Harry had seen the mirror.

It still didn't make sense why Dumbledore would *want* Harry to have an easy time getting to the Stone.

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The next day was a Sunday, and the day that the rest of the students would be returning to the school. Fortunately, they wouldn't be showing up until that evening since they were currently on the train. This was fortunate because shortly after lunch Dobby popped into the Ravenclaw 1st years dorm room to deliver a message to Harry that had been given him by Lucius, from the Minister.

Harry quickly broke the red wax seal and unfolded the letter; not even realizing that he was holding his breath.

Dear Mr. Potter,

You will be happy to know that everything went wonderfully smoothly. Pettigrew's interrogation confirmed everything that you told me. Sirius Black was taken from Azkaban three days ago. Yesterday he stood trial before a closed small session of the Wizengamot with a few specially selected reporters and was found innocent on all charges. Pettigrew will be facing a more public trial tomorrow. You should expect to find news of all of the events in Monday mornings Daily Prophet.

I am sure you will also be happy to learn that Sirius Black has retained a shocking amount of his faculties. I have never met such a coherent man out of Azkaban. I do not think you will have any serious worries about the man being found unfit to take custody of you. He is currently resting in St. Mungo's.

One of the selected reporters from the Daily Prophet expressed to me her desire to get your opinion on the events that transpired but also noted that she has never been successful in her attempts to contact you in the past. I have a very agreeable working relationship with this journalist and think that she would make a good contact for that interview you expressed the desire to make. It would be ideal if you could provide a few quotes right away so that it could make it into Monday morning's Prophet.

Her name is Rita Skeeter and I highly recommend establishing a mutually beneficial working relationship with her. Be cautious, she can be quite eager when trying to find a juicy story, but if you give her what she's looking for without a fight, she can be very useful in getting the right information out to the masses. Perhaps you could use that energetic young house elf of yours to bypass that bothersome post charm.

Best luck to you,

Minister of Magic

Cornelius Fudge

A small ecstatic laugh escaped Harry's mouth as he looked down at the letter. *It had worked!* He'd gotten Sirius Black out of Azkaban and it had been bloody *easy!*

Merlin! He had to tell Remus!

But first, he needed to contact that reporter. He'd needed to fulfill his part of the bargain. The Minister had come through for him, and the man could be useful again in the future. It would do no good to appear to renege on his side of the deal and get on the man's bad side.

Harry quickly called Dobby, who appeared a moment later with a pop. Harry spoke hurriedly to the elf while he grabbed a piece of parchment and began to scribble away a quick message to the reporter, informing her that there was a redirection charm on all his mail so contacting him was very difficult. He told her that if she had any questions for him that needed answering right away to give them to this elf and he would bring them directly to Harry.

Harry handed the letter to Dobby and told him to find a woman named Rita Skeeter at the Daily Prophet and give it to her. He then said that Dobby should wait for a response letter because the woman would no doubt have one, and to bring it to Harry as soon as he got it.

Dobby was all too happy to oblige and disappeared with a pop, letter in hand.

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Harry hurried through the enormous double-doors into the Great Hall for the start of term feast. Most of the hall was already filled with students – all eagerly and excitedly talking with their friends about their winter holiday. Harry had only just finished with his last correspondence with Rita Skeeter. He'd stayed in his dorm room all afternoon so that he would be available whenever Dobby needed to return since the elf couldn't appear before him if Harry was in the presence of anyone else.

He and Rita had ended up making use of the energetic little house elf to send questions and answers back and forth very quickly for the last hour, finally calling it quits because Rita needed to finish writing her story, and still had a deadline to meet if she was going to make it in time for the morning edition.

Rita had clearly been very excited about what was happening. Even through the quickly scrawled questions written back and forth he could tell she was practically foaming at the

mouth with how juicy this story was. Harry made sure to portray a certain sort of persona to the woman, because he knew better than to give her anything more than was absolutely necessary. He knew her type the moment he had first started corresponding with her and knew to *not* trust her, no matter what. She was a bloodthirsty reporter out for the scoop and would run with any potential story angle she thought would get her the best reader response.

He had also recognized her name, so he knew what sort of articles she tended to write.

As Harry rushed through the Great Hall towards the Ravenclaw table he looked up to the Head Table and managed to catch Remus' eyes looking at him curiously. It wasn't like Harry to be late to a feast like this and he gave the young Ravenclaw a curious look.

Harry responded with a wide accomplished grin and mouthed the word 'later'. Remus' eyes widened a bit with increased curiosity and he gave Harry a slight nod in acknowledgment.

Harry sat down beside his classmates just as Dumbledore stood up and tapped a fork against his goblet, earning the attention of the hall. He made a brief speech welcoming everyone back to Hogwarts and hoped they all had enjoyable holidays. With a clap of his hands the feast appeared on the tables and everyone quickly dug in. The din of voices filled the hall almost instantly as everyone returned to their earlier excited conversations about gifts, family, and food.

Harry made a point of thanking everyone who had given him presents, especially since he hadn't actually bothered to get most of them anything in return, not having actually expected gifts from so many of them. A few students asked Harry how it was staying in the castle over the break and he had grinned and said he had enjoyed having the dorm room all to himself for a few weeks.

Harry was practically bouncing in his seat with anxious anticipation by the time the damn feast was finished. A few of the older Ravenclaws had commented on it and he had just smiled brightly at them and said he was excited about something, but it was a secret. *Finally* everyone was dismissed to return to their common rooms and Harry jumped from his seat and went over to the head table to stand directly opposite Remus.

"Professor Lupin, can I speak with you in your office?" Harry asked with an eager smile. Remus nodded and stood up, nodding and bidding goodbye to his colleagues who were all watching with curiosity. Harry met Snape's eyes that were filled with both curiosity and obvious trepidation. Harry's grin shifted into more of an accomplished smirk and he could see the dread color Snape's face and had to fight the urge to laugh.

Remus and Harry made their way through the crowds and headed towards Remus' office. As soon as they entered Harry pulled out his wand and cast a quick privacy spell out of habit. Remus had somewhat gotten used to Harry's 'paranoid tendencies' and no longer questioned it when he saw the young boy do these things – although he often wondered where the heck Harry learned all these spells, or how he had gotten the idea into his head to start doing it all the time.

Remus sat down in his chair but Harry stayed standing and he was practically jumping with giddiness. Remus laughed at all the energy Harry seemed to have. "What's gotten into you,

cub?" the elder wizard asked with a chuckle.

Harry finally stopped bouncing and hit Remus with a wide, smug grin. "I did it! I did it, Remus!"

"Did what?"

"I got Sirius free! He's in St. Mungo's and he's been cleared of all charges!"

Remus's jaw dropped and his face slackened with shock. "What?" he whispered hoarsely. "You... what? *How*? I didn't even know you'd done anything! When did this happen? *How* did this happen?"

Harry's smug grin just grew wider and he finally flopped himself down into the chair opposite Remus looking very pleased with himself. "You'll get to read all about it in tomorrow's Prophet. It actually ended up being a hundred times easier than I expected it to be, because I found Pettigrew."

Remus appeared to choke on his own shock at that statement. "Found him? Pettigrew is dead!"

"Nope. He faked his death. The bastard has been living in his animagus form for... well, a decade, I guess. He was pretending to be someone's pet. He was *here*. In *Hogwarts*. I saw his name on the Marauder's Map, tracked him down, and caught him."

"You, what? Harry! Wait... you did this all on your own? When! Harry, you should have come to me! He could have hurt you!"

Harry waved off Remus' statement with an unconcerned gesture. "It wasn't necessary. It was easy to catch the man and he never even saw me. I stunned him before he even realized what was happening and then I put him under a sleeping spell. I spoke with the Minister of Magic at the Malfoy's party and arranged to give him Pettigrew, and to make some public statements lending him my official support and gratitude if he agreed to make sure that justice was served and Sirius got a trial and was cleared of all charges."

Remus just sat at his desk, leaning forward and gaping at Harry in total shock. His jaw floundered as if he wanted to say something, but had lost his words. Finally he blinked and shut his mouth before rubbing his hands roughly over his face. "I cannot believe you got all of this accomplished on your own. Did anyone help you?"

Harry shrugged. "Well all I did was speak with the Minister and hand over Pettigrew. Honestly, most everything was done on his end. It was actually rather frustrating to have so much of what happened be out of my control, but I guess I'm a bit of a control freak like that."

Remus coughed out a weak laugh and shook his head. "You said that Sirius is in St. Mungo's?"

Harry nodded. "Yup. Minister Fudge told me that he was surprised at how much of Sirius' mind seemed to still be in tact, so I'm hopeful that things will work out from here on out. I doubt I'll be able to get permission to leave the school to visit him any time soon, nor that he'll be able to come here and visit me until some of the custody stuff and been put into motion. Do you think that you could pay him a visit some time soon to check on him?"

Remus sat up straighter and quickly nodded. "Of course. I'll..." he paused looking thoughtful. "I wonder if I'd be able to floo to St. Mungo's and visit him tonight..."

"I think their visiting hours are already over," Harry put in, "but if you send off an owl right now, it should make it to him before the rush of post he'll no doubt get after the articles are published in tomorrow's paper. And then you could go visit him tomorrow after your last class. I'm not sure how much he actually knows about what happened to get him free."

Remus nodded slowly as he looked across the room with slightly unfocused eyes. "Yes... you're probably right. I'll... I'll write a letter and go visit tomorrow."

Harry grinned. "Alright. Good luck with that. I'd better get back to the Ravenclaw common room. Keep me posted on what happens, yeah?"

"Of course," Remus said with a determined nod. Harry grinned, stood up and bid the man farewell.

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PETER PETTIGREW FOUND ALIVE!

SIRIUS BLACK CLEARED OF ALL CHARGES

FREED FROM AZKABAN

In a shocking revelation, it was recently discovered that supposed-mass-murder and Death Eater, Sirius Black was none of those things at all, and most shocking of all, ten years ago when said wizard was first apprehended, he never received a trial that could have easily proven his innocence and prevented a decade of suffering for crimes he did not commit.

Sirius Black finally received that trial this last weekend after the man who had actually committed those crimes was discovered alive and questioned under veritaserum where he made a full confession, proving that Black had had nothing to do with any of it. Sirius Black was retrieved from Azkaban Prison, questioned under the truth serum and found innocent on all charges.

Ten years ago, it was believed that Sirius Black had been the Secret Keeper for the Potters when they put their home under the Fidelius Charm in order to hide from You-Know-Who and his followers, however it has just recently come to light that Black was a decoy while the Potters had actually put their trust in their other friend, Peter Pettigrew. Unfortunately, this trust was misplaced because it has been revealed that Pettigrew bares the Dark Mark of You-Know-Who and had already been a Death Eater when he was made the Potter's Secret

Keeper. Pettigrew was the one who betrayed the Potter's location to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and guaranteed their imminent death.

After the deaths of the Potters and the miraculous destruction of You-Know-Who at the hands of their infant son, Harry Potter, Sirius Black being the only person who knew the truth about Pettigrew being the real Secret Keeper went after the man in hopes of apprehending him and bringing the Death Eater and traitor to justice. Pettigrew however, was able to turn the tables, pinning the blame for the Potter's betrayal on the shoulders of Sirius Black and causing an explosion in the heart of muggle London causing the deaths of over a dozen muggles.

Black was apprehended by Aurors lead by then-Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Bartemious Crouch Sr., a man on a mission and with powerful political ambitions, reaching as far as the position of Minister of Magic. Seeing the capture and punishment of the Potter's betrayer as a political stepping stone, Crouch bypassed our precious justice system and threw Black straight into the wizarding prison without so much as questioning the man.

This outrageous miscarriage of justice would have gone unnoticed – as Mr. Crouch had buried the evidence of his wrong-doing deep – if it weren't for the Boy-Who-Lived himself, and our very own Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge. Young Harry Potter says that he knew that Sirius Black hadn't been the betrayer that everyone believed him to be and went right to the top, seeking the aid of Minister of Magic himself, and –

Albus Dumbledore stared down at the newspaper resting on the table beside his breakfast plate in mild, numb, shock, and honestly, he was temporarily rendered unsure of what to do. He had not seen this coming and that was unsettling. He prided himself on his ability to predict all the likely, and even *unlikely* moves, countless steps in advance and always have some sort of reaction planned out ahead of time.

But this... he did not expect this. He had suspected that it was possible that Pettigrew had survived, but had assumed the man would vanish off the face of the planet and never get captured. Even then, he would have expected Cornelius to try and cover something like this up, not *help* to speed it along. This could bring about a mountain of problems for Dumbledore if certain details leaked to the wrong sources.

Had Sirius known that Dumbledore was the one to cast the Potter's Fidelius? That would be the biggest problem that he could see arising from this. He could not risk anything that would cause Harry Potter to distrust him. Harry had a destiny to fulfill and he had to be properly guided. If he did not trust Dumbledore, it would only make it that much harder to guide his actions and make sure that each step was played out just so in order to achieve the best outcome for everyone.

Of course, Dumbledore fully understood that some of the actions he had had to undertake during the last ten years regarding young Mr. Potter were shrouded in some serious moral and ethical dilemmas and he truly did regret having to cause the boy such misery, but in the end, he was still convinced that everything he had done, had been necessary. This was for the greater good of their world, and for the greater good, a few sacrifices were necessary. He knew that Voldemort would return someday, and when that time came, Harry's full

cooperation was going to be necessary in order to truly and fully vanquish the Dark wizard. Harry would need to do things in *just* the right way, and he would have to do it believing that it was entirely of his own will.

Sure, Dumbledore knew that Harry Potter wasn't the *only* chance they had to destroy Voldemort, nor did he have any expectations that Harry Potter would be casting the finishing blow to the Dark Wizard – it was actually impossible, all extenuating circumstances being considered. And this was a *war* and wars were waged by armies. They were rarely determined by a single duel, or ended at the hands of a single person, however Dumbledore also knew that in order for *this* war to ever hope to end, Voldemort had to die.

Harry was just a single child, but Dumbledore knew that his involvement in this war would be a true deciding factor in Voldemort's eventual demise. Of course, Harry would have to die for it, seeing as how he was carrying a piece of Voldemort's soul around with him, but Dumbledore also was convinced that if he was able to make everything play out just so, that the war could be won easier and faster if he properly guided young Harry down the correct path. Fewer people would die in the end, this way. Yes, Harry would most likely die young after enduring a miserable childhood, but his sacrifice would save the lives of thousands of others, and if everything concluded as Dumbledore predicted, by the end Harry would *willingly* sacrifice his own life, for the sake of saving the world. It was regrettable, but Dumbledore saw no other alternative that was as likely to work as well.

That is, assuming everything went according to his many plans, and he had to admit that things were already deviating in ways he hadn't foreseen. Nothing serious, of course. Nothing that he couldn't slightly alter his plans and compensate for. Sirius Black being released from Azkaban wasn't even the largest unexpected deviation if he was being honest with himself.

No, *Harry himself* had been the biggest surprise. Dumbledore had truly been surprised by the young boy. He was frightfully bright and seemed so eager to learn and to help. Of course Dumbledore had expected a boy desperate to please others – willing to do anything he could in order to earn the approval of others; but he had also expected the boy to shy away from people and more than likely have average or below average academic achievement. He knew that the Dursley's would never have approved of their nephew performing better than their own son in academics. What he had heard from Arabella about their poor treatment of the boy, had led him to be sure that Harry Potter would be far more... well, *broken* than he was. He had been greatly surprised to hear from Remus that Harry had been placed in a gifted program at his muggle school. He never would have expected the Dursley's to allow such a thing. To permit their nephew that they despised to so brightly outshine their own boy... well, he hadn't expected that. He could still work with that though.

He had been a bit concerned at Harry's willingness to associate with the children of Death Eaters, simply because he was worried about what sort of influence they could have on him or the danger he could be placed in by associating with them outside the safety of Hogwarts. He had expected Harry's introduction to the wizarding world at the hands of Hagrid to plant the seeds of distrust and hesitation regarding those sorted into Slytherin house so that Harry would steer clear of them, thus keeping him *safe*, but that had apparently not quite gone to plan. Still, it wasn't that big of a deal. At least the boy hadn't been sorted into Slytherin, which would have been the only significant complication.

Dumbledore had to admit that he was rather proud of the boy's open-mindedness and willingness to cross the invisible house line that so few children were ever willing to cross in their first year. To Harry, each child was a person defined by their actions and words, not by what color their tie was or what emblem was on the breast of their robes. It was such a breath of fresh air to come across someone who was willing to give people second chances and see people as more than who their parents were. Someone who is able to see the *good* in everyone, no matter the stigmas that people and society attach to them. It was also clear that Harry knew about Remus' condition, if what Poppy Pomfrey had to say was true, and the boy clearly did not fear or shy away from the man simply because of his unfortunate affliction.

It really was a shame the boy had to die. He had such promise. So bright, so helpful. He had even given Severus a Christmas present!

The memory still brought a small smile to his lips. The rest of the staff had been so stunned by that. Clearly Severus had also been rather stunned as well. Quite amusing.

But this... this Sirius Black business had the potential to cause a lot of problems. However, it could still work out if he played his cards right – and Dumbledore always played his cards with the utmost care. Assuming that Sirius didn't know that Albus had left him in that awful place intentionally, then things would still be fine. Sirius had been loyal to Albus in the last war, and if he remained loyal now, Dumbledore knew that he could still maintain Harry's trust in him. His loss of legal guardianship, assuming that Sirius was still sane enough to make a bid for gaining it, would be unfortunate, but he was fairly sure he could still maintain a powerful place in the boy's life as an adviser, and with time he could grow to be the boy's confidant.

The issue of the Dursley's, and the blood wards connected with Petunia would likely come up, and he would need to make plans for that.

He let out a small breath and nodded his head slightly to himself, convinced that he still had things under control and this complication would not ruin his plans. He couldn't allow it to. Harry Potter was simply too important.

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Harry sat calmly at the Ravenclaw table drinking his pumpkin juice with a small smile gracing his lips. The Great Hall was on fire with stunned and excited whispers, and more than a few sets of eyes were locked on Harry.

In addition to the main headline story, there were several other articles in the morning Prophet dedicated to all that had happened. There was one story about Pettigrew's Order of Merlin being revoked; another story explaining what a Fidelius Charm was and how the secret was stored in the soul of the 'Secret Keeper' and can only be given up willingly; and then there was another story that included interviews with some witches and wizards who had been classmates of James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Pettigrew's who told stories about their school days and how James Potter and Sirius Black had been as close as brothers, if not closer.

Most of these stories only had a headline, and the first paragraph of the story and then a note to which page the reader should turn to find the rest of the story. Accompanying the main headline story on the front page, however, was another large featured article – this one by Rita Skeeter, going over her interview with the Boy-Who-Lived and his reaction to the events. Harry came off as an innocent, excited young man who was thankful that justice was finally going to be served and the man who actually betrayed his parents was going to pay for his crimes. He also expressed that he was eager to meet Sirius Black, as he knew the man was his godfather, and had been a good friend of his father's.

He also went into how grateful he was to the Minister for his assistance. He said that he was so relieved that the man had been willing to take him seriously, even though he was just a kid. He put in a proper amount of gushing awe that such an important man had been willing to help him, and Skeeter's slant on the whole thing portrayed Harry as a rather adorable, eager and innocent child, which was fine by Harry since it made him appeal to a large portion of the public, and made him seem unthreatening to the rest. Unthreatened people were far more apt to lowering their guard.

She then went into a bit of a bio on Harry's history, noting that he'd lived with muggles (although no mention was made of his treatment at the Dursley's hands since Harry did not yet feel it was necessary to pull out that card), and that during his muggle primary school days he'd been considered 'gifted'. She then transitioned into describing Harry's successes so far at Hogwarts, mentioning that he'd been sorted into Ravenclaw, and that he was currently top of his year out of all of the houses.

A few of Harry's classmates actually felt they knew him well enough that they didn't hesitate in asking him about the articles and what all had been said. He responded easily enough and actually expressed that he really was hoping he could meet his godfather sooner rather than later, but expected it wouldn't be any sooner than the spring holiday.

Breakfast finally ended and people's attention managed to shift away from the news in the paper and back onto their classes. At the end of the day, just as classes came to an end, Harry visited Remus and wished him good luck just as the wizard made use of the Floo in his office to go to St. Mungos.

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It was now Wednesday and Harry had just finished up his block of double-potions with the Hufflepuffs. He lingered behind and waited for the class to leave. A few of his classmates gave him slightly questioning looks, but he gestured for them to go onto lunch without him. As soon as they'd all left, he turned and found Snape watching him with a hesitant, calculating look.

"Did you need something, Potter?" Snape asked cautiously.

"Not necessary," Harry said with a shrug as he pulled out his wand and cast a few privacy charms. "I just wondered if many of the ingredients I gave you were still good. I wasn't convinced that all of them would be all that useful, being as old as they were."

"Age, fortunately, doesn't have a huge effect on many basilisk parts. They are remarkably resilient of deterioration."

Harry smiled. "Ah, that's good to hear."

"Where did you get them?" Snape asked as he pinned Harry with narrowed eyes.

Harry chuckled and shrugged. "It doesn't really matter. What's important is that I can get more. In fact... technically, I could even get some fresh stuff. Would you have any use for basilisk venom? Or some fresh snakes, not just the old dried out shed stuff? I know there are potions that require the parts be fresh."

"There are... how could you possibly have access to *fresh* bits from a *basilisk*?" Snape asked incredulously.

"Like I said, *it doesn't really matter*." Harry repeated, his eyes turning slightly more serious for a moment.

"Basilisks are incredibly difficult to successfully breed and even harder to keep alive. It's why they're so outrageously rare! There are only a few living in captivity in reserves and their scales and venom can only be harvested a few times a year without causing them harm. The expense behind acquiring any of those ingredients is *monumental*." Snape exclaimed. "Even purchasing a small segment of shed skin, like the one you gave me, is incredibly expensive!"

"I'm aware of that," Harry replied in a slightly bored tone and rolling his eyes. "Now that we've established that basilisk related ingredients are damned expensive and near impossible to come by, how about we move onto the more important fact that I can get you as much as you want? Oh, and also the fact that I'm not going to tell you where I'm getting it."

Snape looked dumbfounded for all of one second before his eyes narrowed and he looked at Harry shrewdly. "What do you want?"

Harry's grin turned predatory. "Now you're getting it." Harry walked to stand in front of one of the workstation tables in the front row and pushed himself up so he could sit on it, much like he did the last time they had a chat in this room. "I'm not specifically sure *what* I need, just yet, but I know I'm going to need someone's help, very soon," Harry started. "I've been looking into this magical Trace business over the last week, and while I'm fairly sure I can figure out how to remove it, it's not something I'll be able to do alone when the time comes to do the actual removing. I'll get you whatever basilisk-related ingredients you want, in exchange for the guarantee that, when the time comes, you'll help me get rid of this Trace. Do we have a deal?"

Snape looked a bit shocked. "I'm surprised you feel the need to try and bribe me to help you," he stated after a moment. "I would have expected you to simply *order* me to assist you."

Harry shrugged. "You're baring the Dark Lord's mark, not *mine* – *although* I did help him created the thing... But anyway, it's not like you're one of *my* followers. What right do I have to order you around without offering compensation?"

Snape blinked at him with a blank expression before seeming to collect himself. "Alright..." he said slowly, "but what makes you so sure you can dispell the Trace?"

"I was able to remove the Trace from my wand when I was only *fifteen* – the first time around, I mean – I'm sure I can get rid of this version of the Trace from my person now that I'm more than sixty, if you look at it from a certain perspective – although I'd be more inclined to call myself closer to fifty-one since my perception of time while I was dead was a bit off. But anyway, I've already started analyzing the Trace, it's just difficult to do when I'm trying to analyze a spell is cast upon myself. I'm considering enlisting Draco's assistance so that I can cast my revealing spells on him and analyze the results with less interference."

"Will you be offering him *compensation* as well?" Snape asked with an air of minor incredulity, as if he were still having trouble wrapping his mind around the idea of Harry actually being willing to offer something in exchange for services, instead of simply demanding obedience. But then he had to remind himself that this wasn't the Dark Lord... just someone who had been the Dark Lord's lover and second in command.

"Of course," Harry said dismissively. Snape rose a questioning eyebrow and Harry continued. "I'll remove his Trace as well – assuming that it's not too difficult or dangerous for him. The promise of having his Trace removed should be more than enough incentive for him to cooperate."

"Will your experience with removing the Trace from your wand apply at all to removing a personal Trace?" Snape asked after a moment.

Harry scowled lightly. "No. Not from what I can tell so far, anyway. It's a very different spell. I'm already starting to develop a theory of one way to approach removing it, but I need to do those revealing spells so that I can see if there are any other options first."

Snape nodded his head slowly. "Well... when the time comes that you are in need of my... assistance... let me know."

Harry nodded. "Good. Are there any specific basilisk parts that you want more than others?"

Snape paused, looking thoughtful for a moment before he looked up, his eyes unusually bright. "Can you really get the venom?" he said in an almost whisper.

Harry smirked. "I can try."

--

The school term quickly got into full swing, and the weeks began to pass quickly. Harry easily enlisted Draco's cooperation. The best part was that the Malfoy heir knew better than to ask Harry stupid questions about how he knew the spells he knew, or how he was able to perform non-verbal casting when that wasn't covered until much later in their schooling. He also never once showed that he doubted that Harry would be entirely capable of successfully removing the Trace, even though it was supposed to be impossible.

The only thing about the whole arrangement that Harry didn't entirely like was the fact that he had to reveal the Room of Hidden Things to Draco. He needed to do his work in there because it was the only place in the school besides the Chamber where he could perform all the spells he needed to use without there being any chance of the magic being logged by the school's wards – not that the spells were actually *Dark*, or illegal in any way. And even given the likelihood that no one would ever check those logs unless there was some specific cause to do so or an investigation being conducted for some reason, Harry still didn't want to take the risk. These were high-level reverse-engineering spells and most certainly not something a student should know how to cast, or ever have any reason to do so.

Draco had, of course, been sufficiently impressed with the room's existence and its abilities. Harry made him swear that he would not show the room to *anyone* else, and Draco had agreed, but Harry wasn't stupid enough to take that as any real guarantee. Draco may have been a Malfoy, but he was still only eleven, and he liked to brag. Harry had also made a point to not even *hint* at the 'hidden things' portion of the room, and simply referred to it as the 'changing room' in Draco's presence. He didn't want the boy to find the room filled with hidden objects since one of Tom's horcruxes was hidden in there and the fewer people who knew of its existence the better.

The two spent several hours on the weekends when they both had the time, in the room. Draco would stand in the center of a circle of runes that Harry had drawn on the floor while Harry stood off to the side with small table, parchment, and a charmed auto-inking quill floating above it, and his wand in his hand. He would cast spell after spell and dictate his notes while the quill scribbled away.

Draco would quickly get bored and often complained about having to stand so much, but Harry tuned the boy out easily enough. It was the third week since the start of term when Harry stood looking down at the parchment with a frown on his face before looking up at Draco seeing magically displayed results that only he, as the caster of the detection spell, could see, and then looked back down at the parchment.

"It couldn't possibly be that simple," he said under his breath.

Draco looked up curiously. "You find something?"

"I think... I have," Harry said slowly as he bent down over the parchment on the table and grabbed the quill that had been hovering in the air over the parchment, breaking the dictation spell.

He flipped through several pages and scribbled a few things down in the margins before standing back.

"Well, fuck. That's... just stupid."

"Going to fill me in?" Draco asked, sounding mildly impatient.

Harry shook his head. "You wouldn't understand."

Draco scowled in obvious annoyance and turned to the side to scowl at the wall.

Harry looked back up, seeing the angry look to Draco's face and chuckled. "Sorry Drake. Didn't mean to insult you. No offense, there's just... it's complicated."

"Well, obviously, seeing as how you've been at this for *three weeks*," Draco sneered in obvious annoyance.

"Yeah, well, I think that this will be our last session for a while. I think I've figured out what I needed to from all this."

Draco's eyes lit up. "Do you think you know how to remove it?"

"Yes... I do."

"Let me guess... I wouldn't understand?" Draco sneered.

Harry chuckled. "Actually... it's almost obscenely simple. "An aging potion."

"An aging potion?" Draco echoed incredulously. "It can't possibly be *that* simple! If it's that easy, everyone would be doing it, and it wouldn't have taken you three weeks to figure it out."

"Well, a normal aging potion won't work. It's going to take a very specific sort of potion to trick the Trace. It's designed to remove itself automatically when the body reaches the age of full maturity. It uses your biological clock to know when to dissipate. Normal aging potions temporarily transform your outward appearance into that of your older self, but they have no impact on how old your body actually is. It's going to take... well, this is the part where I get Snape's help."

"This potion you'd have Sev make would age you past seventeen in order to trick the Trace, right?" Draco asked for clarification.

"Correct."

"But we'd go back to our real ages afterwards, right?"

Harry was looking back down at his notes now but nodded absently. "Yes, yes. Don't worry. When everything is said and done, your body will go back to being that of a twelve-year-old again. Once the Trace legitimately believes you've reached physical maturity it'll dispell all on it's own and it'll be gone. The Trace won't suddenly come back just because you're body has gone back to normal."

"Okay, good. The Trace won't get cast on us again here at Hogwarts when we return next fall, will it?"

"Snape says it's only cast on the first years, but I can always store and stasis some of the potion. As long as the proper charms are used, it'll be good in stasis for a couple years and I won't have to brew more."

Draco nodded his head. "Alright. So am I done here?"

Harry nodded absently again and made a shooing motion with his hand that Draco looked at with obvious annoyance before huffing and stepping outside the circle of runes.

"I'm going now," Draco said pointedly, but Harry still didn't look up from his notes. He just mumbled something unintelligible, causing Draco to roll his eyes and stalk out of the room.

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Remus had been visiting Sirius Black in St. Mungo's at least twice a week. After three weeks, the healers were finally satisfied that his health was stabilized and he was gaining weight again at an acceptably steady rate. They had him on a regimen of potions that he would continue for several months – mostly various nutritional supplements, and potions to help restore the damage of a decade of malnourishment on his muscles and bones. They also had a mind healer coming to visit him regularly, but, according to Remus, the man was being incredible stubborn about not cooperating with the woman.

At the end of the third week in the hospital, he had finally convinced them to discharge him and Sirius Black stepped out of St. Mungo's and breathed clean fresh air as a truly free man for the first time.

His wand had been snapped when he was apprehended and thrown into Azkaban, so his first destination was to visit Diagon Alley and get a new one. He went to Gringott's Bank, spoke with the account manager of the Black Family Estate and discovered that he had somehow become head of the family. His father and Uncle Cygnus had both died in 1979 and that had left his mother, Walburga as the head of the family, since aunt Durella had died in 1981, and aunt Lucretia had married a Prewett.

Regulus would have ended up the head of the family, even though Sirius was the eldest, simply because Regulus had been his mother's favorite... however Regulus had died too. Still, despite all of this, he still found himself surprised that he'd ended up inheriting the title of family head because he had honestly believed that his mother had disowned him after he ran off and moved in with the Potters in his fifth year.

Apparently she had added him back to the family after he'd been sentenced to Azkaban for betraying the Potters and being a Death Eater.

He rolled his eyes to himself as his mother's twisted logic and accepted his fate. It meant that he inherited the family fortune, as well as his childhood home – however, that did not mean he had any intention of ever living there. No, he had other plans already in motion for that.

He left Gringott's with a bottomless money pouch attached to his vault and made his way to Ollivander's where he quickly acquired a brand new wand. His presence in the Alley attracted quite a bit of attention and he didn't exactly like it, so as soon as he was done, he took the Floo out of the Leaky Cauldron to the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade. He pulled a bit of parchment out of his pocket and checked the address written there one last time before quickly making his way out of the pub and down the street and turning towards the residential district.

It didn't take him long to find the two story house labeled #224 Boyd Acres Rd. He knocked on the door and after a brief wait an elderly witch opened the door and looked up at him with a blank expression for a moment before she smiled.

"Ah, you must be Mr. Black," she said in a kind voice.

He smiled and nodded his head. "That's correct. And you must be Maggie Sampson? I'm here about the flat?"

"Of course, dear. Right this way," she said as she stepped out the door, closing it behind her and leading him around the front of the house to the side where an exterior staircase went up and around the building, ending at a small landing on the second story and another door. She pulled out an old key and unlocked the door before handing him the key and telling him that it and lock were wardlocked together so that a simple *alohomora* couldn't unlock the door, which he appreciated.

She ushered him inside and stood at the threshold as she told him where everything was located, and informed him that the fireplace was already connected to the Floo network and the address was '224-b Boyd Acres'. He did a quick traversal around the flat before coming back to face her with a relieved smile on his face.

"So is everything acceptable Mr. Black?" she asked and his grin widened.

"Everything is brilliant, Madam Sampson."

"Oh, call me Maggie."

"Then, I insist you call me Sirius," he said with a roguish grin that made her titter.

They spoke briefly over a few details of his new rental agreement and Sirius pulled out the first month's rent and handed it over before she headed out, back down the stairs, and he was left alone in the empty flat.

After heaving a slow heavy breath he reached into his pocket and pulled out another piece of parchment and began to read over his notes. He had a list of things he needed to accomplish. First, he needed to do some shopping. Buy some furniture, a new wardrobe, and a post owl. He had already gotten in contact with a solicitor so that he could start to move forward on claiming custody of Harry.

When Remus had explained that he had his freedom entirely thanks to the actions of young Harry, he had been utterly stunned. Remus had told him a lot about Harry in the last three weeks, and while most of it was glowing praise, the portion about Harry's home life with Lily's wretched sister was horribly disturbing.

The festering ball of guilt in his gut at knowing that it was his own rash actions that had caused both he and Harry's suffering was tremendous. If he had just controlled himself instead of running off after Pettigrew for revenge he could have explained to everyone that he hadn't been the Secret Keeper, and he could have taken Harry in from the start instead of allowing his godson to end up in the care of abusive muggle monsters.

But he was free now, and it was entirely thanks to Harry. And Harry needed him. He knew that the process to acquire custody of Harry would probably not be terribly simple. He would no doubt have to prove to the authorities that he was sane enough and stable enough to look after a child, and to do that he needed to get his life in order, and fast.

Maggie's flat was a temporary solution. He knew he'd be buying a house by spring, but since it would, hopefully, be Harry's home as well, he wanted to get his godson's input on the house before he bought anything. A house would be necessary though since he would have to heavily ward the place for Harry's protection.

Remus had told him that the reason Dumbledore had insisted that the Dursley's was the 'safest' place for Harry was because of some sort of powerful ward he was able to put in place there connected to Harry's blood relation to Petunia. The wards on the house were supposedly so good that a Death Eater could never hope to even find the place, let alone ever set foot anywhere near it.

He would have to commission wards around his new home that could rival those, if he was going to keep Harry safe.

Thinking about Dumbledore caused Sirius to clench his fists and gnash his teeth as a boiling fury tried to erupt from within him. If what Remus had told him was true, he... well, he didn't know what to think. Remus, himself, had been doubtful about it all as well, but said that Harry was convinced and had shown him quite a bit of convincing evidence...

If it was true, then Dumbledore had *known* that Sirius wasn't the Secret Keeper *all along*.

Could it be true? Sirius didn't know, and just thinking about it left him horribly confused and feeling more betrayed than he had ever thought possible.

He wanted to confront the man; to ask him if it was true. But Remus had insisted – *begged* – him not to and to wait until he'd spoken with Harry. That if it was true, then Harry could be in danger if they revealed to Dumbledore that they suspected him. Sirius had reluctantly agreed to wait, and had decided instead to focus on getting his life in order and getting the custody claims started.

He had a decade to make up for, after all. And a godson to take care of.

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Rebirth Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: So I've had a couple people ask me in reviews if I would have **Sirius and Remus be a couple in this story**, and it actually made me pause because I hadn't even considered it until they asked. But I'm not at all against the idea, and it would provide an interesting opportunity to keep Remus in the picture more consistently during the summers. In fact, as I thought about it, I even kind of liked the idea. But I'm not set on it – like I said, it wasn't part of my plans; hadn't even occurred to me before it was mentioned. So if there's a lot of people against the idea, I won't do it. **I put a poll up on my author profile regarding it.**

— — — — Rebirth Chapter 20 — — — —

The first weekend of February Harry made his way down to the chamber and put on a specially charmed pair of glasses that basically left him blind to anything outside his Black Sight – which, fortunately worked despite the lenses. The reason he was currently wearing them was because he was about to venture to the basilisk's nest for the first time.

Tom had told him that, as a wizard who was able to speak parseltongue that he was immune to the Basilisk's stare, but Harry had no idea if that immunity would transfer over to him. He sure as hell wasn't about to take that risk now. So he hissed out the proper commands and the giant statue of Salazar Slytherin that took up the largest portion of the main Chamber began to shift and rumble until the mouth started to open up, revealing a narrow passage. Harry climbed up and made his way down the tunnel until he came out in a large, filthy room that reeked of dead things. He heard the telltale crunching of bones beneath his feet as he walked forward. He cautiously approached the large glowing mass of magical energy that his Sight picked up, knowing it was the hibernating basilisk.

It took the next twenty minutes of coaxing and hissing and casting a few spells that he remembered Tom mentioning to him to finally wake the giant serpent and get her speaking to him.

:You are not Tom,: the basilisk said at one point.

:No, I'm not,: Harry admitted hesitantly.

:What isss your name, childe?:

:My name is Herakles,: Harry replied.

:You are Tom'sss Heri?:

Harry smiled and a bit of relief filled him. *:Yesss, I am.:*

:You are not an heir of my massster,: she pointed out.

Harry fidgeted, *:No... I'm not exactly a descendent of Sssalazar Ssslytherin...:*

:But you still sspeak the tongue of the ssserpent.:

:Yesss, I do.:

:How odd...:

Harry paused, wondering how he should respond to that... or if he should respond at all.

:What bringsss you down here childe?: she asked, finally.

:I was hoping I could request a sssmall favor of you...: Harry admitted hesitantly.

:Do you wish me to eat sssomeone for you?:

:Uh, no... no, that won't be necessary at the moment.:

:Then what do you dessire?:

:Can I have a few of your sscales and a bit of your venom for potionss ingredientss?: Harry asked quickly as he crouched, ready to run if the beast decided she was offended by the request.

:What do you need them for?: she asked, seemingly calm, so Harry allowed himself to relax slightly.

:Oh, well, I wasss intending to trade them to a potions master in exchange for his assistance in sssomething I needed. I don't know what exactly he might end up using them form.:

:That is acceptable.:

Harry blinked, not entirely sure how to take that, but shrugged it off.

:Ssso you'll let me take some of your venom?:

:Yes.:

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Harry got the basilisk bits to Snape and the man appeared legitimately shocked by them. Apparently Snape hadn't honestly believed that Harry could get any of it, and the revelation that Harry *had* done it, was gape-worthy. In exchange for the exceptionally rare ingredients, Snape grudgingly began brewing a potion for Harry.

Theoretically, Harry *could* have brewed it on his own because he did have the necessary skill level, but it was one of those potions that had an annoyingly long brew-time and required regular maintenance that would be difficult for Harry to do without drawing unwanted attention to himself, and inconvenient questions. Snape, in contrast, *always* had a bunch of potions brewing in his personal potions lab, and was accustomed to regularly stepping away from his daily tasks to attend to some potion or another.

Thusly, Harry felt confident that he was making good headway towards the necessary goal of ridding himself of that pesky Trace. He'd gotten Sirius freed with shocking ease, and the man was already working towards getting his rightful custody and Dumbledore did not appear to be fighting against any of his work. He hadn't protested anything related to Sirius' attempts to gain custody of Harry; in fact, it appeared to Harry that Dumbledore was now trying to make it appear that he was quite happy about all of it and was actually *helping* to speed things along. He had even offered to cast the wards on whatever house Sirius ended up buying, but his offer had so far been politely declined. Harry did not doubt that Dumbledore would push the issue again later when they actually had a house to ward.

Harry was fairly sure that Dumbledore was trying to gain Harry's trust with all of this. He wanted Harry to see him as the kind old grandfather that was *on his side*, and only wanted what was *best* for Harry.

Harry suspected that Dumbledore's support of Sirius probably had a bit to do with Harry mentioning his familial connection to Narcissa Malfoy and Draco back during the winter holiday. It had been made apparent to Dumbledore that Harry was taking an active interest in locating any biological family he had in the wizarding world, and the Malfoys were obviously not Dumbledore's ideal choice for such a connection. Harry was just as related to Sirius Black as he was with Narcissa Malfoy, and if Dumbledore could shift Harry's familial connection to a Black that he believed he had the loyalty of, instead of the Malfoys, it would clearly be a win.

There was also the very obvious fact that if Dumbledore's goal was to maintain a position of power and trust in Harry's life, fighting to keep him in the home that he obviously hated and wanted to escape, would only be monumentally counterproductive. Dumbledore was *not* a fool. He was barmy, and Harry really didn't understand how the man's logic worked sometimes, but he knew the man knew enough to understand that fighting against Harry going to Sirius now that Sirius was free, would not help his goals.

Dumbledore had also sent a number of correspondences to Sirius. It was only through the tremendous efforts of Remus that Sirius had not yet done anything stupid. Remus was actually wondering if he should have held off telling Sirius about their suspicions regarding Dumbledore's questionable actions. Sirius Black was apparently more sane than anyone could have reasonably hoped for a man who'd spent a decade in Azkaban, but that didn't mean he'd come out unscathed.

Remus had come back from several of his visits to Sirius' flat in Hogsmeade with obvious concern creasing his forehead. Sirius, apparently, had good days and bad days, according to his old friend. Some days he seemed entirely in his right mind, but other days he didn't seem to completely understand that it was 1991, and James and Lily were dead.

Remus had ended up drafting responses to Dumbledore's early inquiries *for* Sirius so that they could avoid trouble. At the moment Dumbledore was cooperating – *helping* them, even – but it was most likely only because he believed that Sirius would still allow him to play an important role in Harry's life and have influence over the boy by way of his influence over Sirius. And of course, because Sirius Black was a far preferable option over his cousin Narcissa.

It didn't take an idiot to realize that if Harry was angry with Dumbledore for standing in the way of him getting his godfather back, that Harry wouldn't likely be very cooperative with the man. Of course, that was working under the assumption that Harry wasn't already 'angry' with him for other reasons.

In any case, all of these things were going as planned, if not easier than planned, leaving Harry only two things left to focus on. His schoolwork, and the Stone. The schoolwork was obscenely boring, but there was only a few little things he could do in regards to stealing the Philosopher's Stone, since he still wanted to wait until it was closer to the end of term, before he made an attempt at nicking it.

As a result, Harry simply sunk into the mind-numbing routine of classes, writing essays, interacting with his classmates, continuing to charm his classmates and professors, and his weekly chats with Remus. He had also begun to exchange a few letters with Sirius. The first letter was just a basic introduction from Sirius as well as asking Harry if he really wanted to move in with him – in response to which, Harry quickly replied 'Yes.' After that, the letters from Sirius mostly just went over bits about himself and gave him some information on the progress he was making with getting approved to take custody of Harry, and his search for the 'perfect house'.

Harry and Remus had spent the January full moon together as usual in the Shrieking Shack, but February's full moon was the first deviation from the norm, and also Harry's first time seeing his godfather since the night his parents died.

Harry flew to the Shrieking Shack in his animagus form simply because he had no desire to go traversing through a tunnel that required crawling underneath a homicidal tree, if he didn't have to. When he flew in through the window of the room that Remus always spent his full moons in, he found Remus sitting there, still human because it was still early, and in the company of another very familiar man.

Sirius Black was sitting there, smiling eagerly at the tired-looking Remus and laughing heartily about something one of the two of them had just said. The man's head suddenly turned as he caught sight of Harry in his peripheral vision and his eyes widened considerably. Remus, seeing Sirius' sudden shift in attention also turned his head and spotted Harry hovering in the air just in front of the open window.

"Is that him?" Sirius whispered.

Remus' expression shifted into a small, soft smile, and he nodded. "Yes, Padfoot. That's him. Come on in, Harry. He already knows."

Feeling a mixture of trepidation and the slightest bit of annoyance that Remus had gone and 'spilled the beans' on his animagus form, but also knowing he couldn't be *too* annoyed since he probably would have told Sirius *anyway*, Harry flew closer to the ground and smoothly transformed back into his human form.

Sirius let out a sound somewhere between a laugh and a stunned cough and just stared at Harry in disbelief.

"I never would have believed it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. An animagus at age eleven!" Sirius exclaimed and then laughed, loudly.

Harry just blinked at the man, wondering exactly how this evening was going to pan out. Remus would be transforming in about a half hour, and after that point, they'd all be animals and unable to communicate verbally. Kind of a weird situation for getting reacquainted with his godfather.

Harry shrugged and tried to look a bit bashful and nervous. Sirius suddenly seemed to remember himself and stood up, looking down at Harry awkwardly. Harry just blinked up at the man with legitimate confusion for a moment before he was unexpectedly pulled into a fierce hug.

"Oh Harry... Merlin, it's good to finally see you! I'm so sorry! I never should have left! I was such a fool! Will you ever forgive me?"

Harry blinked and stood there stiffly as the man continued to hold him in a firm embrace for a moment before he pulled back and took in a shuddering breath as he seemed to pull himself back together. Harry noticed that his eyes shone slightly with unshed tears and Harry diverted his eyes, feeling a bit overwhelmed by the man's show of emotion and affection considering that they hadn't seen each other in ten years.

"Merlin, I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?" Sirius said with a weak chuckle as he stood up a bit straighter. "I'm Sirius Black."

Harry chuckled, but it was a bit forced.

"Of course, from what I've gathered from your letters and from Remus here, you actually remember me... is that really true?" Sirius continued on before Harry could come up with something to say.

"Er, yeah. That's right. I... I remember you turning into Padfoot and giving me rides around the house on your back, and I remember dad taking me out on his broom and you going out to fly with us... I remember that ball you got me for my birthday that cycled through all those colors and would change texture depending on your mood – getting all bumpy, or smooth, or getting little rounded spikes..."

"Modred's balls, you remember that?" Sirius exclaimed with a tinge of awe and disbelief.

"Sirius!" Remus reprimanded with a shocked laugh, no doubt in reference to Sirius' language.

Harry laughed and shrugged. "I've heard worse things from my dorm mates, Remus. No worries."

"You can really remember all that stuff from when you were a *baby*?" Sirius asked, ignoring Remus' admonishment completely.

Harry just smiled and nodded before going into a description of his 'theory' behind what he figured was some sort of magically enhanced type of photographic memory, how he remembered things from when he was a baby that hadn't made sense at the time since he'd not had the understanding or context, but how they made sense looking back now that he *did*. It was the same line he'd been feeding Remus and it seemed to suitably convince his godfather because the man just looked awed and impressed, and not the least bit disbelieving or suspicious.

They had to cut the discussion short because the moon was rising in the sky and Remus was nearing the time of his transformation. Harry and Sirius both transformed into their animagus forms just moments before Remus went through the painful transition into his lycan form.

Hours later, when the sun finally began to rise in the morning sky and Remus lay sore and exhausted on the floor of the shrieking shack, a tired Harry and Sirius transformed back to their human forms and began checking Remus over for injuries caused during the transformations.

"We're going to have to come up with a nickname for you," Sirius said, seemingly out of nowhere. Harry blinked at him with obvious confusion – not really understanding what the man could possibly be talking about. "Your bat form. We need to come up with a nickname! Remus here's Mooney, I'm Padfoot, and your dad was Prongs. We can't exactly stick with the name Prongslet, it just doesn't fit your form! We've gotta come up with a name!"

Harry laughed lightly as the man's enthusiasm and shrugged. "I'll let you come up with some ideas and pick the one I like, how's that?"

Sirius grinned widely. "Are you sure you're willing to trust me with coming up with your Marauder name?"

"I said you could come up with some ideas and I'd pick one," Harry reiterated, amused by the man's shockingly peppy mood for so early in the morning after staying up all night long.

"Well, I'll try my best to come up with some good options, then," Sirius said as he bent over to offer an arm to help the tired werewolf stand up.

The three made their way through the tunnel that led back into Hogwarts, used a stunning spell to hit the knot on the Weeping Willow to make it freeze it's violent thrashing, and Sirius stuck with them until they got to the courtyard doors of the castle before turning back since Harry insisted he could get Remus on his own from there.

He got Remus up to the hospital wing and Madam Pomfrey took one look at the obviously tired eleven-year-old and gave him a pass for his day of classes, telling him to get some sleep. Harry knew the woman had realized a while ago that he was keeping Remus company during his full moons. She hadn't approved at first, and Harry had been worried that she was going to go to Dumbledore insisting that it wasn't safe since for all they knew, Harry was keeping Remus company in human form and that was just about never 'safe', but Remus had apparently managed to convince her that they were taking all possible precautions and he truly believed that Harry was safe... and also very stubborn. Harry had gotten the impression that Pomfrey believed Remus was locking himself inside a cage or something and Harry was sitting outside both the cage and a magical barrier, just for added security.

It was a viable idea, honestly... Harry wondered sometimes why they didn't just do that since he'd be able to speak with Remus then, but shrugged it off since he didn't really have any qualms with how they currently did things. Honestly it was kind of fun to play around as a bat for a whole night once a month.

Harry trudged up to the Ravenclaw first year dorms and quickly collapsed into bed, endlessly thankful that the beds at Hogwarts were so damned comfortable and that he could skip all of his classes for the day. He was way ahead anyway, so what did it matter if he missed his classes again.

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In an effort to fill time and convince himself he was making progress on his goal of stealing the Stone, Harry visited the third-floor corridor a few more times when Hagrid and Sprout went down there, so he could continue to look for additional protections that he was sure, had to be there. It was obvious that Dumbledore seemed to have some plan in motion where he *wanted* Harry to go down there. After all, the 'protections' guarding the stone were laughable and clearly designed to be beaten by a clever child. Since the protections were obviously not serious, Harry had begun to suspect that there were some *real* protections there as well, only that they had to be far better concealed. The alarm on the door in the room of flying keys was only the first hint at something more.

He never had a lot of time down there since he had to make sure he was done and back out before Sprout finished tending to the Devil's Snare. It was during his trip down to the key room the first week of March that Harry had a bit of an epiphany and tried using a very unusual, old, detection spell that he and Tom had learned from an Indian hermit during their decade of travel in order to teach themselves as much rare magic as they could manage to get their hands on.

He'd been turning up just the slightest indications of subtle magical charms, but it was like catching sight of something just outside of your peripheral vision, but once you looked at it, you saw nothing at all. It had been getting very frustrating and he'd wished he could just stay down there for longer periods of time to work it out. The spell he suddenly thought to use would really only pick up a certain kind of magic, and almost no one actually used any of that sort of magic these days, but he figured it was worth a shot since he'd tried just about everything else he could come up with.

And there it was.

Plain as day. He cursed himself for not thinking to try it sooner, but pushed that aside, grateful that he'd thought to use it at all, because this would definitely complicate things.

There was a magical field all around him. Like a cloud of webbing and netting, invisible to all except those who actually knew anything about this incredibly obscure branch of magic. No doubt the Stone had been charmed with the polarization counter-part spell. The Stone would be caught in this webbing the second you tried to bring it through it. He suspected that every room was probably filled with this stuff. It wasn't a hard thing to cast if you knew how so there was no harm in the extra caution.

Not only would it catch the Stone, it would snatch it away and put inside this little magical pocket of space that only the original caster could access without a lot of trouble.

If a person managed to get through all of the 'protections' and get the Stone, the moment they tried to take it back through these rooms, it would simply vanish from their hand or pocket, or where ever, and go into a nice little protected pocket. There *were* ways to get it back, technically, but it would take ages and it would be tiring process. And of course, next to no one would even know what had happened, let alone how to get it back.

It was rather ingenious. It was also annoying.

Whenever he managed to get down to the Stone, he was going to need some way to bypass this spell... and any others Dumbledore might have around to prevent the Stone from leaving these corridors, for that matter.

If only he could call Dobby to him and just hand the stone over and have the elf pop away with it. It would be so damned easy that way. But he couldn't. Anti-elf wards was one of the easiest to detect of the protections cast around the area. He'd discounted that before he'd even known for sure they were there, sure as he was that Dumbledore would have thought of that. It was just such a 'duh' mistake to make. Leaving a place open to house elf 'popping'. Then again, it was also a very common mistake for wizards to make.

So many of them instantly disregarded the little creatures. Tom had been guilty of that several times as well, for that matter.

But back to the Stone... perhaps he could make a small box that could isolate it from all magics outside it? Put the Stone in the box as soon as he gets it out of where ever it was, and... no. No, it wouldn't work unless Harry knew exactly what other protections were in place so he could prepare isolation charms strong enough and specific enough to counter them.

He decided he was wasting his time debating this while stuck down in the key-room, so he quickly finished up his scans and left, only *just* making it in time since Sprout was preparing to leave just as he got back to the Devil's Snare room.

The following day in History of Magic Harry charmed his parchment so that it would look like meaningless scribbles to anyone who looked his way, and then proceeded to make a list of potential ideas for getting the Stone out past all the potential protections. Anything he could think up that *might* work, and then all the reasons why it most likely wouldn't.

He was just about to scratch through his latest seemingly ridiculous idea in a list of spells that transported an object from one place to another instantly, when his quill froze mid-air and he paused.

There was next to nothing that could instantly transport a person or object through wards as extensive as Hogwarts, but there was actually *one* thing he could think of that could. It was a magical device that had just recently been invented about ten years before he had died. They were quite handy, and totally bypassed every ward that existed at the time of its invention. Of course, it was entirely likely that some sort of counter had been invented since then and implemented on the castle's wards.

The device had been called a Vanishing Cabinet and it came in a set. You go into one, and you come out the other. Harry had been about to scratch it off the list because they were usually very *large* and used for transporting a *person*. He couldn't exactly carry one with him and then use it to transport himself out of the final chamber. If he did, he'd be leaving one of the cabinets behind in the final chamber as the obvious escape route and leaving evidence behind was just stupid.

But what if he didn't use it to transport all of him, but only the Stone? He could make a small Vanishing Cabinet – like, the size of a jewelery box – and take it with him. He would get down to the stone, put it into the vanishing 'box', activate it, and suddenly the Stone would be back in his dorm room. Or better yet... back at Godric's Hollow. It would never even have to enter Ravenclaw Tower, reducing the chances of him ever getting caught with it.

Slowly a smile curled his lips. This one had potential. This one was *definitely* worth looking into further.

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Sirius had been sending Harry updates with increasing frequency, but Harry imagined the man was probably rather eager for human contact after having been deprived of it for so many years, and he admitted that the letters did at least provide a mild distraction. He had slowly taken to telling his 'godfather' about his school life and his friends. He never mentioned to the man which houses said 'friends' were in, since he hoped to spring that on the man later, after he'd come to understand that Harry knew these people and appeared to trust them.

Harry spoke about his study group mostly, since they were probably the only people that directly interacted with Harry outside of classes, and that he spent any significant amount of time with other than his seating rotation during meals. He knew that the Ravenclaws in his group, Su Li, Terry Boot, and Padma Patil, probably honestly considered him their *friend*. He'd grown quite fond of the girls, and Boot was probably the only one of his roommates that didn't drive him insane most of the time, so he considered himself lucky to have been assigned to the same group as him. The Slytherins in Harry's study group probably wouldn't jump straight to using the word 'friend' simply because they had been raised to know better than that.

Slytherins didn't usually have 'friends', they had alliances. Theo, Daphne, Blaise, and Draco had all been raised knowing the importance of strong, beneficial, alliances, and they clearly

realized that being seen as 'friends' with Harry was beneficial, even if some people in their house still didn't seem to understand the value in it. But Harry had continued to insist they spin it among their housemates however worked best, because he knew it would be necessary for them.

He'd been a Slytherin for seven years. He knew how the inter-house politics worked. A childish version of the devious political battles their parents played to gain power and influence. Subtle barbs, insults, and absolutely no hesitancy to use anything they knew against you at the most inopportune time. They were only first years, but the older students wouldn't let that hold them back. If they thought that Draco Malfoy was allying himself with the defeater of the Dark Lord for any reason other than trying to use, manipulate, and trick said boy-who-lived, they wouldn't hesitate for a moment to try and tear him apart.

Harry would say that for eleven-year-olds, his Slytherin 'friends' were doing remarkably well in playing the Slytherin Game and avoiding the wrath of their housemates for associating with him.

In his letters to Sirius, he often mentioned Su, Terry, Padma, Daphne, Blaise, and Theo with casual ease and in equal quantities. He'd never mentioned a last name to any of them, since Sirius would instantly recognize the names Greengrass, Zabini, and Nott. He was hesitant however, to mention Draco at all, since it was a rather unique name and Sirius would no doubt *instantly* realize who he was talking about. Draco was, after all, *related* to Sirius. They were sort of like uncle and nephew. Only... once removed, or something. Harry had never really sorted out how that all worked, since he'd never really had a family before that needed sorting out in that way.

Sirius' cousin was Narcissa Malfoy, Draco's mother, so maybe that made them second cousin's once-removed? Or first-cousins, once-removed?

The Blacks always named their children after stars and constellations, and Narcissa had clearly chosen to stick with that tradition with her son, even though the Malfoy's usually used old Roman names like Lucius, Abraxas, Octavius, and Maximus. The name 'Draco' was very obviously a reference to the Draco constellation, and a clear nod to Narcissa's Black family lineage.

Harry was just about positive that Sirius would be aware of his cousin's son's name, and being the son of a Black and a Malfoy, it was almost a given that he'd be in Slytherin. Finally, Harry started to slip mentions of Draco into his letters along with the stories about the rest of his friends and their classes, and had not yet been called on it. He didn't know if that was because Sirius hadn't caught it, or if the man wasn't sure if he should mention that he had any concerns regarding Harry's friend.

Harry knew that Sirius would eventually find out exactly who all of Harry's friends were, but he wanted the man to get used to the idea that Harry liked these people, and spoke of them often, and 'trusted' them, before that happened.

Harry was sending a letter to Sirius just about every other day by the end of March. Hedwig was happy to be getting so much work, since she had clearly been getting bored spending all her time in the Owlery with nothing to do.

Harry had taken the extra precaution of placing a charm over Hedwig that would guarantee that she would never be diverted towards any post redirection charms, just to make sure Dumbledore wouldn't be intercepting any of his post. Hedwig had seemed a bit indignant over the whole thing, as if she was insulted that he thought she was stupid enough to fall for something like that. It had made him smile. The longer he had her, the more and more intelligent he realized she was. She was truly a remarkable owl.

In addition to his efforts to 'get to know' his godfather, and gradually introduce himself to the man in return, he had also spent the last month working on the 'Vanishing Box'. It was a very complicated magical object to try and craft and required some very delicate and precise arithmancy work, not to mention the tiny runework that needed to be carved into the surface. Usually a Vanishing Cabinet would be quite large, so you had lots of room to work, but he was trying to keep the boxes as small as he could manage since he wouldn't be able to shrink the one he carried with him down. An artifact as delicate as that did not like to be re-sized. He could place it inside a space expanded bag, but that was the best he could hope for.

And so it had been tedious work. He'd slip away into the Room of Hidden Things to do his carving, but he could only stay in there for so long without someone asking him where he'd been. He wanted to try and get it done as soon as possible though, since he still needed to test out it's limitations. He'd done some research and as best as he could tell, a counter ward to stop use of Vanishing Cabinets had never really been developed or put into use, and they'd fallen out of style in the 80s because they were so touchy and easy to break. If one of the cabinets was damaged at all when you stepped into the other, you could end up lost in some sort of in-between limbo and not be able to get out unless someone on the outside realized you were stuck and got you out.

Still, he didn't know for sure if he'd be able to completely bypass the Hogwarts wards with it. He figured that he had three possibilities. One; it would work perfectly and he'd have the second box taken to Godric's Hollow by Dobby and send the Stone directly there. Two; he couldn't send things from inside the school to outside the school, so he'd have the second box in his dorm, or maybe down in the Chamber. Or three; it wouldn't work at all inside the school.

If it ended up being the third one, he would need all the time he could find to scramble for an alternative. But he was fairly sure this would work.

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The Friday of the second week of April, Harry was a bit surprised as breakfast came and went without an owl from Sirius. He'd been expecting one, especially since the Easter Holiday was the following week, and he knew Sirius had been hoping that he could arrange to visit Harry, or maybe Harry visit him.

Harry shrugged it off, figuring that he'd hear from Sirius the following day, when Professor Flitwick walked over and waved to get Harry's attention.

"Yes, Professor?" Harry asked, looking down at the very short man.

"The headmaster would like to see you in his office, Mr. Potter. What class do you have first block so I can notify your teacher you'll be late?"

Harry maintained a blank, perhaps slightly surprised, expression but inside he was wondering frantically what this might be about.

"I have Defense with Professor Lupin first," Harry replied smoothly.

"Ah, yes! Well, I'm sure that Professor Lupin won't mind if you're a bit late. He'll certainly understand," Flitwick chuckled a bit and smiled. "I'll let him know. Do you know the way to the headmaster's office?"

"I do, sir."

"Good, good. Ah, and you should know that today, Professor Dumbledore is feeling a bit partial to Liquorish Wands." Flitwick chuckled and looked rather pleased with himself. Harry just blinked down at him blankly, successfully hiding the sneer that wanted to curl his lips.

Dumbledore and his ridiculous sweets. It was no doubt the password, but it was still stupid. And it was slack security. Anyone could have guessed that, given enough tries.

"Thank you, sir," Harry said, instead.

As Harry began to leave, Terry Boot asked him what was up, and he simply shrugged and kept going. It only took a couple minutes before he was standing in front of the gargoyle that guarded the headmaster's office.

He looked down at it disdainfully before sighing and speaking the password. It instantly jumped aside revealing a revolving spiral staircase. Harry climbed and rode it to the top before reaching up to knock on the door. Before his hand reached the surface, he heard Dumbledore's voice call out from within for him to enter.

He pulled the door open, entered and came up short as he saw someone he did *not* expect to see there. Sirius Black was sitting in a chair opposite Dumbledore's desk, smiling at him. Harry's mind blanked for a second as a bit of a defense mechanism to keep him from showing his shock and discomfort with this situation. He did not, even for a *moment*, trust in Sirius' ability to *lie* to Albus Dumbledore. Sirius seemed every bit a Gryffindor, despite being a Black, and prior to his incarceration in Azkaban, he had been entirely loyal to this man, and then utterly betrayed by him. Sirius had a *lot* of pent up anger at the possibility that Dumbledore had intentionally left him in that hellhole to rot just so he could leave Harry to suffer with muggles. Granted the muggles had probably suffered more than Harry had in the end, but Sirius didn't know that. And generally speaking, Gryffindors were utter rubbish at containing their tempers and holding their tongues even when speaking was against their benefit.

Remus had continued to re-read any and all letters between Dumbledore and Sirius just to make sure Sirius didn't lose his cool and suddenly start making accusations or asking questions that would make Harry's dealings with the headmaster far more difficult.

Coming into Dumbledore's office to find Sirius sitting with him when it really hadn't been all that much time since he was freed from Azkaban, did not sit well with Harry and his mind was already whirling away at contingency plans if this ended up blowing up in his face and Dumbledore suddenly turned his full suspicious attention on Harry's extra curricular activities.

"Ah, Harry," Dumbledore greeted him warmly and with a familiarity that caused Harry to bristle slightly. Dumbledore had only ever called him 'Mr. Potter' before and he wondered what the motive was behind the sudden use of his first name.

"Hello, Headmaster," Harry replied evenly, forcing his face to shift to innocent curiosity and not the turbulent storm he truly felt. Harry's eyes turned back to Sirius who was now grinning even wider and Harry rose a single questioning eyebrow to the man.

"I suspect you already know who this is," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eye as he gestured towards Sirius.

Harry nodded his head mutely for a moment before he finally chose his words. "Yes, sir. I've seen his picture in the paper, of course. And we've been corresponding for the last few months via letters." Harry ducked his head slightly, looking a bit shy and gave Sirius a small, hesitant smile. "Hello Sirius."

Sirius' smile somehow managed to grow even wider and he stood up and walked over to stand in front of Harry.

Harry felt himself stiffen a bit, suddenly worried the man was going to bloody *hug* him again, but, thankfully, he didn't. He reached out and took Harry's hand in two-handed shake.

"I've got some great news, Harry," Sirius said with an excited tinge to his voice.

"News?" Harry echoed blankly.

"The approval came in today from the Ministry's Department of Magical Children's Services. They've deemed me an appropriate guardian! I got custody!"

Harry gaped. He hadn't expected this that soon. They still hadn't purchased a house yet, and he had assumed that they would insist that Sirius could prove he had a suitable house purchased and prepared first. Or at least, Dumbledore would pitch a bit of a fit about casting the wards, first.

Harry closed his mouth shut with a snap and managed focus. "So... so it's done, then? You're my guardian?" Harry asked, putting as much childish awe and relief into his voice as he could manage.

"Yes, Harry, it is done," Dumbledore said with a beaming smile. "I've been pushing to speed things along in hopes that you would be able to visit Sirius during the Easter break."

Harry gaped at Dumbledore now, and suddenly it all made sense. The 'Harry' thing, and the meeting in the Headmaster's office. The old man wanted to earn Harry's gratitude and respect

from this. He wanted Harry to know that he was getting his godfather back because of *Dumbledore's help*.

Finally feeling settled by having understood what was going on, Harry managed to put on a mask of excited gratitude and spent a few minutes giving bashful, but gracious thanks to the Headmaster and making plans with Sirius for his godfather to come collect him at the gates of the school the following morning so they could spend the next week together until classes resumed.

Apparently Sirius had appointments scheduled for a few houses he'd been looking at and telling Harry about through their letters, and the two of them would be going house-hunting during the one-week break.

The little 'meeting' was concluded and it was suggested that Harry could walk Sirius to the main doors before going to his Defense class, and the pair left the headmaster's office. They had gotten to the Grand Staircases and down several flights of stairs before Sirius spoke again.

"You're a bloody good little actor, Harry," Sirius said with a surprising amount of pride and approval in his voice. Harry looked up at the man and blinked blankly.

"What do you mean?" he asked with innocent confusion.

Sirius just snorted.

"I was raised a Black, Harry. Doesn't matter if I ended up a Gryffindor, I know a good facade when I see one. Even *I* had a hard time keeping myself under control around that guy, but you... well, you played your part, perfectly." Sirius chuckled slightly, shook his head and sighed.

Harry suddenly felt his respect for Sirius go up a considerable amount and he grinned up at the man.

"Well, I do try," he said, letting a slight drawl tinge his voice. "But we shouldn't say such things around so many portraits. It's not safe. Some of them may report to Dumbledore."

Sirius looked down at Harry with a slightly surprised expression on his face before his eyes trailed to the walls filled with sleeping and chattering witches and wizards in the many, many portraits.

"You're a paranoid little bugger, aren't you?"

"It's not paranoia if people are *actually* out to get you," Harry pointed out with a smirk and Sirius just rolled his eyes and chuckled.

"Besides, always watching my back, questioning people's motives, and refusing to take things at face value is what led me to the conclusion that you were innocent, and to go after getting you freed," Harry pointed out, and Sirius gave him a meek, grateful, crooked grin.

"Well, in that case, I certainly can't bad-mouth it any. I owe it and *you* my life." Sirius came to a stop at one of the landings and Harry stopped beside him. "Thank you, Harry." Sirius said suddenly with heavy sincerity.

Harry felt a bit uncomfortable with the intensity of the man's gaze and shifted a bit, mentally insisting to himself that he was *not* fidgeting, because Harry only fidgeted when it was an intentional act.

Harry shrugged, and found himself annoyed that he was having difficulty meeting the man's eyes. *Merlin, this was ridiculous.*

"It's not a big deal, Sirius," Harry said and finally made himself look up at the man and smile blandly.

Sirius narrowed his eyes but smirked. *Shit. I'm going to have to try harder around this guy than I'd expected.*

The two finally turned and continued down another set of stairs, finally exiting into the main hall on the ground level and heading towards the Entrance Hall where Harry bid Sirius goodbye and said he'd have his things packed and be ready to leave by 9am.

AN: We're already to mid-April! Not bad progress, if I do say so myself. :)

Just a reminder that I've got a **poll on my author page** right now. Although I'd also love people's opinions in reviews, if you'd prefer that instead.

Rebirth Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: So even after the poll, I still don't know if I'll try anything with Sirius and Remus. I guess it'll just depend on whether or not it fits its way into the story later.

In other news, I've started a **thread in my forum where I answer questions to reviews** I've gotten that I thought other people might also want to read the answers to.

And since it's on fanfiction . net I'm going to go on the assumption that it will not dissolve the link the instant I submit this file. Lets see if I'm right. Hah.

.net/topic/78750/36771352/1/

This is probably a mildly boring chapter. Sorry. It's mostly laying foundation and some character development.

----- Rebirth Chapter 21 -----

The following morning, Harry packed up some of his possessions into his favorite space-expanded knapsack since he had no intention of hauling his trunk out for just a week's trip. He also packed the Vanishing Boxes in hopes that he could work on them during the late evenings. All he needed to do at the moment was continue the rune carving, and that was tedious manual work that didn't require use of magic, so he knew he could do it outside of school.

The knowledge that he likely wouldn't be able to use his wand for the next week was definitely irritating, and just made him that much more anxious for the aging potion to be done so he could finally be rid of his Trace. Snape was expecting it to be complete by the following Wednesday, so at least, it was soon... just not soon enough for this holiday.

Harry met up with Sirius at the main gates of Hogwarts and the two began to make their way down the path towards Hogsmeade. Sirius asked him if he'd eaten yet, and Harry told him he'd skipped breakfast that morning so the two decided to go to the Three Broomsticks before going to Sirius' flat.

They settled into a booth along one wall and were waited on by a rather large-chested woman named 'Rosmerta'. Sirius flirted with the woman shamelessly and got her giggling every time she came by.

They chatted lightly about nothing in particular while they finished their breakfast. The two headed out, Sirius bidding Rosmerta farewell, and then they began to walk down the road towards Sirius' flat. Sirius pointed out various shops on High Street as they passed them, telling Harry how much fun it would be once he reached third year and he was able to leave the school every few weeks for the Hogsmeade weekends.

They turned down Boyd Acres Rd and walked about two blocks before they reached a quaint little house and headed up an old wooden set of stairs going up along the right-hand side of the house to a small landing on the second floor.

Sirius ushered Harry inside after unlocking the door and they spend about a minute taking the 'grand tour' of the small flat. It had two bedrooms, a bathroom, and then the large open space in the mainroom that consisted of the living area and an open kitchen with a large fireplace that Sirius said was connected to the Floo network.

Harry was glad that there was a second bedroom because he really didn't fancy setting up a cot somewhere for a week. Harry dropped his bag off in 'his room' and gave it a quick look-around before heading back out to the mainroom.

Harry came out to find Sirius sitting in an overstuffed arm chair, bent forward a bit with his elbows rested on his knees and looking up at Harry with a hesitant smile. Harry sat down on the couch that was perched slightly diagonal from the arm chair and ran his hand through his hair feeling slightly off balance by not really have a plan for this situation.

"So, uh..." Harry said and frowned at himself before sighing slightly at the suddenly thick silence in the room.

Sirius shifted a bit, and it seemed like the weird atmosphere was stretching far too long before he finally spoke.

"I thought up an idea for your Marauder name."

Harry looked up and smirked slightly. "Oh yeah? What is it?"

"Leatherwings."

Harry nodded his head slowly, mulling it over in his mind before shrugging. "It fits. I'm good with that."

Sirius grinned widely.

"So... what now?" Harry asked.

"Well, we've got an appointment with my real estate witch at three o'clock, so we've got some time to kill until then. Would you want to get out of the house, or stay in till we need to leave?"

Harry pondered his options for a moment before grinning. "Do you own a broom yet?"

"A broom? No, I haven't gotten one yet. You want to go get brooms?" Sirius asked, his eyes lighting up.

Harry nodded excitedly. "Yeah, well, we can get you one. I've already got a broom. How about we go to Diagon Alley and visit Quality Quidditch Supplies and pick you up one and then go flying?"

"Sounds like a plan! The selection of brooms at the shop here in Hogsmeade is pretty pathetic, so Diagon Alley seems like a good option. But... how do you have a broom? First years aren't supposed to have their own brooms?" Sirius said while giving Harry a reproving look that was made entirely unbelievable by the impressed gleam in the man's eyes and the smirk slowly curling up his lips.

"One of my friends got it for me for Yule," Harry said non-nonchalantly as he stood up and checked his pocket for his shrunk-down money pouch.

"Wow, that must have been a good friend to get you a *broom*. Expensive gift, plus they're risking getting in trouble for smuggling one into the school. What broom did you get?"

"It's a Numbus 2000."

Sirius' eyes widened and his brows showed into his forehead. "A *really* good friend... and one with deep pockets too. Not exactly a cheap broom." Sirius stood up and grabbed a light traveling cloak off a hook on the wall beside the fireplace before turning back to Harry again. "So which friend got you this awesome gift? Oh, and did you bring it with you, or is it still up at the school? I didn't see anything on you big enough to carry a broom."

"I did bring it with. It's got a special charm on it so it can be shrunk down."

"Didn't used to be able to do that to brooms. Back in my day everyone said brooms were too complicated to apply shrinking charms on them." Sirius snorted then, "listen to me... *in my day*. Bloody hell, I sound like an old man."

Harry laughed at him while Sirius chuckled at himself as the pair went to stand in front of the fireplace and Sirius grabbed a small tin of Floo powder off the mantle. "You didn't tell me which friend got you the broom." Sirius said again as he offered Harry the tin. "You do know how to use the Floo, right?"

"Oh yeah, I know now," Harry said as his mind worked quickly at whether or not he should admit that it was Draco. He wasn't sure if he was yet ready to discuss the Malfoy's... but if it came up, he at least had some ideas of what to say... "and it was my friend Draco," Harry finally said with ease. "I've mentioned him in my letters."

"Oh yeah, you have... He's in that study group of yours, right?" Sirius trailed off and Harry ignored the speculative *look* the man was giving him.

"Yup, that's right. Diagon Alley, or should I specify the Leaky Cauldron?" Harry asked over his shoulder, even though he knew it didn't make a difference.

"I'm fairly sure that saying 'Diagon Alley' redirects to the Leaky Cauldron automatically... at least, it did back in my day... there I go, saying that again."

Harry snickered as he tossed some Floo powder into the fire turning it bright green and stepping into the heat-less flames. "Diagon Alley," he called out clearly and was instantly overwhelmed by the powerful sensation of spinning very very fast. He saw quick flashes of countless grates as he passed them before being shot out of the Floo in the Leaky Cauldron and only just barely catching himself upright. He moved out of the way and a moment later, Sirius came through behind him.

Harry fought the habit to pull out his wand and spell away the soot from his robes since he wasn't 'supposed to' use magic while away from Hogwarts. Although, from what he'd learned about how the Trace worked, he knew that it wouldn't actually be able to identify that it was *he* using magic, and not one of the many many adult wizards in the area using it instead, so *technically*, in a highly populated magical place like Diagon Alley, a young wizard *could* get away with using magic and not setting off their Trace. Still, *Sirius* would see it, and he might call him on it.

Fortunately, Sirius pulled out *his* wand and quickly rid them each of the soot that had collected on them from the Floo trip.

Sirius motioned for Harry to follow him and the two quickly made their way out the rear door and entered the small courtyard where the 'blank brick wall' was. A few specific taps of Sirius' wand, and the bricks quickly shifted and re-ordered themselves into the shape of a large archway, revealing Diagon Alley behind it.

"So, Harry," Sirius began conversationally as they began to walk down the sparsely populated road, "this 'Draco' you've mentioned wouldn't happen to be Draco *Malfoy*, would he?"

Decided to stick with the conversational tone that Sirius had set, Harry answered. "Yes he is. Actually... oh! Have you met him?"

Sirius paused and looked down at Harry with a bit of confusion on his face. "Met him? Why would I?"

"Well, he's your cousin's son, right? I just thought you might have visited your cousin Narcissa in the hospital after her son was born, since that happened almost two years before you ended up in Azkaban."

"Oh... yeah, well, Cissy and I... well, after she married Malfoy, she and I didn't really see much of each other. For that matter, we didn't get on very well after I was sorted into Gryffindor."

"Really? That's too bad. I mean, I know that my bitch-of-an-aunt hated my mum, but even Petunia came and saw me when I was born."

Sirius blinked down at Harry with a somewhat stunned expression on his face, but Harry just resumed walking towards the Quidditch Supply store.

"I feel like I should scold you for your language," Sirius said meekly and chuckled while running his hand through his shoulder-length wavy hair.

Harry snorted. "But you're not going to, are you?"

Sirius laughed as he caught up with Harry. "No, I guess not."

They got to Quality Quidditch Supply and began to browse around and Harry could see the happy light in Sirius' eyes as he looked over the latest brooms.

"You played Quidditch back in your Hogwarts days, right?" Harry asked from a few feet away where he was looking at some of the broom maintenance kits.

"That's right. Your father and I were chasers on the Gryffindor team. You dad became captain in our sixth year."

"That's pretty brilliant," Harry said with a small grin.

"Have you done much flying on your broom since you got it?"

"I've taken it out a few times, but I've had to be subtle about it. You know, being a first year and all. I'm not actually supposed to have it."

"Right," Sirius said with a small chuckle. "You enjoy it?"

"Flying? Oh yeah. It's brilliant. It's actually way better than I'd expected it to be."

"Think you'll try out for the Ravenclaw team next year?"

"Try out for the Quidditch team?" Harry said with a slight grimace. "Nah, I don't think so. I mean, I enjoy flying, but Quidditch really isn't my thing. Besides, I've always got things to do, and I can't imagine throwing Quidditch practice into that. I'm happy just getting out and flying every now and then."

"Yeah, but flying by yourself is nothing like flying with other people. Broom racing is a pretty wicked sport too."

"I imagine I would enjoy that a bit more than playing Quidditch. Draco and I have gone flying together a couple times and done a bit of one-on-one racing. That was pretty fun."

Sirius chuckled. "So he's got his own broom too?"

"Of course. His father got him one in August and he brought it at the start of the year."

Sirius rolled his eyes. "Somehow, I am not surprised."

"Why's that?"

"Well... it's just that... I mean, if he's anything like his father... Back when your dad and I were in school, Malfoy believed that he was basically above the rules. That they didn't apply to him because he was *a Malfoy*. Basically, the way he looked at life was 'if you've got enough money, you can get out of anything.'"

"Ah... so you don't really like Mr. Malfoy much, then?"

"Have you met him?" Sirius asked, suddenly looking a bit concerned.

"Sure. A couple times. I visited Malfoy manor back in August, and I attended the Malfoy's Yule party in December. That's when I was able to speak to the Minister about getting you freed."

"You went to the Malfoy's home last *August*?" Sirius exclaimed, looking horrified. He looked as if he were about to speak, but he paused, looked around at the store that was empty except for the wizard working the counter on the other end of the shop, pulled out his wand and cast a quick sound-muffling spell. "Why? Who did you go with?"

Harry nodded a bit in approval and in thanks at Sirius' use of the privacy spell – although he would have used something a bit more powerful or secure, but this would have to do. He looked up at Sirius with a look that made it seem like he truly couldn't fathom what Sirius found so *wrong* with Harry having gone to the Malfoy's and answered simply.

"I didn't go with anyone. I mean, it's not like I was going to get *Petunia* to go with me," Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "Not only would she *not* go, but I'm fairly sure that the Malfoy's would have fallen over from shock if I'd tried to bring a *muggle* into their home. As for why... well, I ran into Draco in Diagon Alley when I was doing my school shopping and when I realized who he was, I realized we were related. I took the opportunity to visit their home because I wanted to try and make some connections with actual living, breathing, wizards that I shared a blood relation with."

"Blood relation?" Sirius blanched and then looked confused.

"Well, yeah. I mean... technically, you and I are sort of cousins."

Sirius looked very confused for a moment before a flicker of comprehension passed over his eyes. "Oh... oh, yeah... Dorea was a Black! I completely forgot about that! She was always 'Mrs. Potter', to me. You know, I'd actually known your dad for several years before I even realized his mum was a Black?"

Harry laughed and shook his head in amusement. "Really? Wow. Well, I figured it out just last summer when I got a book on wizarding family trees because it had the Potters in there. I saw that my dad's mum's maiden name was 'Black' and I remembered that your name was Sirius *Black*, so I got curious. I looked up the Blacks and from there, I found I was related to not only you, but also *Narcissa*.

"So, if I recall it correctly... which I know I do, you're grandfather from you mum's side was Pollux Black, and he was the eldest brother of my grandmother, Dorea Black. Dorea was younger than him by a fair number of years, and the offset resulted to you and me being sort-

of-cousins. Second cousins, I believe. And Draco is my 'second cousin once-removed', since his mother, Narcissa, is also my second cousin."

"Well, be that as it may, Harry, I really don't think it's a good idea for you to be spending any unsupervised time at the Malfoy's home."

Harry stopped with what he was doing completely and turned to give Sirius a hard look. "And, why not?" he asked, rather indignantly. "Just because you and Narcissa didn't get on very well doesn't mean I should cut off relations with a potential family member. I personally really like the idea of having some extended family. It's a nice contrast to being so utterly isolated."

"It's not that, Harry, it's just that... well, you *are* aware that Lucius Malfoy was a Death Eater, *right?*"

"He was cleared of all charges. He was under the Imperius curse," Harry defended stubbornly, making sure to put enough effort into his act since this was *Sirius* he was talking to, and he knew the chances of the man buying this was honestly slim-to-none.

Sirius scoffed. "Like I said, Malfoy always believed that with enough money he could break any rules he wanted and get away with it. He wasn't under the Imperius curse! He just used that as an excuse to appease the owners of all the pockets he lined with Malfoy family money to keep himself out of Azkaban."

"There was never any proof that he'd done anything illegal," Harry argued again, but it was weaker, he knew this wasn't going to work.

"I'm sure if there was any evidence, he made it conveniently disappear with a few more well placed 'donations'. It's really undeniable that he was a Death Eater. He had the Dark Mark on his arm, and, while we were never able to prove it, we were pretty sure that it wasn't something that could be taken involuntarily. A person *couldn't* be under the Imperius and be marked."

Harry just put on a childish, stubborn face, folded his arms across his chest and looked away. "Fine, whatever. But he's been nothing but nice to me, and I like Narcissa. Draco is one of my best friends at school."

"Of *course* he's been nothing but nice. He wants to use your name to gain political influence. But Harry... the real danger is in what he might *do* to you. He was a *Death Eater*. He was loyal to *You-Know-Who*! And you're the child who is known as being the one who defeated his master! He might be a bit bitter about that."

Harry rolled his eyes and scoffed. "What's he going to do to me? No matter how much money he has, he couldn't get away with making me mysteriously disappear. The public outcry would be enormous and there would be an investigation immediately. He wouldn't be able to buy his way out of that."

Sirius looked as if he were about to argue something again, but he stopped suddenly and gave Harry a speculative look through narrowed eyes. Harry shifted slightly, feeling uncomfortable

under the man's gaze.

"You're not so naïve that you honestly believed any of that Imperius rubbish, are you?" Sirius asked finally, not really asking at all. "You already *knew* that he *really was* a Death Eater, didn't you? I mean, you *know* you can't trust him."

Harry huffed and rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I do. And I don't bloody care, either."

Sirius suddenly looked stunned. "How can you *not care*? He followed the man who killed your parents, Harry!"

Harry heaved a heavy and slightly annoyed breath and fully faced Sirius. "Lucius Malfoy did not kill my parents. He did not personally betray them, or their trust. They had *no* interaction with the man. Chances are, even as part of his role as a Death Eater, he didn't have anything to do with the attack on them at all. He probably didn't even know about it until after it had happened. Yes, I'll admit that he probably did follow Voldemort of his own free will. Yes, he does prescribe to Voldemort's politics. But he did not, personally, play any role in my parent's death, so how can I lay any of the blame for it on his shoulders?"

Harry rose a questioning eyebrow and folded his arms across his chest defiantly before continuing.

"I cannot spend the rest of my life instantly despising and shunning anyone and everyone who may have had something to do with Voldemort because there were a *lot* of people who sided with him back then who didn't end up in prison. I certainly can't lay the blame for my parents death on *all of them*, can I? No, that's ridiculous. Plus, there are a *lot* of my classmates who are the children of supposed Death Eaters and children of people who just quietly supported Voldemort, politically, in the last war. Am I supposed to judge every one of them because of the theoretical 'crimes' of their parents? Is that really the *right* thing to do? Or should I shun all of them just because of some theoretical risk that they or their family *might* pose to me? Would it be okay if the Death Eater kids instantly hated *me* because I supposedly 'defeated' the Dark Lord? Instantly shunned *me* because of the political affiliations of my parents?"

"No, but that doesn't mean you can just instantly trust any of them, Harry!" Sirius said in a pleading voice. "I'm sure you're smart enough to realize that some of them could just be *pretending* to be nice to you so that they can get close to you because of who you are. Especially if they're *Slytherins*. You don't know what it's like in Slytherin house. It's all a power game to them. Whose on top and who has the best bragging rights, and who has the best dirt on who."

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'm perfectly aware of that, already, Sirius. You're right, I am smart enough to have realized that anyone who plays nice with me could very well be doing it just to use me, or my name. I don't give my trust away easily. I'm not an idiot. In fact, if I'm being frank with you, I'd have to admit that I hardly trust *anyone*. Even my *friends*. And I know perfectly well how Slytherin house works. In fact, I've told the friends I have that are in Slytherin house that they can go ahead and tell their house mates that they're tricking me, if it'll help them explain to the other kids why they're socializing with the Boy-Who-Lived."

Sirius blinked at him, obviously bewildered. "Why would you do that?"

"So that they can hang out with me without receiving any shit from their housemates for it," Harry said with a clear tinge of exasperation. "It may not be the 'right' or 'reasonable' thing to do, but I *know* that there are loads of people that are going to look at me and only see 'the-boy-who-lived' and nothing more. And for a great many of the Slytherins and their families, the 'boy-who-lived' is the person who lost them their Lord and the war. Any Slytherin seen as honestly and truly being 'friends' with me, would probably be shunned by those people. I'm simply giving them the opportunity to continue being my friend and still save face among the other Slytherins. On top of that, by pretending to be manipulating and tricking me, they're getting bonus points with their house mates."

"You really *do* understand Slytherins." Sirius said with a tinge of surprised awe.

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "Yes, I do. I'm not a fool, Sirius. I'm in Ravenclaw for a reason, you know. And I know how to look after myself. I've basically been doing it for the last ten years. I've gotten pretty good at it."

Sirius features darkened and Harry could see an angry storm brewing behind his gray eyes as he no doubt recalled some of the things that Remus and Harry himself had told Sirius about the Dursley's treatment of him when he was younger.

"I get that you want to look after me and protect me now," Harry continued before Sirius had a chance to say something. "That you see this whole 'getting custody thing' as a chance to try and... I don't know, *raise* me, or something. But I really should tell you right now, up front; I'm a very independent person. I've done pretty well on my own for a long time, and it's going to be weird for me to suddenly have an adult who actually gives a damn about what I'm doing all the time."

"What do you mean?" Sirius said, pulling back and staring at Harry with confusion plastered across his face.

"The Dursley's never gave a damn what I was doing, or where I was. Basically from age seven onward, I slept there, and bathed there, and that was it. I spent as little time in their house as I could possibly manage. During the school year, I spent a good portion of my day at school, and then I was out and on my own until I came back to the house to sleep. No one ever asked where I'd been, or what I'd been doing, and I got used to that. Its not a habit thats going to be easy for me to break, come summer... do you get that?"

"I... Well, where did you go? During the day when you weren't at school or at the Dursley's house, I mean?"

Harry shrugged. "It varied, really. I visited some friends houses, I went to the library, I went shopping, I spent hours reading in various cafes, or I'd hang out in a park. I'd go for long walks, I'd find some place that was nice and isolated and I'd practice my intentional-accidental magic. Basically, I did whatever I felt like, whenever I felt like doing it. Very independent. I looked after myself and I learned to watch my own back." Harry paused for a moment, deciding that it was probably necessary to let something out. "Do you want to know a secret no one else knows?"

Sirius blinked and then nodded quickly. "Of course."

"I came to Diagon Alley."

"Wait, you what?"

"I came to Diagon Alley. Several times. I remembered it from the times that mum and dad brought me here before they died. There were times that I felt like maybe I was crazy for remembering all that wizarding stuff when I was now stuck in a world with absolutely no sign of magic at all, except for all the wards and stuff I could *see* around the Dursley's house – not that I knew what the hell wards were. But anyway, I remembered the Knight bus and I remembered where in London the Leaky Cauldron was, and I managed to find my way here, several times."

Sirius stared down at Harry, totally gobsmacked. "And no one recognized you?" he finally asked, clearly stunned.

"The first visit I was lucky, I suppose. It was at that point that I actually got the first clue about how people saw me and that they would recognize me by my scar, so every time I came after that I made sure to keep it well hidden. I only stuck around long enough to get a couple books to tide over my curiosity. But even when I was only eight years old I was able to make my way through a densely populated wizarding shopping district, keep my identity secret, and stay out of trouble. I don't need babysitting."

Sirius gave a bit of an exasperated sigh and shook his head. "Yeah, but no one expected you to be in the wizarding world then. No one would have ever known to look for you... that was still incredibly reckless. Merlin, anything could have happened to you!"

"But it didn't. Nothing happened."

"Yeah, because you were lucky!"

Harry rolled his eyes and sighed. "Fine, whatever. But that doesn't change what I was saying earlier. I've gotten very used to my independence and I'm going to have a hard time adjusting to something different. Even at school I've been able to maintain my independence and do what I want, other than the whole 'not leaving school grounds' thing. It's just a matter of working within the confines of the rules and doing everything that your expected to do, when you're expected to do it. The rest of the time, I'm free to do whatever I want. As long as I get my homework done, no one cares how I spend my time. It's not like my head of house tries to babysit me. Not even the prefects bother me since they can all tell I've got my shit together without any need for their help."

Sirius was frowning and a moment passed while the man seemed to be mulling over what he wanted to say. Finally, he opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the sound of someone clearing their throat. The pair turned their heads to find the wizard who was working the shop looking at them with obvious annoyance gracing his features. Sirius quickly canceled his muffling spell and grinned sheepishly at the man before he pointed at the Nimbus 2000 and said he'd be buying one.

The wizard's face instantly brightened and he started an obviously well-practiced routine of trying to sell Sirius a mountain of accessories to go along with the broom.

After that, the two managed to keep their conversation much lighter. They did a bit more shopping before they flooded to a community pitch that Sirius said he and Harry's father used to go to a lot when they were younger. Apparently it was the pitch that the 'Wigtown Wanderers' played their home games at, and whenever it wasn't be used for the professional quiddich matches, it was open to anyone who was willing to pay the entry fee to fly around and play any amateur games with their friends. You could even rent it out for private parties and such.

So the pair did just that, and the two spent a couple hours just flying through the sky, racing each other, and generally just screwing around.

At two o'clock they called it quits and flooded back to Sirius' flat so that they could clean up and shower. Just before one, they flooded again to the real estate witch's office and she took them to the first house via port key.

Over the course of the next week, Sirius and Harry visited over a dozen of houses and by the end of the week, even Harry's perfect memory was having trouble keeping them all straight in his mind. He'd kept copies of all the papers from the real estate witch that detailed what wards were already in place on the various properties, since a few of them were relatively old wizarding homes, and a number of them were already unplotable.

Unfortunately, Sirius hadn't been very fond of many of the ones that had the best wards, already in place. Apparently they reminded him too much of his Uncle Cygnus' old manor home, or the Black family's London townhouse he'd grown up in. A townhouse that Harry was secretly hoping he might get to visit at some point since he hadn't been there since he was a teen in his previous life, but had not yet found a reasonable excuse for why he would want such a thing, when Sirius had made it quite clear he wanted nothing more to do with the place.

During the course of the week, the topic of Harry's association and defense of the Malfoys had not come up again, and Harry was grateful for that. But he had completely given up any attempts to come off as naive or innocent in Sirius' presence. It had simply become blatantly obvious that Sirius just wouldn't fall for it. He'd seen through Harry once, and that was enough for him to always look deeper into things when they spoke, and he would call Harry on his attempts to portray himself as someone stupider than he really was. Plus it was counter-productive to his argument that he could take care of himself and didn't need a baby sitter.

That didn't mean that Sirius saw Harry's real self, though. Harry had found a nice medium to portray to the man that seemed to work well and fell within the wizard's reasonable expectations of what sort of person Harry might be. He could work with this.

Remus had also visited them several times over the course of the week, and had even been dragged along to visit a few of the houses. He had the week off from school too, *in theory*, but he always insisted he needed to get back to Hogwarts so he could finish all of the grading

he had fallen behind in, and the preparation he still needed to make for the end of year exams that would be approaching in the near future.

But now it was Saturday evening, and the three of them were sitting around the mainroom of Sirius' flat, talking easily. Harry had one of his school books open on his lap and had been pretending to occasionally study while also listening as Sirius and Remus talked about their school days at Hogwarts. The topic of Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers had come up, and they were debating which of the seven Defense professors they'd had, had been the least useless. The only consensus so far was that they'd all been rubbish in general – the debate was which was the least rubbish.

"I can't believe you took the post, Mooney," Sirius sighed at one point, shaking his head. "You are being careful, right?"

"Of course," Remus said tiredly and rolled his eyes.

"I mean, *you* of all people! You've got so much that could be exposed!" Sirius exclaimed, throwing his hands into the air in an exasperated gesture.

"What are you two on about now?" Harry asked, looking up from the book he hadn't actually been reading.

"Oh... it's just the damned Defense-post curse," Sirius grumbled.

"It's not a curse," Remus put in, but Sirius scoffed.

"It damn well *is too* a curse! Half of them end up physically maimed one way or another by the end of the year, and the other half end up publicly destroyed in some way. Or they're just so damned scared by something or another that they refuse to come back. Some of them even end up *dead*."

"It's been nine years since the last one died, and only three have died before that," Remus insisted.

"Defense teachers have *died*?" Harry exclaimed, feigning surprise and taking on a deeply concerned expression as he looked at Remus.

He had to admit it wasn't very hard to look worried. He'd completely let the curse slip his mind, actually, and he really *did* care about Remus. Now that he had been reminded about the curse's existence, he realized he was going to have to do something about it.

"Don't look like that, Harry. I'm not going to die," Remus said reassuringly before turning and glaring at Sirius.

"Yeah, but even if you don't end up *dead* – which you damn well better not! – I think it's pretty easy to guess what *might* go wrong," Sirius said, scowling. "You're just playing with fire here, Mooney. This curse has a way of finding the *one thing* that will destroy the teacher the best way and making it happen. We both know what's probably going to come out of this.

You're lycanthropy is going to get exposed to the public, somehow. If it gets out to the public that you're a werewolf you'll never work in the wizarding world again!"

"Like I could get work before," Remus grumbled bitterly looking away. "Enough people were able to see the signs anyway. You know how much I always wanted to teach. Even if it was only for one year, I couldn't pass up the opportunity when Professor Dumbledore contacted me. I just couldn't."

"Are either of you going to explain this whole curse thing you keep talking about?" Harry interrupted them, knowing that he wouldn't be able to contribute to the issue until they thought he knew what they were really talking about.

Remus sighed and ran his hand through his short graying hair. "There are people who believe that the Defense post is cursed. It started back in the mid-to-late fifties, they say. And ever since the curse was cast, not a single defense teacher has made it past two years. Actually anyone that made it through the whole first year unscathed and came back for a second year, always ended up having to leave before first term was even over. No one has ever made it longer than that."

"Does anyone know *why* this happens? How'd the post get cursed? Does anyone know who did it?" Harry asked since he honestly wondered how much they knew.

"No clue," Remus said with a sigh as he leaned back in the arm chair he was sitting in. "I get the impression that Dumbledore knows something, but he seems to prefer to pretend the curse isn't there at all. He won't even openly acknowledge it, it's rather annoying actually."

Harry blinked at him for a moment before turning to Sirius who just shrugged.

"There were loads of theories, but they were just pulled out of people's arses. No one ever really knew."

Remus made a weak attempt to reprimand Sirius for his language around Harry, but at this point had almost entirely given up.

"What efforts have people made towards identifying and countering the curse?" Harry asked.

The two adults looked at each other and then back at Harry and shrugged.

"What... nothing? Surely there's been loads of people to try and counter this thing if it's been killing off and loosing the school defense teachers since the fifties," Harry said incredulously.

"Oh, I'm sure, Dumbledore has tried loads of things. But like I said, he doesn't exactly like to talk about it." Sirius said.

"But what about the Defense professors themselves. Surely there were some curse specialists in the bunch. It's the *Defense Against the Dark Arts* post for Merlin's sake."

"I really don't know, Harry," Remus said softly.

Harry screwed up his mouth as he pondered the issue. He didn't want Remus getting hurt out of this, nor did he want the man's lycanthropy to get publicly exposed. And knowing the curse the way he did – which was pretty well since he *had* helped to make the damned thing – he knew it would expose Remus' secret in the worst possible way. Mostly like some sort of compulsion would slip in somewhere making Remus forget his Wolfsbane one month and he'd end up attacking a student when transformed. Something that would utterly destroy him – possibly even end him up in Azkaban.

Fuck.

He had to stop this.

"Curses have to have a focal point..." Harry began thoughtfully. "Has Defense been moved around to different classrooms over the years?"

Sirius and Remus both frowned and shook their heads. "I don't think so," Sirius began.

"The room I teach in is the same one that we took Defense in when we were students there. My understanding is that it's been the Defense classroom for more than a hundred years."

"And your office – its the same office the Defense professors always use?" Harry asked and Remus nodded.

"Well... it seems like that would be the first thing to test. I can't imagine why Dumbledore wouldn't have tried moving the class to a different room. That would be the easiest solution if it worked. The location could be the focal point."

"Well, surely he would have tried that at some point," Remus said.

Harry nodded slowly. "Yeah, maybe. Anyway, I'll think on it and look into some stuff when I get back to the castle."

"Harry, there's no doubt that many many witches and wizards have looked into this. I wouldn't exactly get your hopes up," Remus said softly.

"Doesn't hurt to try," Harry said reassuringly.

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By Sunday Harry and Sirius had narrowed down their favorite houses from the previously sizable batch down to just two. The real estate witch was kind enough to take them back to the two houses again so that they could make the final decision. They were basically stuck between two extremely different options, but the houses they had looked at all fundamentally fit into two different categories, and these were the best of each of those categories.

One was basically isolated and out in the middle of no-where, so it could very easily be warded, and they would be very well protected from any unwanted visitors – however being totally isolated certainly wasn't a mandate for good wards. A house could be in the middle of London and be strongly warded. But this house came with a lot of land and even had it's own small quidditch pitch out there. The house wasn't overly extravagant, or uppity, which Sirius

had been rather insistent on. In fact, it rather resembled a farm house, and had quite a homey feel to it.

The other house was nestled in a nice little wizarding village not far from Perth in Eastern Scotland. Harry was actually leaning more towards the village since it would give him the opportunity to leave the house from time to time with a reasonable excuse – *going down to the market*, or *going to the library*. At the farm house he would feel dreadfully isolated and have a hard time coming up with excuses for leaving the house without a chaperon.

As he had feared, but totally expected, Sirius was slipping into that over-protective parent mode and wanted to make sure he could keep Harry *safe*. He insisted he *wasn't*, and that he liked the farm house with the land best because of the quidditch pitch, but Harry could tell part of the man was worried and liked that Harry could go flying around the house freely and remain within the protective wards and out of Death Eater hands.

Harry knew that some of the letters Dumbledore had sent Sirius had gone on about the potential Death Eater threat and how Harry needed to be properly protected when he was away from the safety of the school and its extensive wards. No matter how much Sirius now distrusted the old headmaster when Harry was concerned, Harry knew that Sirius couldn't help but worry about the concerns mentioned. He may not trust Dumbledore, but he sure as hell didn't trust any Death Eaters either.

And even if none of them were willing to leave Harry's safety in Dumbledore's hands anymore, none of them would argue with the fact that Dumbledore *did* honestly want to keep him safe from Death Eaters. In that regard, the Headmaster honestly did want what was in Harry's best interest, in regards to his safety.

At least, it would be in Harry's best interest if Death Eaters were actually a legitimate concern for him... which they weren't. Not even remotely. But he couldn't exactly tell that to any of them without them wanting to know *why*, and he *definitely* couldn't tell them *that*.

And it didn't matter how many times Harry insisted to Sirius that he could take care of himself if anything dangerous did come up, because Sirius would never really believe it. Not unless he actually witnessed it, and Harry was definitely *not* ready to give Sirius any sort of demonstration of his real skills.

And so they were left at a bit of a deadlock on the two houses.

But there was one thing that the house in the wizarding village had going for it over the other one. It already had a veritable *mountain* of quite impressive protective wards on it. The previous owner was an old man who had lived to the ripe old age of 179 before he'd finally kicked the bucket, and he had apparently lived so long because he was exceptionally paranoid.

The house was unplotable to everyone except those that knew the exact address. Normally 'unplotable' just meant that muggles couldn't see a place, but even *wizards* couldn't see this house unless they knew the address and they wouldn't be *able* to know the address unless allowed, because the very address itself was heavily warded with what Harry thought was an incredibly ingenious bit of magic. As an added level of security, only those listed in a

specially charmed book that controlled some of the wards, could actually remember the address. It was almost like a variation on a fidelius charm, only instead of a secret keeper, you had the book that controlled whether or not you could know the secret. If someone was in the book at one point but then removed from it, they would instantly forget the address and no longer be able to see the house at all.

A person could be told the address while standing outside of it, be able to temporarily know and remember it and then led inside, but as soon as they left the property, if their name wasn't added to the list, they wouldn't be able to return. Harry had to admit it was a pretty effective home protection ward, and one he hadn't quite seen before in such a way. The real estate witch believed that the old man himself has invented it as well as his own security system around the whole property, and Harry was inclined to think she was right since he recognized the old man's name as the author of a few advanced warding books he'd read about forty years ago.

The house was hooked up to the floo network, but once again, if you didn't know the address then you couldn't get in, so only those listed in the book could enter through the floo. There was a secondary label for the property that was open so people could place floo calls, but not actually use the floo to enter the house. It was fairly obvious that the old man wanted to have very strict control of who could and could not enter his home.

He was also clearly a booky type because he had a fairly large room on the ground level that had been converted to serve as a library. Judging from the layout of the home, Harry suspected that the room used to be a formal dining room, but the house also had a breakfast nook to one end of the kitchen that was more than sufficient for he and Sirius and Remus to have a table for meals.

That was another thing that he and Sirius had silently established while house-hunting even though they had never really spoken it aloud. No matter what the houses were they were looking at, they always made sure there was room for Remus. There had to be at least three good-sized bedrooms for them to even consider a house, and they still liked the houses to have four rooms so that there would be an extra guest room should the need ever arise.

Remus didn't know about this though. Both Harry and Sirius knew the man well enough to know that if they suggested he move in, he would consider it charity and fight them. They still intended to do it. Sirius would probably just tell Remus to move in once the school year ended just 'until he found his own place' and then convince him to stick around until Harry went back to school in September so Harry 'wouldn't miss him', and assuming Remus wasn't going back to teach another year – which was both Remus and Sirius standing assumptions at the moment – Sirius would then guilt the man into sticking around because he was lonely now that Harry was gone back to school...

It would probably work, honestly.

Another bonus of this house was the basement. The old man had clearly been quite a potion's hobbyist because he had a fairly extensive little lab down there. He also had an spare room down there with a cot set up that Harry suspected the man had used when making those touchy brews that required frequent maintenance over a twenty-four hour period. The basement's spare room could *easily* be converted to hold Remus during the full moons.

So with a very nicely equipped kitchen, good sized family room, library and bath on the first level, four bedrooms and two baths on the second, and potions lab and spare room in the basement, Harry was voting for the house in the village.

They went to the farm house out in the country first and Sirius spent a good half hour going on about all the room and the pitch and the fresh air, and then the real estate witch took them to the village and Harry spent his half hour needling Sirius and eventually sunk to using the old 'puppy-dog-eyes' thing that he used on Tom when they were kids.

Sirius had scowled at Harry the moment he started doing it, but then turned away and muttered something about 'Lily's eyes' before heaving a sigh and giving in.

Harry was quite satisfied.

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Rebirth Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Long chapter. 19 pages, this time, got it written in two days. woo. Getting close to the end of term now.

— — — — — Rebirth Chapter 22 — — — — —

Harry returned to Hogwarts Sunday night just before curfew and made his way to the Ravenclaw Tower. It was nice that Sirius was living in Hogsmeade since it meant that there was no valid excuse for Harry to be forced to take the stupid train all the way to London. That would have been two days of his 'vacation' wasted on travel.

He passed through the Ravenclaw common room and said hello to a number of his housemates before going through the doorway and heading up to the first years dorm room. He unpacked his things and pulled out the two Vanishing Boxes. He ran his wand over them checking over all of the runes he had carved during the evenings of the last week to check for imperfections or errors. A few little things glowed lightly red and he set to cleaning up the work he'd had to do 'blind', since use of his wand had been prohibited.

The errors were minor and he was just finishing them up when Kevin Entwhistle came up and went over to his desk to work on some homework assignment. Harry put the boxes away in his wardrobe and warded it before going over to his trunk, switching to the second compartment. He glanced up to Entwhistle hunched over his desk, back facing Harry and absorbed in his work.

He dug into the deep expanded compartment and pulled out a *very* long scroll of parchment, tearing it off where the charmed quill was still scribbling away relentlessly. He took the roll of parchment over to his bed, drew the hangings closed and sat there cross-legged as he poured over the details of Dumbledore's movements over the last week, and then over the activities of anyone who had gone into the third-floor corridor.

It was business as usual for the third-floor corridor, with Hagrid and Professor Sprout being the only people who had gone in there during the holiday week. Dumbledore's movements had diverted only slightly from his usual habits. Harry had been observing and tracking

patterns in the man's activities for months and had finally figured out the method to the man's madness.

He definitely had some reoccurring habits, but he also seemed to intentionally avoid doing anything predictable. Still – if you looked closely enough, it actually became obvious that Albus Dumbledore was a man of habit, despite his efforts. Harry made notes in a bound notebook of the noteworthy activities the man had changed during the school's holiday, and then also noted the things that had remained consistent with the patterns. By this point, he was fairly sure he could accurately predict the exact days that Dumbledore would be out of the school during the next two months. It would be during one of those days that Harry would make his move on the Stone.

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It was Wednesday, and Harry was in potions. The class was just about over, and everyone was finishing up their potions and preparing to bottle them and hand them in. It had been a fairly event-free class for once. Not a single one of the Hufflepuffs had blown up a cauldron. Snape had established a long time ago that every group was to be made up of one Hufflepuff and one Ravenclaw. There was one group that had to have two Ravenclaws since there was one more Raven than there were Puffs in their year, but that was just additional security.

Snape, in general, did not seem to have a lot of faith in the skill of the Hufflepuffs. And it wasn't like they were all stupid, or anything. Harry had determined by the second week of classes way back in September that the only reason the Puffs performed so badly in his class was entirely because they were terrified of the man.

Harry was a practical person, and when something was blatantly impractical, he greatly disapproved of continued use of that something. Snape's teaching method, while theoretically valid, was clearly very impractical. The man wanted complete control over his class, and he had very good reasons for wanting such a thing. Potions was a very dangerous subject in the hands of people who didn't know what they were doing, and as first years, very few of his classmates had come in having any idea what they were doing.

So ruling the dungeon with an iron fist was a valid option, *in theory*. But as far as a learning environment, it clearly didn't work very effectively. And since the Hufflepuffs, and even some of the Ravenclaws, were so intimidated by Snape, they didn't learn shit, they continued to perform horribly and only prolonged the period of time where students were regularly blowing things up.

Very impractical. Harry was never one for coddling people, but teaching the class with a bit more delicacy would probably go a long way. It was the same with how he treated house elves. Many wizards looked down on house-elves as significantly lesser beings and as such, felt the right to treat them however they wanted, which included punishing them with whatever painful hex the wizard could think up on the spot.

But an ill-treated house elf was not a willingly loyal house elf. A happy, well-treated house elf would go to the end of the world to keep their master happy, and keep their treatment kind. Harry didn't think the little things were necessarily worthy of being treated as equal or

anything ridiculous like that. He just preferred his servants loyal and happy. They did better work that way.

Harry focused on his potion as he saw his partner, Sally-Anne Perks, double-check the book and then hesitantly move to add the final ingredient. His eyes widened and he only just managed to dart his hand out and grab her by the wrist, just in time to stop her from dropping the dried newt spleen into the simmering cauldron. She yelped slightly in surprise and blinked at him in confusion.

He held back the biting remark that wanted to come out of his mouth and instead gave her patient smile.

"Er, you need to make sure the fire is off. It would be... bad, if you'd put that in while the fire was still on," he said softly.

Her eyes widened again and her eyes darted back down to her book as she read the section on 'warnings', which always listed common mistakes to avoid and swallowed thickly as she got to the point that described just what would have happened if she had succeeded in botching the potion.

Harry took over and got it finished up in the next five minutes without any difficulty. He put it into two bottles, handed one of them over to Perks and then made his way up to the front of the room to leave it on Snape's desk.

He set it down with the few others that were already turned in and was about to turn when Snape cleared his throat and caught his eye.

"See me after class, Mr. Potter," Snape said quietly.

Harry nodded at him, acknowledging the request and went back to his seat.

The bell chimed through the halls of Hogwarts five minutes later, signaling the end of class and Harry lingered behind, packing away his things slowly as his classmates all began to chatter excitedly as they eagerly left the dungeons for lunch in the Great Hall. As soon as the room was clear, Harry slung his knapsack over his shoulder and looked up at Snape expectantly.

Snape made a few casual flicks of his wand that Harry recognized as some simple privacy charms – a silencing bubble with a ten foot radius, and a proximity ward that would alert him if anyone approached the door.

"The potion is complete," Snape said simply, cutting straight to the point.

Harry's eyes widened slightly and the corner of his mouth turned up. "Brilliant. Were there any complications?"

"Of course not," Snape said, making a face that suggested he was offended by the mere suggestion that anything could have gone wrong with *him* doing the brewing.

"How about the potency? How many years will it age me, and how long can the potion last before the effects wear off?"

"It will add ten years to your current age, so it will make you age to roughly twenty-one years old. The length of time it lasts initially depends on how much you ingest. A few drops and it'll last an hour. You can get it to last twenty-four hours with a mouthful, however after that it has an exponential decline in how long it lasts in relationship to how much you consume. No matter how much you take, it won't last more than three days before wearing off, and taking that much comes with the risk of overdose sickness afterwards."

Harry nodded. "About what I expected. If you want, you can give me a detention for smart-mouthing you or something and I can help bottle it tonight."

"You're offering to assist me in bottling it?" Snape replied, looking a bit surprised.

"Of course," Harry said with a shrug. "I'd like some pretty specific durations set aside, and I know that the stasis charms will only work if they're not interrupted, so multiple doses in multiple bottles will be the only way to go..."

"You're clearly intending to use this for more than just removing your and Draco's Traces," Snape observed dryly.

Harry snorted. "Now what possible use could I have for an aging potion, I wonder..." he asked rhetorically.

Snape rolled his eyes. "I suppose I can imagine you might enjoy not being trapped inside the body of a child all the time. Are you sure you want me to give you a detention? It will be recorded if I do."

"Do you ever do 'extra-credit' sessions with anyone outside of Slytherin house?"

"No."

"Then it would look incredibly unusual if I was in your private lab after hours for any reason other than a detention. It's not a big deal. Take off ten points or something and say I snapped at you after you held me after to snark at me about some assignment."

Snape sneered down at Harry, but the boy only smirked at him wider in response. Snape sighed in exasperation, which seemed to be a very uncharacteristic gesture for the normally cold and stoic potions master.

"Fine. Ten points from Ravenclaw for your cheek. Detention with me tonight at seven," Snape said with a bored tone.

Harry grinned. "Yes, Professor," he said with mock shame. "Is that all?"

"Yes, Potter. You're dismissed. Get out of my sight."

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes as he turned and left the classroom feeling the privacy wards being dismissed behind him.

Harry spent a couple hours that evening carefully measuring out individual doses of the potion, labeling each one, and placing a different stasis charm on each one. He had transfigured himself a storage box before even coming to the dungeon that night and was organizing the doses by the length of time they would last, inside the storage box. While he worked on bottling the doses, Snape worked on some other potions he had brewing in his private lab.

Harry heaved a sigh and wiped his brow with the back of his forearm as he placed the last bottle into his storage chest and closed the lid. There were a few drops in the bottom of the cauldron, but he'd basically gotten all of it. He pulled out his wand and levitated the large cauldron over to the big basin sink and set a few charms to start cleaning it out for him before turning and heading across the room to appease his curiosity.

Harry stood on his tip-toes and peered into several of the cauldrons and his movement drew Snape's attention.

"What are you doing?" Snape asked curtly as he looked at Harry with narrowed, cautious eyes.

Harry shrugged. "Just curious. I'm assuming you must supply the school's healer with most of her potions. These all look like things for the infirmary."

"Correct."

Harry looked into an especially large vat of thick, slowly boiling goop. "That's a *lot* of burn-healing paste," Harry observed, raising his eyebrows slightly in surprise. "It doesn't exactly have a long shelf-life. You expecting a lot of burn-victims in the near future?"

"Professor Kettleburn, who teaches the Care of Magical Creatures class keeps me up to date whenever he intends to cover an especially dangerous creature in his future classes. He'll be introducing fire salamanders to his fifth years next week."

"Ah. That makes sense. Although, the fire-protection potion is easier to brew and would prevent them from getting burned in the first place, as long as the students took it before handling the salamanders."

"True, but then they wouldn't learn anything, would they?" Snape said with a sadistic smirk that made Harry snicker.

Harry went over and looked into the next cauldron. "Deflating draught," Harry said as a statement, since it wasn't a question.

"Correct. The third-years will be brewing Swelling Solutions this week."

"Another pre-emptive precaution. Nice."

"I assume the fact that you're bothering me is a sign that you've finished with your own task."

"Correct."

"Well then, you are dismissed from your... *detention*."

Harry snickered as he turned, picked up his case, shrunk it down and put it into his knapsack. He slung the bag over his shoulder, bid Snape farewell and left the dungeons.

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"Draco!" a voice called out from directly behind him, causing him to jump slightly with surprise and Draco Malfoy swiveled around quickly in his seat to find Harry Potter standing there looking down at him with an amused smirk.

Draco sneered slightly at him before catching himself and forcing a blank mask on his face. He was sitting at the Slytherin table in the Great Hall and Harry did not often come speak to him during meals, so he couldn't help but wonder what this was about.

"You need something, Potter?" Draco asked with casual boredom and he turned back to his meal.

Harry grinned, leaned in close and spoke in a low voice. "Yeah, I need you. Tonight. Got any plans?"

Draco turned back and looked at him through narrowed eyes. They didn't usually meet on Wednesdays, and as a matter of fact he *did* have plans for that evening. The Slytherin quidditch team was holding a practice that evening in prep for their game against Ravenclaw in a week. Draco had been wanting to watch from the stands and had made plans with several of his dorm mates to do just that.

He frowned slightly but quickly pushed it off his face.

"No, I'm available. What do you need?"

"We'll discuss it tonight. You'll need to set aside at least two hours for this, just to be safe, although it could take less time. Will that be fine?"

"Of course," Draco replied easily with a disinterested tone.

"Good. Then meet me in that place we were using to work on that special project earlier in the year, at seven."

Draco nodded his understanding as he suddenly realized what this was probably about and then told Harry he'd be there. Harry smiled at him before turning and returning to the Ravenclaw table.

As soon as the raven-haired boy was gone, Draco sighed the slightest bit and some of the tension left his shoulders. He turned back again and refocused on his meal.

"Why the hell did you agree to that?" Theo, who was sitting directly beside Draco asked after a minute that he had apparently spent sitting there stunned.

"What ever do you mean?" Draco asked flatly, not bothering to meet is gaze.

"We had plans tonight! You've been going on about how much you're been looking forward to watching tonights practice since the weekend. You didn't even tell him you already had plans. You just dropped them without a moments hesitation!"

"Keep your voice down, Nott," Draco hissed as he finally bothered to look at the other boy.

"You know, this isn't even the first time I've seen you jump at his *requests* like a dog. It's pathetic, Draco."

"Fuck you, Theo," Draco said through clenched teeth in a quiet voice as his eyes darted around to make sure no one was eavesdropping. He saw a couple curious side-ways glances and pulled out his wand, quickly erecting a sound-muffling bubble around them.

"I get that he's not the stupid little Light savior everyone thinks he is, but that doesn't mean you have to lower yourself to jump to his every beck and call like some pathetic house elf."

"Bite your tongue! You have no idea what you're talking about. You don't... you don't know who he really is!"

Theo's brows rose into his forehead before lowering back down and narrowing his eyes.
"What's that mean?"

Draco looked around again, looking as if he were considering something before he quickly began to pack up his things.

"Where are you going?" Theo asked, suddenly.

"If you want to hear what I have to say, you'll pack up too. Hurry up."

Theo quickly took another bit of something off his plate before standing up and shouldering his bag. Draco was already standing at that point and was giving him an impatient, contemptuous glare. He quickly turned and stalked out of the Great Hall with Theo running hurriedly behind him.

Draco led him into an empty classroom where he made a quick trek around the room, checking a large cupboard and a closet to make sure they were legitimately alone. He aimed his wand at the door and went through a series of spells his father had drilled into his head before coming to Hogwarts. A one-way silence ward, and a proximity ward among them. They weren't the most powerful, and a person could probably pull them down if they tried hard enough, but the third ward he cast was one that would alert him if someone was trying to dismantle the other two.

Finally satisfied that the room was as safe as he knew how to make it, he turned back to sneer at Theo who was looking at him with a bored, expectant face.

"Well?" Theo said, impatiently.

"This doesn't leave this room. You tell *no one*, you understand?" Draco said coldly.

"I get it. I'm not an idiot."

"How good is your Occlumency?"

"Good enough. You know my father. He's almost as bad as yours. Wouldn't let me come to Hogwarts until I could at least put up a good fight when my tutor used Legilimency on me."

"Well, you're going to be making use of it now."

"Fine, fine. Get on with it! What the hell do you mean, 'I don't know who Potter really is'?"

"I don't know anything for sure," Draco began, "but I'm not an idiot and my eyes and ears don't lie. I know what I've seen, and what I've figured out makes the most sense."

"So what... this is just speculation?" Theo said, looking disappointed and annoyed now.

"*Informed* speculation." Draco drawled. "I don't think he's really Harry Potter. At least, not entirely."

"Then who, exactly, do you think he is?"

"I think he's the Dark Lord."

Theo's eyes went wide and he gaped at Draco for a moment before he recovered. "What? That's mental! Why the hell would you even suggest such a thing!"

"Use your brain, Nott! He knows magic that no eleven year old should know. He performs it *non-verbally* too. But he's careful who he does it around, and he usually covers it up by vocally performing some first-year spell in the middle of his non-verbal casting just in case someone is watching.

"He's got *everyone* fooled, even bloody *Dumbledore*! You already know that the hat wanted him in Slytherin but he talked it into putting him in Ravenclaw just so that he could stay under everyone's radar. He doesn't *talk* like someone raised by muggles, and he knows loads about pureblood traditions and culture."

"None of that makes me think 'Dark Lord'. It makes me think that he's a bloody brilliant Ravenclaw who reads too damn much."

"Fine, but that's not what really convinced me. What convinced me is watching my father with him. After I first met him, my father sent an invitation to tea at the manor. When he first arrived and joined us for tea, it was obvious that my father still saw him as an opportunity. At that point, he was pulling that whole 'innocent kid' act and we all bought it. Father was practically salivating at the political opportunities that would come with gaining the trust of a naïve Harry Potter. But after tea, father and Potter disappeared off to Father's study, at Harry's request and they were gone for *hours*.

"When they finally came out... well I'd never seen father look so pale. He looked absolutely stunned, and the way he was speaking to Harry was totally different. His body language was

totally different. He wasn't treating Harry like some political pawn, he was treating him with *respect*. *With deference!* I'd never seen him treat *anyone* like that before."

Theo's brows had slowly risen higher and higher into his forehead as Draco spoke, but he still looked slightly skeptical. "Is that all?"

"He came to our house another three times during August, and while he spent some time with me, he spent most of his time with father in his study. I know for a fact that he's continued to remain in regular contact with father all school year. But that's not what's really convincing. What has added more evidence to my theory is the way Uncle Sev treats him now, versus how he treated him at the start of the school year.

"You've heard from Boot, Patil, and Li's whinging, how Severus treated Harry at the start of the school year. It was like a personal vendetta for him because of Potter's father. He would constantly try to push Harry's buttons, and he was relentless, even when Harry never *once* responded."

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, apparently the day after Severus substituted for Professor Lupin back in September, he totally stopped doing all that 'taunting Potter' stuff in Potions class. He practically ignored Harry's presence, completely. Boot said that he stopped calling on him for a couple weeks, when before that he'd called on him more than anyone else in class.

"And then, back just before the end of term in December I was talking with Boot again and he said something that *really* sparked my interest. Apparently in Potions class earlier that day, Sev had been looking at Harry as if he were looking at a thestral for the first time after first witnessing someone die. It was apparently subtle and only happened a few times when he didn't think anyone was looking, but he *definitely* appeared put off his game.

"On top of all that, I happen to know that right now, Severus has been brewing a high level, complex, potion *for Potter*, and as far as I know, he's not even getting anything in return for it. Now why would he do that for the son of James Potter, who he apparently held a personal grudge against since they were kids? Not to mention, why would he do that for the 'Boy-Who-Lived' if that's all Harry Potter really was?"

Nott's eyes took on a calculating look and he focused on the wall behind Draco as he debated the potential validity behind Draco's suggestion. "Your idea has merit," Nott admitted slowly. "And honestly... well, it does sort of explain away a lot of things..."

"Exactly!"

Nott's face continued to look pensive for a moment before some sort of realization dawned on him and his expression slowly morphed into horror. "I've been in a study group with the Dark Lord since September?" he whispered hoarsely.

"You see now why I treat him the way I do?" Draco bit out.

"But we don't *really* know that he's the Dark Lord..."

"No, of course not. You think he would trust *children* with information like that?"

Theo snorted and shook his head. "But how do you think it happened? The Dark Lord being in Harry Potter?"

"It probably happened that night everyone thinks he was destroyed or something. They say that his body just disappeared that night and all that was left was Potter with a scar on his head."

"So you think the Dark Lord is possessing Potter's body?"

"That's one possibility. Another is that he simply took it over completely, and the real Harry Potter was the one who died that night."

Nott nodded his head, looking pensive again. "It does sort of make sense. But why would he get Sirius Black out of Azkaban if Black was never a Death Eater? Or was he? Maybe he really *was* a Death Eater, and Potter rigged all that too."

"No, I don't think Black was a Death Eater. I think he really was innocent," Draco said.

"But then why would the Dark Lord go to the trouble of getting him out, then?"

"Well you know that Dumbledore was Potter's legal guardian, right? I mean, in the magical world, at least. And it was Dumbledore who dumped it on those muggles. He wanted to get out from under Dumbledore's legal control. Can you imagine the Dark Lord sitting around and being okay with knowing that Albus-bloody-too-many-names-Dumbledore had legal say over his life?"

"No way," Theo said, quickly shaking his head.

"Exactly. So Black might not have been a Death Eater, and he may have been an Auror, but he's still better than Dumbledore."

"Yeah, I see your point," Nott said and then heaved a heavy sigh and ran his hand over his face. "Merlin, I don't even know how I'm going to handle this. I mean, if you're right... how the hell do I keep acting around him like I don't know?"

"That's *your* problem, but you damn well better figure it out. If he wanted us to treat him like the Dark Lord our fathers would have warned us. His biggest priority here at school is obviously to fit in. If we start treating him weird, it's only going to make him stand out more, so you'd better get your acting skills up to par, or else."

"Fuck, Draco! This is... this is too much! The *Dark Lord*?"

"How do you think I felt when I figured it out?"

"Bloody hell..."

The two were quiet for a moment, and Draco just stood there, waiting until Nott got his emotions back under control.

"But you know... this is an *incredible* opportunity," Draco said finally, a small, devious smirk now curling his lips.

Theo looked at him skeptically. "How so?"

"Just think! Obviously, if 'Harry Potter' just up and vanished, the Wizarding World would go crazy trying to find him and want to protect him or whatever, so he couldn't just vanish and start up his war again while stuck in Potter's body. Also, there's no denying that some of the Death Eaters would probably refuse to follow him, or try to challenge his authority if they saw him as a kid and considered him weak. So he's biding his time. He's staying underground until the time is right. He'll probably wait *years* more before he makes another move to restart the war, and we have a chance to be his right-hand men when that happens! If we play our cards right here at Hogwarts, we can be his most trusted lieutenants after graduation!"

Nott's eyes widened but the rest of his face remained passive. "Valid point." he said after a silent moment. "Very valid point."

Draco gave him a wide, devious grin, and Nott's stone face finally broke a bit, and he grinned back.

"Very valid point."

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That evening Harry skipped dinner, telling his classmates that he was feeling a bit queasy and was going to head up to the hospital wing and ask Pomfrey for a potion to settle his stomach. Instead, he headed to the Room of Hidden things, asking for a comfortable sitting room, and quickly settled himself on one of the emerald green couches the room provided him.

He dug into his knapsack and pulled out several things – one was a pair of stretchy gray sweat pants and a t-shirt that he had transfigured to be much larger, and the other was a small vial and eyedropper that he'd put a bit of the ageing potion into. Draco wouldn't be showing up for about an hour, so that would give him time to make sure that the potion worked correctly before the other boy showed up.

He quickly disrobed, folding his uniform, dress shirt, and slacks neatly and placing them on a footstool a foot from the couch. He dressed in the excessively oversized clothing and had to hold the pants on him while he went back and sat down on the couch again.

He uncorked the vial, and pulled some of the potion up into the eyedropper; then re-corked the vial and placed it on a small end-table to his left. He opened his mouth and gently squeezed two tiny drops onto his tongue. He quickly set the eyedropper aside just as he felt the first tell-tale signs that the potion was working.

It was painful. That was for sure. But he'd experienced far more painful things than this before, so he managed to hold in the urge to cry out in surprise. It felt like his bones were growing at one rate while his tendons and muscles raced to keep up. He felt like his head was expanding and yet not expanding fast enough and the pressure was likely to make him pass out, but he knew he couldn't.

By the time the pain had died away, he found himself curled in the fetal position on the couch, panting roughly, and had no recollection of ever even falling down onto the couch from his earlier sitting position.

He pushed himself up and groaned out loud at the painful stiffness aching through his whole body. But the groan was deeper than it would have been only a few moments earlier. And his perspective, as he sat up fully, was higher than before as well.

He looked down at his hands and they were large, masculine hands instead of the annoyingly delicate hands of a child he had grown accustomed to through necessity. He felt a grin spreading across his face and stood up, mentally asking the room for some full-length mirrors. A moment later, one wall was lined with floor to ceiling mirrors and Harry came to a stop, standing before them.

His hair was still the same length, so that hadn't grown – which he was relieved for. It was still long, going down to brush his shoulder blades, and still completely black. Snape's estimate had been right, because he looked to be around twenty-one. He would estimate his height somewhere around five-foot, ten-inches. His shoulders were broad and he had a reasonable amount of muscle tone. Nothing seriously defined, but it was simply an older version of his existing weight-to-height-to-muscle ratio.

The clothes he'd put on were still a bit baggy on him. Finding himself too curious not to, he reached down and pulled the t-shirt off over his head and examined himself, shirtless, in the mirror. He chuckled lightly at his vanity as he appraised his future form appreciatively, internally debating whether or not Tom would find him attractive in this body.

He sure hoped so.

—

Draco walked into the room a bit under an hour later with casual ease that quickly vanished as he came to a dead stop and stared at Harry, lounged casually across the couch with his head rested on one armrest while his legs, crossed at the ankles, were propped up on the armrest on the other end. His arms were up above his head with his fingers threaded behind his head and he was smirking at Draco as he stood there gaping at him.

Harry yawned and pulled himself up into a sitting position, still smirking at Draco.

"I take it, that the potion works?" Draco drawled as he recovered and resumed his casual gait further into the room.

Harry's smirk grew. "The ageing potion did – yes. From the charms I've cast, it appears that the Trace is gone too, but it's hard for me to tell one-hundred percent for sure if I'm stuck casting the spells at myself."

"So you'll be wanting to do those detection spells on me again after I've taken the potion?"

"That's correct."

Draco nodded curtly. "Alright. How long will this last?"

"Mine should be wearing off within the next ten minutes. We may want to wait till then just to make sure it's going to wear off before you take it too."

"I would appreciate that," Draco drawled.

Harry went on to show Draco the small vial and explain that the dosage determined how long the potion would last, and that he would have to make sure he only took two drops. Then he went on to describe the pain that Draco should expect, and that he'd be best served by changing into some enlarged clothing before taking the potion.

"Is that why you're sitting in here shirtless?" Draco had said with a small sneer on his face that just made Harry chuckle.

"What? I can't enjoy the fact that I'm going to look fairly nice when I finally reach twenty? I'd ask you to forgive me my vanity, but I don't honestly give a damn."

Draco rolled his eyes, but smirked slightly.

A few minutes later, mid-sentence, Harry suddenly bent over, clutching his middle and tightly clenching his teeth while a pained keening noise escaped his throat.

Draco stood up right away and just stood there helplessly, watching while Harry's whole body twisted and shrunk down in what looked like an incredibly painful transformation. It finally ended a little less than a minute after it started, with Harry panting heavily for a long silent moment before a weak chuckle escaped him.

"Not sure which hurts worse. Ageing ten years in a minute, or de-ageing." Harry said weakly. Then he looked up and met eyes with Draco. "Well, Drake – ready to get your Trace removed?"

Draco swallowed the lump that had managed to lodge itself in his throat and tried to push down his nerves so that he could nod.

—

Draco had done a good job of enduring the transformation with dignity. But he *was* a Malfoy, so Harry would have been disappointed if Draco had done any less. Harry had then run his rest spells and after only twenty minutes, he was completely convinced that the Trace had been completely removed.

Despite his remarks earlier in reference to Harry going about without his shirt, Draco had also given in to curiosity and vanity and examined his older self in the mirror, shirtless. Harry had to admit that Draco was going to end up being a very attractive man. He was the perfect combination of a Malfoy and a Black. And both Malfoys and Blacks were known for their pretty, aristocratic features.

Harry had hummed appreciatively as he watched Draco examining himself in the mirror and the boy – or rather, temporarily the *man* – had actually *blushed*. Which Harry found entirely

amusing.

Harry stayed and kept Draco company until the ageing potion finally wore off and once Draco had recovered from that, Harry performed a few of his detection spells one last time just to make sure the Trace really was still gone.

And it was.

Success.

--

The next two weeks passed without any notable deviation from Harry's normal routine. Aside from his standard classwork, he was dedicating all of his free time to finishing the Vanishing Boxes. And he managed to get them done two days before April's full moon.

He spent the weekend before the full moon (which would be falling on a Monday-night this month), thoroughly testing the box to determine its limitations, and through all of his many many diverse tests he was able to determine that it had none. He would put an object in one box, tap the box and speak the command, and the next moment a small glow would appear around the other box. Open it and the object was now in the second box, and no longer in the first.

It worked transporting an object from anywhere in Hogwarts to anywhere else in Hogwarts. It worked transporting something from in the Chamber to his dorm. It worked transporting something from the room of hidden things to his dorm. But far more important than any of that, it worked transporting from anywhere he tested *in Hogwarts to Godric's Hollow*.

He had Dobby take the second box to the house and wait for the box to light up. Then he was supposed to come back and tell Harry if it worked. And it had.

The level of testing after that was to make sure it still worked even if he put a powerfully charmed, cursed, or hexed object in it, and while he could never hope to re-create something as magically powerful as the Philosopher's Stone, and especially not on such short notice, he was still able to make a number of variations for testing, and all had worked.

—

Sunday afternoon, Harry found himself pacing through the hallway outside the Defense Against the Dark Arts class under his invisibility cloak and internally arguing with himself. He'd been putting off actually tackling the Defense-post curse for as long as he could, but at this point, he knew he couldn't reasonably risk waiting any longer. Not with the fullmoon being the following night, and the end of term quickly drawing nearer.

He had to admit that part of him had a sentimental attachment to the curse. He and Tom and developed it together, in their own fit of bitter annoyance with Dumbledore. And the fact that it had caused the man grief for the last fifteen years brought a smug grin to his face. But the curse would only inconvenience him now.

And he had grown to actually care, somewhat, about Remus and his well being. The man, along with Sirius, was one of those rare connections to that surprisingly happy year and three months he had spent with his parents as an infant. As frustrating as that time had been in many ways, it had also been amazingly stress free, enjoyable, and quite frankly, *shocking*, in how overwhelming it had felt to have people who loved him so completely and unconditionally.

Plus he just *liked* Remus. The man was calm, and intelligent, and good company, and he was a good teacher. Not that Harry had anything to learn from the man, but at least his class was enjoyable. And from some of the horror stories he had heard Remus and Sirius about the seven Defense teachers they had endured, and some of the horror stories he had heard from the upper-year Ravenclaws, Harry knew that he did not want to endure a different shitty teacher every year he was stuck attending school for the second time.

Finally, Harry huffed and reassured himself with the knowledge that he could just recast the stupid curse when Remus was ready to willing retire from the post.

He stopped his pacing and made his way into the Defense classroom, walked to the far corner and tapped his wand on a brick there. It glowed a faint blue for a moment before it faded away. He walked out of the room and began the tedious process of going to a dozen other rooms, each one with a stone or brick, or pillar in various random locations; tapping each one while not saying anything out loud because he simply didn't need to.

He had known exactly where each and every place was with the full precision of his crystal clear memory, mostly because he had been the one to cast them there in the first place. After Dumbledore had so flippantly dismissed Tom's attempt to apply for the job, and the two of them had developed the curse in a fit of anger at the damned stubborn old coot, Heri had volunteered to be the one to sneak back into the school to set it into place.

The school's wards had always been slack when it came to animagi, and it had been a simple matter to just *fly in*, sneak around, and cast the dozen different anchor points. The only room that *had* to have an anchor, specifically, was the Defense classroom itself, as the main focal point, but after that, Harry had just put the other anchors in whatever classrooms actually had easily accessible open windows at the time. He had aimed for un-used classrooms that Defense could have been moved into in an attempt to dodge the curse in the future, but knew that at some point, if they kept changing the room enough, they would probably stumble across one he hadn't hit and the curse would be effectively dodged.

Apparently that hadn't happened. In any case, it hadn't been that difficult to cast it in the first place, and had been even easier for him to disable.

And so, in the span of twenty minutes, he had completely disabled the curse and guaranteed that Remus would not encounter any weird, inexplicable, magically-induced events that would result in him having to quit, or be sacked... or be imprisoned.

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The full moon was once again spent in his bat form with Remus prowling around the Shrieking Shack in his Lycan form, and Sirius in the form of a very large black dog. Remus

and Sirius had actually tussled playfully, and Harry was surprised that Sirius was willing to do such a thing since all it took was one bite to break the skin for the disease to be transmitted.

Harry had flown around the high-ceilinged room, diving and then soaring back up, playfully teasing Sirius who would jump into the air and try to chase after him. By the time the sun was raising, their energy had decreased significantly, and Harry and Sirius transformed back to their human forms and helped an exhausted and worn-out Remus to get back to the school.

Sirius actually went inside this time, helping Remus all the way up to the infirmary with a tired Harry following behind. Sirius insisted that, now that he was the legal guardian to one of the school's students, he had every right to pay his godson a visit, and saw no reason not to go all the way to help Remus up all those damned stairs.

Pomfrey had seemed a bit surprised to see Sirius there, but then smiled at him knowingly as she helped Remus into a bed and began applying some salve to the torn and tattered skin on his elbows, which were bloody, and to some of the scratches he'd made on his face during the actual transformation.

Again, one look at Harry and Pomfrey insisted that he go to bed, and Sirius added in his consent, allowing Harry to skiv off his classes for the day.

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"So where were you today?" a voice said from directly behind him at his perch in the library. Harry turned around in his chair slowly and looked up at the buck-tooth, frizzy-haired, muggleborn, that he had almost managed to forget about since she had mysteriously stopped driving him mad at some point around January.

"What?" he asked, as he turned to fully focus on her.

"I asked where you were today," Granger repeated.

"I was in bed," he replied flatly. "I was sick all night and didn't sleep any. I went into the hospital wing this morning and Madam Pomfrey cleared me to skip classes, so I went back to bed."

Granger seemed to square her shoulders subtly and walked around the library study table he was sitting at and pulled the chair opposite him out, while silently asking him if she could sit down with her eyes.

He was watching her with an air of suspicion, but he kept his face covered with innocent curiosity and nodded for her to sit down. She did just that and then leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

"I know," she said simply, and with confidence, as if that was supposed to mean something.

He blinked at her blankly. "You know, what?"

"I know why you were gone. Why you're always gone the day after the full moons."

"Really? And why is that?" Harry asked, still deadpanned.

"Well," she faltered and looked around cautiously for a moment before leaning in even closer and whispering, "you're a werewolf."

She sat up straighter and her face betrayed the slightest bit of smug satisfaction at being convinced she was right.

Harry just continued to stare at her blankly for a moment longer before he snorted and rolled his eyes.

He sat up a bit straighter, folded his arms over his chest and smirked at her. "You're wrong."

Ah. That was satisfying.

"What do you mean, I'm wrong?" she said, sounding amusingly affronted.

"I mean, that *you're wrong*. I'm not a werewolf."

"Yes you are!"

"No... I'm really not." Harry took that opportunity to subtly pull his wand into his hand and cast a quick non-verbal silence bubble around them since they were clearly about to discuss something that was potentially sensitive and he definitely didn't want to risk any eavesdroppers.

"Then why are you always gone from classes the day after the full moons?" Granger asked, stubbornly.

"Really? I'm always gone the day after full moons? I hadn't realized. Are you really sure? I mean, I know I haven't missed a day of classes *every single* month, and isn't there a full moon every month?"

"Well... I suppose you haven't been absent *every* full-moon since the start of the year, but you've been gone for *most* of them. And the day after the full-moon is the *only* day you're ever gone!"

"Coincidence."

"It can't be a coincidence!"

"Sure it can. Sometimes the simplest explanation really is the right one. I've been sick, or tired, or felt like skivving off my first couple classes in a day like... five or six times so far this year? I always make sure I'm ahead in all of my classes, and I only ever skip days that I feel I can miss without really *missing* anything. If it just so happens that all of those instances happened to fall after a full moon, it was a coincidence and nothing more. Because I'm definitely *not* a werewolf."

"But Professor Lupin is," Granger said with absolute conviction and giving him a hard look that was just *daring* him to contradict him. "He always gets sick around the full moon. He

looks tired and listless for the day or two before it, and looks just horrid for a couple days after. He's got all those scars that are *obviously* the result of a werewolf transformation, and he *has* missed *every single* day after a full moon, all year. Professor Snape has substituted for at least one day, every month, since the start of term, and it's *always* on the full-moon. You cannot tell me that this is just a coincidence! I know what I've seen!"

Harry's bored, disinterested look had slowly shifted cold and hard during her little rant and when she finally stopped talking enough to observe her surroundings again, she flinched when she looked into his piercing green eyes.

"Okay, lets say, hypothetically, that I didn't instantly dismiss what you all just said. What, exactly, do you intend to do with the information?" Harry asked in a cold, low, voice.

She paled slightly and backed up a little in her chair. "What do you mean?" she asked with a slightly shaky voice.

"What are you going to do with this theory of yours? Do you intend to go to the press or something? Or complain to the board of governors? You're going to try and get him sacked?"

"What? No!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Why would I do that?"

Harry frowned. "Why *wouldn't* you?"

"Because he's a good professor. His class is enjoyable and very educational. I've heard the upper years talk about some of the professors they've had in the past! Why would I want to get rid of one of the few good ones?"

Harry leaned back in his chair, giving her an appraising look. "Okay, so why bring this up? Why even come to me about this theory of yours?"

"Well... well, I thought you were one too. That... maybe you and Professor Lupin were spending it together or something..."

"I'm not a werewolf," Harry repeated.

"Okay, so you're not one. But he is."

Harry heaved a sigh and looked away. Denying it would be pointless. She'd convinced herself and he knew there was nothing he could say that would change her mind.

"Do you... do you spend the full moon with him?" she asked, hesitantly.

Harry narrowed his eyes and examined her closely for a long moment before huffing slightly. "Yes."

"But... isn't that dangerous?"

"Not really. Not with the wolfsbane potion. He retains all of his mental faculties. We take other precautions, but his mind is all there, and I really don't think he'd ever hurt me, but like I said – we take other precautions anyway."

Granger took on a pensive look for a moment before she looked back up and gave him a small, smile. "That's really very kind of you, to do that." And with that, she stood up and walked away.

Harry blinked at her back as she departed, frowning slightly and debating whether or not a memory charm would be a good idea. The thing was that he didn't know how long she'd been formulating this werewolf theory of hers, and he'd always hated trying to manipulate people's memories when it dealt with going back more than a month or two.

Finally he just heaved a resigned sigh and mentally decided to keep a closer eye on Granger from now on.

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Rebirth Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Another long chapter. 19 pages again. Posted Jan 18th 2011.

I highly recommend visiting my 'Review Replies' thread because I've gone into a lot of character development discussion in there. Sort of 'understanding how Harry's mind and motives work'.

[fanfiction\(dot\)net /topic/78750/36771352/1/](http://fanfiction(dot)net /topic/78750/36771352/1/)

----- Rebirth Chapter 23 -----

A few days later, during dinner, Harry felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up on end, and the sensation of skin crawling. He frowned slightly but remained outwardly calm and continued to dip his soup spoon into a bowl of tomato soup and then reached over and dipped his sandwich into it and took a bite.

Again the crawling sensation surged over him and he hesitated for a moment, trying to identify exactly what was causing it. Someone was trying to cast a spell on it. He was sure. And that was a significantly infuriating idea. But the spell wasn't taking hold. It was sliding right off of him and refusing to stick. The only spells that he was naturally immune to were spells that effected the mind, and the only person who would have the gal to try and cast some sort of mind-magic at him was Albus Dumbledore.

He opened himself up, trying to catch the spell the next time it was cast at him so he could figure out what the hell sort of spell it was instead of it just slipping away and dissolving. He closed his eyes and let a small breath out of his nose and waited. Nearly two minutes passed before anything happened and he had been about to just give up.

The spell hit him and he grabbed it before it was deflected and pulled it into his unused physical mindscape.

It was obvious right away why this one was just slipping off while Dumbledore's previous attempts had made it into his mindscape and just sat there being all ineffective. There was no

eye contact available to Dumbledore this time, so he'd used a different kind of spell. This was actually very much to Harry's benefit because this sort of spell always came with a lot of extraneous mental and magical residue from the caster.

Harry had a feeling that Dumbledore was getting slightly desperate. He had pointedly avoided direct eye contact with the man for the last month. The last time the man had had the opportunity to look into his eyes was when he was summoned to the man's office to meet up with Sirius before the spring holiday. Dumbledore probably hadn't thought it wise to try anything right then since Sirius was in the room with him, and being an former Auror, would probably be able to spot a compulsion spell being cast.

And before *that* Harry had been avoiding direct eye contact for months as well. Basically, since *Yule*. So Dumbledore was clearly running out of time if he wanted to influence Harry to do something in regards to the Stone.

Harry quickly began to pick apart the spell and saw that the very first layer of it was a rather powerful compulsion to turn and look at Dumbledore.

Harry snorted internally. To hell with that. He wasn't going to make this easier on the old bastard. And it certainly wasn't unheard of for a person to be naturally immune to this particular type of mind manipulation magic. Not *common*, but Harry was supposed to be 'special', right? He had a bloody prophecy saying he was supposed to have the power to defeat the Dark Lord – surely that should count for something.

It also looked like Dumbledore had considered it a possibility that Harry wouldn't turn and meet his eyes because there were more layers to the spell than just the 'turn and look at me, damn it!' compulsion.

Worry. It was trying to instill a lot of worry. And the need to protect something. This sort of spell couldn't be very specific, because of how it worked, so this was the sort of thing he would expect. It also seemed to want to grow and encourage Harry's distrust of anyone he considered untrustworthy. And paranoia.

Interesting... So it wanted to latch onto whatever distrust Harry might already have in someone – say, if there was someone in the school that Harry considered untrustworthy, and then emphasize that and layer in a lot of paranoia. Then fill him with the need to protect something.

Seemed a reasonable bit of mind manipulation if you were desperate because you couldn't get anything more specific than that. It was still quite a reach. This all assumed that Harry would even think of the third floor corridor or whatever might be down it, and even know enough about it to assume it might need protecting from someone. Which Dumbledore really had no valid reason to suspect... Not really. Although, Hagrid had let stupid little hints slip several times through the course of the year. No doubt those were Dumbledore's doing. And Harry knew the chances that Hagrid had any ability in protecting his mind were slim-to-none since he was obviously half-giant. Giants were literally *incapable* of practicing mind magic. And giant halfbreeds were pure rubbish at it. So it was likely that Dumbledore knew exactly what things Hagrid had let slip in Harry's presence.

What all had Hagrid let slip? Well, he'd mentioned 'Fluffy' at one point, but the name certainly didn't give any indication as to what the hell 'Fluffy' was. Quite the contrary, actually.

And of course, it was Hagrid who had first let the name 'Nicolas Flamel' slip, and Harry had obviously known who Flamel was. Harry also knew from what Hagrid had said that whatever was down the third-floor corridor was something that belonged to Flamel and that Dumbledore and the teachers were protecting the thing 'for Flamel'. So, okay, it was obviously reasonable for Harry to know that the thing on the third floor was something that needed protecting.

Throw in some paranoia and some healthy distrust for someone, and it would definitely work out for a person to start thinking that 'so-and-so untrustworthy person might actually be out to steal Nicolas Flamel's magical artifact'. Ah, but that was where another level to the 'not trusting people' thing came in. It would be within reason for this to go so far as Harry not trusting any of the other people in the school to handle the protecting of the stone... Harry was supposed to have a history of not trusting adults and authority figures with his youth with the Dursley's. Well, it was all still a stretch, but it was obvious what Dumbledore was trying to get at with all this.

He wanted Harry to act the hero. To protect the stone from whatever villain his own paranoid mind could come up with.

He felt the spell hit him and slide right off again and internally snickered as he pointedly to ignored it. He slipped out of his mindscape and resumed eating his sandwich and soup; smirking to himself, knowing that Dumbledore was no doubt becoming very frustrated that Harry wasn't reacting in any way to indicate that his stupid little spell had done anything at all.

--

Harry was sitting cross-legged on his bed with the hangings drawn. It was just after five in the morning, on May 2nd – a Saturday – and Harry was currently crouched over his copy of the Marauder's Map, watching the dot labeled 'Albus Dumbledore' as he moved through his private quarters, preparing for his day.

Dumbledore always got up at an ungodly hour on days he was going in for a full session of the Wizengamot, and one such session was today. It was the last full session of the Wizengamot that would be held during the school term, and while there would be two other easily predicted days during the next month and a half when Dumbledore would be out of the school, this would be the *best* opportunity for Harry to make a move on the Stone. Plus, just in case he came across some protection he couldn't deal with today, it would be good to have two other opportunities to try again before the end of term.

Harry had his knapsack packed and ready for the day. He would be taking the map and the Lethifold-skin invisibility cloak with him when he left his dorm room, but he'd be packing the map into his bag when he no longer needed to carry it on him.

Already in the bag was one of his Vanishing Boxes, with the other already in place at Godric's Hollow in his private study where he had instructed Dobby to leave it and not touch it, even if it glowed, signaling that there was something in it. He was to leave it be, but make sure it was protected and should it come under threat, to take it and hide somewhere immediately.

Harry continued to observe the map as Dumbledore's dot moved from his private quarters, through a hidden passage and into his office. He moved around in there for a minute before going over to the floo and vanishing from the map.

Harry's lips formed a grin and he instantly switched his attention to the third floor corridor that was presently being guarded by Argus Filch, the squib caretaker and his stupid little demon-cat.

The Professors all tended to stay up late Friday nights grading papers so that they could have Saturday morning mostly free, and none of them seemed very keen on taking guard duty on early Saturday mornings, because none of them ever did. Today was no exception and Harry's grin grew wider still.

Harry pulled out his wand and cast a rather complex area-effect notice-me-not and repelling charm on himself. It worked much the same way the muggle-repelling spells on wizard locations like the Leaky Cauldron or the muggle-entrances to the Ministry of Magic or St. Mungo's worked. The moment someone's eyes landed anywhere near him, without even realizing anything had happened, they would feel the urge to look the other way and not see him at all. He'd gone with an especially high level version of the spell so it would even work on animals and most magical creatures – that included Filch's cat Mrs. Norris, *and* Fluffy.

With that spell cast, he began applying a few other simple spells, like a spell that would make all of his movement's completely silent, including his feet on the floor, and his breathing. Once he was sure the spells were successfully in place, he shouldered his knapsack and pulled the invisibility cloak over his head and pulled the hood up, securing it heavily over his face. He folded the map up, but didn't deactivate it, and slipped out from between his bed hangings. He used a simple sticking charm to hold them closed and knew that none of his dorm mates would bother him with them closed, if any of them work up this early for some inexplicable reason.

He silently slipped out of his dorm room, down the stairs and through the empty common room. He was fortunate to not encounter a single person on his trek from the Ravenclaw Tower to the third floor corridor. He stood in a shadowed alcove and looked at the map from beneath the invisibility cloak. Filch's dot was walking down the corridor away from the forbidden door, slowly heading in Harry's direction. Mrs. Norris was pacing back and forth in front of the damn door and Harry huffed in mild annoyance.

Not *really* a problem.

Once Filch has passed his alcove and turned down another corridor, Harry quickly trotted down towards the forbidden door and silently maneuvered around the cat that was entirely oblivious to his presence there. He got to the door, pulled out his wand and silently unlocked

it with a simple *alohomora* spell while rolling his eyes as the idiotic simplicity of the so-called 'protections'.

The cat's ears perked up at the sound of the *click* of the lock and she spun around, acutely observing the door with obvious suspicion. There were a lot of rumors about this cat among the students. Some believed she was part kneazle since she was obviously far more intelligent than a normal cat could ever possibly be. The fact that Filch was a squib excluded the possibility of a familiar bond to explain away her intellect. Some insisted that she was actually an animagus – which was laughable – while others said she had been human and had been cursed to live the rest of her life as a cat. Again, stupid.

Harry was fairly sure the kneazle theory was the right one, and she was currently glaring around the open space, searching for any sign of an intruder or untrustworthy person. However the repelling charm, combined with the cloak, was preventing her from seeing him at all. Harry drew his wand from beneath the cloak, aimed it at the cat and silently cast a light *confundus* charm. The cat staggered drunkenly for a moment in confusion before turning and walking away.

He turned back to the door and slowly pushed it open to reveal an enormous three-headed dog, sleeping soundly, in the center of the room. He stepped inside, the silencing charm preventing any of his movement from making any sound. However when he closed the door, it was *not* silenced, and one of the dog's many ears twitched and one of the beast's three heads began to stir.

Harry quickly pulled out his wand and threw up a silencing ward around the whole room so that no noise from inside it would be audible from the hallway, and then threw a timer charm on top of it so that the silence ward would destroy itself in five hours. Next he conjured a small harp and charmed it to play a soft, soothing lullaby. It took him about two minutes to get all of this setup and while he had worked the Cerberus had managed to stir enough to open its eyes and look around the room in confusion.

It had even gotten to its feet when the harp was suddenly conjured out of thin air and growled at it, menacingly. It had been about to attack the thing when Harry had finally gotten it playing music.

It was almost comical how fast the damned beast fell back asleep after that. Harry used a simple levitation spell to lift the heavy wooden trap door beside the slumbering dog-beast, and then used the exact same self-levitation spell that Sprout used every week to lightly lower himself down into the hole.

He conjured some blue-bell flames and lowered them down below him. Not only did it illuminate the otherwise pitch black space, it also drove away the Devil's Snare, and he lowered himself down, through the writhing deadly plant without so much as touching a single vine.

He made his way down the familiar declining corridor and into the room of flying keys, but he ignored them for the time being and set to work disabling all of the magical wards around the door, and the alarm spell that would notify Dumbledore of an intruder.

It only took him eight minutes to tear them all down, but that was only because he'd been practicing and had known exactly what to expect. It no doubt would have taken a *lot* longer than that, had he not come prepared.

Finally satisfied that the wards were down, he pointed his wand at the correct flying key that he could see flitting about amongst the cloud of keys in the air above him and whispered a Dark variation on the summoning charm that cut through most anti-summoning protections.

The key shot through the air and landed right into his outstretched hand. Harry snorted, once again, at the obscene ease of this whole thing so far, but reminded himself that he was entering uncharted territory from here on out.

He inserted the key into the heavy wooden door, unlocked it, and then slipped the key into his knapsack. He would release it back into the room on his way out. He pushed the door open and hesitantly stepped through. The room beyond was pitch black, but his Black Sight showed him a *lot* of large magical objects ahead. As he stepped further into the room, lights came on and a huge chessboard was revealed. The chessmen were carved from stone and taller than an adult wizard.

Harry just stood there, trying to make sense of what he was seeing for a moment. It was obvious which of the teachers was behind this one. If Sprout was behind the Devil's Snare, Flitwick was most likely behind the charmed keys, and Harry would wager that *McGonagall* was behind the giant chessmen. He could tell just from looking at them that they were Animated. It was a much more advanced and *powerful* version of the enchantment placed on wizarding chess sets, where the pieces would obliterate each other in a violent game of strategy, and then instantly put themselves back together perfectly once the game was over and reset.

The only real difference between these chess pieces and the chess pieces in a normal wizarding chess set was that these were much much bigger and the swords and spears they were holding were quite obviously very sharp.

Harry stood at the side of the chess board and began to wave his wand in a series of complex gestures as he cast one detection spell after another, analyzing what hidden security precautions might be in the room, since he very much doubted that playing a game of chess was the only trick to this room.

Many of the hidden spells he had found in the key room were also in this one. The magical webbing that would catch the Stone was here as well, just as he'd suspected, and from what he could tell, the moment a game of chess was activated, a spell would begin that would log the moves used. What valid use there was to that, Harry couldn't really imagine, but he knew he would want to disable it first. He was hoping to be able to leave the series of corridors without any evidence that he'd ever been there at all, being left behind.

There were also charms on several random spots on the chess board that, when stepped on, would send little alarms to the headmaster's office. They were basically the same spell that had been on the door and they would be easy to disable the same way.

Harry set to work, disabling everything he could from a distance before ever even approaching the chessboard. Once he was sure they were all taken care of he had to pause for a moment as he debated what to do about the actual chessboard. Should he actually bother to play the damned game, or should he just deactivate the animation enchantment?

Deactivating McGonagall's undeniably high level enchantment would be permanent. He couldn't set a timer so that they'd be reactivated when he was done. However, it was also only something that an incredibly powerful wizard could do, so *no one* would suspect a student had had anything to do with it when it was finally discovered that the Stone had been stolen.

While it was widely known that Harry Potter was exceptionally gifted, he was still eleven and no one would suspect him of being able to deactivate a spell like this. So while it had the disadvantage of leaving behind evidence that someone had been here, the evidence it left behind actually drew attention *away* from Harry...

But then there was the *time* issue. Which would take less time? Actually playing the game, or deactivating the enchantment? That one was debatable. It would also depend on what chess difficulty level this set was charmed to. Seeing as how these so-called 'protections' were in place so that Harry himself would be able to get past them, and Dumbledore would have no way of knowing if Harry even knew how to play chess, let alone if he was any good at it, Harry imagined the difficulty level wouldn't be all that high.

So it was entirely possible that it would be quicker to just play the game.

And that was what he decided to do.

Harry stepped up to the giant chessboard, and even though he was under his cloak and under the notice-me-not spells, the enormous stone pieces instantly came to life, aware of his presence. Harry knew there was no point in trying to get past them without playing. He could feel the magical barrier around the board that would prevent passage. He spent a brief moment making a plan of attack before beginning.

"Pawn to e4," he called out in a clear authoritative voice and the giant stone piece shifted across the floor and into position. Black responded by moving it's pawn to c6.

"Pawn to d4," he said next and black's pawn moved to d5. Next Harry sent his knight to c3 while black sent a pawn to capture his first pawn on e4. Immediately following that, Harry sent his other knight to reclaim e4 where it 'captured' black's pawn in an explosively destructive display with it's large stone sword. Black's knight moved to f6.

Harry paused, looking over the board, his mind whirling through what options would keep this game as short as possible. "Queen to d3," he called out, feeling a smirk curl his lips. He almost laughed when black's pawn moved to e5 just as he'd expected. Harry moved his pawn sitting on d4 to e5, capturing another of black's pawns and leaving a mount of rubble on the ground.

Black's queen moved to a5, putting him in check, but he wasn't worried. Black was playing right into his hands... Harry moved his bishop to d2 and black moved it's queen to e5, taking

back the spot Harry's pawn had claimed only a moment earlier with a smashing array of crushed stone.

Harry's grin widened as he ordered his castle into the black queen's open spot. Queen-side castling. Black's knight moved to e5, demolishing Harry's knight in a spectacular display of violence. But it didn't matter. Harry moved his queen to d8 and called out "Check," knowing that he was about to lose his Queen, but in one more move it wouldn't matter.

As expected, Black moved it's King to d8, smashing Harry's Queen to bits. Harry's bishop moved to g5 a moment later, and there was no denying that the game was done. Black had lost. There was no way for it to win.

Rook to d8 and checkmate.

Game done in ten moves. The giant animated chess pieces bowed down and Harry Saw the magic shift as he was permitted passage beyond the chessboard's borders.

As soon as he'd stepped off the board the pieces began to magically reassemble. The rubble cleared, the dust vanished, and by the time he'd reached the large heavy doorway, the board was spotless and not a single sign remained that anything had occurred there.

Brilliant.

Harry cautiously slipped through the door into the next chamber and closed the door behind him. At first inspection, the room appeared to be empty, except for a single, large, cupboard standing in the center of the room. Harry stayed to the side of the room and began to cast his detection charms, disabling the common ones as soon as he came across them. There weren't as many anymore – clearly the assumption was that by this point you would have tripped most all of the alarms already.

The only new one was a glowing line on the ground that one of his spells revealed. It was connected with the large standing wardrobe and as far as he could tell, crossing the line would cause the cupboard to open. Unfortunately, it also appeared to be connected with the exit door. It appeared that the exit wouldn't open until the cupboard was dealt with. He knew he could probably work it open if he set to it long enough, but whatever was in the cupboard was low level enough that a theoretical 'first-year Harry' could deal with it, so dealing with it would probably take less time then forcing the door open would.

Heaving a silent sigh, Harry crossed the line. The cupboard door swung open and for a moment, Harry saw nothing but blackness within. The a wispy dark form seemed to come out from within and shift and morph right before his eyes. Before he even knew what was going on, the wisp transformed into... *himself*. But he was older, and he was kneeling on the ground, crying over a bloodied, lifeless corpse that he was holding in his arms bridal style.

It was Tom. He was dead. But somehow Harry knew that the dead body of Tom he was seeing was *dead*, dead. This was Tom with no more backup safeties. No more horcruxes. What he was seeing right now was...

Harry choked back the horrified sound that wanted to escape from his mouth, even though nothing would have come out anyway thanks to the silencing charm. His head shook back and forth for a confused, stunned and bewildered moment before he was able to clamp down on the horror twisting his gut long enough for his rational mind to push through the fog.

What he was seeing was his greatest fear. Him, being doomed to live again and again, eternally reborn – *alone*. Because Tom was dead. Dead for good.

Boggart. His mind supplied him and he knew he was being an idiot for letting an illusion effect him so strongly.

It's just a bloody boggart! Pull yourself together you stupid git!

Harry aimed his wand at the scene before him and tried to imagine some way to change it to something amusing instead of the blood chilling scene he was witnessing.

"*Riddiculus!*" Harry said aloud, though no sound escaped his silence charm. Still the spell shot from his wand and hit the older not-him and dead Tom on the floor before him.

The scene suddenly changed and instead of him cradling a dead Tom in his arms, he was sitting cross-legged and holding Tom as a cat, laying sprawled on his back in Harry's lap and Harry was tickling his belly, while TomCat hissed at him in obvious annoyance and tried to scratch his hand.

A weak chuckle managed to bubble up from his chest and a small, sad smile spread across his lips as another chuckle escaped him. The Boggart instantly dissolved and the black wispyness escaped back into the cupboard.

Harry closed his eyes and let a few slow breaths pass before he opened them again and saw the door on the opposite side of the room was now open. He sneered at it and rolled his eyes. What sort of 'protection' was a Boggart supposed to be, anyway? Was it supposed to scare a person strongly enough that they just *give up* on getting the Stone, even after coming all this way? No. That was absurd. This *whole stupid thing was absurd*.

Huffing a frustrated breath he pressed on and passed through the door. It led to a short corridor that opened into a larger chamber. Harry paused at the open arched frame between the corridor and the next room, and pulled out his wand to check for spells. He found one around the archway almost instantly. It was some sort of fire spell. It looked like as soon as he entered the room, the archway would fill with flame to prevent him from going back.

He frowned and he went over in his mind what would be necessary to disable it by pulling the spell apart. It would take a while. His eyes traveled past the archway and into the room and he saw a table sitting there, and from what he could tell from where he stood, there were several potion bottles of varying shape and size, spread across it in a line.

Harry's brows rose slightly into his forehead before a slightly amused smirk spread across his lips.

Right. This was supposed to be something that he, as his theoretical eleven-year-old self, could get past. So obviously the solution would be provided for him in the room somewhere. And it appeared to be provided in a rather obvious way.

Alright, so he would probably be provided with the way past the fire. What he needed to concern himself with were whatever *hidden* spells were placed in the room. He set to casting the rest of his detection and revealing spells and was once again faced with the standard batch of alarms that he'd found in all the other rooms since the key room. The webbing spell, interesting enough, was absent from this room. From what he knew about this set of rooms, and from his map, he was fairly sure that the room after this one, was the room that held the Stone. So if some theoretical thief got the Stone from the last room and made to leave, they'd most likely put the stone in a pocket or a bag or something. They'd pass through this room, and the Stone would still be right where they'd just put it. By the time they passed through the Boggart room, the webbing spell would activate and silently snatch it away, quite possibly without the thief even realizing it.

Harry disabled all of the detection spells before even passing through the archway. Finally deciding he couldn't waste anymore time, he stepped through the archway and as soon as he was clear of it and standing on the other side, a wall of purple flames erupted behind him. On the opposite side of the room in an identical archway, a wall of black flames erupted.

Harry walked over to the table and examined it for a quick moment. The table had seven different bottles of potion on it, and beside the potions was a piece of parchment with... *a riddle* written on it?

Harry read it over and snorted. *This* was a protection? A bloody logic puzzle?

Of course, he did have to admit that there were a fair number of wizards who didn't possess a lick of logical reasoning ability to them. So maybe it was a reasonable 'protection'.

The riddle had a rather flowery way of saying that three of the potions were poison, two were wine, one would get a person safely through the black fire, and one would get a person back through the purple. You just had to work out the puzzle to figure out which was which.

He scoffed again and began picking up each potion, sniffing them, swirling them, and examining the consistency. It took all of thirty seconds before he knew, without even working out the puzzle, which potion was the right one to take him through the black flames, and which would take him back.

However, since he was sure Snape was behind this and the man was a tricky bastard, he read through the puzzle and worked it out in his head, just in case. It wasn't necessary though, because he'd been right. The potion to get through the black flames was in the smallest bottle, and the one to get back through the purple flames was in a rounded bottle at the right end of the line.

Harry took a quick swig from the tiny bottle, drinking about half of it's contents and felt a cold chill in his gut for a moment before it spread through all his veins in cooling wave. He set the bottle down and walked through the wall of black flames as if they weren't even there.

He found himself hesitantly entering the last chamber. He quickly began waving his wand about, checking every possible detection spell he could think of. The webbing spell was absent again, just as he'd expected. There were quite a few little alarm tripping spells scattered here and there. A charmed floor stone here, another charmed floor stone there; a line along the floor there, a curtain of magic detection all the way around the center of the room, all cast with a different kind of brand of charms magic to try and trip someone up so that they'd miss something simply because they wouldn't know how to look for it, or ever think to try.

But Harry remembered in crystal clear clarity every revealing spell he'd ever read about, and was dedicated to being very thorough. It took him ten minutes of very tedious delicate spell unraveling to get every thing in that room disabled or destroyed to the point where he felt safe walking the rest of the way into it.

Finally satisfied enough with the knowledge that if there was anything he'd missed, he deserved to get caught because Albus Dumbledore obviously knew far more obscure warding magic than he'd ever even imagined one man could, Harry walked all the way into the center of the large chamber and found himself standing just beyond the range of the Mirror of Erised.

He found himself *glaring* at the mirror for a moment. He was still under his cloak so there was nothing for the mirror to reflect yet, and Harry knew he was going to have to reveal himself for the mirror to work, but he *hated* the idea that he was going to have to face the stupid bloody thing again.

He'd known it was probably down here, but he still hadn't been able to imagine *why*. He began casting an array of spells at the mirror to try and identify what sort of things may have been added to it for whatever the hell Dumbledore needed it down here for. He'd been rather limited in what sort of detection magic he'd been able to use the last time he'd encountered it since Dumbledore had been there spying on him, but he could tell that some of the magic around the mirror *was* different.

There seemed to be some sort of magic in place that would trigger an action if a defined need was met. The mirror would detect the need the same way it normally detected what a person's desires were. So if you *desired* the proper thing, it would respond by... doing something.

Finally huffing in annoyance, Harry reached up and pulled the cloak down over his head, revealing his floating head. He took a few steps forward so he could see himself in the mirror.

On first inspection, it just showed him standing there – again, he was older, but this time he looked just like his twenty-one year old self from the ageing potion – and standing beside him was Tom, only now he looked the same way he looked when *he* was twenty-one. Harry almost laughed at himself for the minor changes in his 'greatest desire'. *Ah, he would never deny the fact that he could be a vain little shit.*

But this was not going to help him out any in this situation. Obviously, the mirror was being used to determine what you wanted to do with the Stone. If you wanted the Stone so you could turn lead into gold, it would probably show you surrounded by gold and riches. If you

wanted the stone for the immortality, it would probably show you drinking the elixir of life. But Harry didn't want any of that.

He already had a mountain of money from both the Valerius vaults as well as from the Potter vaults – granted he wouldn't get most of that till he turned seventeen, but really... *big deal*. He didn't need the immortality the Stone granted, although it certainly wouldn't be that bad and he probably *would* take advantage of it at some point... but that wasn't why he wanted the Stone.

One potential thing he 'desired' was him giving the Stone to Tom... but he really didn't want it for that either. Really, he had no intention of 'giving' the stone to Tom. He was going to *share* it with him, because he damn well wasn't going to just totally part with the thing. He *wanted* it.

He had wanted the damn thing since he was somewhere around twenty. He and Tom had tried to *steal* the bloody thing for several years straight. And while he had wanted it for a few very specific reasons back then, right now he really only wanted it because he'd been unable to get it before.

It was like a nice shiny toy that he'd wanted as a child, but accepted he would never get because it was too expensive or rare, and now he was suddenly provided with an opportunity to have it after all, and even though he didn't really *need* it for anything specific, he still damn well wanted it!

Harry blinked, pausing in his thoughts as his reflection suddenly began to change. Tom disappeared from the reflection and instead it showed Harry's floating disembodied head, smirking back at him. His hand appeared out of thin-air, parting the front of the cloak and pushing it aside, revealing Harry's body underneath. The hand went back, dropped into his pocket and reappeared a moment later holding the Philosopher's Stone. The reflection Harry's grin widened as the hand retreated back into the pocket and Harry suddenly felt a heavy lump appear out of nowhere in his pocket.

The reflection seemed to laugh at the slightly surprised expression on the real Harry's face as his shoulder shifted and the invisibility cloak closed up again.

Real-Harry's hand dipped into his pocket and pulled out... the Stone.

He felt himself laugh in shock for a moment as he pulled the Stone out in front of him, out from the cloak, so that he could see that it really was real. His Sight told him that it was, because the enormous amount of powerful magic rolling off it like smoke pouring off of dry ice, that only Harry could see. Another laughing bark escaped him, although no sound could be heard because of the silencing spell that was still in place.

Harry proceeded to have a good hysterical laugh that morphed into a maniacal cackle before he finally calmed down. He slipped his knapsack off his shoulder and set it down on the floor, shoving his cloak aside so he could see what he was doing. He pulled the box out of the bag, took one last look at the Stone and squashed the cackle that started to escape him again and instead opened the box and put the stone inside. He tapped his wand on it, silently

incanting the activation command, and felt the magic momentarily surge. He opened the box up again and found it empty.

He stuffed the box back into his bag, shouldered it, re-secured his invisibility cloak... *and left.*

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Leaving the string of chambers and corridors had gone by without a single hitch, which was a relief. He had effectively disabled all of the spells and security precautions on his way in, so leaving hadn't been a problem. The wizarding chess set hadn't even made him play another game to leave. He'd been able to just walk right past them. He locked the flying key room door behind him and then released the key so that it could return to flying around the ceiling with all the rest.

Some conjured blue-bell flames had parted the ceiling of Devil's Snare and he'd levitated him up through it, and up through the still-open trap door. Fluffy was still out cold. He silently closed the trap door and managed to slip out the door and cancel the music and room silencing spell without the dog even waking up. Filch passed him without even noticing him beneath his cloak and with his repelling spells still in place, and ten minutes later he was slipping back into his dorm room, feeling exceedingly pleased with himself.

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Harry flew in through the window of the shrieking shack and fluidly transformed back into his human form and landed on his feet. Sirius was already in there sitting across from Remus and chatting casually. They turned and smiled at Harry as he stretched, popping his back briefly before coming over and sitting down on the floor with the other two.

"Hey, Harry," Sirius greeted as Harry was settling himself on the floor.

"Hey Sirius," Harry replied easily and then turned and nodded at Remus who grinned tiredly and nodded his head. They'd seen each other only about an hour earlier, so greetings were entirely necessary.

It was late May, and they were once again gathered for the full moon. The weeks had been passing quickly for Harry. Things had become a bit more hectic and focused around the school the last few weeks since end of term exams were only a week away now. The Ravenclaws were especially dedicated to their studying, so his dorm mates had been rather focused.

Harry, for the most part, had simply been relaxing amid the chaos. His study group with Boot, Li, Patil, and Draco, Theo, and Daphne had started meeting three times a week at his Ravenclaw group member's insistence. The Slytherins certainly hadn't minded, but they weren't about to admit that they appreciated the Raven's assistance.

Harry had kept watch on his Map for any signs of someone going down into the Chamber to check on things, and amusingly enough, no one had. Sprout and Hagrid had continued their weekly tending to the first two rooms, which seemed to suggest that no one had even realized that the Stone was gone yet. Harry had frequently had to put silencing bubbles around

himself so he could have a good cleansing *cackle* at how utterly amused he was that no one had even realized he's stolen the Stone.

He suspected that Dumbledore would probably notice sometime soon, though. The old coot had continued to occasionally shoot little spells towards him in an attempt to compel him to meet his eyes, or to go investigate the third-floor, but his attempts had tapered off the last week. He probably figured that if Harry wasn't inclined yet at this point to investigate the Stone, it was too late in the year to reasonably introduce the idea. Harry would be gone from Hogwarts this time next month. There simply wasn't enough time left to do anything.

"So, Harry – how goes all that studying?" Sirius asked, pulling Harry from his musing. "With you being in Ravenclaw, I imagine everyone's really starting to cram for their exams?"

Harry shrugged. "*Starting* to cram? You underestimate Ravenclaws. They've been revising all month. In fact, they're really starting to get a bit crazy with it – especially the upper years – and, honestly, it gets rather tedious for me because I really don't need it like my classmates do. Eidetic memory and all that. I can quote any page from every one of my text books, and could transcribe the lectures from every lesson I've attended word for word, so when it comes to standardized tests on knowledge, I've got that in the bag. For me, the only parts I really need to practice are the practical parts. You know – actually *casting* the spells, and there isn't a lot of emphasis on that for us first years."

Sirius chuckled and shook his head. "That would have been one hell of a handy little skill back when I was in school. I definitely envy you on that one."

"You might have actually gotten some decent marks that way," Remus teased and Sirius swatted at him and scowled playfully.

"I got good grades where it mattered!" Sirius said defensively. "I got into the Auror training program without any real trouble, didn't I?"

"You never would have passed your potions NEWT if it weren't for Lily," Remus said, smiling fondly.

"Yeah... Lils always was good with potions though; and I was rubbish at it."

Harry smiled softly at the two of them for a moment before clearing his throat and broaching a subject he had been wanting to bring up with Sirius. This was the last full moon before the end of term, so it was his last chance to ask Sirius in person about it while he was still in school.

"Hey, Sirius?"

"Yeah?"

"I was actually hoping I ask you to do something for me before the end of the school year."

"What's up?" Sirius said, turning his full attention on Harry now.

"Well, now that you've got full legal custody of me, can you write to Dumbledore and ask him to switch control of my post-intercepting spell to you, and not him?"

Sirius looked utterly bewildered and Remus was just frowning.

"Post-intercepting spell?" Sirius asked, voicing his confusion.

"Yeah, I mean... the Goblins explained to me back in August that they had detected that there was a spell in place that was re-directing all my post to my 'magical guardian' so he could sort through it and make sure nothing dangerous was being sent to me. That was why I wasn't getting any of my vault statements. He also 'intercepts' all my 'fan mail', but I guess I don't terribly mind that. I can only imagine how embarrassing it would be to sit down for breakfast at the Ravenclaw table every morning and get random fan letters from total strangers for an event I only technically remember, and had nothing personally to do with."

"Are you saying that you think Dumbledore goes through your mail? And *keeps* some of it?" Remus asked, looking more upset than tired, which was saying a lot considering the full moon would be coming out in less than an hour."

"I *know* he does. I mean, there are letters that I *know* I should have gotten but didn't. It's rather irritating, really since I have no idea what he's decided to keep from me and he's approved to go on through. I assumed you two knew about it, since it's one of those 'protecting me' things," Harry trailed off, blinking in apparent confusion. "I figured Dumbledore would have at least told *you*, Sirius."

Sirius was scowling and looking at his hands, which were fisted in his lap. "No... he hasn't mentioned it," Sirius said with a mild hint of bitter sarcasm.

"Yeah, well, ask him to fix it or just switch it over to you. He's not my legal guardian anymore, so he's got no right to be intercepting my mail. We can either just let it all come to me, or we can set up our own re-direction post charm and sort it at home before you send along the reliable stuff to me at school. We can wait till next school year for that though.

"Yes... I'll contact him tomorrow. I'm glad you found out about this Harry. I'll deal with it from here."

Harry kept his face blank and nodded; squashing the smirk that threatened to spread across his lips.

"Great. Thanks."

Sirius paused in his scowling and looked at Harry for a speculative moment with slightly narrowed eyes. Harry just blinked at him innocently and after a silent staring contest Sirius seemed to heave a slightly defeated sigh and shook his head a little. He looked a bit *disappointed* but the expression quickly vanished from his face as Sirius changed the subject by asking Remus something about some book he'd lent Sirius the previous weekend.

Harry frowned slightly before huffing silently and joining in on their conversation. Sirius saw through him too easily sometimes. No doubt Sirius knew that Harry would never be naive

enough to believe that Dumbledore was intercepting his mail just to protect him... or at least, he wouldn't just be okay with that, like he had pretended he was a moment ago. Sirius already knew him well enough to at least know that 'being protected' like that would actually piss Harry off. No doubt Sirius also realized that the reason Harry hadn't pitched a fit about it before now was simply because it would bring about Dumbledore's suspicion and scrutiny of his actions.

Sirius was a smart man, Harry would give him that. Sometimes, potentially too smart. Harry knew he was going to have to deal with it at some point, or it was going to sneak up and bit him in the arse.

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Harry marked the last question on his Potions exam and lay his quill down on the desk as he leaned back in his seat and stretched his arms over his head before twisting his neck from side to side to work out the kinks that had formed from being hunched over his desk and parchment for the last forty minutes. Written portion done. Practical brewing would be next, but first...

Harry shuffled out of his seat and grabbed his test before calmly walking up to the front of the class. Several of his classmates' eyes traveled up to him and a few were scowling mildly, or just looking nervous or miserable. He was the first one done – no surprise there.

He set the parchment down on Snape's desk and the man looked up from whatever he was scratching away at with his quill.

"Potter," Snape said, quietly, drawing Harry's attention back to him and halting his immediate return to his desk.

"Yes, Professor?" Harry responded equally quietly.

"I have something I need to discuss with you, remain behind after class."

A very small subtle curl appeared on his lips, but he restrained most of it. "Of course, Professor," Harry responded easily and returned to his desk to get his cauldron ready for the brewing of the potion on the board.

Harry was fairly sure what the man wanted to 'discuss' with him since he'd seen the notes taken by his charmed quill dictating from the Map from the last two days. Dumbledore had finally gone down the third-floor hidden corridors and no doubt discovered Flamel's Stone very-much *gone*. Harry found it especially hilarious that it had taken this long for its absence to be discovered. It had been more than a *month* since he'd stolen it.

According to the transcripts of Dumbledore's movement, he had called a staff meeting the previous evening, quite late at night after curfew. All of the heads of house and several other professors and staff, including Hagrid, Remus, and Filch had been present in the room with him. Part of Harry really wished he could have known what went on in that meeting, but from the map he could only determine that it had lasted about forty minutes before it had disbanded.

Hagrid had already removed Fluffy, but Professor Sprout was probably going to wait until the weekend, or probably even the end of term – since it was less than two weeks away – before she tackled the Devil's Snare in the second room.

Harry had no trouble with his practical brewing portion of the final exam and finished up with plenty of time to spare. He pulled out a book to read since he had nothing better to do and settled in for the next half hour while he waited for the rest of his classmates to finish up their potions exams and leave.

His reading material of choice was actually a *fiction* book. The third in a series of stories one of his older house mates was addicted to. When you had as much free time as Harry did, it was necessary to find a few things to help pass the time without going mad from boredom. And he generally didn't feel comfortable pulling out a parseltongue book from the Chamber while in class or the common room or... well, *anywhere* in the school, honestly. So he needed more public-friendly reading material and had started borrowing the books.

He'd been rather immersed in the action when he heard a throat clear over him. He rose his head slowly and looked around, realizing the room had cleared and the only ones left were he and Snape. He chuckled, marked his page and slipped the book back into his bag.

"Sorry. Got sucked into the story," he said as he leaned back in his chair, looking entirely relaxed and possibly a bit smug as he grinned up at the scowling man. "You wanted to speak with me?"

"Yes..." Snape drawled in annoyance before he brought out his wand and cast several privacy and security charms, including locking the door, and setting a proximity alarm to warn them if someone approached. "I was called to a meeting last night," Snape began slowly as he came to stand by the desk across the aisle from Harry's.

"Is that so?" Harry asked cheekily, earning him a narrow-eyed glare from Snape, that really only made his grin grow and clearly annoyed the man further.

"Yes," Snape drawled slowly in annoyance. "As you may, or may not, be aware, there was an object being kept at the school this year. It was being protected by a series of powerful spells and enchantments –"

Harry scoffed and Snape's glare narrowed on him for a moment before Harry made a motion with his hand for the man to continue.

"The Headmaster discovered the day before yesterday that it has been stolen. He has no idea how it was taken, or who may have taken it. He believes it had to have been an exceptionally powerful wizard though, since he guarantees us that there were a number of very subtly hidden protections that were extremely obscure and only a master of warding magic could have discovered them, let alone known how to counter-act them."

Snape paused for a moment, piercing Harry, who was looking more and more smug by the moment, with his black beady eyes. "He believes that the Dark Lord may have somehow found a way into the school without being discovered. He cannot imagine how this was possible and seemed rather... *upset* by the implications."

"Oh really? So he believes the Dark Lord did it?" Harry asked, clearly amused.

Snape's lip curled in obvious disdain. "Yes, he does... do you know anything about it?"

"You mean, do I know if the Dark Lord stole this mysterious object?"

Snape rolled his eyes. "Yes."

"He didn't. Actually, if he had come here and stolen it and I hadn't known and had missed him, I would be entirely furious with myself... wow, that would have really pissed me off, actually... But no, *he* didn't take it."

"And how, *exactly*, can you be so sure *he* wasn't the one to take it?" Snape asked, obviously already knowing the answer to that question.

Harry just grinned up at him with increasing amusement and oozing smugness. "I cannot imagine how I would *possibly* know such a thing," Harry said in an innocent voice that was completely negated by the still overly-smug expression on his face. "Maybe I'm a Seer. I just get this *gut feeling* that it wasn't taken by him. Must have been... *someone else*."

Snape rolled his eyes again.

"Although," Harry began again, "and not that this has *anything* to do with what we were just talking about, because it doesn't... *really*. But I'm curious, *Sir*... have you ever wanted to try experimenting with potions that made use of the *Elixir of Life* as an ingredient?"

Harry's grin morphed into a full-on Cheshire-cat smile at the sudden light of intrigue that appeared on the normally constantly-dour potion master's face.

"I can only *imagine* the sort of intriguing experimentation a potion master of your caliber could do if he could get his hands on such an incredibly rare and powerful ingredient. Although, *obviously*, any experimental results you got would have to be kept secret and any potions you brewed would have to be kept within the circle... *still*... I think I might be able to arrange for you to get your hands on some. If you're interested, that is."

Snape's face went from greedy, to suspicious and then slowly morphed into contemplation.

"How did you do it?" he finally asked, in a quiet and surprisingly *impressed*-sounding tone; which wasn't really what Harry had been expecting.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Harry replied easily, still grinning.

Snape rolled his eyes and made an exasperated sound.

"Fine, whatever. What do you want in return for access to his *rare ingredient*?"

Harry shrugged. "Continued loyalty? Assistance with whatever the hell I might need, the next time I need it? I'll think of something."

Snape scowled slightly at that. He obviously did not like to be indebted to people without knowing what would be expected in return. Not that Harry could blame him. He was the same way.

"Do you live in the castle over the summers, or do you have your own place you return to?" Harry asked.

Snape's eyes narrowed further. "I have my own residence that I keep," he answered hesitantly. "Why?"

"I've got a house elf I bought from Lucius who will be bringing the Elixir to you, so I'll need an address to direct him to. I could probably tell him to just 'take this to Severus Snape' and he'd *probably* be able to find you – he is a surprisingly dedicated little thing – but a general location helps a lot in speeding things up."

"You should wait until a week into July. I will be at my home by that time. The house I keep is in a village near Manchester on the end of a street called *Spinner's End*. That should be sufficient for your house elf to narrow down my location and find me directly. It's a muggle village and he'll be able to sense the wards I have around my home without any significant interference."

Harry smiled and nodded his head. "Ah, good. That should do. I'll send him along a week or two into July with a small package."

Snape nodded and then looked speculative for a moment. "You haven't already... *drank* any of it yet, have you?"

Harry scoffed. "Why the hell would I want to keep myself this young any longer than is necessary?" Harry said with a small incredulous laugh. "No... actually, I was wondering about one thing, though... what is your opinion on potion conflicts if I was to take the aging potion and then drink some of the Elixir before the aging potion wore off in order to extend its effects? Of course, I'm sure just taking the two potions like that would be stupid and have unforeseen side-effects, but it did get me wondering if the Elixir could be incorporated into the ageing potion to extend its effectiveness so that it can last more than three days, if desired."

Snape's brows rose slightly into his forehead and he looked intrigued. "It is an interesting idea to ponder... I will give it more thought. I would have to examine the Elixir itself and perform some tests on it before I would know anything for sure."

"Of course. All the more reason for me to give you some of it," Harry replied with a cheeky grin.

Snape barely refrained a snort from escaping him, and instead sneered mildly at Harry.

"Well, if that's all, I'll be off. Don't want to miss lunch."

"Fine," Snape said with a sigh.

Harry stood up and shouldered his bag. Just as he was about to leave Snape called out to him and he turned to look at the man curiously.

"One more question, Potter..." Snape said without really meeting Harry's eyes.

"Yes?"

Snape hesitated for a moment before speaking; a look of intrigued curiosity on his face.

"How long ago did you steal it?"

Harry gave him a lop-sided grin. "I didn't steal anything, Professor. I haven't a clue what you're talking about."

Snape did not look amused at all when Harry chuckled. Harry paused for a moment before shrugging. "But... I have the strongest feeling that whatever it was that might have been hidden up there has been gone for... *oh... about five weeks.*"

He laughed at the stunned look on Snape's face, and turned and left the room.

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Rebirth Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: This chapter is 35 pages long. Woo. Also, I've made some edits since it was originally posted. Edits made Wednesday Jan 26th.

— — — — — Rebirth Chapter 24 — — — — —

There was a whole week spent, still at Hogwarts, after the end of his last exams, before the end of year feast and the day they all departed on the Hogwarts Express. During his first youth, he had always been desperately grateful for the extra week. It was one less week he'd had to spend at the orphanage, and as an added bonus, it was a week spent at Hogwarts without classes or exams. But at this particular time, he was actually a bit more eager to just *leave* then he was to spend more time then necessary at Hogwarts.

To ease his annoyance at having to stick around longer then was really needed, he slipped away to the Chamber, and to the Room of Hidden things several times during that last week to get a few more books or little items to take away with him.

The second to last day, they all got their exam results – except for the fifth years and the seventh years, since they would have to get their OWL and NEWT results from the Ministry during the summer. Harry had top marks in every one of his classes. The person in second place for the first years varied between two different people, depending on the class. It was either Hermione, or Draco, swapping between second and third place, and one or two where they'd basically tied in their marks. Draco had been clearly incensed that he'd been topped by a muggleborn in some of his classes, but didn't seem the least bit phased that Harry had topped him with such ease. Draco seemed to expect it, really.

Hell, *everyone* seemed to expect it. It was no secret that Harry Potter was considered a Prodigy among his peers.

The end of year feast was... a feast. Nothing especially noteworthy as far as Harry was concerned, especially since every meal at Hogwarts tended to be rather impressive. Harry had all of his possessions packed away the night before leaving and ready to go. The following morning he shrunk down his trunk and slipped it into his pocket before the rest of his dorm

mates had even gotten up. The house elves would be taking everyone's trunks down to Hogsmeade Station for the students, and Harry didn't want his stuff going down with everyone else's luggage seeing as how he wasn't going to be getting on the train.

He attended breakfast with his housemates and bid his farewell to all of his 'friendly acquaintances' and to his 'friends' from the study group. He rode down to Hogsmeade in a carriage with Draco, Crabbe, Goyle, and Theo, but parted ways with them as they headed towards the train and Harry instead walked over to meet Sirius, who was standing just to the side of the station already waiting for him.

"Hey, Harry!" Sirius said as he greeted him with a wide excited smile that had Harry smiling in return.

"Hey, Sirius," Harry replied easily.

"Well, we've got two choices at this point. We could head back to my flat and take the floo to the new house, or I can apparate the pair of us to the front and go in through the front door. Got a preference?"

"Hmm... I think I'd like to apparate," Harry said.

"Sounds fine with me."

"How much longer have you got the flat for?" Harry asked as they began to walk away from the front of the train station to the designated apparition point.

"Just to the end of the month, so just over a week," Sirius answered easily. "I've already got it emptied out though. I'll probably just turn in the key early and call it good."

Harry nodded and the pair came to a stop and Sirius offered his hand to Harry who took it without hesitation. He hated side-along apparition, but it wasn't that big a deal as long as you weren't doing it with excessive frequency. Plus it didn't leave soot all over your clothes like Floo travel did.

Sirius gripped him firmly and Harry felt the uncomfortable sensation of being squeezed through a tiny tube and tugged, *hard*. A moment later a *crack* sounded and Harry stumbled slightly before recovering his balance and looking up to find himself in front of the familiar two-story house that he and Sirius had picked back during the spring break.

Sirius looked up at the house with a wide smile before looking down at Harry.

"Welcome to Number Fifty-Two Pentwin Road, Lower Thornhill! Our new home!"

Harry chuckled at Sirius' enthusiasm and smiled up at the house.

"New home," he said lightly under his breath, and at that moment it really truly sunk in. He was never going to have to see the Dursley's again. It wasn't like dealing with them had been all that difficult or painful over the last few years since he'd had them trained so well, but it was still a slight relief to know he'd never have to set foot in their damned snooty little house

again. No more returning every two weeks to maintain the wards. No more sleeping in that ruddy little bed. Never again would he even look upon Number 4 Privet Drive. He was *done*.

He wondered if he should bother sending them a letter informing them that he'd never be coming back. The idea of letting them stew in fear was amusing. Never knowing *for sure*, if he might show up some day... But, no. He was done with them. Still, he didn't consider them worth his time. Oh! He'd have *Dobby* tell them! That would be a lovely fright. A house elf in the Dursley's pristine muggle home. Oh, that was an amusing image.

And that way he wouldn't even have to bother himself with writing them and wouldn't have to even consider stepping back in their home.

He gave a determined little done, having settled on his decision and was turning his attention back on his new home when a small gasp escaped his mouth and his hand flew up to his forehead. He staggered slightly in surprise and had to blink his eyes several times to refocus them.

Sirius heard the little gasp and looked down at Harry with concern in his eyes. Harry didn't appear to be in pain though. Mostly he just looked bewildered and possibly a bit dizzy.

"You alright, Harry?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah, I think so," Harry said as he lowered his hand. Now it was Sirius' turn to gasp. Harry's eyes widened as they locked on his hand as it passed down in front of his vision and he saw a bit of blood on his palm.

"Harry! You're scar's bleeding!" Sirius exclaimed.

Harry looked owlishly at his hand. "I see that," he said quietly.

"Lets get you inside and get that cleaned up," Sirius said, quickly ushering Harry through the small wooden front gate and up the small path to the front door. They passed through the foyer, down the hall to the left and into the small bathroom beside the dining room-converted-library.

Sirius grabbed a small hand towel from a hook mounted to the wall and ran some water over it before gently dabbing at Harry's forehead. Harry frowned in annoyance at the man babying him. He was certainly capable of cleaning himself up, but sighed and let his godfather finish up.

"Well, it looks fine..." Sirius said hesitantly after a few minutes of examining Harry's stupid scar. "You gasped... did it hurt?"

"Uhm... sort of a *zap*, I guess." Harry admitted hesitantly. It had been like something had just given way and a small flood of magic had been released from behind a dam. Some magic just left him in a powerful *woosh*, while another bunch of magic had sort of let free. But it wasn't really painful, and only mildly overwhelming for a moment before he was able to recover from the shock of whatever it was that had just happened.

Sirius was frowning deeply with obvious concern. "Maybe I should call a healer..."

"No!" Harry exclaimed quickly. "No, really Sirius, this isn't a big deal."

"Not a big deal? Harry your scar from where you got hit with a killing curse more than *ten years ago* just started bleeding for no apparent reason. I would consider that a *big deal*."

Harry rolled his eyes. "It's not like it's the first time it's happened."

Sirius' brow furrowed with concern again. "This has happened before?"

"Well, not exactly like this... the last time my scar bled it actually *hurt*... like a lot. This was just a little *woosh* and a *zap*."

"When did it happen last?"

Harry huffed in impatient annoyance before giving a resigned sigh. "Uh... I guess it was when I was eight."

Sirius continued to frown and looked contemplative for a moment. "I'm going to fire-call Remus and ask his opinion."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You don't need to bother him," Harry groaned. "It's really not a big deal."

Sirius shook his head and turned, heading out of the bathroom and towards the fireplace in the foyer. Harry shook his head at the man's distracted retreat but took advantage of his isolation in the bathroom to finally take a look at himself in the mirror.

He leaned over the sink and peered closely at his scar, using his Sight to examine it for any abnormalities. His eyes widened and his mouth slowly dropped open as he realized what was different.

The Light magic was gone. The magical protection left over from his mum was... *gone*.

But... why?

He took a step back from the mirror and frowned, deeply in thought as he tried to figure out what could have caused it. He had only ever seen that magical signature in three locations. One was around his scar, the second was around Privet Drive, and the last was just residue in his nursery back in Godric's Hollow.

He wondered suddenly, if he were to go back and visit Privet Drive if the magic would be gone from there too.

But was that it? He had just been thinking about Privet Drive. He'd just decided that he would never be setting foot there again. That he was done with it and would never go back. He has *just* mentally committed himself to utterly abandoning it and any connection to his blasted aunt and her family.

Was that it?

The excuse for him having been at the Dursley's had something to do with blood wards, right? That he was protected there by being near a close blood relation of his mother, who's sacrificial magic had laid the foundation for the protective magic. Dumbledore had explained the blood wards extensively to Sirius in his letters to give him an example of how well 'protected' Harry had been in his muggle relatives home and how important it was to establish very powerful wards around their new home. By mentally and emotionally severing all ties with the Dursley's, had he just destroyed the last thing holding that ridiculous Light magic protection in place?

A sudden and unexpected laugh escaped Harry's mouth as he realized that *all that work* and *all that research* he had done while attempting to find some way to get the damned Light magic in his scar to just *go the hell away...* and all he'd had to do was mentally and emotionally give up on the Dursley's?

He wanted to bang his head on a wall in exasperation. But there was little point in doing such a thing. Plus Sirius would wonder if he'd lost his mind.

Harry wondered suddenly if Dumbledore had known at all that this might happen. Well, he probably knew that the wards around Privet Drive would fall, but he wondered if the man was aware that the Light magic around the horcrux was gone now, too? Dumbledore would be more apt to suspect him if he did know it. Without the Light magic there, it was more likely that Tom's soul fragment would begin to effect Harry mentally and emotionally. At least, it would, if Harry were not more than powerful enough to keep it at bay on his own. Plus his relationship with Tom would also play a role in what his horcrux tried to do to him. It could very well *choose* to remain dormant.

The horcruxes had a teeny bit of free will. Tom's first horcrux – his childhood diary – for example, was capable of possessing someone who wrote in it long enough and using them to re-enter the Chamber at Hogwarts and release the basilisk to attack muggleborns. Tom had set it up that way so that he could finally fulfill 'Salazar Slytherin's Great Work' without putting himself at risk, and so that it would happen when he was no longer there to have to suffer if the school was forced closed. Tom had thought it was a brilliant idea back when they were sixteen. Now, it just seemed silly.

Harry wondered suddenly if he would be able to converse with the soul bit stuck inside him. You could converse with the diary horcrux by writing in the diary. You could converse with the locket horcrux if you were able to open the locket. Inside was a small portrait of Tom and you could speak with it. The others didn't really have a method for communication with them though... but considering that this one was inside him...

For that matter... he wondered if he'd have an easier time trying to contact Tom over their link, now. He wouldn't be splitting his attention between holding the Light protection magic back at the same time he tried traveling across the link. He could focus all of his energy towards trying to break through Tom's stupid Occlumency wall.

A surge of hopeful excitement soared through him and Harry found himself grinning at himself in the mirror.

After a moment, he managed to get his expression back under control and went back out into the hall to find Sirius. The man had his head in the fireplace and Harry could hear half of the conversation, but wasn't really paying it much attention. Sirius finally pulled himself out and stood back up just as Remus came through looking concerned. Harry huffed in annoyance as the two men set to looking him over again with obvious worry on their faces. The three went into the family room and the two older men grilled Harry for information on every odd for inexplicable thing his scar had ever done. Of course, most of what he told them was bull, but he had to give them something to satisfy their concerns.

He tried to reassure them, and managed to dodge a trip back to Hogwarts to have Madam Pomfrey look him over, and also managed to flat out refuse a trip to St. Mungo's. They concluded the talk with Harry promising that he would tell them right away if anything else weird happened and he was finally allowed to go up to his new room to begin unpacking.

Sirius and Remus came upstairs with him and Harry could hear the two of them down the hall as Sirius showed Remus one of the two guest rooms that he then began to insist Remus make use of as soon as he was ready to leave the castle for the summer. Remus appeared to be protesting, but Sirius was making some persuasive arguments and Harry found himself chuckling quietly to himself as he pulled his clothes out of the wardrobe compartment of his trunk.

He really was surprised sometimes that Sirius had been sorted into Gryffindor instead of Slytherin. The man clearly still had plenty of Slytherin traits in him, he just kept them subtly hidden. Of course, Harry had realized by now that Sirius ending up in the house of red and gold had most likely been an act of rebellion against his overly strict and old fashioned family. He probably could have gone either way though. The hat probably even gave him a choice. He'd have to ask him sometime if his suspicions were correct.

He was fairly sure they were when he heard Remus finally giving in and accepting the room. *But only for a few weeks. I can find myself a flat, Sirius. I'm not a charity case.*

Harry chuckled.

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Remus stayed for most of the day, Flooing back to Hogwarts just after lunch to finish up some paperwork he had to do, and then coming back later that evening for dinner. The three chatted easily over the meal that Sirius had managed his way through. The man wasn't a *bad* cook, per se, but he certainly wasn't a *good* one either. Harry was debating between offering to do the cooking himself, or trying to figure out a way to introduce Sirius to Dobby. He wasn't sure how he would explain to the two wizards that he'd come into the ownership of a house elf, but if the cooking situation wasn't resolved soon, he would force himself to figure something out.

After food they retired to the family room where conversation was light for a bit. Sirius at one point noted his shock that nothing horrible had happened to Remus all year and wondered if the werewolf had managed to dodge the curse.

"If looks like you may have gotten off, Mooney. Lets hope I'm not jinxing you and something nasty is going to happen in the next couple days. All the more reason for you to move in right away."

Remus chuckled weakly and shook his head.

"But you're coming back for next year, right?" Harry asked, looking up at Remus hesitantly.

Remus looked thoughtful and Sirius frowned as he looked between the two.

"You can't seriously be considering coming back, are you?" Sirius asked, looking a bit worried. "It was always worse for those that tried to come back a second year."

"Dumbledore *has* asked me to return..." Remus answered hesitantly.

"You were *lucky*, Remus! You got through a whole school year teaching Defense without ending up dead, maimed, or imprisoned! You should count your blessings and call it quits," Sirius said with a determined nod.

Remus looked torn and was looking down at the small coffee table in front of the couch where his tea was currently resting.

Harry scowled lightly and huffed before running a hand through his hair. "I think you should go back," he said finally.

"Harry, you don't know how bad it can get," Sirius said in a slightly pleading voice. "I've seen what's happened to some of them. It was *bad*."

"But Remus wants to teach, right?" Harry asked looking at Remus who blinked at him for a startled moment before looking away again.

"Yeah, but he's not going to get to teach very long before the curse comes in and blows something to pieces in a spectacular display of life fuck-uppery!"

"Sirius!" Remus reprimanded.

"Oh, Harry doesn't care if I curse," Sirius grumbled. "Do you Harry?"

"You're setting a bad example!"

Harry shook his head and snickered for a moment before turning serious again and looking at Remus with a thoughtful expression.

"I still think you should go back. I think you'll be fine."

Remus frowned slightly and sighed but Sirius' eyes suddenly narrowed and zoomed in on Harry with a contemplative look to them.

"Think he'll be fine?" Sirius echoed curiously, piercing Harry with his eyes.

Harry blinked back at him blankly, not responding in any way.

"What makes you say something like that? That you 'think he'll be fine'?" Sirius repeated.

Harry shrugged. "Nothing, really. Just a gut feeling, I guess."

Sirius gaze grew suspicious for a moment before a sly smirk curled his lips. "A gut feeling. *Sure.*"

Harry narrowed his own gaze and stared right back at Sirius for a moment, practically *daring* the wizard to accuse him of something or question him further. The man chuckled after a moment and leaned back in his armchair, looking relaxed all of a sudden.

"Yeah, maybe it would be okay. Why not give it a shot?" he said to Remus, who looked shocked by the sudden switch.

"Excuse me?" Remus said, bewildered.

"You heard the kid. He's got a *gut feeling*. Maybe you will be okay."

Remus looked back and forth between Harry and Sirius with a slight frown. "What am I missing?" he asked cautiously.

Harry rolled his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest as Sirius' grin grew wider. Fucking cocky ex-Auror. Harry wondered what exactly the man thought he'd figured out, but wasn't about to *ask*.

"*Nothing*, Remus. Never mind. So, did Sirius tell you about the room in the basement beside the potions lab?" Harry asked, effectively changing the subject. It was only a week until the next full moon, and discussion easily shifted to the arrangements the three would be making for Remus' next transformation.

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"Hey, Sirius, I'm heading to bed!" Harry called out down the hall from his open doorway. Harry heard a muffled reply from somewhere inside Sirius' bedroom across the hall and then ducked back into his own room to dig through his new dresser where he stored his sleep pants.

He'd just pulled them out and closed the drawer when a light tap came on the open door behind him. He turned and looked over his shoulder to find Sirius standing there, giving him a small, hesitant, smile.

"You need something?" Harry asked.

Sirius twisted his mouth slightly and looked as if he were contemplating his words. "I... suppose. It's not that I need something, I just..." Sirius trailed off and sighed slightly.

Harry turned around fully and looked at the man with mild curiosity.

Sirius looked pensive for another moment before he looked up with a slightly more determined expression.

"You know you can trust me, don't you Harry?"

Harry blinked. "Yeah, of course," he answered calmly.

"No... *really*. You can trust me."

"I know that Sirius," Harry said, giving him an amused yet curious look.

"No. Clearly you don't, or you wouldn't feel the need to hide things from me."

Harry's expression became guarded and he leveled Sirius with an utterly blank expression as he wondered where this conversation was going to go.

"You see?" Sirius said, pointing at Harry, suddenly. "Like that. You're closing yourself off from me. You don't need to do that, Harry! I mean it. You can *trust me*. I..." Sirius huffed and ran his hand through his wavy shoulder-length black hair and sighed. "You're my best mate's son. *My godson*. But far more important than any of that? You *saved me*, Harry. You *saved my life*. Everyone else in the world was content to forget about me and leave me to rot in that awful place until I died. But *you* got me out. I owe you my life for that."

Harry didn't even blink. He just continued to level Sirius with a blank stare, which only seemed to frustrate Sirius further.

"Harry..." he began again and took a step inside the 'younger' wizard's room. "Being locked away in Azkaban for ten years... well, it gives a person a lot of time to think," Sirius said with a rather humorless bark of a laugh. "It gives a person a lot of time to go over their mistakes. Their choices in life... to think about what they wasted. It gives you time to realize what's really important. Not just the stupid petty things that you *thought* were important, but what's *really* important..."

"Is this going somewhere?" Harry asked in a flat tone that seemed to startle Sirius.

The wizard frowned slightly and ran his hand through his hair again. "Yes... Look, like I said; you saved me. Even if you only did it just so that you could get out from under Dumbledore's legal control, it doesn't change the fact that *you saved me*."

Harry's brows rose into his forehead slightly, and he had to mentally give the man credit for having realized his ulterior motives for having freed him... and also for not taking it badly as Harry would have expected him to.

"I owe you, Harry. And..." Sirius shrugged and grinned, "I like you."

"You don't even know me, Sirius," Harry said, pointedly.

"Then *let* me get to know you," Sirius pleaded. "Let me get to see the *real you*. You don't have to pretend with me, Harry! You don't have to put up some false facade and act like

someone else in order to fit some expectation you think I have of you. I... I want to be here for you. But if I'm going to help you, you have to *trust me*."

Harry leveled Sirius with a very long, very speculative look and Sirius just stood there waiting without so much as flinching under Harry's sharp gaze.

"What exactly do you expect me to tell you, Sirius?" Harry asked after a very long few minutes.

Sirius sighed and sort of weakly threw his arms into the air with exasperation. "I... I don't know, Harry. *Anything*. Just... give me something? That's all I ask. Just... *consider* trusting me?"

Harry sighed, finally breaking a little from his blank stoic mask. He turned away from Sirius as he engaged in an internal debate. There was no way he was going to come completely clean with the man – that was without question – but... perhaps he could tell him *something*. He'd already acknowledged that he was going to have to address Sirius' tendency to see through his act more often than just about anyone else.

"Tell me something, Sirius," Harry said without turning around. "What *first* made you start to figure I was hiding things?"

Sirius chuckled slightly. "Well... some of the stuff that Remus was telling me from the start really got me wondering... I mean, an *eleven year old kid* caught Pettigrew on his own and got me out of prison all on his own. But I guess it was that meeting in Dumbledore's office just before the Easter holiday that really made me start to look a bit deeper with you."

"Ah..." Harry said simply, still looking away.

"I mean, I *knew* you had to be acting, just because of what Remus had told me about you, and how you felt about Dumbledore – how you didn't trust him and didn't seem to like him much. But I *never* would have guessed you were acting from what I witnessed that day in his office. So... well, it made me realize right then and there that there was obviously a lot more to you than you showed people."

"So, from then on, you always questioned and second-guessed everything you saw from me," Harry concluded and Sirius shrugged and nodded.

Harry sighed again and slowly turned around to look at Sirius who was standing just inside Harry's room and looking rather nervous. Harry took a few steps to the side and pulled the chair out from behind his desk and sat down.

"Sit," Harry said, waving his hand towards another chair sitting against the wall beside the door.

Sirius pulled it forward a bit and sat opposite Harry.

"I can't tell you everything," Harry began. "But I'm willing to tell you some things. Will that be enough?"

Sirius' eyes lit up with hope and he nodded. "I'd take anything at this point."

"Do you know anything about reincarnation?"

Sirius blinked at him and his eyes widened with apparent surprise and confusion.

"Reincarnation?" he echoed somewhat incredulously.

"Yes. Rebirth. Soul-recycling. Life after death, after life, after death. Reincarnation. Do you know anything about it?"

"Er... well, I guess not, really. I mean, I understand the theory. The idea is that after a person dies, they're born again as someone else, right?"

"Yes."

"Alright... so?"

"It's true. I mean, that's how it works. Souls are re-used again and again. There's different terminology depending what you read or who you learn it from, but the ones I generally go with is calling the... the *place* that you go after you die – let's call it the Astral Plane. And all sentient life that exists in our world exists there first. That's your astral body. We all have astral bodies, and that's our *real* body. This bag of water and flesh that you're in right now is just a temporary vessel that the real you is connected to through what I call an astral 'tether'. Your body is just what your astral mind is temporarily connected to until the body dies. When your body dies, the tether detaches and your consciousness will return to the astral plane where it will rest and wait until another compatible physical body is conceived that needs an astral soul to run it, and your astral body is tethered to it.

"And that's how it works, over and over again. It's an endless loop, really. There's next to nothing that will destroy an astral body, as far as I can tell. Your soul will live on, forever. You just keep getting reborn."

Sirius was looking at Harry with wide, semi-stunned eyes and he blinked slowly. "Okay... so... how do you know this, exactly?"

"I studied it. A lot, really. In my last life, that is."

Sirius' eyes widened. "Your *last* life?"

"Yes. You see, I'm a bit of an anomaly. I have a very young astral body. My *soul* was born quite recently. Since astral bodies just get reused again and again, there isn't demand for new ones all that often, but it does happen, and when there is demand that cannot be immediately met by current supply, a new soul comes into existence. Don't ask me how, even I don't know that one. But anyway, my previous life – as in, the one before this one – was my *first* life. And during that life, I studied life and death and the astral plane, a lot. During those studies, I discovered a... *ritual* that... okay, first you need to understand something else. The astral body remembers everything. Every bit from every life you've ever lived is stored with perfect precision in your astral body's mind. But when connected to a physical body, we only have

access to the chemical memories in our physical brain, and thus, only have access to the memories from *this life*.

"There is this filter in place between our physical mind and our astral mind that prevents us from accessing the knowledge and memories of all our previous lives. The ritual that I performed destroyed this filter. Permanently. What this means is that no matter how many times I die and am reborn, I will *always* have access to my astral mind. Access to *all of my knowledge and memories from every life* that I will ever live."

Harry paused to give Sirius a moment to absorb what he'd said. Said wizard looked a bit overwhelmed and clearly still fairly confused.

"I'm... not sure I quite understand," Sirius admitted after a long moment. "You... alright, so you remember your previous life – is that what you're saying?"

"Right. I was born into this life, still completely remembering my last one. So, when I told you and Remus that back when I was a babe and I witnessed Dumbledore casting the Fidelius that I didn't understand what any of it meant, but I was able to look back at the memories later and understand it in retrospect... in reality, I understood perfectly well what was going on at the time. I was in the body of a baby, but I still had all of the knowledge and memories from the forty years I lived in my last life."

"Merlin..." Sirius breathed out in disbelief. "That's why you know so much magic. Why you can cast non verbal magic... Oh! That's why you're an animagus at age eleven!"

Harry chuckled and shrugged. "Interestingly enough, my animagus form didn't change from my last life to this one. I brewed the potion during September just to be sure, and knew right off that my form was the exact same. After that I went ahead and gave it a go and it just worked."

Sirius gave a strangled laugh, looking utterly shell-shocked. "So you... I mean... okay, wait... this previous life of yours, obviously you were magical. Were you still in Britain? How long ago was it? You said... what, forty, right? I... how old *are you*, really?" Sirius trailed off, looking overwhelmed by his own confusion.

Harry smiled and ran his hand down the back of his head, pulling the tie out of his hair as he went and then running his fingers through it, smoothing it a bit. "Uh, yes. I was a wizard, and yes I was in Britain. Fourteen years passed between my death in my last life and my birth into this one. Time passed oddly in the astral plane. It *felt* like only a few years passed between my death and my next life, so when I finally realized what year it was after I was reborn, I was rather shocked. I was forty years old when I was murdered, so if you take that, plus the eleven years I've lived in this life, and I'd say I'm fifty one. I suppose you could add a few theoretical years to that for the time I experienced while I was dead, but like I said, time passed oddly in there, because it's all about perception, so I'd have a hard time really counting it."

"You're fifty-one," Sirius deadpanned.

"Uh... yes."

"And you were murdered?" Sirius asked, his eyes going a bit hard.

"Yes. Although, I wasn't really the target. I jumped in front of a killing curse aimed at my lover, during a battle."

"Wow..."

Harry made a noncommittal noise in his throat and shrugged at the awestruck look in Sirius' eyes.

Sirius blinked owlishly as he seemed to go over things in his mind again for a moment before he laughed lightly and shook his head. "You're older than I am."

Harry snickered. "Yup."

"I think I can see why you kept trying to warm me up to the idea of you being rather independent and not wanting a babysitter."

"Yeah, that gets real old, real fast. There are times when I like to actually act my age. You know, for about four solid years between the ages of six and ten I made regular trips to Diagon Alley under a glamour almost every day?"

"You did, what?" Sirius exclaimed with a bit of amusement. "How did that work? A glamour can't change your height and can only do so much to mask your muscle and body mass."

"I made myself look like a part-goblin half-breed," Harry said, snickering. "That way, it wasn't so odd that I was so short. Quite a few of the shop owners down Diagon and Knockturn knew me by name – although it was an alias, of course. I was quite the regular. Basically, I was desperate to escape muggle Surrey. Once I managed to get my old wand back, I didn't really hold back."

"Your old wand?" Sirius asked, his eyes widening slightly and then traveling over to the bedside table where Harry's wand currently rested.

"Right. My partner – the lover I died protecting? Well, obviously he knew about the things I'd done in an effort to make myself pseudo-immortal. He and I had an arrangement. If I died, he promised to put my wand into my Gringott's vault. I had arranged this set up with the goblins where, upon my death, my vault was frozen and put on hold until someone was able to come along and meet all of the criteria to lay claim to it. The criteria needed to claim it were all very specific and rather odd, so no one would ever be able to just guess it. Basically I set it up so that whenever I was reborn, I could find my way to Gringott's and reclaim my old vault, and thus, get my wand, my money, and all my stuff back."

"And that's the wand, right there?"

"Right."

"Wow..." Sirius looked thoughtful again for a moment before he looked up at Harry, speculatively. "He?"

"Huh?"

"You said this lover of yours was a *he*? And you were male in your previous life, right?"

Harry's brows flattened and an annoyed expression graced his features. "Is that a problem?" he asked in a clipped tone.

Sirius laughed and quickly shook his head, waving his hand. "No, no! Oh Merlin, no. Just making sure I understood everything. Believe me, that's not something that's going to bother *me*."

Harry cocked a curious brow but didn't feel inclined to ask for clarification on that statement.

"So, does anyone else know?"

"About me being reincarnated?"

"Yes."

"Lucius Malfoy does."

Sirius made a choking sound and gaped at Harry. "What? Why him?"

"I know you're not going to like this, Sirius, but I knew the Malfoy's in my last life. I trusted Abraxas and his sister Astraea – in fact, when I attended Hogwarts in my first life, Astraea was in my class – and when I realized I had a familial relation with Lucius' wife, I took that, combined with my general trust for the family, and decided to come clean with the man. I needed someone in a powerful position on my side in case anything came up."

"*Trust*? You *trust* the Malfoy's?" Sirius exclaimed, looking utterly dumbstruck.

"I *trust* that I understand what motivates them. Money, power, influence, political gain. They're easy to predict. And since I've got this ridiculous 'Boy-Who-Lived' title and the fame that comes with it, I knew that Lucius would likely be willing to assist me in exchange for the perceived political influence that would come with a positive relationship between us."

Sirius blinked at him blankly for a moment before he snorted and began to chuckle. "You were a Slytherin in your last life, weren't you?"

Harry rolled his eyes but grinned. "How did you guess?" he asked with playful sarcasm. "You know, I was good friends with your dad."

Sirius stopped his chuckling and looked at Harry with obvious surprise. "You were?"

"Yup. I really liked your dad, actually. He was a couple years below me... lets see... I was in my 3rd year when he started his first. He and Cygnus started that year. I like your aunt Lucretia a lot too, but you mum Walburga was a bitch. No offense."

Sirius snorted. "None taken. She *was* an awful wretched woman." Sirius stared off into space, appearing rather stunned for a moment. "That's very... odd... to think that you were around

with all of them when they were younger."

Harry laughed and shrugged. "Yeah, I suppose so. You know, when I was around six or seven and I started sneaking my way back into the wizarding world to get away from the muggles, I looked up the Potter family tree, and I can't even tell you how stunned I was when I saw that my grandmother was Dorea. I just couldn't *fathom* how she ended up marrying *Charlus Potter*." Harry shook his head and chuckled weakly before shrugging.

"Did you know Charlus?"

"Yeah, but not closely. He was in Gryffindor and I was in Slytherin. He was also older by a few years."

"Didn't get along, huh?"

Harry snorted. "Understatement."

Sirius laughed weakly before sighing heavily. "This is so insane."

Harry gave Sirius a soft smile and leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "I'm still Harry Potter, just as much as I was the person in my last life. I still think back very fondly on James and Lily. They're really the only people I associate as 'parents'. I was an orphan in my first life. My father died before I was born and my mum died when I was just over three months old. Lily was... she was wonderful." Harry paused, looking down sadly. "It hurt... a lot... to watch her die. More than I had really expected it to. I thought I could be detached enough from it all... that I'd seen enough death..." he sighed and sat up straighter.

"She and James meant a lot to me, even if I only knew them for fifteen months. And the time I spent with you and Remus during that time... it was nice. It was a good time, even if I was frustrated by being trapped in the body of an infant. After everything happened and Dumbledore ditched me on the Dursley's doorstep and neither you nor Remus ever came for me... well, I actually thought you were both *dead*. That the only reason that I would have ended up in the Dursley's custody was if everyone else had died. Although I did understand that Remus would never be able to get guardianship over me because of his 'condition'. But you... I really didn't know that they'd locked you away in Azkaban until I was seven and found it while researching the Blacks.

"I even did a bunch of digging, trying to get court transcripts from your trial that didn't exist, but had a hard time getting through the red tape since people had gone to a lot of trouble to bury the evidence. The thing is that at the time, I thought you'd actually killed Pettigrew. I had no idea he was still alive. I realized they'd locked you up, thinking you were the secret keeper and a Death Eater and while I knew that wasn't true, I still thought you were guilty of murder. I knew I could try and clear you on some of the charges, but the big one would still be there and you'd still be stuck in Azkaban. I didn't think it was worth the risk of exposing myself and how I knew what I knew if I wasn't even going to be getting you out of prison."

Harry looked at Sirius, slightly apologetic, but Sirius waved his hand in a dismissive manner.

"Don't worry about it, Harry. I doubt you could have done anything back then anyway. What matters is that you did do something about it now, and for that I'm eternally grateful."

Harry nodded and the room slipped into silence for a minute.

"So... are you really okay with this?" Harry asked hesitantly, watching Sirius closely.

Sirius gave a weak laugh and ran his hand over his face roughly. "Yeah... yeah, it's just... it's a lot. Wow. I still don't think I've really processed it completely."

"There's a lot more, obviously..." Harry said cautiously, still eyeing Sirius.

The man groaned slightly, but then laughed and sighed. "Yeah, I can imagine there is..."

"You're a smart man, so I have the distinct feeling that you're going to connect a lot of dots on your own..."

"Yeah..."

"And you're still going to be okay with this? With *me*?"

"You mean the fact that you were a Slytherin, you were buddy-buddy with the Malfoys and the Blacks, and the fact that the only sort of magic I can possibly imagine being able to make a person retain their memories after death has got to be some *seriously Dark shit*...? Yeah, Harry. I'm okay with you. Like I said, you *saved me*. I owe you my life. I'm not going to turn on you."

"You can't tell anyone else what I've told you. Not even Remus. I'm not ready for him to know yet. Especially if he's going to be teaching at Hogwarts."

Sirius looked a bit disappointed but nodded his head. Suddenly his eyes lit up and he grinned at Harry. "Did you do something about the Defense Against the Dark Arts curse?"

Harry chuckled, ducked his head and shrugged. "Maybe. But only until Remus is done teaching. The curse will bypass him, but it'll probably come back and attack the next guy who comes along."

"How?"

"It's complicated." Harry replied with a grin.

Sirius snorted. "Fine, don't tell me." Sirius stood up and stretched his back. "Well, I think I'll head to bed."

"Sounds like a good idea," Harry agreed, standing up and returning his chair to his desk.

Sirius pushed the chair he'd used back against the wall beside the door and turned back to look at Harry. "Thank you," he said sincerely and Harry looked at him with mild surprise.

"Thank you... for not, you know... freaking out about it." Harry replied with a grin.

"Goodnight, Harry."

"Goodnight, Sirius."

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Harry hopped down the last few steps and headed into the kitchen while running his hand through his still-damp hair. He pushed the door open and made his way over to the cozy little table in the breakfast nook where Dobby already had breakfast waiting for him, and Sirius was sitting reading the Daily Prophet while occasionally sipping from a mug of coffee.

It had been just under one week since Harry had left Hogwarts and he had partially 'come clean' with Sirius about his unusual origins. Sirius had at one point asked him what his name had been in his old life and Harry had considered simply refusing to tell him. Instead, he told Sirius that his name had been Lucan Valerius, since it was true – it *had* been his middle name, and his *real* family name, after all. It had the added benefit of next to no one from his old life having known it. Everyone had known him as Herakles Jude.

Tom had always wondered why he kept his ties to the Valerius secret and Heri had never been able to give him a good explanation for it. Really, he couldn't even come up with a logical reason for himself. He just liked keeping his 'real identity' a secret between he, Tom, and the few he trusted with it.

Now, he was making use of the name again, but in a subdued way. It was the name he had used as an alias during his trips to Diagon Alley a few years prior, and it was the name he still used on his private post box where Lucius and the goblins sent his correspondences to.

Dobby was still retrieving his mail from said post box every week, but the elf no longer had to hide to bring Harry his letters. Harry had told Sirius about the elf the morning after their talk, when Harry came down stairs to discover Sirius cursing over some burned bacon, and a skillet full of what Harry suspected was intended to be an omelet of some sort.

Dobby had moved into their home, taking up residence in a large walk-in pantry that was connected to the laundry room. The little elf seemed entirely too happy to have wizards to look after more regularly. Harry knew the little guy had to be bored off his crazy little rocker spending so much time at Godric's Hollow alone.

Harry had gone to the Godric's Hollow house his second day of summer holiday to fetch some of his things. A few of his books, a few trinkets, and one Philosopher's Stone. He now had it safely hidden away in a highly warded wall safe in his bedroom that he had transfigured and placed himself.

Remus hadn't moved in yet, but all the professors stayed in the castle for at least one week after the end of term as they finished up things. The werewolf was actually supposed to be coming to stay with them that evening. The following night was the full moon.

Harry and Sirius had slipped into a very easy, relaxed routine over the last five days. They had talked a few more times about Harry's past, but nothing too deep, but Sirius was finally getting to know Harry a bit better, and Harry was getting to know his godfather. From what

Harry had seen of the man, he seemed entirely sane and in full control of all of his faculties. Harry wondered about the times Remus had seemed concerned, noting that Sirius had seemed confused about what year it was since nothing like that had happened to him directly yet.

Perhaps Sirius had simply still been early in his recovery and his head had still been a bit overly muddled at the time, and it had cleared up since then.

Harry and Sirius chatted lightly through their breakfast and Harry asked his godfather if there was anything interesting in the Prophet, but there really wasn't much. The results from the latest match between Puddlemere United and the Chudley Cannons – the Cannons had lost, big surprise.

"I'm going to go into Diagon Alley today," Harry said absently as he finished off the last of his toast.

Sirius looked up at him from over his paper. "Want some company?"

"Nah. I'm just running in to pick up a object I ordered from a shop down there," Harry replied easily.

"Dobby could go collect it for you, Master Harry!" Dobby offered excitedly.

"No thanks, Dobby. I want to get out of the house for a bit," Harry said with an easy smile. "Maybe do a little window shopping, while I'm at it."

"You going under a glamour?" Sirius asked, as he turned back to his paper.

"Yup," Harry replied easily.

"Knockturn Alley?"

Harry smiled and chuckled. "Yes."

"Just be careful."

"Always."

Harry stood up and Dobby snapped his fingers, levitating Harry's plate off the table and across the kitchen into the sink.

Harry jogged back up the stairs to grab his knapsack and to set up his glammers. His wand was already in the wand holster attached to his wrist where he always kept it. He had told Sirius about his removal of his magical traces and the man had gone with him to a park to test to make sure it had actually worked. Harry cast a couple spells and then they'd waited around for an owl to show up with a warning from the Ministry, but nothing had come.

Harry had to admit to himself that he was glad things had worked out the way they had. It was nice not having to sneak around and hide everything from Sirius. Plus the man let him go off and do his own thing without putting up a fight as long as Harry was under a glamour

when he went out on his own. He knew, however, that once Remus moved in, he'd have to be a bit more cautious again.

Harry got to his room and began to apply the glamour he had only just first developed earlier that week. It was a departure from the half-goblin look he'd gone with in years past. He was still short for a normal human adult, but not so short that it was unreasonable. He went with very short, dirty-blond hair, blue eyes, and a slight, but fit build. The over-all appearance came off as someone in their mid twenties who just happened to be a bit on the short side.

Once he was all set up, he shouldered his bag and made his way back down the stairs towards the fireplace in the foyer. Sirius came out of the kitchen holding his coffee and gave him a quick nod and a smirk as Harry tossed some Floo powder into the fireplace, turning the fire green, and stepping inside. He called out 'Diagon Alley' and was whisked away a moment later.

It was nice being back in the alley, free and anonymous. He got some simple shopping around Diagon done first and then made his way down Knockturn Alley. The shopkeepers were cautious and overly suspicious of him at first, as was their nature. He was a new face and they didn't know if they could trust him. But a few galleons and a few intelligent, informed questions about certain wares and they relaxed slightly.

He'd been working his way through the stores and street vendors for a few hours and was getting ready to head back home to have lunch. His hand came up and he unconsciously rubbed his glamoured scar. It had been sort of *itching* every now and then for the last twenty minutes or so. It was quite odd, really, and he was tempted to head back just so that he could look into a mirror and examine it with his Sight to see if there was something weird going on with it. Now that the Light magic protection was gone, he'd been keeping an eye on it. The horcrux seemed to be completely dormant and had made no moves to try and leach from his magical core or try to influence his thoughts.

It didn't seem to be doing any at the moment either, but there was definitely *something* weird going on.

He was just about to turn and head back towards Diagon Alley when a small black blur caught Harry's attention out of the corner of his eye. He turned his head and saw a small black cat darting out from one of the narrow alleys between buildings and then slipping inside Borgin and Burkes as the door was held open by a witch who was leaving the store.

Harry stared after the cat for a stunned moment. It had looked so... *familiar*. But no... it couldn't be...

It's not like black cats were *rare*. It was probably just someone's familiar. And yet he couldn't ignore the nagging at the back of his mind and quickly jogged across the cobblestone road and slipped inside the shop.

"Ah, back again, sir?" Borgin asked from behind the counter. Harry had been in there less than an hour before and actually bought a few things so the man was looking at him with a greedy, welcoming expression.

"Yes, but I'm just looking to something I think I lost. I'll just be a moment," Harry said as he began to look around.

Borgin looked a bit disappointed and went back to polishing something. Harry scanned the room with his Sight, which was a bit disorienting since there were so many objects in there that were cursed, or simply charmed with powerful Dark magic. But then he caught sight of the magical signature of something alive and bent down onto one knee and peered under a small table.

There, glaring at him with angry, piercing, *red eyes*, was a strikingly familiar, little black cat.

Harry felt as if his heart had just jumped up and lodged itself in his throat. He almost gasped, but refrained. The itching in his scar increased several fold as he held the feline's eyes for another moment, and he was almost sure that his heart would burst from his chest with as fast as it was racing at the moment. Shock and *hope* soared through him and before the feline had a chance to react, Harry had twisted his wrist just so, shooting his wand out of his holster and into his readied hand, catching it and shooting a stunner out.

The cat seemed to realize what was happening, but it was too late. The stunner just barely caught the cat before it had fully dodged out of the way and Harry reached out and grabbed him by the scruff of his neck.

Harry cradled the unconscious cat in his arms, feeling his adrenaline shooting through him as part of his mind still reeled in shock and denial, while another was raving with excited hope. He stood up and quickly left the store with Borgin looking at the cat in his arms with confusion and then shrugging it off.

Harry didn't know how long he'd have before the stunner wore off so he ran, with the cat in his arms, to the nearest apparition point. Knowing that he was going to want complete privacy for this encounter, he spun on the spot and apparated to Godric's Hollow.

Once in the house, he went into the study, set the still-unconscious cat on the floor and began casting a few wards around the room. He knew Tom would be able to get past most of them if he had a few minutes to work at it, but hopefully those few minutes would give Harry the time to explain to the other wizard who he was and keep him from running off.

Finally secure in the belief that Tom wouldn't be able to simply run from the room, or apparate or portkey away the moment he woke up, Harry waved his wand to *finite* the glamours over him and sent an *enervate* at the cat.

The cat shook his head and stood groggily before apparently clearing his head enough to realize that something was definitely not as it should be. The cat looked up, saw Harry and hissed angrily, baring his sharp teeth, flattening his ears back against his head and arching his back.

Harry felt the itching flare angrily in his scar and could only smile wider at the small verification that pain gave him that he was *right*.

"Hello Tom-Cat," Harry said, unable to squash the enormous smile on his face.

The cat seemed to get even more angry with that and began to inch around Harry in a circle, searching for the best escape route.

"Sorry, but you're going to find that the room is warded. You can't just get out through the door. You'd have to be a wizard with a wand to get past the protections and it would *still* take you a few minutes," Harry teased and the cat narrowed his eyes, glaring angrily at Harry and hissing again.

"Come on! Don't make me force you out of your animagus form! Transform back, I don't want to stand here talking to a bloody cat!"

The cat's head, which had been cautiously turned to look around and examine the room for the best escape route, swung back and nailed Harry with a very wide-eyed stare.

Harry rose his hand slightly in the air, drawing the cat's attention to the wand held there. The cat eyed it and hissed again. Harry held the wand up in an appeasing gesture and then held the wand between his two hands so that the cat could see it.

"See my wand, Tom? Does it look familiar to you?" Harry asked, still grinning.

The cat finally stopped its hissing and studied the wand for a moment before a glassy look came over its large, slitted, red eyes. The cat looked from the wand, up to Harry's face and back at the wand again.

And then suddenly the cat was morphing and growing in size as it transformed back into a human. The human in question, however, was not exactly what Harry had been expecting.

"Where did you get that wand?" a boy who looked to be probably the same physical age as Harry, with short, neatly trimmed, dark brown hair, pale blue eyes, and very sharp, angular features, asked him in a harsh voice.

Harry gaped at the person standing opposite him. "Holy crap."

"WHERE DID YOU GET THAT WAND?" the boy bellowed, clearly growing angry in his impatience.

Harry swallowed, gathering himself back up and letting a somewhat shocked little laugh escape his throat. The boy opposite him glared angrily and Harry realized suddenly that the boy was now holding a wand as well. His eyes widened as he recognized it.

"You got your wand back too!" Harry exclaimed pointing down at the familiar yew wand. His eyes traveled back up to the strangely pale blue eyes that were looking back at him with an expression of shock and disbelief. "Bloody hell, you're a kid! How the heck did this happen?"

"Who are you..." the boy whispered.

Harry smiled softly. "I'll give you a clue. *Non mortem timemus, sed cogitationem mortis*" he said with a soft, reassuring voice.

The boy-Tom sucked in a sharp gasp and his jaw was floundering in shock and disbelief.

"You've got a line to say too, Tom. Don't tell me you're memory's slipping in your old age... or your young age as it would seem..." Harry teased.

"Impossible..."

"I don't blame you for thinking it hadn't worked," Harry said softly. "It took me longer to come back then I'd expected it to. I'm really sorry for that... I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am that you had to wait so long..."

"Heri?" Tom whispered.

Harry grinned and nodded his head.

A shuddering breath escaped Tom slowly and he seemed to collect himself, somewhat. "*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit*" he said with as sure a voice as he could manage given how shocked he seemed to be.

We do not fear death, but the thought of death.

Everything changes, nothing perishes.

A strangled, elated, laugh escaped Harry suddenly, and he wasn't sure which was the more overwhelming urge – to laugh or to cry.

"I finally found you," Harry said in a weak voice through his enormous smile.

And before he even realize he'd moved, Harry had surged forward and wrapped his arms around the waist of the stunned 'boy', burying his face in his neck and holding on as if his life depended on it.

Tom seemed frozen for a moment longer before some of the stiffness began to leave his shoulders and his arms slinked around and wrapped hesitantly around Harry's shoulders. Harry felt a deep, shuddering breath slowly leak out of Tom's mouth as the rest of the tension melted away and the arms suddenly tightened around him.

"You're really my Heri?" he asked again in a shockingly emotional voice.

Harry laughed weakly into Tom's neck and nodded his head. "Yes, Tom. It's me. It all worked. Just like I said it would, it just took longer then I'd expected to get back."

Harry sighed and pulled back hesitantly so that he could meet Tom's eyes. It was strange looking into the face of this strange unknown boy, but he imagined that it was equally weird for Tom to be looking into his face.

"I was aware while I was in the astral plane, but time moves oddly there. The forth dimension intersects with perceived reality in a way I hadn't entirely expected. When I felt myself being pulled back to the physical world and reconnecting with a new body I thought that it had maybe been a few years since I'd died. Three or four at the most. After I was reborn and I finally managed to figure out the date and I realized it was *nineteen eighty*, I nearly fainted. I had no idea it had taken me fourteen years to be reborn. I..." Harry sighed heavily and let his

head fall forward, resting it on the other boy's shoulder. "I'm so sorry I left you alone for so long. I'm sorry I wasn't able to get back sooner."

"You should be sorry," Tom said, but it had no malice to it. It was almost weakly teasing. Harry rose his head up and smiled at the other, and Tom's eyes were actually shining slightly with tears he knew the other would forever refuse to admit had been there.

"I've missed you... *so much*..." Harry said.

Tom's young, sharp jaw tightened and flexed slightly as he appeared to clench and unclench his teeth in his closed mouth. His face appeared conflicted for a moment before his eyes softened and focused down at Harry's shoulder.

"I missed you too," Tom whispered back.

A smile brightened Harry's face and Tom looked up at it and the corner of his mouth hesitantly curled into a tight smile. Then Tom's eyes traveled a bit higher up and the smile disappeared from his face and his eyes widened almost comically.

He took a sudden step back, pulling away from Harry and staring at him with a stunned expression.

"Tom?" Harry asked, hesitantly.

"Harry Potter," Tom whispered.

Harry blinked for a moment before realization dawned on him and he almost smacked himself, but refrained. Tom had just spotted the scar.

"Uh... yeah... heh." Harry said, giving the other a sheepish, apologetic grin.

"You're Harry Potter," Tom repeated, still clearly shocked.

"Er... yup. I'm Harry Potter. I forgive you, by the way. The whole, killing my parents thing. And believe me, there's a lot to forgive because after you offed them, I got dumped on muggles who made my second childhood almost as miserable as the first. Only the second one I had to deal with on my own, without you to help keep me sane, which sucked." Harry paused, but Tom just continued to look dumbstruck and slightly horrified, so Harry continued. "Oh, and by the way... *what the hell were you thinking?* Putting weight behind a *prophecy*? Were you out of your mind? You know prophecies are meaningless unless the people involved *believe in them*. You were dooming yourself by acting on the damn thing! *Especially* since you hadn't heard the whole thing!"

Tom's face suddenly sharpened with annoyed defensiveness. "Excuse me?" Tom hissed angrily.

"You heard me!"

"Dumbledore knew the whole thing and was acting on it quite aggressively. I couldn't just *do nothing*!"

"Sure you could have! You could have at least waited until you had heard the whole damn thing. Or you could have just realized that it was nothing more than divination *nonsense* and *ignored it!*"

"I couldn't risk that! Even if *I* didn't believe in it, Dumbledore was clearly putting weight behind it. If I had allowed him to continue on unimpeded he could have raised some sort of... Light savior or something. The stupid brat was just a helpless baby, how was I to know..." Tom suddenly trailed off. "Did you do something? That night? When I... when I attacked you?"

"No. I didn't do anything," Harry said softly. "I knew that I could make sure I came back faster the next time I died and was convinced I could make sure I was reborn almost instantly. I was just going to take the curse, die, and get reborn. It would have only been about two years wasted..."

Tom nodded his head and looked as if he had expected his answer. "He... *you*... you looked like you had *accepted* it. Like you... ready to die," Tom said quietly, looking contemplative. His eyes suddenly lit with determined revelation. "It was the Life Debt."

Harry blinked. "Life Debt?"

"When you saved my life and died taking that bastard's killing curse for me, I suddenly owed you a Life Debt. It must have stuck with you even after you were reborn. When I attacked you with the killing curse, I was directly defying the Life Debt. That's why it rebounded on me."

Harry blinked. "By Merlin, I think you've nailed it right on the head."

Tom coughed out a humorless laugh and his hand came up and pinched the bridge of his nose. "All these years of trying to understand what the hell happened... it was the Life Debt. It was *you*... You're *Harry Potter*." Tom lowered his hand and scoffed. "The child of prophecy," he said bitterly.

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "*Prophecy*. What a bunch of stupid rubbish. They're always up to interpretation and introducing different facts can easily totally change the whole perceived meaning. From one point of view 'the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord' sounds like a threat or a warning, or a beacon of hope to your enemies. From another point of view, it's a statement of fact describing the one person you ever trusted with that sort of power of you. I'm the only one you ever trusted enough with the very specific information necessary to 'vanquish' you. The only one that you ever loved. Loving someone means trusting them with the power to destroy you. That's how it works. But that's the point. It's a matter of trust. And I would hope that you still trust me enough to know that even though I hold that power, I would *never use it*. The stupid prophecy says I have the power, but that line doesn't say anything about me using it, does it?"

"Are you saying you know what the entire prophecy says?" Tom asked.

Harry scoffed. "No, I haven't a bloody clue what the rest of it says. When I was a baby my parents refused to talk about it when I was awake. Something about me picking up on their

stress." Harry rolled his eyes. "I pretended to be asleep a few times and managed to overhear a few conversations regarding a 'prophecy' and going into hiding, but never got any worthwhile details. The only reason I know the first three lines of the prophecy now is because Lucius Malfoy told me."

"Lucius!" Tom exclaimed.

"Yeah... oh hey, did you know that Dorea Black married Charlus Potter? Can you believe that? Well, they're my grandparents in this life – fancy that. My relation to the Blacks makes me Narcissa's second cousin and I got involved with the Malfoy's that way, but I went ahead and revealed my real identity to Lucius because I was hoping he could help me find *you*."

"I haven't spoken with Lucius," Tom said quietly.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Or *any* of your Death Eaters. Merlin, Tom! Where the bloody hell have you *been*? I know you've had a body since Halloween of '89... wait, is this why?" Harry said as he waved his hand at Tom's youthful body. "How the hell did this happen, anyway?"

"How do you know how long I've had a body back?"

"Where did you think that magic power you used was coming from? The magic that was being sent to you several times a day for a year and a half before you got a body?"

Tom's eyes widened and his brows shot into his forehead. "That was *you*?"

Harry grinned smugly and gave a little mock bow. "Guilty as charged." he stood upright again. "I sent it along our link."

"Link?" Tom echoed in confusion before a speculative expression suddenly covered his youthful face. "Wait..." he looked up at Harry curiously. "How did you establish this link to me while I was still a spirit? I detected it after you started sending magical energy to me and I tried going back along it numerous times, but there was a rather... *violent* bit of defense magic whenever I tried."

Harry grumbled to himself. "That was the protective Light magic Lily Potter so graciously left me with. I learned how to hold it back so that I could send magic to you, but unless I was actively suppressing it, it was always in place. I tried to catch you when you were trying to reach back to me along the link, but I never managed to get the Light magic suppressed in time."

"Alright, but how did this *link* get established in the first place?" Tom asked.

"Actually, I believe that was *your* doing. Oh, Merlin, Tom – you will *not* believe it..." Harry paused for a moment before pulling a hair tie out of his pocket and reaching up to secure his hair back into a low ponytail. He pointed his finger at the scar on his forehead. "Cast the *Seola identit  * spell on my scar."

"*What*?" Tom exclaimed incredulously.

"Just do it!"

Tom hesitated for a moment, his brow furrowed in confusion before he raised his wand, pointed it at Harry's forehead and quietly spoke "*Seola Identité*".

A blue glow swirled around Harry's whole forehead like wispy clouds. The clouds started to thicken around the scar and turn sort of purple-ish in hue before shifting to a bright vibrant red, right over the scar. A thin red thread began to appear at the center of it, stretching through the air, connecting directly to Tom's chest.

He gaped at the thread with a look of utter disbelief on his face. "Impossible!" he whispered hoarsely as he stared at the tiny thread connecting the two of them together.

"Apparently not. Were you intending to use my murder to create another horcrux?" Harry asked.

Tom nodded his head, looking numb. "I had prepared some of the rituals ahead of time... but I didn't bring the vessel. I was going to do that part after I had returned from..." he trailed off and his eyes were still locked disbelievingly at the thread."

"I suspected it was something like that," Harry said with a small sigh that then shifted into a mildly amused chuckle.

"I don't see anything funny about this," Tom snapped at him as his eyes came up and locked on Harry's face.

"Oh, I know. It's definitely not funny. You've gone and put a bit of your soul into a *living vessel*. If my body dies, that bit of your soul gets destroyed. Definitely *not funny*. Fortunately I'm young, and I'm not stupid, so I'll be doing my best to not end up dead until we can figure out a way to get this bit merged back in with your central soul, or at least moved into a less vulnerable vessel."

"I'm not worried about that. Well, okay, maybe I am a bit, but what I'm really worried about what it's going to do to you! Has it... I mean... you mentioned some sort of protective magic from Lily Potter?"

"Right. It was actually encasing the bit of your soul and keeping it separate from me. It was some rather powerful Light magic, actually. I had to spend a couple years study *Light* magic just to start figuring out how to work around it – crazy huh? *Light* magic! Me!" Harry chuckled. "You'd be surprised how valuable I found some of that knowledge, I've got some books you've *got* to look at –"

"Heri!" Tom snapped impatiently.

"Right, right. So anyway, it's gone now, as you can see since the *Seola* spell worked. I think two things played a role in it dispelling. The first thing was that the Light magic was connected to the wards on my Aunt's house. She was a blood relative from my mum's side, so as long as I could call her house my home, the wards stayed in tact. But I think that the Light magic around my scar was also locked onto me personally by my age. Both things had to fail for the protection in my to finally dissolve."

"Your age, but how would it fail in relation to your age? It should have remained until you reached physical maturity, wouldn't it?"

"Right. A few months ago I had a high level aging potion brewed so that I could get rid of the magic Trace that was cast on me when I started attending Hogwarts. I was temporarily aged to twenty, and I think that weakened the protective magic right there, but since the magic was still in place around my aunt's home, it was confused. It probably realized I wasn't *really* seventeen yet, so it was still trying to hold on. After I made the mental decision that I would never be returning to Petunia's home ever again, it finally broke, so no more Light magic in my forehead."

Tom frowned and looked away. "We need to get the horcrux out of you as soon as possible. Without anything holding it back it will probably try to start sapping your magic or try to possess you."

"I'm not terribly worried about it. It's remained dormant so far – granted it's only been a week. However I think that it realizes who I am, and that I want to protect it, so it's not being hostile to me. I think we've got time to figure out how to deal with it."

Tom still looked worried – which was actually rather touching and it made Harry smile at him. This seemed to be enough to snap Tom out of his mood because he rolled his eyes and grimaced slightly.

"So!" Harry said, clapping his hands together once. "You're a kid! How'd this happen?"

Tom sighed and his hand came up and he pinched the bridge of his nose. "You are rather frighteningly chipper right now. Have been consuming an odd excess of sweets or something?"

Harry laughed. "No, I'm just extraordinarily elated. I have been trying to find you for... well, *years*, obviously. Today was a total fluke. I still can't believe you're really here. I think I'm in some sort of shock, to be honest. I keep thinking that this is all just going to turn out to be a dream and I'll wake up and still not know where you are, but then I know that I'm *not* dreaming and this really *is real*, and I just feel all giddy and crazed so... yeah! How did you end up in the body of a kid?"

Tom sighed but he smiled at Harry softly. "It's a rather long story."

"I've got time. How about we sit. The living room is the most comfortable place for such things."

Harry waved his wand, deactivating all of the wards he'd set and the two left the room. Tom froze as soon as he set foot in the living room, his eyes wide as he took in the familiar place and he realized precisely where he was.

"You brought me *here*?" he asked, incredulously.

Harry shrugged. "I own it. It's been my sanctuary of sorts. No one has any idea that I use this place. It's sort of like hiding in plain sight, really, since everyone knows where the house is."

Hell, there's a bloody shrine to my parents noble deaths and my *heroic* defeat of the Dark Lord just down the street. Bloody idiots." Harry scoffed and rolled his eyes.

Tom seemed to take another annoyed look around the room, grimacing at it before he huffed out a breath and sat himself down on the couch that Harry had motioned him to. Harry didn't even hesitate as he sat himself down directly beside Tom, leaned back into a relaxed position, resting his arms along the back of the couch and crossing one leg over the knee of the other.

"Alright. Long story time! What's the deal with the kid's body?" Harry asked.

Tom sat stiffly for a moment before pulling in a long breath, letting it out and slowly relaxing back into the couch.

"Back in '89, I'd been slowly growing more and more powerful thanks to the energy that you were sending me. I decided to start working towards regaining a legitimate body for myself. Up until that point I had been relying mostly on possessing the bodies of small animals or simply floating around in a non-corporeal form, which was entirely disorienting and uncomfortable. After my body was destroyed that night, I eventually retreated to Albania. I went to the Shebenik mountain, not far from Lake Ohrid – you remember the place?"

"Just north of Lbrazhd, of course. The ley lines around there were incredible. The Dark magic in those mountains was intense."

"Yes, precisely why I went there to recover and try to build up some energy. However, whenever I tried to possess an animal I would drain it rather quickly. If I didn't leave them after a brief stay they would grow very ill and die and it was rather unpleasant to be in them when they died. When you were sending me magic I was able to stay in my host bodies longer since I didn't rely entirely on draining them of their own energy, but I was sick of possessing the bodies of animals.

"I was able to possess a few muggles over the years, who happened to wander into the forest, but once again, I drained them rather quickly and they would end up dead before I could get much use out of them... plus they were *muggles*," Tom grimaced at that, but then continued. "I needed someone who was magical if the body was going to last long enough for me to be able to make any progress on gaining myself a permanent body of my own, and a magical body was also necessary since I wouldn't have access to my own magic if the body I was in was unable to handle or wield magic. So around the end of the summer in '89, I finally decided to venture away from the forests and search for a witch or wizard who could be of use to me. Magical, but weak enough that they wouldn't be able to fight me off.

"It was very near the end of October and I was traveling through Greece just outside a muggle city. It was an early freeze that year and I was passing by a large river with a bridge over it at the same moment that some sort of automotive accident occurred. One vehicle skidded into the opposite lane and another car had to swerve to dodge it. Their tires skidded and the car went over the side of the bridge and into the frozen river.

"I suppose you could call it a mix between morbid curiosity and simple boredom, but I went to investigate the accident. The car had two occupants in it, a woman and her son. The car sank very quickly and filled with water. The woman drowned in the accident and it looked as if the

child was just as doomed. However in what must have been accidental magic, the child burst the door off the car and escaped. The escape was short lived because then he was trapped beneath the ice and was disoriented enough that he was unable to find his way to the open section caused by the car's initial crash through the surface.

"By this point, the other muggles in the area had gathered at the side of the river and someone had alerted the authorities. None of the stupid fools tried to venture into the river to rescue the boy and he basically drowned. An ambulance showed up along with a fire engine and they cut through the ice and pulled his lifeless body out of the water. I would have left right then, but the fact that the boy had displayed accidental magic made me curious. I thought that perhaps his father was a wizard and I could possess the man while he was grief ridden at the loss of his wife and son.

"But then I heard one of the emergency medical muggles say that they'd gotten a pulse out of the boy. They rushed him into their vehicle to take him to the hospital. I followed, still intent on my plan to possess the child's father. On the way to the hospital the child's heart stopped *again*. In the hospital they resuscitated him and he ended up on life support. The machines were breathing for him and pumping his blood for him. They conducted more of their tests and at one point one of them said that the child was brain dead and if they were to disconnect the machines he would die. I have to admit that this got me curious. I remembered you talking about how one's astral spirit disconnects from the body, it can no longer live, even if the body is still perfectly capable of operating.

"I checked over the boy's body with every sense I could manage given my frustrating limited form and was able to determine that he was nothing more than an empty shell. The boy's *soul* had left him."

Harry's eyes lit up with apparent understanding of the significance of this revelation. A fully-functional, *magical*, body, with no soul attached.

"What luck," Harry observed.

Tom smirked. "I thought so as well. But I wasn't entirely convinced that I would have the power to take full ownership of the body as I was. Samhain was the following evening, and I knew I would have a better chance at success if I tried to take the body on that night over any other. So everything relied on the muggles leaving the boy connected to their machines until I was fully prepared.

"Fortunately, they were dedicated to waiting until they had located a next of kin before they disconnected the body and allowed it to die. The police began an investigation to try and figure out who the child and mother were. In the end they effectively found nothing. The woman had no living family and had never been married. The child's birth certificate did not list anyone as the father. As far as I've been able to determine, the woman was a muggle, so this boy was either.." he heaved an annoyed sigh and grimaced distastefully, "*muggleborn*, or a half-blood and the absent father was a wizard. In any case, no one was found and they made plans to disconnect the body from life support for the first of November."

"But you took control of the body before that," Harry supplied with a grin.

Tom smirked back, smugly. "Of course. Since the body was completely unoccupied, I was able to take over it completely and managed to get my 'astral tether' properly attached to it, and my consciousness fully lodged inside it. Without a soul already occupying it, there was nothing there to fight me, it was simply a matter of mustering up enough raw magical energy to seize control. It took me a few weeks to fully recover from the magical exhaustion and the child's accident and the effects of hypothermia, relying on the muggle's pathetic medical practices. They were, of course, utterly stunned when I woke up since they were fully prepared for me to die the next day when they disconnected the machines. At the first opportunity, I ran away to the nearest magical village, stole a wand to make use of temporarily until I was able to get back to Britain and recover my own wand."

"How'd you do that, by the way? Get your wand back, I mean?" Harry asked, legitimately curious.

"I created a spell the year after you died that would automatically relocate my wand to a specified location if it were out of my direct possession for more than a week."

"Ah. Smart."

"Of course," Tom replied with a smirk.

"Okay, so that explains the body, and I suppose the body explains why you haven't contacted your Death Eaters. You didn't trust any of them to respect you in the child of a body – am I right?"

"Yes," Tom admitted easily.

Harry rolled his eyes. "It amazes me how little you trust your own minions. You could have gone to Malfoy. He's helped me out. Even Snape's been useful."

"Severus?" Tom echoed with a bit of incredulity.

"Yeah, he teaches potions at Hogwarts. It was useful to have someone I could somewhat rely on within the castle."

"He's still there, is he?"

"Yup. We can talk about that more later though. So what happened after you got your wand back? Where the hell have you been?"

Tom turned to Harry and his face suddenly took on an extremely smug look. The fire of proud accomplishment burned in his pale blue eyes and Harry's brows rose into his forehead as his curiosity spiked even further.

"You're going to *love* this, I *just know it*," Tom said with considerable haughtiness and an arrogant smirk. "In fact, I imagine you are one of the few people who can truly appreciate my brilliance in this..."

Harry laughed lightly. "Okay, so get on with it!"

"I have been traveling the world. During the last two years, I have visited every country on the planet."

Harry's eyes widened slightly but his brow furrowed. "Okay... why?"

"Several years after you died, after I had already made considerable headway into my efforts to overthrow Britain's wizarding government, I came across the most fascinating curse. I began to research it, pull it apart, and I modified it to serve a very specific purpose that I had in mind. However at the time, it was no longer something I had the time to pursue since I would have only trusted myself to do it personally, and decided to hold off on using it until a later time. The curse in question could be placed on a location and would remain there, effecting the entire location and quite a reasonable radius around it, until it was properly deactivated by the caster. Disabling it any other would be extraordinarily difficult, and it would be exceedingly difficult to detect in the first place."

"Okay... what does it do?" Harry asked, with amused impatience. Tom was drawing it out for dramatic effect but Harry was too thrilled to be sitting beside Tom, experiencing his antics again, to be annoyed by it.

"Any human being of a non-magical origin, born within the radius of the curse, is born completely sterile," Tom said with a very gratified, self-satisfied smirk.

"Sterile?" Harry echoed, rather stunned.

"Yes. Sterile. It only effects muggles. Muggleborn children are unaffected, but I suppose I can accept that given the other benefits. If I made any attempts to make it effect muggleborns it would run the risk of accidentally effecting other magical children and I was unwilling to take that chance. It doesn't effect squibs, interestingly enough. I suppose that sort of confirms what you had said years ago about squibs being magically compatible bodies with the souls of muggles in them so they had no magical core to run the magic of the body."

"Right," Harry said, nodding his head slowly, still trying to process what Tom had just revealed.

"So, over the course of two and a half years, I made my way to every country in the world, traveling to every hospital, birthing center, and birthing doctor's office I could find and cast the curse on every one of them. Fortunately it's actually a very simple and quick curse for me to cast – especially knowing it as well as I do – and I got very efficient in my work. I was often able to get an entire city taken care of in a single day. I know that I won't be getting *all* of the muggles this way. There will always be muggles who choose to birth their children at home, and in many of the smaller nations and little villages, they have no hospitals or birthing clinics at all. In many of those cases I merely picked a building at the center of the residential district and cast the curse there. But all of the more civilized and advanced muggles rely on their hospitals and they are the ones who are the real threats to us, so I consider this a general win."

Tom leaned back, crossing his arms across his chest and looking very, very pleased with himself.

Harry snapped his gaping mouth shut and a small shocked laugh escaped his throat.

"It's exactly what you wanted," Tom said a bit softer. "We can destroy them without having to actually kill a single one. No mass murder. We just sit back and wait. Let them grow old and die off while their children are unable to continue breeding like rabbits, no longer constantly growing their ever-massive population. No longer consuming the world and all of its resources as if it were all placed here just for *them*. It'll take time, but I have it. You have it. We naturally live longer than them, so I imagine our youngest generation of wizards will likely get to see some of the results of my efforts. I know many wouldn't think it of me, but can be patient. Being trapped in non-corporeal form for eight years has given me a new appreciation of *patience*," he sneered and looked away for a moment before continuing.

"They won't even start to notice that their children are being born sterile for at least another ten to twenty years," Tom resumed, "by which point there will be twenty years worth of sterile muggles populating the world. And it won't stop there because they'll have no idea how to stop it. Eventually they'll start to realize that those who were born outside of the hospitals are still fine, and they'll start to avoid the places, but the damage will already be done and we can begin to cast the curse on other locations as well.

"And best of all, this way we will never have to face them in open warfare. At least, not until they are significantly fewer in numbers and we will finally have a legitimate chance. They will no longer outnumber us, and their pathetic muggle weapons will be meaningless against our magic!"

Harry nodded his head slowly, still looking rather stunned. And then slowly – ever so slowly – his lips turned up into a wide grin and he looked up at Tom in *awe*.

"It's brilliant," he whispered and Tom's visible elation grew several fold.

"I knew you would appreciate it," Tom replied haughtily, grinning wickedly.

"I can't believe you've done so much, just in the last two and a half years! It's... it's incredible, Tom!"

Tom tipped his nose up, smugly. "Yes, well, it's amazing how easy it is for a young child to sneak about unnoticed. No one suspects a child of anything truly *devious*."

Harry snickered. "Oh yes... I've been enjoying that as well."

"I bet you have," Tom looked at Harry with amusement in his eyes. "Since I did not feel comfortable gathering my old followers while in this youthful body, I decided to attempt resurrecting my old plans regarding this curse. I had always known that I wouldn't trust anyone else with the task, but had been far too busy managing my efforts in Britain to do it before. Of course, the more people who know of the existence of the curse, the greater the risk that some of the magical governments would get wind of it and try to put a stop to it. The way it is now, until the muggles start to notice and start to make a stink about it, it's unlikely that any wizards will even realize it exists, let alone take actions to counter-act it."

"And so," Harry picked up, "until anyone notices it, it'll continue to go on doing it's job, leaving the next generation of muggles completely incapable of breeding."

"Precisely," Tom said lightly and smirked.

Harry's eyes were unfocused as he thought for a quiet moment, but suddenly a giggle escaped his lips, quickly followed by another, before he erupted into a full-out cackle that left Tom to watch him with smug amusement.

"Bloody hell, Tom! You've really topped yourself this time!" Harry exclaimed as he finally began to reign in his devious delight. His eyes locked on Tom's and his smile softened and he felt himself fill with admiration, awe, *relief*, and so damn much love for this man... even in a child's body. Because it was surprisingly easy to look past the foreign, youthful face, and still see Tom behind those eyes. "I missed you so damned much," Harry whispered.

Tom's face softened as well. "And I you."

The moment lasted for a long minute before Harry's smile turned back into a smirk. "The world will never know what hit it. You and me... they'll never see us coming."

"Not till it's far too late," Tom replied smugly.

"We're going to do it this time. For real. No one will stand in our way. No one will think to! We..." Harry trailed off and got a glazed look to his eyes for a moment before he turned his attention back on Tom, full force and his mouth formed into an enormous grin. "I've got it!"

"What?" Tom asked, hesitantly.

"Come back to Hogwarts with me!"

"What? Why the devil would I do that?"

"Just think, Tom! You always said that there were only really two successful methods for taking over a country. You work your way up from the inside, get yourself into the ultimate position of leadership and then abolish the old system, instating yourself as a dictator, or you build an army and tear the system down by force from the outside. Well we both saw how much of a pain the in ass the force option was, and how long it was taking, but the other option was sort of taken away from us because of Dumbledore's suspicious nature regarding the two of us, and the fact that we disappeared off the map for a decade while we traveled to continue our education. By the time we got back to Britain, neither one of us wanted to bother with working our way up in the Ministry the hard way.

"But we could do it this time! Hell, we could use our contacts with your old Death Eaters to speed our progress in the Ministry even faster. And I'm the bloody *Boy-Who-Lived*. They already worship the ground I walk on. We spend the next six years at Hogwarts making connections, gaining the awe and admiration of all our peers, getting the best marks anyone has ever gotten out of Hogwarts – hell, we could probably take our NEWTs a year early and get out even faster. Then we go right into the Ministry, jumping into a high position and

within a few years thanks to Lucius and whatever other connections we make, either one of us could easily become the youngest Minister of Magic in the history of the Ministry!

"And while we're doing all of that, we could secretly restart our efforts with your Death Eaters – grow our base in secret, orchestrating their activities from the shadows... just imagine, Tom! It would be so simple! No open warfare. No messy frontal assault. We could do it like Slytherins are supposed to! Sneaking in from behind and slitting their throat when they least expect it! Using our cunning and intelligence to control wizarding Britain from the shadows and then take control in a swift, powerful move that no one ever saw coming!"

Tom was looking at him speculatively and Harry could see the moment Tom made his decision. He smirked deviously and chuckled. "I must say, Love... your suggestion has legitimate merit."

"Of course it does," Harry replied cheekily and Tom chuckled. "We both look young... how old is your body, exactly, anyway?"

"This body is currently twelve, although I will turn thirteen on the fifth of September."

"Still puts you in my year at Hogwarts, age-wise. I turn twelve at the end of July. You could start with the second years on September 1st. We'd just have to come up with a cover story to explain where you came from and why I know you. Also why you missed first year."

"That part is easy enough. We can say that when I was eleven, I was in eastern Europe and the only sizable magical school that considers that region its jurisdiction is Durmstrang and they don't accept muggleborns. Since I have no proof that this body's father was a wizard or not, I would be considered a muggleborn. They would have never sent me an invitation."

"You would be willing to go to Hogwarts letting them think you a muggleborn?" Harry asked, honestly a bit surprised.

"If the goal is to go under certain people's radar, it would be an effective deterrent."

"Valid point," Harry conceded, thinking about Dumbledore and his eternal love for the muggleborns.

"Besides, I think that a valid reason for my sudden return to England would be some sort of childish desire to try and find my father. According to this child's birth certificate, he was actually born in London and lived here for most of his youth. My knowledge on exactly what brought them to Greece is spotty... I'll discuss some of it with you later..."

"As for a motive for returning to London, we could say that I hoped to discover more about my father and that I was here to consult with a wizard who was going to help me get my ancestry information so that I could find out if my father was a wizard or a muggle."

"Who knows... maybe this kid's father *was* a wizard," Harry said speculatively. "Would be something if he were an old pureblood or something. Of course that seems a bit slimmer since whoever the bloke was, he was willing to sleep with a muggle."

"He could very well have been one of my followers and he raped the woman," Tom said, off-handedly.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I always hated that you let some of them do shit like that."

"I was not their keeper," Tom sneered in annoyance. "It was not my job to babysit them."

"Yeah, but if you'd thrown around a few crucios and made examples of those who you caught doing that sort of stuff, the others would have seen that it wasn't acceptable. Instead you just turned a blind eye."

Tom sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "You know how it was, Heri. I didn't exactly have a lot of room to be picky. There were only a few different sorts of wizard who were willing to serve me, and one of those sorts would do anything for me if it meant having the chance to do certain *other* things as well. I needed skilled followers who would serve me without a fight."

"Fine, fine. I don't see a lot of value to getting back into this. It's an old argument and it's really not important anymore, anyway," Harry said.

Tom looked minutely revealed that Harry was letting it go and relaxed a bit into his seat. After a moment he turned and smirked at Harry.

"So, you've heard what I've been up to – traveling the world and cursing an entire generation of muggles... what have *you* been doing?" Tom asked, grinning smugly.

Harry narrowed his eyes playfully, seeing the challenge for what it was. He took on an airy, disinterested look and smoothed his hair a bit with his hand. "Oh, not much, I guess. I mean, after I spent a year and a half sending you magical energy so you could revive yourself, I didn't do much for a while. Certainly nothing as ambitious as what you've been up to... But I did get in contact with Lucius and a few other Death Eaters... and more *recently*... let's see... I made buddy-buddy with the Minister of Magic, got my godfather out of Azkaban so that I could get out from under Dumbledore's legal control and... Oh yes! I almost forgot! I stole Nicholas Flamel's Philosopher Stone."

Tom almost did a double-take, but of course, Tom would never do something so plebeian as that.

"No!" Tom gasped in disbelief.

"Yes," Harry said with a smug grin and an upward tip of his chin.

"How? We tried for *years* to find a way through Flamel's securities! It was impossible!"

Harry's face remained smugly stoic for all of one minute before he burst into chuckles. "Oh, you will *never* believe it! It's just so utterly absurd!"

And Harry went on to describe to Tom his arrival at Hogwarts and his eventual discovery that the Stone was being kept there as bait to either lure in Tom to reveal himself, or simply to

provide Harry an opportunity to be a 'hero'. He described all of Dumbledore's attempts at messing with his mind and the two had a nice laugh over that.

The story about the so called 'protections' around the stone, and the fact that it took Dumbledore *five weeks* to realize that it had been taken got an even bigger laugh.

In the end, they spent the entire rest of the daylight, sitting there talking about how they had spent the last few years, and making plans for what to do next.

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AN: I haven't done a very thorough proof-reading pass on this one, and I don't have a beta, so it's likely got some screwing typing errors. Sometimes the connection between my brain and my fingers do screwy things.

Rebirth Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Rating: T

Rating: T

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: 19 page chapter this time. FYI – I made a few changes to the last chapter during the discussion Tom and Harry were having at Godric's Hollow. Basically I was planning through things and found a possible plot hole and made some minor tweaks. Some people might want to re-read it. But maybe not.

AN at the end of the chapter links to a family tree I put together if you want to check it out when you get to the appropriate point in this chapter.

— — — — Rebirth Chapter 25 — — — —

The sound of the flames flaring from the fireplace in the foyer, immediately followed by the sound of someone tumbling out of it sent Sirius to his feet and rushing out of the living room. Harry was there, dusting himself off with one hand while the other twisted and his wand suddenly appeared there. A few quick movements and the dust was banished.

"Where the hell have you been! I was worried sick!" Sirius exclaimed.

Harry turned to look at him with an expression somewhere between bewildered confusion and surprise.

"I'm sorry, what?" Harry replied, confusedly.

"You! Here! Late! Where have you been? It's dark out! Remus will be here any minute and I would have had no idea what to tell him when he asked where you were. For all I knew, you got kidnapped by someone and were... were... *dead* or something!"

Harry blinked at him again, his face remaining blank for a minute longer before his features softened and he looked a bit apologetic. "Ah... right. Er... sorry about that," Harry said as he reached his hand up and rubbed the back of his neck, giving Sirius a weak smile. "I sort of lost track of time. I caught up with an old friend and... yeah. We just got carried away, catching up on old times and stuff..."

"Old times?" Sirius echoed, a tinge of curious suspicion in his voice.

Harry's expression morphed into a huge smile and he nodded his head rather enthusiastically. "Oh, Merlin, Sirius! I'm so bloody excited! I – " Harry's words were suddenly cut off at the sound of the fire flaring behind him and coming to life. He looked back at Sirius, quickly and spoke "I'm going to have to wait to tell you later, okay? Oh, and tomorrow I'm meeting up with this friend, just play along when I bring it up later, okay?"

"Play along? What? I –" but just then, Remus appeared in the fireplace and strode out with relative ease. He blinked and looked around at Harry and Sirius standing there with a slight air of surprise before he began to dust himself off.

"Hey Remus!" Harry exclaimed, turning his attention on the werewolf and smiling at him. "Did you bring your luggage?"

Conversation went smoothly from there, and Harry followed Remus up stairs to his 'temporary' guest room where Remus pulled out a miniaturized trunk from his pocket and then returned it to its normal size at the foot of his bed. Harry kept up a steady stream of chatter with Remus and Sirius joined in, but he kept shooting questioning glances at Harry.

Remus had already been introduced to Dobby a few days earlier, so he wasn't surprised when the little guy popped in, informing them that dinner was ready. The excuse for Dobby's sudden presence in their home was that Dobby had been left to Sirius in Lucretia's will and Sirius had decided to keep him in order to make sure Harry got food that was actually edible, instead of the mockery of sustenance that he was capable of producing. Harry had actually been a bit shocked when Sirius had used this excuse – not because of the lie itself, but because he hadn't realized Lucretia had *died*. Apparently it had only happened about a month earlier, and Harry couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed that he hadn't bothered to visit her while he'd still had the chance.

Harry had ordered Dobby to play along with the story if he was ever asked about his time with Lucretia, but it hadn't come up.

During the course of the meal, Sirius mentioned that he'd gotten another letter from his cousin Andromeda, and was thinking about inviting her and her family for dinner some time during the summer. Apparently her daughter Nymphadora had just finished her first year of Auror Training and Sirius was interested in speaking with her and swapping stories to see how much it had changed since he had gone through Auror training himself.

About half-way through the meal, Harry spoke up. "I don't know if Sirius told you, Remus, but today I went to Diagon Alley with Terry Boot and his mum," Harry began and both Sirius and Remus looked up at him with mild surprise, "and while I was there I ran into an old friend of mine!" Harry finished, smiling brightly.

"An old friend?" Remus echoed.

"Yes! It was the most shocking thing! I knew him back when I was in muggle primary school. You know how I was in those special classes for gifted students? Well, he was too. We went to different schools, but for the special classes, since there were so few of us, we

were all gathered from all over the place and brought into one course. Anyway, it turns out he's a wizard too!"

"Wow, Harry, that's great," Remus said smiling.

Harry continued to smile for a moment before his face turned slightly sullen. "Yeah, but his situation is kind of messed up. He and I... well, we were best friends for years. I sort of *knew* he was magical back then, but I didn't really know for sure since my memories of magic were restricted to just when I was a baby, and his mum was a muggle – no question about that. But I saw him do some accidental magic a few times, and I showed him some of what I could do. We helped each other out and I think the fact that we both realized we were sort of the same is why we stuck together like we did. But when he was nine, his mum got a job offer in Greece and they moved away. I didn't think I'd ever see him again, really," Harry gave a weak, forced laugh and looked down. "I was sort of a mess after he left, to be honest... I missed him... so much..." He cleared his throat and put on a strong face and a soft smile and then shrugged.

"Anyway, I was so excited to see him today, I practically jumped him. It turns out he's come to London because he plans to visit the Magical Historical Society. Their genealogy department offers a service where you can come in and for a fee they'll generate a detailed family tree from a small sample of blood. They keep all of the supplies necessary to make them, right there! It's a newer service, they've only been doing it for a few years because some new potion was developed that's a lot cheaper than the old way of generating family trees. But, anyway, he's trying to find out if his dad might have been a wizard."

"Does his mother not know?" Remus asked.

"If she did, she never told him. She died in a car accident about two and a half years ago, in Greece. His muggle birth certificate doesn't list a father, and his mum was never married. He's got no family at all, as far as he knows. After his mum died and he was released from the hospital, he ended up a ward of the state and got shuffled around the Greek children services for a while. Foster families and group homes mostly. He... well, none of them were very good, but the last one was sort of the last straw, and he sort of got sick of it. He kind of... ran away," Harry said hesitantly, cringing slightly as the two adults' eyes widened.

Harry cleared his throat and made to look uncomfortable for a moment before continuing. "Yeah... so, he came back here to England – to London, specifically, so he could see if he could find anything on who his father might be. He knows all about the magical world now because the summer when he was ten – just about to turn eleven – he performed some sizable accidental magic trying to protect himself from one of his foster parents, and the Greek Ministry of Magic had to come and talk with him. They told him about the magical world and about the statute of secrecy and all that. Because he's an orphan and he's got no money, he couldn't afford to hire any tutors, and the only sizable magical school with scholarships that considers Greece its jurisdiction is Durmstrang and they don't accept muggleborns.

"He got some grant money from the Greek Magical Ministry and was able to buy books, so he's sort of been self-educating himself since then, but like I said – it's only enough for books, not for any teachers... but anyway, he took what he knew, and what little money he managed to save up and he came back to England. He's hoping that his father might still be alive and

be willing to take him in. I promised him that I'd go with him when he goes to the Magical Historical Society tomorrow, can I *please* go, Sirius? *Please*?"

Sirius's jaw floundered for a moment and he looked a bit gobsmacked "Wuah... I... I suppose.."

"Wait, Harry, how old is this friend of yours? You said he ran away?" Remus cut in, looking concerned.

Harry shifted in his seat, looking every bit like a nervous kid. "He's twelve. He turns thirteen in early September."

"And he ran away? Does that mean he's here alone?"

Harry looked down at his lap and nodded his head, not making eye contact.

"Where is he staying, right now?" Remus asked softly, trying not to sound like he was upset.

Harry mumbled under his breath.

"What was that?" Remus prodded.

"He's staying in an abandoned house he found," Harry huffed out and frowned. "He made me promise not to tell..."

"Oh, Harry..." Remus said with a sigh. "We can't just leave him to sleep in some abandoned house. Anything could happen to him."

Harry shook his head and gave Remus a pleading look. "We can't tell the authorities. He won't go back to child services. It's been *horrible*. He won't go back!"

Remus held his hands up in a placating gesture. "It's okay, Harry. We'll work something out, you have to know that he can't stay where he is." Remus hesitated and looked over at Sirius who's expression was oddly blank. When Sirius realized that Remus was looking at him, he sort of jerked out of his own inner thoughts and made eye contact. Remus gave him a sort of questioning look, but Sirius didn't seem to get the message and Remus rolled his eyes and huffed. "Maybe Harry's friend could stay here for a few nights?" he offered, aloud.

"Oh! Oh, yes. Of course," Sirius said.

"Really?" Harry said with barely contained excitement.

"Just until we can work out some other arrangements, of course," Remus put in and Harry made his face fall slightly with apparent disappointment.

"Do you know exactly where this friend of yours is right now?" Remus asked and Harry shook his head.

"I don't know where it is, exactly. I just know where I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow to go to the Historical Society."

"Well, hopefully the kid will be alright on his own for tonight," Sirius put in. "How long has he been staying in this abandoned house you mentioned?"

Harry shrugged, looking down. "He only just got into England, so this is only the first night he's been there."

Remus sighed heavily. "Well, I hope he'll be alright..."

"So I can go meet him tomorrow?" Harry put in, with a suddenly hopeful voice.

"Yes. But I think we should come too – don't you, Sirius?"

"Uh..." Sirius eyes went from Remus to Harry and a slight questioning look crossed between the two and Harry gave the other a very slight nod. "Yes. Yes, I think we should go to. So what's this friend's name?"

"Dominick Parker."

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Harry's grin grew wide as he rounded the bend and saw Tom standing out front of the Magical Historical Society's building. It was towards the end of Diagon Alley with the professional buildings – solicitors, a few private specialty healers with private practices, a real estate office, etc. – and about a block down from the London Library of Magic.

"Harry! Wait up!" he heard Sirius call from behind him a ways. He looked back at Tom and the two met eyes and shared a quick smirk before the two 'adult' wizards rounded the bend and came up behind Harry.

Tom quickly masked his expression to guarded worry for a moment and looked at Harry with an expression that anyone else would have interpreted as hurt betrayal. Harry ran up and pretended to be placating his worried friend and was reassuring him that Remus and Sirius wouldn't be turning him in to child services and that he could trust them, just as the two adults came up.

Introductions were made and Tom played the role of an overly cautious kid with a well-earned distrust of authority, and what appeared to be a very strong trust in Harry. Harry couldn't help but silently admire Tom's acting. Of course, he'd always been brilliant at it. Harry had expressed his worry the day before about whether Tom would be willing and able to play the role of child again, almost constantly for several years, and Tom had simply scoffed at his worries, pointing out that he'd been in this body for two and a half years while he traveled the bloody *world*. He was well-practiced as playing innocent child when necessary to get himself what he wanted.

The group went into the building and the witch at the front desk directed them to the second floor for the genealogical department. Up the stairs was another witch sitting at a desk in the middle of a small waiting room that was flanked by two doors, one on each side. The one to the right Harry remembered from his many visits here several years earlier. It led to the rooms where family trees were stored so you could go looking through them. The witch at

the desk informed them that the door to the left led to the private offices, which was also where they would go to have the family tree made up. She explained the fees and then told them to wait a moment while she checked to see the wizard who was responsible for that task was available.

She wrote a quick note on some parchment, waved her wand over it, and it folded itself into the shape of an origami bird and flew through a small open window at the top of the door.

They sat down and waited. Sirius sat on one end with Harry beside him, then Tom, or 'Dominick', and then Remus sat down on the other end. Tom frowned slightly and made to appear a bit uncomfortable for a moment. Remus seemed to want to speak with him, but hadn't yet gotten up the nerve. Just as he looked like he was about to speak, a folded paper airplane came through the small window and landed on the witch's desk. She unfolded it, read it and then called to them, informing them that Mr. Caedmon was available and they could go in and see him now.

They got up and as they were about to go through the door, she called out saying it was the third on the left. The group quickly made their way down the hall and Tom knocked on the door with a nameplate on it saying 'Caradog Caedmon'. A voice called out from the other side and Tom pushed the door open and entered a fairly large-sized, but also very cluttered, office. Harry, Sirius, and Remus followed behind him and they paused for a moment as the man at the desk in the center of the room quickly finished scribbling away on a piece of parchment.

Finally he looked up, smiling brightly. "Do forgive me. I was just finishing up. Please sit down, sit down. I'm Caradog Caedmon. What can I help you with today?"

There were only two chairs in the office, but Sirius pulled out his wand and conjured two additional chairs that he and Remus sat in. Tom sat in the one closest to the desk, while Harry sat down beside him.

"Hello, Mr. Caedmon. My name is Dominick Parker and I was told to come here for help. You see, I'm trying to learn about my father's side of the family, but I've never been able to find any information on him. My mum was a muggle and she died several years ago without ever telling me anything she might have known about him, and when I was born, she didn't put anything down about my father on my birth records. Since my mum died, I've been on my own. I don't have any family that I know of, and I suppose I was hoping I might track down some information on any living family I might have from my father's side. For all I know, my father could have simply been a muggle, but I realized it's also possible he was a wizard... I was hoping that you could help me."

"Ah, how fascinating. Yes, yes, dear boy. I'd be more than happy to help! How fascinating! I hope you do realize though, that the process we use can only determine *magical* heritage. If your father is a muggle, the spell won't turn up anything at all."

"I understand, sir," Tom said with a solemn nod.

"There are other spells, of course. Spells that will list your family tree back quite a few generations, even listing the muggles and the squibs, but they require different potions and

take a bit longer to prepare... so if we can't turn up anything, don't lose hope because there are still other options!" Mr. Caedmon said, reassuringly.

"Thank you, sir," Tom replied respectfully.

"Good, good," Caedmon said as he pushed off with his feet and wheeled his chair back several feet and twirled around to face a large filing cabinet there. He opened one of the drawers and leafed through the papers until he found what he was looking for. He pulled out a crisp, flat, *blank*, bit of parchment and wheeled back to his desk. He pulled open one of his desk drawers and it pulled out about four feet from his desk. He began to dig around in it and his arm disappeared up to his armpit before he apparently found what he was looking for. He placed the parchment on his desk along with what looked like a normal ink pot, and a strange looking quill. Then he pulled out a small dagger and placed it with the others.

He closed the drawer and looked back up at the group with an eager smile. At that point, his gaze traveled to the two adults and recognition seemed to dawn. "Oh, my! Ha ha, I didn't even recognize... Remus Lupin!"

Remus smiled softly and ducked his head. "Hello, Caradog," he said quietly.

"My, I get so focused, I don't even see the world going on in front of my own nose. And my! Sirius Black too? I read about what's happened in the Prophet!"

Sirius blinked at the man and then looked back at Remus with sort of 'Help me? Who is this?' look in his eyes.

"Sirius, you remember Caradog, don't you? He was in our year at Hogwarts. He was in Hufflepuff."

Sirius still looked confused but turned back and smiled at the man, faking recognition and greeting the man more warmly. Harry heard Tom huff quietly in annoyance, but he still managed to keep his demeanor and behavior consistent with the role he was playing. Finally discussion got back on track and Mr. Caedmon described exactly what was necessary for the construction of the family tree and how it would work.

Tom would pierce his finger with the small dagger and squeeze a drop of blood onto the bottom center of the parchment. They would wait a moment for the parchment, that had been specially prepared, to accept the blood. He was then to dip the quill into the ink pot and then bring it over to the parchment and the quill would apparently do the rest on it's own.

Tom didn't even flinch as he pierced his index finger with the dagger and easily let several drops onto the parchment. He stuck his finger into his mouth and sucked on it for a moment while he picked the quill up with his other hand, dipped it into the ink pot and then brought it over top of the parchment. He felt as if the quill had suddenly been grasped by someone else and released it. It hovered over the parchment of it's own apparent power and slowly lowered.

The quill suddenly started writing out very quickly in a rather fancy sort of cursive, making quick fluid strokes and curvy swishes.

It wrote out one name and then moved to draw a line up from it that branched to draw a few more lines and then began writing names again. It took several minutes before the quill stopped moving and fell down onto the desk.

"Ah! Always such a fun process to watch!" Mr. Caedmon exclaimed excitedly as he bounced in his seat slightly. He pushed the piece of parchment to the end of the desk and everyone crowded around to look.

The first surprise was in the very first name written on the tree. Instead of Dominick Parker, as Tom had known his new body's name be, according to the muggle records, it said "Dominicus Prewett".

"Would you look at that! It would appear that your father performed a proper naming ritual, or else it would have simply written out whatever name you thought you had," Caedmon observed with excited interest in his voice. "Fascinating! You know, young man, that this means you were also deemed as his proper heir! A male heir to the Prewett line! How exciting!"

"Prewett?" Sirius exclaimed with obvious surprise in his voice. Harry and Tom were also looking at it with quite a bit of surprise.

Above the name Dominicus Prewett was the line that went up and forked in two for his parents. His mother's name wasn't even listed. It just said 'Mother (muggle)'. In the spot where the father was listed, it said 'Ignatius Prewett II'. Above him, it forked again and listed Ignatius Prewett I, and Lucretia Prewett (nee Black) as Dominicus' grandparents.

"Bloody hell!" Harry exclaimed, legitimately surprised. "You're grandmum was a Black!"

Tom blinked at it owlishly, and Harry suspected that he didn't have to 'act' surprised at this revelation. He had somehow accidentally stumbled across and started using the body of Lucretia's illegitimate grandson. Or maybe not as 'illegitimate' as they had originally expected, since the heir naming ritual had clearly been performed.

"I take it from the general surprise that this was not expected?" Caedmon said, looking around with a bit amused interest in his eyes.

"No... not expected," Tom said, quietly as he continued to examine the tree.

Harry turned to Sirius, who was also looking stunned. "Lucretia was your aunt, right?"

Sirius nodded his head silently, looking quite surprised.

Harry looked back at the tree. It had drawn up a bit of Lucretia's family above her name, listing her parents Arcturus Black and Melania Black (nee McMillian), as well as her brother, Orion Black, and his wife Walburga. Below that, it listed Sirius and Regulus as their children.

Tom pointed at the spot where it said 'Sirius Black', looked over at Sirius with wide eyes. "Is that you?" he asked with stunned shock in his voice. Sirius continued to nod in shocked silence.

Back on the Family Tree, above Ignatius Prewett, it listed his parents, Antares Prewett and his wife Moira Prewett (nee Gamp). Beside Ignatius and also down from his parents was listed three additional siblings. One brother and two sisters. The brother was Charon Prewett who married Mary Prewett (nee Dagwood), and had three children; Molly, Fabian, and Gideon. Ignatius' two sisters were apparently both old maids because both were still listed as un-married, and childless. Tessie Prewett and Muriel Prewett.

Harry barely swallowed the shocked noise that wanted to escape him when he noticed that the 'Molly' on the tree listed as the daughter of Charon and Mary Prewett had the married name 'Weasley', and then the veritable mountain of children listed under her name. Most notably, one *'Ronald Weasley'*.

"Look at that, Sirius!" Remus said, reaching over and pointing at the tree. "He's related to Gideon and Fabian too."

Harry noticed that Gideon and Fabian shared the exact same birth date and the same date of death, back in 1980. Thinking back, he was fairly sure that he'd remembered a pair of red-headed identical twins at one of the few Order meetings that his mum had taken him to that had been referred to as 'Prewett'. He glanced over at Tom at that moment and noticed he was grimacing subtly.

"This is really quite a discovery!" Caedmon exclaimed happily. "We had believed that the Prewett line was extinct in the male line! Very exciting, very exciting! The only Prewetts left were all women, Muriel is unmarried and after Tessie's husband died, she went back to the Prewett name, and she never had children. It was believed that once Muriel and Tessie died, the Prewett line would be gone forever, but not now! How exciting!"

"That is, assuming that he decides to use the name," Remus put in and Caedmon looked up at him with a confused expression. "He's been 'Parker' his whole life. He might not want to start using his father's name." Remus explained.

All eyes turned on Tom who appeared startled by the sudden attention and looked thoughtful. "I... I wouldn't mind using the name Prewett. My mum has been gone for more than two and a half years, and I've never known any other family from her side of the family. I've got very little attachment to the name Parker. Honestly, it might be nice to have a clean start. New name. New life."

Mr. Caedmon smiled widely and clapped his hands. "How exciting!"

Harry nearly rolled his eyes. The man seemed to find a lot of things *exciting*.

They spent a little more time there before finishing up. Tom received two copies of his family tree and paid the witch at the front desk the small fee for having the tree made in the first place. He even signed over permission for the tree to be added to the Historical Society's records, which seemed to thoroughly thrill Mr. Caedmon. As far as Harry was concerned, the man was far too fascinated and easily excitable when it came to *genealogy*.

As they were leaving the building, Tom was walking slowly and holding one of the family tree parchments in front of him, and appeared to be reading it with rapt interest.

"So... Dominic," Sirius said awkwardly, "or should I call you Dominicus?" he joked weakly.

Tom looked up at him with a blank face that didn't betray any emotion and Sirius fidgeted for a moment before continuing.

"Right... anyway, we were thinking of going to the Leaky Cauldron for lunch and I'd like to invite you to come with. In fact..." he paused and looked at the others, "in fact, you're welcome to come back home with us, too. To stay."

Tom continued to look at him blankly for a moment with slowly widening eyes before his head turned and he met Harry's eyes with an innocent questioning look. Harry smiled and nodded his head, encouragingly. It was all an incredibly convincing act, over all. Remus would certainly never question it, at least.

"Um... for how long, sir?" Tom asked, Sirius cautiously.

Sirius sighed and looked at Harry with a slightly questioning look. Harry suspected that Sirius realized that a lot of this was being put on for Remus' sake, and he didn't particularly like to be out of the loop while cooperating in pulling the wool over Remus' eyes. Harry knew that Sirius would be confronting him later, insisting on some more legitimate details. "Ah, well, we'll figure that out later, yeah? But for now... let's just say that you can *stay*. How's that?"

Tom's eyes lit up with surprisingly convincing childish hope and he smiled widely. It was a truly beautiful smile and Harry felt his breath catch for a moment and thanked his lucky stars that Tom had managed to snatch up such an appealing body. He couldn't wait to see what he'd look like with a few more years of age on him. His thoughts danced to the ageing potion stashed away in his room and he had to squash a deviously pleased grin that threatened to appear on his lips.

"Are you sure, sir? I mean... I... I don't want to be a bother," Tom said, suddenly looking hesitant.

"Stop with this *sir* stuff, already. I've already told you. You can call me Sirius. And besides, it looks like your my '*second-cousin once removed*' so... we're family, right?"

Tom gaped at him and it slowly morphed into a wide, excited smile. Harry couldn't help but feel pride that Tom's acting was so remarkably convincing. He hadn't seen Tom really *use* his acting skills like that during the last few decades of his last life. There really hadn't been any need for it. It was reassuring to see that Tom hadn't lost his touch any.

The group made their way back down the twisting and turning curves of Diagon Alley, to the other far end and went through the archway into the small courtyard to the rear of the Leaky Cauldron and on into the pub. They all ordered their meals and after some awkward silences, the group finally slid into some casual conversation. Mostly it was Sirius and Remus asking Tom questions about his life, and Tom masterfully constructed a fake history to tell them.

He and Harry had done a lot of planning the previous afternoon to make sure their stories would align, but Tom had managed to flesh it out even more on his end and it was

remarkably convincing. The things that Tom said about 'his' muggle mother, and the things that he and the woman had done together over the years were very detailed and even Harry would have believed it, had he not known that it had to have been all fabricated.

The four finished their meals and took the floo back to 52 Pentwyn Rd, after telling Tom the address and making plans to add him to the ward book once they got home. As soon as they entered the foyer, Harry dragged 'Dominick' off towards the stairs, stating that he was going to show him his new room, and Sirius and Remus were left downstairs to wonder how exactly such a surprising turn of events had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly.

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"A Prewett! Haha!" Harry laughed as soon as he had his door closed and turned to look at Tom. The other 'boy' in question was actually looking a bit stunned. As in, *legitimately* stunned.

"Yes... it's quite... shocking," Tom admitted slowly. "I'm not... entirely sure how I feel about this."

"There were some Prewetts in the Order of the Phoenix right?"

Tom grimaced again. "Yes... Charon Prewett's twin sons were members. I believe it was Rudolphus who killed them..."

"Well, the last generation of Prewetts may have been more inclined towards Dumbledore's idiocy than remaining loyal to their heritage and blood, but before them the Prewetts were a well respected old pureblood family. Sure, this body's mum was a muggle, but you've got good blood beyond that. Blacks and Prewetts. Not bad. And Merlin! Lucretia's grandson!" Harry barked out a laugh and shook his head. "What are the chances?"

"Yes, precisely!" Tom hissed suddenly. "What *are* the chances? This is just obscenely coincidental. It bothers me."

"How so?" Harry asked, looking more serious as he went over and sat on the edge of the bed there.

They were in the 'spare bedroom'. It was the smallest of the four bedrooms the house had and Harry knew that Sirius had actually been debating converting it into an office since they hadn't expected to really have need of the extra room. It was very sparsely decorated with a light cream-colored bedspread on a full-sized bed with a dark brown wooden bed frame and headboard. The floor was hardwood with a round cream-colored rug, and a wooden end table, wardrobe, and dresser that matched the bedframe.

"How so?" Tom echoed incredulously. "I don't like *coincidences*," he said in a quiet, agitated voice. "As far as I'm concerned, overly convenient coincidences are anything but. There is always something deeper going on --"

"And if you don't understand what that something deeper is, it drives you mad. Alright, I get it," Harry finished for him and sighed lightly as he took on a thoughtful expression. "It is

pretty crazy... when you think about it."

"You could have been reborn as *anyone*," Tom said, pinning Harry with his striking pale blue eyes. "You could have been reborn as a shaman's daughter in Paraguay! You could have been born in America, or Asia. But you were born here in Britain. While I can accept that as a fortunate coincidence, the fact that you were born as a blood descendent of a Black? Your grandmother... *A Black*. Alright... luck? I suppose I could possibly accept that. But what about me? That I would stumble across a remarkably convenient magical body, empty, but alive. Ready for the taking. That it would just, conveniently, be right where I was at just the right moment... but for that body to *also* be the grandson of a Black? I just happened to stumble across the unknown grandson of a Black *while in Greece*? It's absurd!"

Tom threw his arms up into the air and growled slightly as he began to pace the room like some sort of menacing feline. It was times such as these that Harry would mentally remark how appropriate Tom's animagus form was, even if the man would eternally deny it.

Harry drew his attention away from that distraction and mulled over Tom's rant. It was... well, he had a point. It was rather bizarre. Just the same, Harry couldn't imagine any explanation at all that could bring sense to it.

A thought suddenly struck Harry and he frowned slightly. "You know..." Harry began and trailed off. Tom stopped his pacing and looked over at Harry with impatient expectance.

"Yes?"

"Remember back... what was it... the summer right before third year... the year we stayed at the Black's house for the last week? And Melania gave me my first Necromancer Grimoire?"

Tom frowned and slowly nodded his head. "Yes... that's right."

"I often wondered why a Necromancer Grimoire was in the Black family library. The only reason for it is if a member of the Black family had been a Necromancer at some point."

"I don't see what this has to do with what we were just discussing," Tom said flatly.

"Well, alright, it's just... it's just one more weird thing that ties us to the Blacks, I guess. But, it actually made me think of something else."

Tom rose a single eyebrow, silently prodding Harry to continue.

Harry stood up suddenly and walked towards the door, "Hang on, I've got to get something... you know what, let's move this to my room."

Harry and Tom quickly left the room and went one door down and entered Harry's bedroom, sealing the door and casting a quick silence ward behind them. Harry went over to his trunk, opened it to the compartment where he stored his books that wouldn't be appropriate to put on a shelf. Tom looked around the room with an impatient huff and pulled the chair out from behind Harry's desk, pointed his wand and transfigured it into something a bit more elegant and comfortable.

Harry turned back from his search through the trunk with a book in his hand, saw Tom perched comfortably in a far more pompous chair than Harry's desk chair had been earlier, rolled his eyes and smiled in amusement before coming over and handing the book to Tom

Tom frowned at it for a moment before a bit of confusion entered his eyes. He looked up at Harry. "And what exactly do you expect me to do with this?" he asked, motioning his hand towards the very old tome in his lap. It was bound in what looked like old leather, but was quite probably skin from something else entirely. It was very thick, but not terribly large length or height wise. It had a thick strap along the open end and a brass buckle with an embossed skull on it.

"See if you can open it," Harry said anxiously and Tom's eyes widened at the look of anxious anticipation he saw enter Harry's verdant eyes.

Tom looked back down at the book dubiously. He knew what it was. It was a Grimoire. One of those frustrating, irritation-causing books that he'd never been able to open or read on his own. Harry always had to open them for him, and even then, the words would either be invisible or appear scrambled to his own eyes. Heri had transcribed some for him over the years, but generally Tom simply scorned the damned books and their stubborn resistance to allowing him access to their knowledge.

And yet, Harry seemed to expect something different...

Tom rest the book on his lap and began to work the buckle loose. He took the strap off and grasped the front cover of the book and slowly opened it.

There was no resistance at all. It just... *opened*.

He flipped several pages in, and then several more... every page was filled with perfectly legible text. He could read it. He hadn't had to do a thing. No fighting with the book to open for him, no straining or exerting his substantial magical power just to force the book to show him garbled text rather than nothing at all. It had just worked.

He looked up at Harry who was watching him with wide, exited eyes.

"What does this mean? How is this possible?"

"You're a Black now!" Harry exclaimed and actually jumped a bit in his excitement.

"Technically, I'm a Prewett. I don't see how that explains *this*, though," Tom said, motioning towards the book.

"The Blacks have Necromancer blood in their line! They've got to! But even if they all have the biological *potential* to control the necromantic arts, most wizards don't possess a powerful enough magical core to truly tap into it! You've *always* had a powerful enough magical core. It's a part of who you are. You're astral body's magic is incredibly strong! Your old body had a number of advantages because of your Slytherin lineage, but your body didn't have any Necromancer blood in it. I think that, in order to first tape into one's Necromantic abilities, they've got to have *both*. The physical capability, *and* the magical capability. Now you do!"

Tom's eyes were wide and he just looked away from Harry, eyes unfocused, for a moment as he considered Harry's revelation.

"What about you?"

"What about me?" Harry asked, confused.

"Does this mean that at some point you could get born into a physical body that isn't compatible with your necromancer powers? The way my first body wasn't compatible with it, but this one is?"

"Ah... very valid question," Harry mused. "But I don't think that will be a problem."

"And why not?" Tom asked, quirking a single curious brow.

"Well, first... say something in Parseltongue," Harry said.

For a brief moment, Tom looked confused by the request, but understanding seemed to dawn upon his face a moment later. *:Fine, I'm saying something in Parseltongue:* Tom hissed easily.

Harry grinned. "Ah! See! It worked. You can still speak it! But your current body has no connection to the Slytherin line. You *remember* the skill. You've retained it because you remember completely how to access that gift. Just because you've lost the physical aspect, you've still retained the gift. I think that, even if I was reborn in a body that wouldn't necessarily be best suited for accessing the Necromantic Arts, the fact that I know how to use them so thoroughly will allow me to force myself to work them out anyway. It's something that the soul can learn and retain, even if placed in a different body."

"But what makes you so sure?"

:Because I can do this now,: Harry hissed with a wide grin.

Tom just looked at him with confusion for a moment before his pale blue eyes widened. "What did you just say?" he whispered.

Harry's grin widened. *:I said, I can do this now.:*

"You're speaking in parseltongue. That's not possible."

Harry laughed. *:It's obviously possible, seeing as how I'm doing it. You say something.:*

:Like what?:

:You just said, 'like what?' See, I can understand you now! Isn't this brilliant!:

"How the hell did this happen?" Tom exclaimed. "It can't be biological. The Potters have no connection to the Slytherin line at all! And neither do the Blacks! And it certainly didn't come from your mudblood mother. You cannot be a parselmouth!"

"Hey, Tom. Watch it, alright? It's bad enough you killed her, I won't stand for you calling her a mudblood, you got me?"

Tom blinked at Harry with stunned shock for a moment before he suddenly looked away, frowning. The room remained silent and heavy for several long seconds before Tom's hand came up and he pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "I apologize. That was very insensitive of me," he said quietly.

Harry nodded his head. "Apology accepted. Let's move on... right. Parseltongue. So the way I look at it, the only reasonable explanation for why I can do this now is because of your horcrux."

Tom looked back up at Harry and his face filled with intrigued understanding.

"My *soul* remembers the skill, and now that it's in you, you've gained it as well," Tom said.

"Exactly. I'd be willing to bet that now that I've practiced it on my own, my own soul now possesses the knowledge of the skill and in future lives, even without being your horcrux, I'd still retain it. And for you – if you practice this new access to the Necromantic arts you'll be able to retain it in future bodies, just like you've retained your parseltongue ability."

"Fascinating theory..." Tom pondered for a few minutes longer as he aimlessly flipped through the heavy parchment pages of the book on his lap. "Very fascinating... but we've gotten off track."

Harry looked at him blankly for a moment before he seemed to remember what they'd been discussing before they got side-tracked. "Right! The whole weird coincidence thing..."

"Yes, the *weird coincidence thing*," Tom echoed, rolling his eyes.

"Hmm..." Harry hummed as he walked over and sat down on the edge of his bed. "I can't even imagine any reasonable explanations for it outside of some obscenely ridiculous 'fate' or 'destiny' sort of thing, which is just... ridiculous."

Tom snorted. "*Fate* and *Destiny* are explanations used by the simple-minded and those too stupid to understand the truth behind what's really going on."

Harry nodded his head in agreement, looking thoughtful for another minute before sighing. "Well, it's something we'll have to keep in mind. For now, I can't even imagine where to start looking for an explanation. I say we try to tackle more pressing matters."

Tom heaved an annoyed sigh and nodded his head. "I'll concede you're probably right for the time being. I still don't like it."

"Neither do I. I agree that it's probably a bit *too much* of a coincidence to continue to deny that it's there –"

"But there is little we can do about it now," Tom finished and Harry nodded his head.

"Alright. So... well, it would appear that you and I are both about equally related to Sirius

Black. I have to admit that out of all of the outcomes I anticipated possibly coming from today's excursion, this was not one of them."

Harry snorted and laughed lightly. "Yeah, I was definitely not expecting this either. But it's undeniably convenient."

Tom made a small scoffing sound as if he found the 'convenience' outweighed by how uneasy he was made by the inexplicable coincidences, but Harry ignored him and pressed on.

"I was hoping that I could convince Sirius to try and gain custody of you anyway and this just makes it that much easier. Seeing as how he's basically your closest living relative anyway... well, I guess Muriel or Tessie Prewett would be technically 'closer', but they're both old and I doubt either would be interested in taking in a halfblood –" Tom scowled at that, "but anyway, Sirius is basically your closest blood relative so the Ministry shouldn't have any reason to contest it. All we'll have to do is file the proper papers and you'll have a legal guardian that we can both trust to work towards our interests and no one else's. It's a hell of a lot better than you becoming a ward of the Ministry, or Merlin-forbid, a ward of Hogwarts."

Tom sneered at that for a moment before sighing and leaning back in his chair some. "I suppose so. I'll just have to accept the 'convenience'. Are we going to move forward with telling Black what we discussed last night?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I think we'll have to. He was already giving me questioning looks today. Considering what I've already told him, he's got to be questioning the story we've used about you."

"I still can't believe you told him as much as you did."

"I, personally, find value in allowing myself to occasionally trust a few different people with certain sensitive information," Harry said sarcastically. "Obviously, I'd never tell anyone the *whole truth*. Aside from you, of course. But I've definitely benefited from entrusting certain information with certain individuals."

"You've benefited so far, but there's no telling how badly things would blow up in your face should you place this idiotic *trust* of yours in the wrong person," Tom said pointedly.

Harry rolled his eyes. "In the last nearly-twelve-years, I've entrusted limited information to *three people*. I've been rather cautious as to who I trusted with what. I'm no fool, Tom."

Tom smiled at that and gave Harry a rather endearing smirk. "I will concede that. Generally speaking, at least... you are no fool. You picked me, after all."

Harry rolled his eyes, but smirked back.

The two spoke for a few minutes longer before a knocking came at the door to Harry's bedroom and the two turned to look at it. Harry twisted his wrist, bringing his wand into his hand and, with a few quick flicks, disabled the locks and privacy spells before slipping the wand back into his wrist holster.

"Come in," he called out.

The door opened slowly and Sirius poked his head through looking between the two with cautious curiosity before putting his full attention on Harry.

"Uhm... Hey, Harry. Can I talk with you for a minute?"

"Sure Sirius," Harry said standing up from his bed and glancing over at Tom. "Be back in a few. You'll be alright for a bit?"

Tom rolled his eyes and motioned to the book that was still open in his lap. "Oh yes, I'll be fine."

Harry snorted lightly, grinning before heading over to the door and following Sirius out. Sirius walked over to his own bedroom, leading Harry inside and then closing the door behind him. He stood, still facing the door for a moment before heaving a quick breath and turning to face Harry.

"Do I get to ask what the deal is with your friend?" Sirius asked rather directly.

Harry grinned. "Of course. We intended to tell you, as soon as we got the chance. If you want, we can even go back in there and you can discuss it with him too."

"I think I'd rather hear it from you first."

"Fine. Well, basically most everything we said today is true, although he and I didn't go to muggle primary school together. But the fact that he was born in London; that his mum was a muggle and moved them to Greece and that she died in a car accident and he's spent the last two-plus years in foster care is all true. The fact that he's related to you was just as much a shock to us as it was to you, I assure you. He was honestly expecting to just be a muggleborn, but we figured that if we were going to try and get him into Hogwarts that we should at least check to see if his father was a wizard or not."

"Alright..." Sirius said slowly. "So if you didn't know him from muggle primary school... how...?" he asked, his voice trailing off.

"My previous life," Harry said easily with a small smile. "You know that person I told you about? The one I died for? My lover?"

Sirius' eyes widened slightly and he nodded his head slowly.

"This is him," Harry said, his face brightening with a wide smile. "I finally found him. I've been searching for him for... well, more than half a decade. Basically as soon as I was able to get out of the Dursley's house and started venturing into the magical world again, I was trying to track him down. Not an easy prospect when I had no idea who he might be, let alone where, or how old... hell, I couldn't even necessarily know for sure he'd been reborn. It's a rather tricky business, the whole reincarnation thing..."

"Wait, wait," Sirius said, putting his hands up and cutting Harry off. "Are you saying that he's the same as you? I mean, the whole ritual to keep your memories thing... he did it too?"

"Yes," Harry said with a firm nod of his head and a large smile.

"How many people do you know from your last life who've done this?" Sirius asked, somewhat incredulously.

"Just me and him. We never told anyone else about it. We did it together. It was so that we could always... be together," Harry finished with a shrug and a slightly bashful smile. "I've loved him for... well, forever, really. We grew up together as kids. We were both orphans. We only had each other. We went to Hogwarts together, and it was then that we really... I don't know, *realized* the full extent to how we felt about each other. That it wasn't a brotherly love. It was more. And after school we traveled together. We worked together. I... the last twelve years *without him* have been the hardest of my life. I have missed him *so much* that it hurt."

Sirius gaped at Harry, clearly a bit dumbstruck by Harry's admission. Slowly, he closed his mouth and blinked a few times, mulling over Harry's words. "How... how did you find him?"

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "It's really ridiculous, honestly. All the spells I tried to tack him down... all of the resources I used, and the contacts I made... none of it worked. But yesterday while walking down Diagon Alley I saw him. I just... *saw him*. Of course, if he had been in his human form I never would have recognized him since he's got a new body, just like I do. But he was in his animagus form, and that didn't change. Just like mine didn't change. I recognized him instantly and that was that."

"He's an animagus too?"

Harry nodded. "Of course. We learned it together."

"What's his form?"

"He's a cat. Just a simple house cat."

"A cat and a bat?"

Harry shrugged, still grinning.

Sirius sighed and ran his hand through his loose wavy hair. "This is... this is a lot to take in... *again*."

Harry chuckled. "Sorry for making your life so complicated," he apologized, obviously not *really* meaning it.

Sirius snorted. "I'll take complicated over Dementors any day."

"Glad to know."

"So... what now?"

"Well, I have to admit that part of me would be perfectly happy running off with him and just disappearing off the face of the planet, but we both know that wouldn't go over too well. Being The-Boy-Who-Lived and all that rubbish... And since I can't run off with Dominic, I

figured I'd take him with me. We said that he couldn't have afforded magical tutors or to go to any of the schools, but the reality is that he saw absolutely no point in going to a magic school since he obviously already *knows* everything that they'd teach in some school for children. He was just some nameless muggleborn that no one knew about or cared about. It was perfectly easy for him to just disappear into the background, but not me.

"In any case, he's willing to endure going through the motions of Hogwarts again if it means sticking by me, so we're hoping to get him enrolled. He's twelve right now and still will be on September first, so he can go into the second year with me. Of course, getting him into Hogwarts means he's going to need a legal guardian. Otherwise he'll end up a ward of the Ministry or Hogwarts and we'd obviously rather avoid that."

"So you want me to... adopt him or something?" Sirius asked.

Harry shrugged. "Basically... yes."

Sirius gave a weak little laugh and sighed. "Well, I suppose I can do that."

Harry's grin grew into a beaming smile. "You'll really do it?"

"I'll do it."

"That's fantastic! Thanks Sirius! Really, thank you *so much*. I can't express how grateful I am that you're willing to help us out like this."

Sirius sighed but smiled. "Yeah, no problem, kiddo. It's the least I can do after what you've done for me."

"Okay... well, I'm gonna head back in. He and I still have loads to catch up on. Alright?"

"Yeah, yeah. Go ahead."

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AN: To check out the Prewett Family Tree I put together, go here:

[http: dl\(dot\)dropbox\(dot\)com/u/7067561/images/Prewett_Fam_Tree\(dot\)jpg](http://dl(dot)dropbox(dot)com/u/7067561/images/Prewett_Fam_Tree(dot)jpg)

Rebirth Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Rating: M

Rating: M

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: 17 pages long this time. Posted on Feb 2nd 2011. Again – no beta, and minimal proof reading, so typos are likely.

– – – – – Rebirth Chapter 26 – – – – –

Sirius Black walked with heavy tired feet, down the stairs, past the foyer and through the hall towards the kitchen. He passed the open door to the living room and heard the quiet voices of Harry and Dominick from within and chuckled tiredly in amusement that the two boys could actually be up so damned early. *Freakish morning people*. He walked into the kitchen and yawned loudly as he made his way to the coffee pot and tapped his wand on the top, instantly causing it to hiss slightly as hot water began to fill the pot and turn black. He heaved a tired sigh and smiled happily as the smell of coffee filled the room.

He had just come down from a annoyingly short 'nap'. After sunrise he had helped an exhausted Remus up into his own room after yet another rough full-moon, and then had gone into his own room to collapse on his bed. It had only been about two and a half hours since then, but he had known he needed to get out of bed. Remus would be out for most of the day, but he would have to check on him in an hour to make sure all the scratches were healing, and the boys might want to do something for the day, requiring his presence. Maybe he could get some pepper-up potion from the Chemist downtown.

He really needed to get a better stock of potions in the house. At the moment, all he had were a few healing pastes and some pain potions... and a few hangover draughts. He'd only really stocked up on the things he'd need for Remus for the mornings after his monthly trials.

Harry, in his animagus form, had joined Sirius and Remus for about half the night, but had then went off to bed. *Which* bed... Sirius wasn't sure. He wasn't sure he wanted to know either. It was... very... odd, to think that Harry's... Harry's *lover* from his previous life was here now.

Sirius could, rationally, get himself to acknowledge that Harry wasn't *really* eleven years old. The kid certainly *acted* older. The way he spoke sounded older than any kid. Sirius believed

what Harry had told him. That definitely wasn't a problem. The whole story was crazy, but he believed it. Still – rationally accepting that something was the truth was different then looking at someone who *looked* like a kid and convincing yourself that they weren't really a kid.

Sirius Black had grown up in the magical world; grown up in a world where the impossible was common place. Just the same, he was having a very difficult time wrapping his mind around everything that had been happening to him recently. There were times that he wondered if he was actually still in Azkaban, and he had finally lost his mind and was just living in a delusional world of his own creation.

But he knew that wasn't possible because he was no where creative enough to have thought up something so unbelievable as this.

He'd spoken with Harry and Dominick a bit more the previous night but the two had mostly kept to themselves, and Sirius had needed to put most of his focus on Remus and preparing for the full moon. Remus was obviously nervous about having Dominick in the house during the full moon. He'd been on the brink of Flooing to Hogsmeade and going to the Shrieking Shack, but Sirius had managed to talk him out of it after casting several extra sound silencing wards around the basement and the room that Remus would be spending the night in and adding even *more* locks.

Sirius didn't know yet if Harry had told Dominick about Remus' Furry Little Problem. It obviously wasn't Harry's secret to tell, but Sirius knew that Harry trusted Dominick and... well, he wouldn't be surprised if Harry had let it slip. Part of Sirius had actually wondered for a moment about the possibility of bringing Dominick in on their full-moon activities, in his own animagus form, but there was really no way to explain it away. It had been difficult enough to buy that *one* eleven year old could have some how managed such a transformation at such a young age, but two? No way. It was just far too impossible. Remus wasn't *that* gullible.

Sirius filled his mug with coffee, added a little cream, and sat down at the small round table in the breakfast nook. He sighed heavily as he slowly sipped at his mug.

Remus.

Sirius felt incredibly conflicted about this whole thing. He would stay by Harry's side, like he'd said; there was no question of that; but he hated lying to Remus. He desperately wished that Harry would consider bringing Remus in on the Big Secret.

He was sure that Remus would believe it. He was also fairly sure that Remus would also chose to stand by Harry even after the truth about Harry's whole past life thing was revealed. Remus *was* still grateful to Dumbledore for the opportunity he'd been given to teach, and for what the man had done for him when he was younger, but he also knew not to trust Dumbledore either. The aging Headmaster clearly had ulterior motives in regards to Harry. This whole mess with some crazy prophecy, the fact that Dumbledore *knew* all along that Sirius hadn't been the Secret Keeper and yet he had left him to rot in Azkaban... and the very real possibility that he'd done it just so that he could maintain control over Harry's life... well, it left a very very bitter taste in both men's mouths.

And as insane as the truth about Harry's rebirth and the whole past life thing was, Sirius had to admit it was also slightly amusing. Overwhelming and difficult to believe, but definitely amusing. It was like the most outrageous prank ever pulled. Sort of defying death, but... *crazy. And no one knew!* No one suspected them. Because, honestly? How could someone ever suspect something so unbelievable?

But he supposed that was why Harry was cautious with who he told. No one would ever *guess* the truth, but once you were told... well it was still unbelievable, but it also explained a lot. All the weird, confusing, and inexplicable things about Harry made a lot more sense if he had the memories and experience of an adult wizard behind him. And if Dumbledore suddenly realized that all this effort he'd gone to, to try and control Harry's life was wasted because Harry wasn't really some naïve child that could be manipulated... well, there was no telling what Dumbledore would do then. He obviously wanted Harry for something – most likely to do with that damned prophecy – and was hoping he could just nudge Harry into what he wanted. But what would he do when he realized that wouldn't work? Sirius really didn't know, and Harry obviously didn't want to risk finding out.

Sirius was pretty good at Occlumency. There were undoubtedly other wizards who were better at it, but Sirius knew he was still better than average. His father never would have allowed him out of the house and into Hogwarts without knowing his son could at least tell if someone was trying to use Legilimency on him. The Black Family valued its secrets above all else, and paranoia was practically a secondary family motto. Sirius had been tutored in elementary Occlumency starting the summer he turned ten, all the way until the following summer when he left for Hogwarts.

Then he was sorted into Gryffindor.

After that, Sirius' father didn't really care much anymore. He was too *disappointed*. Sirius rolled his eyes, bitterly.

Sirius had let his studies in the mind arts slack considerably after that, but he never completely forgot what he'd learned and the foundation he had, provided a good starting point for his Auror training when near-mastery of the skill had basically been mandatory.

Remus did not have that advantage. He didn't come from an old pure-blood family that hired expensive specialty tutors for obscure mind arts. Remus' family had been decidedly middle-class. Not wealthy by any means, but they had been comfortable enough... well, they were until Remus had been bitten.

He and James had tried teaching Remus a little Occlumency while they were in Auror training. Remus had wanted to try and learn it since he was joining the Order with them, even though he wasn't going into a career that required a skill like Occlumency. Plus, Remus would never pass up an opportunity to learn. But they'd been rather pressed for time and pressured with everything involved with starting a new life fresh out of school. So much had been going on at the time with the war, the Order, starting new careers, and then Lily had gotten pregnant...

Sirius sighed and ran his hand through his hair as he took another deep gulp of his cooling coffee. He could understand Harry's reluctance to tell Remus. Even if the man did suddenly

become good at Occlumency, it didn't change the fact that he would be around Dumbledore on a daily basis for nearly ten months out of the year. It was highly unlikely that Dumbledore would go rooting around the minds of his teachers unless he felt like he had a seriously desperate reason for doing so – they were *adults* after all, and even without being able to keep Dumbledore out, Remus would know the man had tried to use Legilimency on him, and he could easily press charges for such an attack. Using Legilimency was *illegal* after all...

Still, the risk existed. And the less sensitive information Remus knew, the less temptation there would be for Dumbledore to do such a thing.

That didn't change the fact that Sirius *hated* hiding things from Remus. He *hated* lying to him. Remus was... well, aside from Harry, Remus was all Sirius really had keeping him going. They were like life-lines for him. His motivation to keep himself together. His reason to keep moving forward.

Harry needed him, and he would keep himself together so that he could be there for Harry. He wasn't stupid – he knew that the reason that Harry had gotten him out of Azkaban was because he wanted his help. Needed his help. And Sirius was going to make sure he held up his end. It didn't matter if Harry was the reincarnation of some wizard who died decades ago, Harry was still James' son and *his* godson. He had promised James and Lily that he would look after their son if anything happened to them, and he meant to keep that promise.

Okay, so the kid wasn't exactly a *kid* like he'd expected, but it was probably better that way. He was no father figure. He'd never been cut out for something like that, and he honestly wouldn't have known what to do with a kid. He would have felt lost with some kid suddenly totally dependent on him when he was still feeling just barely beyond being lost and desperately trying to pull together some semblance of a life.

So he would hold it together to do what he could for Harry. But he was also holding it together to prove to Remus that he could. That he didn't need to be supported or taken care of. He was a grown man and he could take care of himself. More than that. He could take care of others as well. And he *would*. He would look after Harry and... and his newly discovered second cousin – a strangely amusing and still very weird thought – and he could look after Remus too. If the damn stubborn fool would just let him.

Because Azkaban had made him realize a great many things.

What's really important. That silly insecurities are a terrible reason to keep things hidden when you care about someone...

Sirius brought his mug up to his lips but found it empty. He blinked down into the stained cup and chuckled weakly at himself before sighing, standing up and placing the cup into the sink. No sooner had it touched the bottom when Dobby appeared looking excited and exceedingly chipper.

The little guy quickly asked if Sirius wanted breakfast started. He honestly wasn't very hungry but decided he'd go ask the 'kids' if they wanted food and told Dobby to wait a minute and he'd go find out.

He wandered out of the kitchen, across the hall and came to an abrupt halt at the entrance to the living room.

On one of the couches further into the room, Dominick was sitting in the center of the couch with Harry straddling his lap, a knee on each side of his hips, sunk into the couch cushions. Dominick's hands were wrapped possessively around Harry with one perched clearly on Harry's rear and the other moving up and down his back, fisting the fabric of Harry's shirt. Harry's hands were in Dominick's previously neat hair, fussing it into an utter disarray with quite a bit of enthusiasm, and the pair were engaged in a rather heavy snogging session.

There was obviously a lot of tongue in that kiss. And heavy rutting. Yup. Lots of rutting. Harry was quite enthusiastically grinding his hips against the other boy beneath him, and the other boy... oh... he's moaning now... and thrusting upwards.

Their lips broke apart and Harry's head fell back on his shoulders with a euphoric expression as Dominick began to attack Harry's neck with his tongue and open-mouthed kisses. Dominick's hand released Harry's shirt and slipped away from his back and snaked in between them and down the front of Harry's pants, and Harry *moaned*...

Sirius jerked himself away from his position of stunned shock and quickly spun around and left before he could witness anymore. He would ask them about breakfast... um... *later*. Much later.

He hurried back into the kitchen and told Dobby to hold off on food. They'd probably wait to have a meal until lunch, unless the boys came in and asked for something sooner than that. The elf looked a bit distressed, but Sirius finally managed to get him to scurry off to the cupboard by the pantry. Sirius sat back down into the chair he had occupied earlier and let his head fall into his hands as he hunched over, resting his elbows on his knees.

That had been... bizarre... and intense... and *wrong*. *But maybe not*, he thought, correcting himself. Not really. They weren't *really* eleven and twelve. Not really.

It was another one of those 'rationally knowing they weren't really kids' versus what your brain and eyes naturally thought and saw. Seeing two young boys doing... *that*... Well, it was blatantly obvious they'd done something like that before. It wasn't the awkward exploration or experimentation of two twelve year old boys. That was intimate and experienced.

They would definitely have to make sure they didn't do that when there was the chance that Remus just could walk in on them. They were lucky that Remus was out for the day thanks to the full moon.

Sirius sighed and shook his head in his hands. It was a lot to take in so suddenly. The introduction of Dominick had added a new level of reality to Harry and his past-life story. And Harry had seemed so legitimately *happy* about the arrival of the other boy... er... *man*. They were clearly very happy with each other *right now*, that was for sure.

Sirius realized that he really needed to get to know this Dominick person more. He didn't even know what his name used to be in his past life. It was also rather insane that he was related to him in *this* one. Sirius had met the kid's father, his cousin Ignatius, of course. Not

many times though. Sirius' father hadn't been terribly close with his sister Lucretia during Sirius' childhood. They'd remained much closer with Sirius' mother's side. His uncle Cygnus and his three daughters. Sirius had always gotten the impression that his father didn't entirely approve of Lucretia's marriage to Ignatius Prewett Sr.

The man wasn't a blood traitor, exactly, but some of his family... And Aunt Lucretia had slowly distanced herself from the rest of the family after her marriage to the man, which meant when she had her son, he'd been distanced from them all as well.

When he was growing up, it had always seemed to Sirius that since Ignatius Jr. was a 'Prewett' and did not carry the 'Black' name, that it wasn't as important to maintain ties with them. Sirius was just as related to Ignatius as he was to Bella, Cissy, and Andy, but he'd seen them almost constantly growing up, while only seeing Ignatius a hand full of times.

So it really wasn't surprising that he'd never known Ignatius had a son. It *was* strange that the boy would grow up not knowing who his father had been, considering that Ignatius had done the proper ceremonies to name the kid his heir. But according to the family tree Ignatius had died the same year that Dominick had been born. The kid had been about three months old when his father had died.

If Dominick did the same memory ritual that Harry did, wouldn't he remember that time? Wouldn't he have realized that his father was a wizard?

Unless Ignatius was living as a muggle during that time... which seemed unlikely, but it's not like Sirius knew the man very well. He could have been living in hiding. Sirius had no idea if his cousin had had any involvement in the war. Of course, any old pure-blood like Ignatius who would willingly chose to marry a muggle woman would be an instant target. *Blood-traitor*.

So much to think about. So many questions.

And the only people with answers to any of his questions were in the other room, snogging. His godson and his cousin's son, *were snogging*.

He wondered for a brief moment if he should talk to them about... stuff... but quickly squashed that thought. They were grown men, right? Grown men in the bodies of young boys, but mentally and emotionally they knew how to... er... not hurt each other. Merlin, this was awkward to even *think* about, let alone ponder *talking* to them about it.

He would hold off. If anything, he would talk to them about being discreet, but that was it.

— — —

Harry's second week of summer, and his first week spent with Tom at the house, passed surprisingly quickly. It was a week of transition by nature, and everyone was adjusting to the new arrangement with relative ease, all things considered.

Sirius had engaged the 'boys' with what was obviously an extremely uncomfortable (for him, at least) conversation about discretion that had left Tom mildly annoyed, and Harry very

amused. Harry had promised that they would make sure to avoid any public displays of affection if there was any chance of Remus, or anyone else, walking in on them.

They also promised him that they were taking every precaution they felt necessary when they were in either of their rooms together. Each night they would each retreat into their respective rooms, Tom would cast a proximity alarm and lock his door and then cast '*vallumpotus*' on the wall between their rooms, creating a door there and walk right into Harry's room.

The first night in several decades that the two had spent in the same bed, Harry decided, was the happiest night of his second life. Wrapped up in Tom's arms – even if they were thin, somewhat gangly twelve-year-old arms. It was Tom, and he was sleeping beside him. Things were finally *right* again.

Not only was this Tom's first week in the house, it was also Remus' first week in the house. Although the first two days were spent mostly resting and recovering from the full moon, which was probably good since it meant he didn't have as much energy to closely scrutinize Harry and 'Dominick' as the pair enjoyed finally being in each other's company again after so many years apart. This lack of attention was also important because Harry had slipped a couple times and called Tom 'Tom'. He had managed to play it off by pretending he'd said 'Dom' instead, and no one questioned it.

Tom was less than thrilled with the nickname, especially when Sirius picked up on it and started using it as well. The only person who had been allowed to use the name 'Tom' during the last... well, *forty years*, basically – was Harry. Or, rather, Heri. He hadn't allowed *anyone else* to use his birth name. The only person who had dared use it without his permission had been Dumbledore, and he'd done it with the obvious intention of annoying him.

The opportunity to get a new name with relative ease, had been nice and convenient, and he somewhat liked the name Dominick. He had quickly corrected Sirius, insisting that he greatly disliked the nickname 'Dom' and that Harry only called him that as a tease.

That didn't seem to work in stopping the man's use of it. If anything... it seemed to provide incentive to use it more often since the man seemed to equate bonding with teasing, which only served to significantly annoy Tom. There were a few times that Sirius teased Tom in one way or another and quite clearly using the name 'Dom' with the purposing of 'teasing' and Harry had seen a furious gleam in Tom's eye that gave him worried pause, but each time Tom had managed to reign his temper in within moments and reapply his mask.

While Tom still disapproved of how much information Harry had trusted Sirius with, he was willing to acknowledge that Sirius had his uses and doing anything to the man would be extremely counter productive. Especially since Sirius was already working on the whole adoption thing. Since he already had the experience from his efforts to acquire custody of Harry, Sirius already knew exactly who he needed to contact to get started on the whole process, and so far things were progressing fine. No one really *cared* if Sirius Black tried to adopt some kid that appeared out of no where, so there wasn't any worry about someone contesting it. The only roadblock was the fundamental tedium of Ministry bureaucracy. They were simply waiting on how long it took for paperwork to make its way through the Ministry.

It was about four days into the week when Remus was finally back up to full working order that he had suggested the group pay a visit to Diagon Alley so that they could get Dominick some new things of his own. No one saw any reason to argue with the suggestion. Harry had no qualms with getting out of the house for a change. He and Tom had basically spent the last few days holed up in Harry's room, or in the house's small library with books that they'd spelled to appear innocuous.

Harry also needed to visit Gringotts, however the thing was that he needed to visit his *old* vault, not his Potter trust vault. Sirius knew he had another vault, but obviously Remus didn't, and he wasn't about to let the man find out, either. He would only be able to get down to the vault if he could do it without Remus present. He would have to play it by ear.

Tom was more than willing to help though – especially considering that Harry was going down to his old vault so that he could gather up all the old Grimoires he had stored down there, so that Tom could now make use of them. Harry had them all basically memorized, and had seen little point in keeping many of them with him. Now there was a valid reason for digging the out of storage. Tom could finally read the damn things.

After the group arrived at Diagon Alley Harry and Tom suggested the plan of the group splitting in two. Harry and Sirius headed to Gringotts while Tom and Remus went to Madam Malkin's to start fitting Tom for his new wardrobe. When Harry and Sirius entered the bank the two split off going to two separate counters and presenting two different keys. Each was quickly escorted to the carts and taken to their respective vaults.

Harry tried to get his things collected as quickly as possible. He'd brought his space-expanded knapsack with him, shrunk down and tucked into the inner pocket of the light weight outer robe he was wearing over a forest green tunic. He unshrunk the bag and quickly set to stuffing as many of his Necromancer books and supplies as he could find in the few minutes he'd given himself before finally shutting it, re-shrinking it, and stuffing it back in his pocket.

He and the goblin arrived back on ground-level about five minutes later than Sirius, who had only gone down to refill his spending money pouch, but the man didn't mind waiting. Minutes later they were back out on the street and heading towards Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions.

Tom had always had expensive taste in clothes, and Harry could tell that the man was having difficulty restraining himself. If he'd been using his own money, he wouldn't have restrained himself at all, but there was no easy way to explain away Tom's substantial funds to the two adults. Tom didn't have a vault with the goblins with some special inheritance trickery like Harry did. He'd never trusted the goblin bank with his money. Not specifically because of they were goblins – no, he hadn't trusted the fact that no matter how autonomous the goblins pride themselves in being, they still have to occasionally bow down to the whims of the Ministry.

If the Ministry had gotten wind that the Dark Lord had a vault at Gringotts, they would have no doubt insisted on being allowed to seize the contents. And the goblins would have eventually bowed, albeit bitterly, to the pressure.

No... Tom's money had been hidden in numerous secret caches all over Britain. Some of his funds were still inaccessible to him even now, because he's basically trusted them in the hands of some of his followers. Never anything too substantial, of course. The muggle idiom 'never put all your eggs in one basket' was one that Tom believed in whole-heartedly.

For the sake of his global travels, Tom had collected quite a bit of funds for his use and still had a reasonable amount on him, even now. But he was supposed to be an orphan who had spent the last two and a half years as a ward of the Greek government, being passed around from one foster home to the next. A scenario that did not, in any way, leave his strange surplus of funds reasonably explainable.

So, instead, he was left to rely on the financial backing of his 'second-cousin' and his generosity. Tom had no qualms with this, but he did put on a show of 'not wanting anyone's charity'. This required him to hold back a bit in the quality of his new clothing, which Harry could tell slightly annoyed the man... boy... whatever.

After clothes shopping at Madam Malkin's was done, Sirius dragged them off to Twilfitt and Tattings because they apparently had a section of muggle-style clothing to choose from. Tom had momentarily sneered at the suggestion but had masked it quickly enough. The group went in and made their way over to the section of the store that had racks of muggle clothes to choose from. Harry and Tom both took one look at the selection and snickered quietly before turning to Sirius and telling him that they were wasting their time in there and if the man honestly wanted muggle clothes they were better off going to an actual muggle store.

Wizards had always been pathetic at understanding muggle fashion, and that clearly hadn't changed at all in the last fifty years.

The two 'boys' dragged the adults out of the store and the group refocused their shopping towards other needs. Sirius dragged the group to Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop and Sugarblum's Sweets Shop, while Harry and Tom both insisted on stops at Obscurus Books and Flourish and Blotts. They ended with a visit to Wiseacre's Wizarding Wares where they picked up some things for Tom's bedroom so he could personalize the space some.

Harry could see Tom eyeing the Magical Menagerie every time they'd passed it as they had made their way up and down the alley, and apparently Remus had noticed as well because just before they were preparing to leave the alley for the day, Remus suggested a visit to the pet store by asking Harry if he needed to get any treats or supplies for Hedwig. Of course, if the real reason was *just* so Harry could get owl treats, they could have just as easily gone to Eyelops Owl Emporium, not the Magical Menagerie.

Tom looked legitimately hesitant with the suggestion and Harry knew why. If Tom got himself a 'pet', he'd be looking for a snake. No question. And Harry knew that Tom probably really *missed* having a snake, and it was no doubt why he'd been eyeing the store.

But a snake was just... well, it was *too* obvious. Plain and simple.

The group entered the store and Harry quickly restocked all of the supplies he needed for his owl while Tom casually browsed the numerous animals. Harry walked over to him as the two adults were distracted and they eyed the reptile cages.

"You know you can't," Harry said quietly.

Tom *sighed*, quite heavily, but nodded his head with a resigned look. "I know," he said back, just as quietly.

He reached into one of the large open tanks and gently ran his fingers over the back of a rather large boa constrictor and smiled softly as the beautiful snake hissed out it's approval. Another quiet sigh escaped Tom's lips before he retracted his head and turned away from the tank.

Harry watched Tom's retreating form with a small, soft smile. Maybe he'd find some way to get Tom a snake when they got to school. Assuming they could get the other boys in their dorm to be okay with that... assuming that Tom got sorted into Ravenclaw.

Harry shook his head and quickly followed Tom to the front of the store. Remus was asking him if he'd seen any animals that caught his fancy and Tom simply gave the man a very small smile and shook his head 'no'.

Harry couldn't help but feel slightly amused at how much effort Remus seemed to be putting into making 'Dominick' feel welcome and accepted in their 'family'. Of course, Remus honestly believed their cover story, and he was a very compassionate man. Sirius knew that Dominick wasn't really a kid, so he was mostly just giving he and Harry their space. Remus was trying to... well, he was sort of taking on the role of pseudo parent.

For as much as it amused Harry, it clearly annoyed Tom. Or at least, it was clear to *Harry*. Tom had kept his masks in place well enough that Remus hadn't yet picked up on any sense of annoyance. If anything, he probably thought that Tom was just rather anti-social – understandably so, considering his supposed experiences in the foster system.

Finally the group left the store and Floo'd back home via the Leaky Cauldron.

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Tom and Harry had escaped to Tom's room with the numerous bags of clothes and books to unload his new things, but it was only about an hour later that they were called downstairs for dinner. Remus had spent almost the entire meal talking with Tom about his life and experiences so far; asking questions about where all he'd lived, things he'd done with his mum, about he and Harry's time in muggle primary school, and his time spent in Greece.

Harry and Tom had adapted some stories from their *actual* youth to fill in the stories about their fabricated childhood friendship among muggles growing up in the 80's – after all the best lies are half truth – but the stories that Tom told about his childhood as Dominick Parker, and about his mother were surprisingly fleshed out and completely foreign to Harry. They were not adaptations from their youth back in the 30's or any life that Harry was familiar with, and yet they were extremely believable, and Tom almost didn't appear to be lying, which seemed odd because Harry could almost always tell when Tom was lying.

Dinner was finished and the conversations lasted a bit longer while they all sat in the living room for some time before Harry and 'Dominick' excused themselves to go up to Harry's

room. The two entered the room and Harry locked the door and set up the standard privacy wards he always cast around the room that would alert him if anyone approached the door and inform him of who it was who approached.

Tom had already climbed onto the bed with his back propped against the headboard and reached for the *Grimoire* he was currently in the middle of from the bed-side table. Harry climbed into the bed and snuggled up against Tom's side, sighing happily. The bed was full-sized, but the two of them were relatively small still, so it was plenty roomy for the pair. Just the same, Harry had always been rather cuddly and affectionate in bed – something that Tom had always snickered about. Despite his playful teasing, Harry knew Tom liked it and had absolutely no inclination to give the other wizard any space.

Tom had his legs bent up and supporting the book resting there. One hand was free to turn the pages but the other had instantly slid around Harry and was absently carding through Harry's long black tresses. Harry sighed in contentment as Tom's fingers massaged his scalp and was about halfway to slipping into unconsciousness when a thought passed through his mind.

"Hey Tom?" Harry said, opening his eyes and looking up at the other 'boy' who was intently focused on the book in his lap.

"Hmm?" Tom hummed, not looking up from his book.

"Where'd you come up with those stories from 'your' childhood with 'your' mum? They were really well worked out."

Tom seemed to freeze in his reading, frowned slightly and sat up a bit straighter. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but closed it again a moment later and took on a look that seemed to say that he was trying to work out just what to say. Finally he turned entirely towards Harry and Harry scooted himself so that he was now sitting up, back against the headboard.

"I... didn't actually 'come up' with them. They're actually... well, *true*." Tom said.

Harry blinked at Tom with obvious confusion for a moment before he spoke. "Wait... what?"

Tom chuckled slightly and shrugged. "This requires a bit of explanation, actually," Tom began as he reached over to the bedside table on his side of the bed, picked up a bookmark and slipped it into the book and closed it. "When I took ownership of this body there was nothing left of Dominick. He'd left it an empty shell as far as I could tell. All of my memories from my life had stayed with my disembodied spirit and when I took ownership of this body, my memories filled this mind. However as time passed, I became rather frustrated with some of the limitations of this body. I suppose I would say that this body was probably very average in just about every way. This meant, of course, that it was lacking in comparison to my own former body.

"I... *missed* the convenience and precision that my old eidetic memory granted me. During my travels across the world, I took a few breaks to do some research into enhancing rituals, and tried to determine what would suit my needs best and what I could actually perform on this body considering it's age. Last Halloween I performed one that would enhance several

things I found lacking; my physical memory and recall, being the most prominent improvement."

"Wait, last Halloween?" Harry cut in.

Tom frowned and nodded. "Yes, why?"

Harry snorted. "After last Halloween Lucius sent me a letter informing me that his mark had burned, that's all. I guess it was a result of this ritual you performed."

"Ah. Not terribly surprising," Tom said with a small nod. "Anyway, the ritual had an unexpected side effect. Not only did it give me improved recall and precision of my own memories, I suddenly had access to about nine years worth of memories that weren't mine. I guess that the life experiences of the actual Dominick Parker were still chemically imprinted on my physical mind and the ritual I performed was enough to bring them out." Tom sighed slightly and shrugged.

Harry blinked at him with obvious surprise. "Wait... so you actually *remember* this kid's life?"

"I remember *some* of it. I recall my own memories with very sharp precision, but the memories from my body's life before me are a bit patchy in places."

"Why didn't you mention this before?" Harry asked, somewhat incredulously.

"It didn't seem important. They're not my memories. They don't matter."

"That's got to be so weird," Harry murmured as he looked away, slightly unfocused and pondered how odd it might be to suddenly have nine-years worth of someone else's memories suddenly in your head. "I guess it'd probably be like that if you dissolved the memory filter on your astral tether and suddenly remembered all your past lives..."

"What was that?"

"Oh, I was just thinking... well, you remember way back when I first performed the ritual to allow me full access to my astral mind? Where I destroyed the filter on my astral tether?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know how at the time, I didn't know yet if I'd lived previous lives before that. If I had, I very well could have come out of it suddenly remembering countless lives before my present one."

Tom scowled deeply. "Yes... I *remember*," he said sharply through tightly clenched teeth.

Harry sighed and rolled his eyes. "Oh come *on*. Don't be like that. It's been *decades*."

"Yes, but you never warned me about that particular possible outcome until it was too late to turn back. What would I have done if you'd had all these countless past lives suddenly crammed in your head and had woken up and –" Tom cut off suddenly, looked away and scowled at the wall.

Harry sighed heavily and reached out to rest his hand over Tom's. He'd felt guilty about it for a long time and was currently berating himself for having brought it up again. As much as he'd sort of wished to have memories from some long-ago past lives, in the end he was grateful that he'd been such a young soul just because of how upset Tom had gotten by the whole possible revelation.

But Harry had wanted to do it and wasn't going to let Tom's fears stop him. He'd been convinced that, no matter how many past lives and memories he could have gained, he would still love Tom just the same. Old lives wouldn't negate the importance and power of his current one.

Tom hadn't been quite so convinced. He'd been afraid that Harry would suddenly change. That he would suddenly become someone else entirely by gaining memories of all his past lives. Past lives that, fortunately, hadn't existed.

"But doesn't this prove that your fears are... well, unwarranted?" Harry asked suddenly, causing Tom to look back and scowl at him.

"Unwarranted?" he hissed out in obvious annoyance at Harry's word choice.

"Well, what I mean is... you suddenly remembered Dominick's life – at least nine years worth of his life – and that didn't change you, did it?"

Tom rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Of course not, but his was nine spotty years of inconsistent memories, versus my entire lifetime worth of crisp, precise, memories. There was no competition. Your situation could have very well been hundreds, if not thousands of years worth of memories, that could have easily overpowered your twenty-five years of memories..." Tom stopped and huffed in annoyance. "This is an obscenely pointless argument."

Harry chuckled weakly and nodded. "Yes, it is."

The pair settled into silence for a while and Tom sighed quietly a few times before Harry spoke again. "So what's it like... remembering Dominick's memories? I mean... I'm guessing you don't remember anything about his father..."

"It's rather... strange. And no, I have no memories at all that pertain to his father. His mother never discussed the man at all. The boy seemed to instinctively realize that it was a tender subject for his mother and never asked either."

Harry nodded his head. "Did he... did he have a happy childhood?" Harry asked quietly as he looked at the wall to his side.

Tom was quiet for a long moment before he nodded his head. "He did. He... he loved his mother, and she loved him. They were very close."

"And you remember all that as if you were him?" Harry asked, looking at Tom now with barely contained curiosity.

"I do," Tom replied very quietly.

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During the start of the next week, a letter was finally sent off to Hogwarts to inquire about getting 'Dominick' registered for Hogwarts and what would be needed to get him started straight into second year.

McGonagall replied with some sort of pamphlet that was given out to the very few transfer students that Hogwarts accepted from time to time with information about where a student was expected to be with each of their magical subjects, and informing them that if Dominick wanted to start in second year, he would have to pass some equivalency tests to prove he was up to the task.

This would obviously not be a problem for him, so a reply was sent back asking for a time to be scheduled for Dominick to come and take the tests.

Remus offered to go over some of the textbooks with Dominick to help him prepare, but he had declined as politely as possible and instead Harry and Tom had retreated to 'study' alone. A day later they had retreated down to the basement potions lab with the excuse that they were going to practice potions since it was something they could do without worry of the getting in trouble for underage magic use. Remus actually informed them, as they were about to retreat to the basement, that he'd be gone for most of the day anyway because he was visiting Hogwarts.

Apparently McGonagall had asked each of the teachers to come in for a few hours at some point over the next week to help her put together tests in each of the subjects for Dominick. It was extra convenient because Harry and Tom weren't going to the basement to practice potions.

They got down there, locked and warded the door, and then Harry promptly pulled the Philosopher's Stone out of his pocket and made his way over to the large brewing bench to get things set up. The Stone was placed in a small metal ring that held it about eight inches off the table and below that they put a glass phial.

It took them about fifteen minutes to figure out exactly how to trigger the extraction process for the Elixir of Life, but once they had a steady dripping stream slowly began to trickle from the stone and into the jar.

It started out like beads of condensation on the surface of the stone that collected until they gained enough to start dripping down. It was a slow process, but fortunately the two had brought books to entertain them. Harry had one of the parseltongue books he had retrieved from the Chamber, while Tom was reading one of Harry's Necromancy Grimoires. It was an amusing reversal.

In the end, it took three hours to fill the glass jar to the top. They stopped the Stone's 'perspiring' and Harry slipped it back into his pocket while Tom took the contents of the jar and split it in half, between two bottles, each charmed to be shatter proof. They intended to

keep one for their own studies, but the other was prepared and sent off, via Hedwig, to Severus Snape later that afternoon.

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"Well, Remus, I must say... that is quite a story," Minerva McGonagall mused as she sat in her straight-backed chair in the office of the Deputy Headmistress at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Remus Lupin was sitting in a chair opposite her desk, hunched over and making a few notes on a piece of parchment in front of him while a stack of notes lay on the desk beside him from the previous years worth of first year classes.

He was writing out some of the fundamental topics introduced during the year so that Minerva could incorporate them into the test she would be giving Dominick to see if he was really ready to start straight into the second year.

"Yes..." Remus said slowly as he finished writing a line and sat back up. "It was really quite a surprise."

"I can only imagine. Having some boy just show up out of nowhere and discover he's Sirius' long lost second cousin..."

"And that he was Harry's friend growing up!" Remus remarked before chuckling weakly and shaking his head. "Quite a shock for all involved. Harry and Dominick most especially I think. I doubt either of them would have ever guessed that they're sort of distantly related. They're obviously very close and have been for quite a while. I think that they really missed each other after Dominick and his mother moved to Greece. I got the impression that Harry had been hoping he would see Dominick when he started Hogwarts and had been quite disappointed when the boy didn't attend last year. I've been watching them over the last week, and I have to say, I don't think I've ever seen Harry smile quite so much."

"They went to the same muggle school, you said?" McGonagall asked as Remus handed over the parchment he'd been preparing.

"Not exactly. They attended different primary schools, initially, however they were both identified as 'gifted' by their schools' staff and each day they'd be bussed away to a separate building where classes were held for exceptional students so that they could be challenged. That was how they met."

"So this Prewett boy is also... 'gifted'?" she clarified, raising her eyebrows slightly.

"Yes, I don't doubt it at all. He's clearly a very bright child. A bit cold and stand-offish at times, but given how he's had to live the last two years, I certainly can't blame him."

Minerva nodded her head and sat back in her chair slightly with a pensive look. "A Prewett... Didn't think I'd ever teach another one of those..."

"Yes, that was quite a shock as well," Remus agreed before smiling and chuckling slightly. "You should have seen Caradog's face... you remember Caradog Caedmon of course, don't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, he works for the Magical Historical Society now in their family trees department and he was the one who performed Dominick's test. He was downright ecstatic when he got a look at the tree. You should have seen his face when Dominick agreed to allow him to add it to their collection."

"He always was enthusiastic about history," Minerva mused with a smile curving the corners of her lips.

"Yes, he was," Remus chuckled. "We were all pretty shocked, of course. It's still pretty amazing to think that Dominick is related to Gideon and Fabian."

"You know that the Weasley's are Molly's sons, right?" Minerva asked.

"Right, right. They were all listed on the tree as well, of course. I didn't get to know Molly very well, though. Only met her a few times. I suppose the only reason I got close to her brothers was because they were in the Order. Molly was out of Hogwarts before I started my first year, after all, and Gideon and Fabian were four years ahead of me."

"The Prewett twins..." Minerva sighed. "And now we have the Weasley twins... amazing how much they look alike."

Remus chuckled weakly and sighed. "Yes... they remind me a lot of them too. I have to admit that I think it was the antics of Gideon and Fabian that really inspired James and Sirius to..." his voice trailed off and he suddenly cleared his throat and looked away guiltily.

Minerva pierced him with a reprimanding glare for a moment before it broke into a small amused grin. "Yes... I know. Although as much trouble and Gideon and Fabian got into during their years here, I have to say you four got into an awful lot more."

Remus gave her a sheepish grin.

"So, back to our new transfer student... you say he's had no official schooling while he lived in Greece?"

"No, he couldn't afford private tutors, and since the Ministry there had him down as a muggleborn he wasn't granted admission to Durmstrang. Although he says he did a lot of self study and bought a lot of second-hand text books in order to teach himself."

"Self study is well and fine, but it rarely runs equal with directed instruction."

Remus nodded. "I agree, although Dominick seems to be quite a focused and studious type. He and Harry have been spending a lot of time in Harry's room and the house's library with Harry's text books reviewing over things. I think Harry is really hoping to have his friend in the same year as him so they seem to be giving it a lot of effort."

"Well, if anyone can bring him up to speed it's Mr. Potter. I doubt I've ever seen a more studious and talented Ravenclaw than he. And he's such a help with the other students in class."

"Yes, he is," Remus agreed with a proud smile.

"So how long has Mr. Potter known Mr. Prewett?"

"Apparently they met when they were six and seven years old. Harry had some vague memories from his childhood about the magical world, and apparently even at age six he was already experimenting with his accidental magic. He witnessed Dominick perform some accidental magic at some point and approached him. They apparently became fast friends after that."

"Remarkable..." Minerva said with a slightly stunned look to her. "That boy never ceases to amaze me. He's mentioned his intentional practice of his 'accidental' magic before, but I must admit I didn't realize he'd been able to form any semblance of control at such a young age."

"Dominick could as well, apparently. They used to practice making things float, unlocking locked doors, and turning their classmates hair blue," Remus said with a small chuckle.

Minerva's eyes widened quite a bit but her lips remained a rather thin line. "Can they still do it? Wandlessly?" she asked after a minute.

Remus looked curious for a moment. "You know, I'm not sure. I'd go ask them to show me but... would performing wandless magic come up on the Trace?"

Minerva hummed thoughtfully. "I'm not actually sure. Obviously it wouldn't set off their wand Trace, but the Ministry still might pick it up on Harry's personal Trace. I doubt that Mr. Prewett's Trace – if he has one at all – is connected to our Ministry since it was likely applied when he was visited in Greece when he was ten. So he very well might still be able to perform some sort of magic without alerting anyone at the moment. Not that I'm condoning such a thing," she ended with a pointed look.

"Of course," Remus added quickly. "Well, you can always ask him for a demonstration when he comes for his placement test."

"That's true. I know that skill in wandless magic is rare, but it does happen from time to time with children. Of course they usually lose the skill once they become accustomed to relying on a wand," Minerva said.

"Yes... I wonder if Harry has tried to use any of his wandless abilities since he started at Hogwarts..."

"It would be interesting to find out if he still has a talent for it after a year of Hogwarts instruction," Minerva mused. "Something you could ask him about come September, I suppose."

Remus hummed and nodded his head as he looked thoughtful.

Minerva began to skim through the parchment that Remus had handed to her a moment earlier and the room fell into silence. "From what you've seen of Mr. Prewett, what house do you suppose he'll be sorted into?" Minerva asked suddenly, not looking up.

"Oh... I suspect he'll be in Ravenclaw with Harry.

She hummed absently and nodded her head. Finally a moment later she looked up. "Well, I believe that this will do fine. All I'm waiting for now is for Severus to owl me with his questions for Mr. Prewett and I can schedule a time for the test."

"That's great."

"You can tell Mr. Prewett that I'll be sending an owl when everything is ready."

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AN: I've got a new poll up.

Rebirth Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Rating: M

Rating: M

Pairing: HP/TR

Disclaimer: I am not JKRowling and I do not own Harry Potter.

AN: Sorry for the delay – expect more. My kids are sick, I'm sick, and my mom who usually babysits is sick, so I'm home with sick kids which is bleh.

– – – – – Rebirth Chapter 27 – – – – –

Harry had come to the firm conclusion that having dysfunctional plumbing was obscenely frustrating. For the last few years, a big part of him had been *dreading* having to go through puberty again, but now he was simply incredibly impatient for it to just happen already and get over with.

His frustratingly young body was able to get erections just fine. He just couldn't ejaculate. Tom could though, and Harry had managed to get the other 'boy' off just fine, quite a few times over the last week. Tom was more than willing and eager to reciprocate any physical favors, but Harry just couldn't reach completion, and it was a very frustrating situation to find himself in.

It was getting to the point that he was considering looking into potions or rituals that would speed up the whole puberty thing. Every boy went through puberty at a different time and pace. Generally between the ages of ten and fifteen. He'd be turning twelve in a couple weeks time, which put him in a nice average sort of location for spontaneous puberty-type growth spurts. If he showed up at Hogwarts in September with a slightly deeper voice, several inches taller, and a frustratingly greasy forehead with little red spots of teenage misery littering his skin, no one would actually question it. And there were plenty of potions and creams that could instantly magic away zits.

But it wasn't the kids and professors at school that he would have to worry about reacting to a sudden onslaught of puberty, it was Remus. Because if Harry took a potion to speed things up, it would be most apparent to the people who saw him before the potion and immediately after.

But he couldn't help but wonder if it was even worth the trouble. Once he and Tom got to Hogwarts they wouldn't have nearly as many opportunities to snog since privacy would be

scarce and twelve and thirteen would probably seem a bit early for dating. At that age, the most kids did was have a one-week 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' where they might give a single peck on the lips because their friends dared them to. Twelve year olds didn't tend to engage in heavy snogging.

And when he and Tom did get some legitimate privacy, they would most likely spend it in the Room of Hidden Things with an hour-long dose of ageing potion. So why bother with putting himself through the mood-swings and physical annoyances, like unpredictable body odor, of puberty any sooner than needed?

Once he really did start to go through some more obvious changes, then maybe he'd look up a potion to make things move along *faster*.

But until then, he still had the rest of the summer to be frustrated with his under-developed body, and the subtle teasing he occasionally got from Tom about it's frustrating deficiencies. Of course the smug bastard's body already had armpit and pubic hair, the occasional slow-growing chin stubble and his voice would break if he spoke quickly when he was excited – the last one being exceptionally amusing to Harry and a cause of annoyed embarrassment to Tom, when it happened. Of course, Tom's body was turning thirteen in a couple months, so he had almost a year's advantage over Harry's body.

Maybe he would ask Snape for help finding some different potion options.

Harry grimaced at the thought. He was more than willing to ask favors from the man, but this seemed a bit... private? Slightly embarrassing? Well... yes, it felt embarrassing, although he couldn't rationally explain why, it just *was*.

He'd been perfectly content to let his body go through the natural paces of aging and hormones at it's own speed... right up until he found Tom, that is. Or, more specific, right up until the first time they'd tried snogging in their current bodies.

There had definitely been some awkwardness to the whole thing. They hadn't done anything more than heavy snogging and rutting against each other – always while mostly clothed. The less clothes they were wearing, the more blatantly obvious their body's youth became, and neither one of them exactly fancied themselves particularly attracted to such... *youth*. But it was almost shocking how quickly and easily they'd both moved beyond any weirdness once they got into things. Tom was still Tom, no matter what body he was in, and Harry was attracted enough to *Tom* to not really care how young he *looked* – although, granted, if he looked nine-years-old or, Merlin forbid, even *younger than that*... well, there probably wouldn't be any snogging going on, that's for sure. But no matter how awkward their bodies made everything, it didn't change the fact that they had desperately missed each other, and deeply missed the intimacy that they'd grown accustomed to over the decades.

And it's not like Tom's old body was the only body that Harry had ever fucked, or vice versa. Granted, neither of them had ever had sex with anyone so... young. Sure, they were each other's first sex partners, but over the years they'd invited plenty of people to join their bed to spice things up some. Both had also wanted to know what it was actually like to lay with a woman, and they'd done that as well. They'd shared, they'd swapped, they'd partaken in trains... no one could ever accuse them of having a dull sex life. And they did tend to prefer

whoever they invited to join them to be around a certain age group. Usually around their early twenties, but there'd been a few seventeen and even sixteen year olds in there. But they'd never gone younger than that. Even evil Dark Lords had lines they preferred not to cross.

Of course, all those still very vivid memories of sexual experimentation with Tom were now haunting Harry because his underaged pecker was presently dysfunctional and he had no choice but to hold back and wait just because a certain part of his anatomy wasn't cooperating properly.

It was even more annoying than when he was an infant and he couldn't get his tongue and mouth to cooperate enough to get words to form correctly. Just another instance of his body not being able to keep up with his mind and memories.

He huffed a frustrated sigh and tried to reassure himself that he could be patient, even though he didn't really believe it. It's not like he didn't get any enjoyment out of the snogging and the groping. He just couldn't *complete*. Which... was frustrating.

Stupid, prepubescent body.

—

Harry had gotten his summer homework done already – it had been beyond easy, not like that was a surprise. Tom had gone ahead and done the same homework assignments as Harry for the sake of practice. They both knew that Tom would have difficulty dumbing himself down under any circumstances, and it was good if he got some actual practice doing it now, before he went to Hogwarts to take his equivalency exams with McGonagall.

It was the end of the second week of July and they still hadn't heard back from McGonagall on a time for 'Dominick's' test. Despite the lack of obvious progress on the 'getting Tom enrolled at Hogwarts' front, there had been quite a bit of progress on the 'getting Tom adopted by Sirius' front.

One unexpected part of the process, however, had been when the Department of Magical Child Welfare had contacted all of the other relatives on the family tree to see if any of them wanted to try to seek custody as well. What this meant was that they'd received owls from both Muriel and Tessie Prewett inquiring about 'Dominick' the very next day. Neither one wanted custody since both were set in their ways and believed themselves too old to take in a young boy, and neither intended to object to Sirius seeking custody in their stead, however they *did* want to arrange a meeting with the 'boy' to discuss his eventual role as Head of the Family, since he would gain the title as soon as he reached age seventeen.

The Prewetts were an ancient and very well respected old pure-blood line, however they'd never reached the same level of power or wealth as, say... the Malfoys or the Blacks. But still, Tom was clearly intrigued by whatever potential titles he might have come into by being in possession of his new body. At one point, the Prewett family had held a seat on the Wizengamot and Tom couldn't help but voice to Harry how amusingly convenient it would be if he could claim it upon reaching his majority.

It actually made Harry pause and wonder if *he* would be inheriting a seat on the Wizengamot because he knew the Potter's used to have one as well, and he was the only Potter left.

Arrangements were made for 'Dominick' and Sirius to meet with the two elder Prewett women over tea, for early August – neither woman could clear their schedule any earlier than that, apparently – and things went back to normal for exactly one day. And then they received a letter from Molly Weasley.

She was clearly both shocked and very very excited to have discovered a new addition to her extended family. She sent an invitation for lunch and insisted that they come to her family's home. And as such, that Saturday, Sirius, Harry, and Tom found themselves on the outskirts of Ottery St. Catchpole in Devon, standing at the point where a small dirt path led off a cobblestone road, marked with a crooked sign labeled 'The Burrow'. A short ways in the distance, at the end of the dirt path, one could easily see what appeared to be a house on the brink of collapse.

Sirius had side-along apparated both 'boys' to the edge of the Weasley's meager wards, and they were going to walk the rest of the way. Harry and Tom lingered slightly so that Sirius was a few feet ahead of them. Harry glanced over and saw Tom sneering at the house with obvious disgust, which only grew as they drew closer and got to see it even more clearly.

It was more than obvious that the only thing holding the house together was magic. The house itself looked as if it had started out as an old stone pigpen and then appeared to have been added upon and expanded multiple times over the years, adding several crooked stories to it and quite a few of the additions were tilting precariously with support structures that logic would dictate were clearly insufficient to hold anything up.

The yard to the front of the house had a small garage to the side of it, and beyond that a chicken coop could be seen. From what they could see from their vantage on the pathway leading towards the house, it appeared that the back garden had an old stone outhouse that had a few brooms leaning up against the side of it. Beyond that was an overgrown garden and then a pond filled with frogs croaking away merrily.

Harry realized he was sneering at the sight too and masked his expression as he heard Sirius speaking to them and saw the man turn to look over his shoulder at the two 'boys' trailing behind him.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" Harry called out as he skipped a few paces quicker to catch up with Sirius. He heard Tom sigh quietly as he did the same.

"Remus mentioned that their youngest son is in your year, right?" Sirius said, repeating himself.

"Oh... yeah," Harry said flatly, grimacing at the reminder that he was about to have lunch with Ron Weasley.

"And the twins are the ones that had the Marauder's Map?" Sirius went on.

"That's right," Harry confirmed. "They've still got it actually. You could probably ask them to show it to you. I imagine they've got it up in their room or something. I can't picture them leaving it at the school."

"They didn't give it to you?" Sirius asked, stopping and turning to look at Harry with surprise.

"No point. I made my own," Harry said with a shrug.

"What map?" Tom asked, looking slightly annoyed at not knowing what they were talking about.

"It's a map of Hogwarts that taps into the school's wards so that it can provide you with an animated labeled dot for each and every person registered by the school's ward system," Harry answered.

"Made your own? What do you mean, you made your own?" Sirius asked, looking incredulous.

"Well, I borrowed the one that you, Remus and my dad made and studied it, and I asked Remus some questions about how he did the charm work and linked them into the wards, and just... made my own," Harry answered with a dismissive shrug. "Mine's better, actually," he added with a smirk.

"Can I see it?" Sirius asked, still appearing a bit stunned.

Harry looked thoughtful for a moment as he debated it before shrugging. "Sure, don't see why not. It's back at home though."

"Of course," Sirius said with a nod as he turned back and resumed his journey to the house.

"A map that shows you where everyone is in the school?" Tom asked as he stepped closer and spoke quietly into Harry's ear.

Harry grinned. "Yeah, it's brilliant. I've got to show you all it can do once we get to Hogwarts in September. It's brilliant. Especially some of the... special features, I added."

Tom looked intrigued and smirked slightly before the two 'boys' had to turn their attention back to the house they had just arrived at. Sirius was already at the front door and knocking. A moment later the door was thrown open and an a short, plump, and frumpy-looking woman with flaming red hair and brown eyes greeted them with a wide, beaming smile.

She quickly welcomed them and motioned for the three of them to come inside. They were led into a cluttered sitting room littered with arms chairs of several different styles and states of disrepair, and a large sofa with several bits patched. There was a large fireplace, a wooden wireless set, and a clock that, rather than telling the time, appeared to list each member of the family and their current status. Instead of numbers it had phrases such as 'home', 'school', 'work', 'traveling', 'lost', and 'hospital'. Harry's eyebrows rose slightly into his forehead as he observed the clock with his Sight. It was quite an advanced bit of charm work. It appeared unique too. Harry wondered absently if one of the elder Weasley's had created the clock.

The woman introduced herself as Molly Weasley and was piratically gushing with excitement over their arrival. An initial introduction was made – '*Mrs. Weasley, this is Dominic Prewett and Harry Potter.*' '*It's a pleasure to meet you Mrs. Weasley,*' '*Oh, call me Molly!*' and then she made apologies, saying that lunch was just about ready and it would be just a minute, as she disappeared towards the back of the house to attend to whatever she was cooking.

Harry felt a tug and glance down to see Tom already sitting on one end of the couch and pulling slightly on the hem of Harry's outer robe, indicating he sit down as well. Harry quickly did so, just as the sound of feet came barreling down the staircase to the side of the sitting room. Sirius had just taken a seat in one of the armchairs with its back to the stairs and he twisted and looked over his shoulder just as a pair of identical red-headed twins appeared on the stairs, grinned widely, and quickly hurried the rest of the way down.

Following behind them at a far more sedate pace was the boy Harry recognized as Percy Weasley. The twins came over and pulled two wooden chairs of different styles with them, perching them around the armchair that Sirius was sitting in and stared at him with something akin to awe. Sirius just looked at them with bemusement in his expression. Percy looked down at the twins and made a disgusted noise in the back of his throat before going over and sitting in a free armchair as far away from the group as possible.

"So you're Sirius Black?" one of the twins began with an excited air to his voice.

"One of the Marauders?"

"Padfoot, right?"

Sirius blinked at them before looking over at Harry who chuckled quietly under his breath. Tom rolled his eyes.

The twins proceeded to grill Sirius for tales of his pranking days with the Marauders at Hogwarts for about ten minutes, while everyone else in the room seemed to just sit there in awkward boredom. Finally Molly Weasley appeared again from the doorway to the kitchen and told them all the lunch was ready before going to the foot of the stairwell and calling up for 'Ron' and 'Ginny'. She then waved her wand and a little light shot through the room, out a partially open window, and directly towards the garage Harry had seen earlier at the front of the house.

With some reluctance, Harry and Tom pulled themselves out of the couch and into the kitchen. It contained a very large wooden table with ten different chairs around it. No two chairs matched in style, shape, or size, and Harry could practically feel Tom's disdain for the extraordinary commonness of it all. Another large fireplace was in the kitchen, and this one looked like it was probably the one actually hooked up to the Floo Network since it was much larger and a tin of floo powder was visible on the mantle.

Harry, Tom and Sirius hesitated for a moment as everyone else began to take seats around the table, before Molly Weasley told them to 'just sit anywhere dears'. The twins beckoned for Sirius to sit down between them, something that seemed to amuse Sirius, so he agreed, and Harry and Tom on the opposite end of the table. Percy Weasley sat down on Tom's right, leaving one seat available on Harry's left, one seat directly opposite Harry, and two chairs

open on the end of the table diagonal from him. More thundering steps could be heard coming down the stairs and a moment later a scowling Ron Weasley made his way into the kitchen, followed by a very timid and nervous looking girl with long, straight hair... *red*, of course.

Ron took one look at Harry and his scowl deepened and twisted into a sneer. He looked at the seats available and took the one opposite Harry, rather than sit in the one beside him. Harry figured that the two on the end were apparently designated for the parents – his guess was confirmed when, a moment later, a red-headed man came in through a doorway that led to the back garden, gave Molly Weasley a quick peck on the cheek and then sat down in one of those seats while greeting Sirius enthusiastically.

The timid-looking girl seemed to squeak when she realized the only seat open was next to Harry and for a moment, she looked like she was about to make a run for it. Then Mrs. Weasley called out to her, telling her not to dawdle and to sit down. Flushing bright red – which looked awful with that hair of hers – she went over and sat down next to Harry while keeping her head bowed and her hands folded in her lap, twisting nervously.

Harry barely refrained from snorting before he turned to Tom and resumed some light conversing. A moment later introductions were being made all around. The man was Arthur Weasley, and the girl was named 'Ginny' and would apparently be starting Hogwarts this fall.

Mrs. Weasley began dishing out food, levitating platters and plates all around and serving pumpkin juice in an assortment of vastly different cups. Even the silverware was mismatched.

Mrs. Weasley sat down and the meal quickly began – filled with discussion about family (apparently there were two more older brothers in this already enormous family, but they'd already moved out of the house) and questions mostly directed at Tom. They were all very interested to learn that 'Dominick' had known Harry Potter growing up in the muggle world. Arthur Weasley grilled both of them with questions about muggle 'tekonomy', asking questions about 'automobiles' and wondering if either of them could explain to him what a 'telly' was and how it worked.

Tom was clearly not the least bit interested in discussing the finer points of the muggles and their culture, but even he couldn't stand by silently and not correct the man of his obscenely inaccurate ideas. Tom had, after all, spent the last two years traveling through countless muggle cities, in addition to the fact that he and Heri *had* actually grown up among them back in the 30's. He was far from ignorant about how they lived and worked. He had always made a point to keep up with the muggles. 'Know thy enemy' he had told Heri, numerous times through their youth.

Discussion was brought back to the family relation topic once food was done. Molly Weasley cleared the table with a wave of her wand and Tom was asked to pull out a copy of the family tree that he'd brought with him. It was spread out onto the table in front of the senior Weasleys. Percy Weasley, who had mostly feigned disinterest through the whole meeting, actually craned his neck slightly in obvious curiosity, while the twins got up and walked over behind their parents to peer at it. Ron, who hadn't stopped scowling once through the whole meal, appeared to give in to his curiosity and leaned over to look at it as well.

"I never realized that mum's uncle married a Black," one of the twins commented offhanded.

"But that doesn't make us blood related to the Blacks, does it?" Ron asked, looking as if this idea made him somewhat ill. If Sirius noticed, he didn't comment.

"Well your grandmother Cedrella, my mother, was a Black, you know," Arthur said with chuckle and a smile. "So, while you lot may not be related by blood to the Blacks from your mother's side, you certainly are from mine."

Harry noted that Ronald seemed to make a startled choking sound and looked at his dad with rather wide eyes. Did the moron honestly not know what family his grandmum was from?

"She was?" Sirius exclaimed, looking surprised as he turned his attention to Arthur.

"Oh yes. Cedrella Weasley was a Black. Of course, once she married my father, she was disowned for it. Her family didn't approve of him, much, obviously."

"Cedrella, Cedrella... yeah, I know the name, but I'm afraid I'm not exactly sure how I might be related to her."

"I believe that your... let's see, I guess he would be your Great-grandfather, Cygnus Black, was brothers with my grandfather, Arcturus. So it's not exactly a close relation," Arthur said with a chuckle and a shrug.

"Yes, well the Blacks were a rather large family. Married into a lot of different families; the Flints, the Bulstrodes, Crabbes, Longbottoms, Crouches..." he paused and chuckled, "*Potters and Prewetts*. Of course, I suppose I'm the last one to actually carry the name 'Black', now..." Sirius said.

"Ah yes, and young Dominick here is the last male to carry the name Prewett!" Arthur said. "It's a bit exciting really, isn't it dear?" he continued, turning to Mrs. Weasley.

"Oh, quite," she agreed with an enthusiastic nod. "I have to admit, the idea that the family name might live on is rather reassuring. I'm sure Aunt Tessie and Muriel are both thrilled. You're meeting with them in August, right?"

"That's right," Sirius confirmed with a nod.

"Wait..." Tom said, cutting in, "wasn't the former headmaster of Hogwarts, Pineas Nigellus Black, Arcturus and Cygnus' father?"

"Ah! Yes, that's right!" Arthur confirmed with a proud grin.

"You're great-grandfather was a headmaster of Hogwarts?" Tom said, just to clarify. Harry noticed that Ron's head shot up again and his eyes went slightly wide as if he hadn't actually known this bit of information either. That's one of the reasons he hated these bloody fools the most. No room left for proper respect for their heritage and history because they were too busy drooling over stupid little muggle gadgets.

He failed to refrain from rolling his eyes, and Ron seemed to notice because his gaze locked on Harry and he glared angrily for a moment before he shifted to a smug look of superiority.

"So my great-great-grandfather was a headmaster of Hogwarts?" Ron asked his father, while maintaining eye-contact with Harry and looking entirely too proud.

"Have you ever looked at the Black family tree?" Harry asked and Ron's smug expression shifted back to a scowl.

"No, why would I?"

Harry gave an exaggerated sigh. "I don't know, maybe because your grandmum was one – on wait, you didn't even realize that, did you? Well, if you had any idea about the Black family, you'd realize that every one of our lines descends from Phineas Nigelis. He's my great-great-grandfather, he's *your* great-great-grandfather, and he's Dominick's great-great-grandfather."

"Wait, *you*?" Ron exclaimed, and his voice cracked in the middle of 'you'. "You're related to the Blacks? I'm related to *you*?"

Harry grimaced slightly before rolling his eyes and muttering 'unfortunately', under his breath before saying "*Distantly*, related," aloud.

"Harry's grandmother, Dorea Potter, was born Dorea Black," Sirius explained.

"The Blacks really did get around, didn't they?" one of the twins said to his identical counterpart, with a smirk.

"That they did, dear brother. It's a regular family reunion of family we didn't even know we had!"

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The 'adults' eventually got to talking about old family relatives – mostly all deceased – and it became blatantly obvious that the kids were all bored out of their minds so it was suggested that the Weasley's enormous brood of children take Harry and Dominick out to the yard. Neither Harry nor Tom actually liked this idea at all, but staying with Sirius and the elder Weasley's wasn't exactly much better so they reluctantly allowed themselves to be dragged out. Not that that actually led to anything productive because the only activity that Ron and the Twins could come up with was a game of pick-up quidditch and neither Harry nor 'Dominick' expressed any interest in such an activity. Instead they were given a tour around the property.

The afternoon passed exceedingly slow and it was excruciating to endure. Harry managed to carry on some light conversation of mild interest with the twins for a while and Tom was able to put up with Percy for a bit, but otherwise, both 'boys' were sick of the whole ordeal long before Sirius was finally ready to leave. Apparently he had gotten caught up in talks of 'the old days' memories of Gideon and Fabian Prewett, with Molly Weasley.

As such, it was a considerable relief when they finally left.

Two days later, Tom finally got a letter from McGonagall with word on when 'Dominick' was to come in for his test. More specifically, she instructed him to come in the following afternoon at 2pm.

For this visit, Harry had to stay behind. Sirius and Tom left an hour after they all had lunch and Harry went down to the basement to continue some of the investigations into the nature of the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone. It was just before six o'clock when Tom and Sirius returned. Remus called down to Harry to let him down that the others were back and he quickly finished up his current test, packed up his things and jogged up the stairs. Tom was standing in the foyer looking bored and mildly pleased with himself. Sirius was stretching and remarking something about being starved as he disappeared into the sitting room with Remus.

Harry turned his full attention on Tom. "So how'd it go?"

"Fine. I succeeded in restraining myself, while also sufficiently impressing her. I did nothing that a second-year wouldn't have been able to do –"

"A *normal* second year, or *you* when you were a second year?" Harry asked, smirking.

Tom seemed to contemplate the question for a moment. "I would say I performed around *you*-level from second year," he answered with a smirk.

Harry snorted and shook his head in amusement.

"She did have one curious request though."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"She asked me for an example of my wandless skills."

Harry's gaze sharpened slightly and he frowned. "What did you do?"

"I told her that my ability to do it has reduced significantly since I started using my wand last year. I pretended to try and fail to summon a quill from her desk. She seemed sufficiently convinced."

Harry nodded his head. "Probably the best route to take."

"Yes, I thought so as well. It's not unheard of for magical children to gain some level of control of their magic without the aid of a wand during their youth, but retaining or improving upon any significant control –"

"Extremely rare," Harry finished.

"Correct," Tom nodded.

"Hell, the most even I ever managed was simple summoning, banishing, and things like unlocking doors. You were always a freak in your wandless control," Harry griped playfully.

"You had your necromantic powers to make up for it and none of them required a wand," Tom pointed out.

Harry just grinned widely and shrugged.

The two went into the library to wait until Dobby informed them all that dinner was ready.

"So when do you get the official word about whether or not they think you did good enough on your tests to go into second year?" Harry asked as they settled into a pair of armchairs.

"She said that she should have the tests graded in a week and I'll be receiving the results at the same time that she sends out the Hogwarts letters to everyone else. So I suppose I'll get the official word at the same time that you get your book list for next term."

"Cool."

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The rest of the summer passed quickly. Harry and Dominick's Hogwarts letters arrived precisely one week after Tom had to go in to take his tests and, of course, he was approved for second year. The following day they went with Remus and Sirius in to Diagon Alley to buy all their school supplies. Neither were particularly pleased when they ran into the Weasley clan while visiting Flourish and Blots for their books.

"Oh, no. It's *you*," a familiar and oh-so-unwanted voice sounded from behind where Harry and Dominick were standing by a bookshelf. Harry heaved an annoyed sigh and turned around to find Ron Weasley standing there, scowling at him.

"Hello Weasley," Harry said flatly.

"What are *you* doing here?" Ron said with a mockery of a sneer.

Harry just gave him a *Look* that seemed to say, without words, 'are you really *that* stupid?'

"Gosh, I don't know... perhaps we're here to buy *books*," Tom said in a sarcastic, patronizing tone.

"I know that," Ron spat back, as his face started to turn pink with embarrassment. "So I guess this means you got into Hogwarts?" Ron said, motioning towards *'The Standard Book of Spells; Grade Two'* nestled in the crook of Tom's arm.

"Of course," Tom said, dismissively, looking bored and turning to face Harry, completely turning away from Ron.

"Harry?" another familiar voice came out from several feet away and Harry and Tom both turned in the direction of the new voice.

"Draco," Harry replied in surprise – although he realized he really *shouldn't* be surprised to run into so many classmates considering it was the day after the Hogwarts letters were sent out. The Alley *had* been rather filled with Hogwarts students all day.

"I wondered if I'd get to see you at all this summer," Draco said, as he came to stand by Harry and Tom, pointedly ignoring Weasley's presence entirely, and causing the red-head's face to darken with obvious irritation. "I asked father if I could invite you over to the manor for the summer, but he said it would have to wait until August, although I can't imagine why." Draco paused then and blinked at Tom for a moment before tipping his chin up rather pompously. "And who are you?"

"Draco, this is my friend, Dominick Prewett. Dominick, this is Draco Malfoy," Harry introduced.

"Prewett? I didn't think there were anymore Prewetts," Draco replied, looking at 'Dominick' appraisingly.

"That's an interesting story, actually," Harry replied with a quirked grin and he and 'Dominick' then went into a description of Dominick hadn't known who his father was until just this very summer when he returned to Britain from living in Greece for the past two years. Draco's opinion of 'Dominick' appeared to take an instant dive when it was revealed that his mother was a muggle and he'd grown up in the muggle world. Harry quickly moved on to say that he and 'Dominick' had attended the same muggle primary school and Dom was his *very best friend*.

Draco had frowned and looked between the two with a mixture of confusion and curiosity. Whatever it was that was going on in his mind, he apparently came to the conclusion that Dominick deserved his respect because he never again sneered at him, nor did he act exceptionally snooty or stuck-up around him.

At some point during their talk, Ron Weasley had huffed off, clearly annoyed at being so blatantly ignored. He had gone off, most likely to the second-hand books section, while Harry, Draco, and 'Dominick' had slowly browsed around the store while they talked. They were in the middle of a discussion about the Hogwarts houses when some sort of disturbance from the front of the store caught their attention. Harry was already facing the correct direction so he saw what was happening first and his eyes went wide as his jaw dropped. Draco had to turn all the way around before he saw what was happening, but when he did finally face the proper direction, his shock was apparent on his face.

Lucius Malfoy seemed to be in the middle of a *physical scuffle* with Arthur Weasley. Rolling around on the floor like a couple of muggles! Harry looked over at Tom and, while he had expected to see something akin to disgust on Tom's face, he was surprised to find amusement there instead.

Tom actually *snorted* and smirked before rolling his eyes and turning away from the idiotic scene and using the distraction being presented at the moment to wandlessly summon a couple books from a high shelf that his frustratingly short body wasn't able to reach.

Sirius and Lupin managed to intervene and pull the two grown wizards apart and end the ridiculous spat. The two men exchanged a few more snarky words before Lucius bent down and picked up a pile of books that had been knocked out of Ginny Weasley's cauldron during the scuffle and unceremoniously tossed them back into the girls possession before turning and calling to Draco.

It was at that point that his eyes met with Harry's and he actually looked a bit abashed for a moment before quickly straightening himself, raising himself up proudly and vacating the store. Draco looked obviously annoyed and abandoned the books he'd collected on a shelf before walking back out of the store as proudly as he could manage.

"What the devil was *that* about?" Tom said quietly under his breath while looking back with mild amusement, at Arthur Weasley, who presently had a split lip and had Molly Weasley fussing over him with a handkerchief.

Harry snorted. "I have *no* idea."

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Harry's birthday was the following week and Harry was more than happy to celebrate turning twelve since it meant he was one year older and he was more than eager to get some good aging behind him. Tom had thought the whole thing was ridiculous and unnecessary, however that didn't stop him from getting Harry a present. Actually he'd gotten him *two* gifts, but one was just a decoy. His 'public' gift was a book on defensive charms appropriate for someone in their second or third year. His *real* gift was... a legitimate surprise. Tom had taken off for an afternoon at one point and even Harry hadn't known where he'd gone to. Apparently he had been retrieving Harry's birthday gift.

It was the Peverell ring. Tom's second horcrux. Harry had gasped and gaped at it in shock when he'd opened the box the evening of his birthday after Tom had dragged him to the privacy of 'Harry's' room and handed him the small box.

Harry had proceeded to ask Tom what had happened to it after his death (since Heri had been wearing it when Dumbledore had killed him), to which Tom had admitted that after Heri had been killed, Tom had removed the ring from his corpse and had hidden the horcrux somewhere appropriately protected. He would have buried Heri with the ring on his finger and set protections around the grave, however Heri had specifically requested his body be cremated. Being a Necromancer, he knew exactly what sort of things could be done with a corpse in the wrong hands and didn't want to leave his body behind for anyone, even if there were next to no chances of any such thing happening.

Harry had always been touched that Tom trusted him to *wear* one of his horcruxes on his finger, but for the first time, he was hesitant with the idea of wearing it proudly on his hand. It was entirely possible that Dumbledore could recognize the ring, or at the very least, he could possibly sense the very significant Dark magic in it. Horcruxes were protected against such things though. It was usually very difficult to tell there was anything iffy about it at all unless one was in constant physical contact with it. But one never knew when Dumbledore was involved.

Still, Harry figured he could decide what to do in regards to wearing the ring or not, when school started. Until then, he conjured a long, thin, silver chain, slipped the ring on to it and latched it around his neck, tucking the ring under his shirt. His finger was too small to wear it now, anyway.

Harry had insisted against any sort of big party for his birthday, but they had still gathered for lunch for Harry to open his presents and eat some cake. Sirius had gotten him a bag of joke products from Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop, and Remus had given him a book on Light magic that he had apparently seen Harry eyeing the last time they were at the book store in Diagon Alley. Tom had looked at it dubiously, but Harry had been mildly enthused. Aside from his new found access to parsel magic, there weren't a lot of magical branches that interested him that he hadn't already spent decades delving into. Light magic was one of those branches that he'd never bothered to investigate in his previous life.

He'd also recieved simple presents, via owl post, from several of his classmates and his study-group members – sweets, and little toy products much like what he'd gotten during the Yule holidays – but from Draco and Theo he'd gotten considerably more elaborate gifts. They were both very high level and rather rare Dark Arts books that Harry assumed they had each nicked from their family libraries, since he doubted either could have gotten those particular books without their parent's explicit assistance, and Harry doubted Lucius would have bothered giving him the book Draco had sent him. He also highly doubted that Nott Sr. would have willing and knowingly handed over a rare Dark Arts book to the Boy-Who-Lived.

It did make Harry wonder what exactly had inspired the two boys to send him such books. While he had made no attempt to hide his Darker nature from the two Slytherins, and they were both aware of his advanced stage in his magical learning, but there was still no reason to believe that he could possibly be advanced enough for such... well *advanced* books.

He was glad that both packages had arrived the previous night with notes for him to not open them in front of anyone else because he would have had a lot of trouble explaining to Remus why his two Slytherin friends were sending him books that were so very, very, *illegal*.

August passed with very little of importance. Tom had his lunch with Muriel and Tessie Prewett and was told about what official titles the family still held the rights to claim, although none were currently occupied since there was no male head of the family. Tom was quite pleased to learn that he *would* be inheriting a seat in the Wizengamot upon the arrival of his seventeenth birthday.

The family vault was currently being used and managed jointly by Tessie and Muriel but they said they were willing to hand over controlling interest to him upon the date of his seventeenth birthday, or their deaths, which ever came first – although they were obviously assuming they'd still be living quite a bit longer. Tom didn't think he'd exactly *need* the money contained within it – although he certainly wouldn't hesitate to make use of it – but he was also curious to see what sort of old family artifacts could be inside it and made note to investigate it in several years. Until then, he would put it all behind him and avoid interacting with the two old witches as much as he could mange.

The only other incidence of note was when Sirius' cousin Andromeda, her husband Ted, and their daughter Nymphadora came over for dinner one evening. Sirius had invited Andromeda

at that specific time, mostly because he had just finished the steps necessary to officially reinstate her to the Black family. She had been disowned after she married Ted because he was a muggleborn. But now Sirius was the head of the family and had the right to reinstate her and her family. So he did.

The most interesting thing about that evening had been the fact that Nymphadora – who was adamant that she *not* be referred to by her full name because she apparently *hated it with a fiery passion* – was actually a metamorphmagus. She spent the evening entertaining them by changing her hair color and facial features, and talking with Sirius about Auror training.

A few days before the end of August, Remus Floo'd to Hogwarts to start preparing for the new term and Harry and Tom enjoyed having the days free, where they didn't have to sneak around the house so much. Sirius walked in on them snogging in the library, the living room, and the kitchen before he finally burst slightly, informing them that *'just because I know, doesn't mean I want to see it'* and then he had quickly left somewhat red in the face.

The snickering from the room he'd just vacated told him that they clearly hadn't taken his discomfort all that seriously.

Finally, September first arrived and the three Floo'd to London and then took a muggle cab to Kings Cross Station. Harry couldn't help but seriously question the logic behind making everyone spend an entire day in a train when most of the students could have just as easily Floo'd directly to Hogsmeade and just walked up to the bloody castle, but the Wizarding World had never been full of a lot of logical thinkers and Harry had to admit that there was some value in respecting tradition.

And thus, Harry and 'Dominick' boarded the bright red Hogwarts Express and bid Sirius goodbye from the window of the first compartment they found empty. As the train finally began to pull out of the station Harry turned to Tom and smiled.

"So, are you excited?" he asked while grinning.

"Excited?" Tom echoed in amusement.

"Yeah, sure. You're getting to go back to Hogwarts. Don't pretend you haven't wanted to go back there for ages."

Tom looked as if he were about to argue, but he stopped abruptly and looked as if he were truly contemplating Harry's question. A moment later he let out a very small chuckle and shrugged dismissively. "Perhaps I am excited."

Harry's grin grew wider. Tom was excited. And so was he.

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Fin

Consider this the end of book 1, but don't assume that means that there will be a book 2. I'm not sure I've got enough ideas in my head to get any more of this story put down into words.

I mean, yeah, I've got some vague ideas, and for the sake of not leaving you all totally hanging (because I've been asked about it a lot in reviews) I'll let you know what I had half-planned for the whole Lucius and the diary thing.

Basically, at some point during the last school year Lucius dug out the diary of Tom Marvolo Riddle that the Dark Lord had left with him, wondering if he could find some way to use it to locate Voldemort. He ended up writing in the thing, and it was Diary! Tom's suggestion to smuggle the book back into the school so that he could drain the magic out of whatever student came into possession of him, gain himself a body, and *then* he would be better able to locate his primary body. So that's why Lucius did that. That is also the extent to the plans I had for second year, which is why I'm not sure I'll be able to get out book 2. I just don't have a fleshed out enough idea for it in my head. If I ever do, I'll try working on the sequel.

If I do ever write a sequel, I'll post a notice chapter in this story to let you all know, so add this one to your alerts if you want to get notified if a sequel ever happens.

Sequel Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Harry and Tom Start at Hogwarts

The train ride wasn't terribly eventful. They had quite a few people come into their compartment to say 'hi' to Harry and several stayed briefly to visit, but none took up permanent residence with them, which they preferred.

Harry was able to introduce Tom to Terry Boot and Padma Patil, who had dropped by at the same time to greet Harry, and he had given them a quick run-down of how he knew 'Dominick' and how he was coming to Hogwarts as a second year student.

Draco and Theo had also shown up along with Greg Goyle and Vincent Crabbe en tow. The two thicker, larger, boys had stayed back in the hallway flanking the door to the compartment as if they were guards while Draco and Theo went inside and the four shared a brief discussion over sweets purchased from the trolley. Harry found it exceedingly amusing to watch Tom unwrapping his chocolate frog and eying it dubiously. Tom had looked up at Harry's quiet snickering, narrowed his eyes, and then defiantly bit the head off the struggling frog with a snap of his teeth.

Harry had burst into laughter and Theo and Draco had both stared on with somewhat stunned expressions.

Eventually the Slytherins had vacated the compartment to return to whatever compartment their trunks were stowed in, leaving Harry and Tom alone, once again. It was getting late and the sun was getting lower in the sky turning the clouds bright orange and purple. Harry yawned, stretched, and dug into his trunk to pull on his and Tom's school robes that they'd stowed together at the top of Harry's main compartment for easy access. He tossed Tom his robes and the two put them on and then got situated quickly enough. They'd just sat back down when another knock came from their compartment door.

Tom heaved an annoyed sigh. "More of your adoring admirers?" he asked with a tinge of exasperated sarcasm.

Harry snorted. "Oh how the tables have turned," he mused quietly with an amused smirk.

Tom rolled his eyes and flicked his wrist, wandlessly releasing the latch on the door and allowing it to slide open.

Harry almost groaned at who he saw there. It was Granger.

"Hello, Granger," Harry said, trying not to let his annoyance at her appearance show in his voice. "What brings you to this end of the train?"

"Hello, Potter. I was talking with Padma and she told me that we've got a new student coming in this year to our class," Granger turned her focus on Tom who was watching her warily, having picked up on Harry's chilly reaction to the girl. "My name is Hermione Granger," she said, sticking her hand out in offering to Tom.

He grimaced slightly at the hand, but masked it quickly enough as he looked up at her and gave her his charming smile, that worked just as well on this face as it did on the youthful face of his previous body. "Dominicus Prewett," he replied as he accepted her hand and shook it.

"Padma told me that you grew up in the muggle world, right?"

"That's correct," Tom replied simply.

"Well, I grew up in the muggle world as well and I wanted to offer up any assistance you might need with making the transition. Hogwarts can be really overwhelming when you're used to the muggle world. Several of the older muggleborn students took me and the other muggleborn Ravenclaws aside at the start of our first year and gave us all sorts of advice, and over the course of the year, they taught us lots of really useful little charms that most magical children pick up just from growing up in magical houses. It was a tremendous help in adjusting. I thought I'd extend the offer to you as well."

"I think I'll be quite fine, thank you. I've got Harry here, after all," Tom replied politely and inclined his head towards Harry, sitting on the opposite bench observing them with disinterest. "Besides, I'm not actually muggleborn. My father was a wizard."

"Well, yes, of course, but Padma made it sound as if you hadn't known that –"

"My muggle mother died when I was nine years old, I've been on my own since then, and I've spent a fair enough amount of that time in the magical world to have picked up on things. Thank you for the offer, but I think I'll be fine."

Hermione looked as if she wanted to argue, but wasn't sure what to argue about so instead she snapped her mouth shut into a thin line and nodded her head jerkily. "Alright. Good luck with the sorting."

"Thank you."

"Bye Granger," Harry said absently as he turned his attention to a book resting in his lap, ignoring her departure from their compartment.

"I take it you're not fond of her?" Tom mused, obviously amused, a few moments after she'd left and the door was re-latched.

Harry snorted. "She's very very... annoying. Bothersome and persistent. Plus she's a know-it-all who doesn't actually know anything at all."

"Ah, one of those."

"Yup," Harry said, popping the 'p'. He heaved a small sigh and closed his book. "We're almost there."

Tom nodded his head absently.

"Did McGonagall say if you'd be sorted with the first years, or separately?"

"She didn't say."

"I suppose it doesn't really matter." Harry mused.

"No, it doesn't."

"Just remember, before it's even on your head, just start thinking a chant in your head 'Ravenclaw, Ravenclaw, Ravenclaw'."

Tom rolled his eyes. "I know Harry. We've gone over this plenty of times."

Harry sighed again and sunk into his seat bench a bit. "I know, I just hate the idea of you ending up in another house and us being separated."

"That would be bothersome. But whatever happens, we'll manage. It's not like you haven't managed to establish friendships with members of Slytherin house anyway. And since we have an established history of friendship, our continued association wouldn't be looked upon oddly at all."

Harry sighed, again, and when Tom looked up at him from the book he was now reading, he couldn't help but snort at the pout on Harry's face.

"I'll do my best to get sorted into Ravenclaw," Tom said, trying to reassure the other. "Now stop pouting."

Harry stuck out his tongue in an entirely juvenile gesture that caused Tom to chuckle and roll his eyes.

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Tom rode up to the castle with Harry in one of the Thestral-drawn carriages, but as they were going through the entry hall towards the doors to the Great Hall, McGonagall called him aside to and told him to wait in the antechamber and that the first years would be arriving in about ten minutes.

Harry went inside the Great Hall and sat down between Terry Boot and Su Li at the Ravenclaw table, but managed to gain enough room around him that he could squeeze Tom in easily enough.

The Great Hall filled with the upper years slowly as the carriages continued to come up from Hogsmeade. Finally they were all there and Harry figured enough time had passed that the

first years had probably made it across the Black Lake and and were in the antechamber with Tom.

McGonagall came out of the side door, spoke with Dumbledore for a minute and looked around the hall to make sure everyone was there and in their seats before retreating back through the door. A moment later she reappeared with a string of tiny first years trailing behind her, and Tom, at the very end of the line, taller than the most by several inches even though they were only a single grade behind him. McGonagall had them line up down the center aisle and wait while she set the three-legged stool just before the head table and placed the Sorting Hat on it.

The Sorting Hat startled the little first years by suddenly breaking into song that resulted in applause from all the upper years as soon as it was done. After that, McGonagall began to call out names and the Sorting was officially underway.

Harry tuned out the first bunch of kids until it got closer to the 'P's'. Lovegood went to Ravenclaw, Marsh went to Hufflepuff, Midgen went to Gryffindor, Nutcombe went to Slytherin and O'Hare went to Ravenclaw. When she went from there straight to 'Radford, Timothy!' without having called for 'Dominicus Prewett', Harry assumed that meant that they'd be sorting Tom after all of the first years were done.

The last first year called up was the youngest Weasley girl – "Weasley, Ginevra!" and her sorting took a frustratingly long time, considering how anxious Harry was for Tom's sorting. Harry huffed impatiently as he checked the time again with a discreet tempus charm, and noted that she'd been under that hat for nearly five solid minutes, officially making her a 'Hatstall'. Finally, the damn thing opened it's 'mouth' and called out 'Slytherin!'

Harry sat up a little straighter, looking wide-eyed at the red-head as she shakily removed the hat from her head and he saw tear streaks running down her cheeks. Was the girl crying because she'd been sorted into Slytherin?

Well, he couldn't exactly blame her. She came from a family of blood-traitors and wouldn't exactly receive a warm welcome into the house of snakes. Not quite as cold a welcome as a muggleborn would get, but she'd have a hard time finding allies, that was for sure. The only thing she had going for her was the fact that she was pure-blood. She could probably get by if she pointed out to some that her grandmum was a Black. Of course she was a disowned Black who ran off and married a blood-traitor...

A quick glance across the hall to the Gryffindor table and Harry saw four pairs of rather shell-shocked freckled faces watching their youngest sister scurry across the hall towards the table of green and silver. Harry couldn't help but snicker at the utterly horrified expression on Ron Weasley's face.

His attention was drawn back to the front of the hall as McGonagall cleared her throat.

"This year we have a transfer student who is coming in to Hogwarts to join the second years. He will be sorted now. Prewett, Dominicus!"

There were a few whispers at the name, and probably among some of the people who had already heard a bit of the story during the train ride, but it was nothing in comparison to the whispers Harry had experienced during his sorting.

Tom, who had been standing with a mild air of impatience for quite some time strode quickly forward, sat down on the stool and accepted the hat onto his head. Harry felt his heart beating away crazily in his chest. The very second the hat touched his head, the rip was opening and it looked as if it were about ready to just scream out its choice right off, but it paused and the rip closed.

The oversized hat sunk down over most of Tom's face, but his mouth was still visible and Harry watched as his mouth pursed, then frowned, then looked annoyed, and then finally smirked. The rip in the hat opened up at just that moment and called out "Ravenclaw!"

Harry released a huge relieved breath and beamed with jubilation. He quickly began to clap along with his housemates and smiled happily at Tom as McGonagall removed the hat and he walked over to join the Ravenclaw table. Harry scooted over slightly so that there was room for Tom to sit and Su Li seemed to get the idea because she scooted closer to the girl on her other side to make more room. Tom came over and sat down with ease, only barely minimizing the smug grin on his face.

Dumbledore stood up and said a few quick words while McGonagall removed the hat and stool, and a moment later the tables were filled with platters of food, and the hall was filled with excited, chatty voices.

Everyone in the second-year class was instantly curious about their new classmate and 'Dominick' was quickly bombarded with questions that he handled with his patented charm and ease. Once it became clear that he and Harry not only knew each other before this, but considered each other their 'best of friends' it seemed to instantly raise many of the student's opinions of the new boy.

Later on in the feast when the puddings had finally arrived and the focus of the discussions had finally turned away from Tom, he leaned over to Harry and quietly spoke so no one else could hear.

"You've really managed to get their respect and admiration," he noted, quietly.

Harry snorted. "Not really that hard. I mean, quite a few of them already worshiped the 'idea' of me from all the boy-who-lived rubbish."

"These are Ravenclaws, Harry – even if they are young Ravenclaws. I can tell that their respect goes deeper than just your legend."

Harry shrugged. "I told you, I've already been wooing their affections for a year. What did you expect?"

Tom gave a bit of a shrug. "I suppose I really didn't know. But you were rather reclusive during our first time at Hogwarts. You basically let me do all the political maneuvering while you just sat in the background and read my coat tails."

"Git," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"What? It's true," Tom said without the slightest inclination to take back what he'd said. Harry just grinned and shook his head.

"Yeah, well like you said – they're Ravenclaws. Earning their respect is a lot different than earning the respect of Slytherins. It's all about what you know and if you're willing to share that knowledge. Most of them like me so much because I've been helping them with their homework."

"But you've clearly gained the respect of several Slytherins as well. Especially young Nott and Malfoy. Those birthday gifts..."

"Yeah... that's actually rather odd. I still don't know quite what to make of those... but they're the exceptions. Most of the Slytherins have anything but high respect for me. To keep suspicions low I've allowed Draco and the others to allow their housemates to think that they're just using me and my fame. It was really the only way that they could get away with being seen associating with the Boy-Who-Lived so much."

Tom didn't look impressed with this and twisted his mouth up slightly before sighing. "Yes, I can see how that would be necessary. We will eventually have to show them that we are worthy of their respect, however."

"But we have to be careful of Dumbledore. We'd best not move too early. We can wait another year or two before we try to prove ourselves to the snakes."

"I suppose so. We'll play it by ear."

Harry nodded. At that moment all of the platters of cakes and puddings vanished and the din of the Great Hall quickly began to die down as all eyes were drawn up to the head table. Dumbledore stood and set right into a very standard (for him) welcome speech. There were no noteworthy announcements and no changes in staff. No corridors were off limits this year and the only real warnings focused on the forbidden forest being forbidden, and Mr. Filch's ever-growing list of banned items.

When the school song began Tom looked horrified. He glanced over at Harry and asked through tightly clenched teeth, "What the bloody hell is this?"

Harry shuddered and lowered his head. "It's atrocious, isn't it? Dippet never made us do anything so ridiculous as this."

"It's not just ridiculous, it should be illegal. I'm a bloody Dark Lord and I wouldn't subject anyone to horror like this."

Harry snorted and dissolved into snickers before regaining control of himself.

The twins didn't take nearly as long this year and for that, Harry was grateful. Finally they were all dismissed to their dorm rooms and the first years were instructed to follow the

prefects. There was no attempt to make it look like Tom was following with them since he had Harry and the other second-years to guide him instead.

When they got to the stop of the small spiral staircase with the door at the top with nothing more than a eagle's head for a knocker, Terry Boot and Kevin Entwhistle took it upon themselves to explain to their new room mate how the knocker would ask a question and require a correct answer before it would open the door. It wouldn't skip questions though, so if you couldn't guess the right answer, you had to just wait there until someone who could get it right came by.

They decided to let Tom take a shot at the question so he took a step up to the silver knocker and waited.

A moment later the eagle head came to life and spoke. "I know a word of letters three, add two more and fewer there will be."

Tom rolled his eyes. "Few."

"Correct," the eagle spoke and the door swung open.

The group of second-year boys made their way through the common room, giving 'Dominick' a quick run-down as they passed through and headed towards the door and up the curved staircase towards the second-year dorm room, which was the second door on the left as they ascended the stairs.

Since it was a new year, and they now had one more bed in their room than they had the previous year, Harry was able to convince the other boys to scoot their trunks around so that he and 'Dominick's' beds were next to each other, nearest the door.

As the other boys began to unpack some of the bare essentials and get into their pajamas or dig out their bathroom supplies and fight over who got the shower first, Harry and Tom set to charming the immediate area around their beds.

The charms included security protections for their possessions that were more sensitive in nature as well as a weak notice-me-not type field around their beds. It wasn't a full-on version of the spell, but a much more subtle version that would cause their roommates to feel disinclined to pay them much attention when they were there.

Once they were done, they each took their turns in the bathroom and then they turned in for bed.

Sequel Chapter 2

AN: Yup, new chapters. Don't expect this to mean that this story is guaranteed to get finished - it's just going to go further than it was. I managed to get 98 pages written of the sequel, but then life got super-busy again and I haven't managed to get any writing done for about a month. I'm *hoping* that I'll get time to work on it again in the coming weeks, but there are no guarantees. Just the same, I got a decent chunk written, and I promised to post it, so it's going up. I still need to re-read and do some editing and clean-up, so release of new chapters will depend on me having the time to do that, but it shouldn't take too long to get them up.

This starts up directly where the last chapter ended, so if it's been a long while since you read any of this, you'll probably need to re-read the last chapter at the very least.

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Harry watched Tom as the pair sat at the Ravenclaw table the next morning for breakfast. It was early and the Hall was sparsely populated.

Tom looked decidedly distracted... again. He'd been zoning out a lot the last month, although more so recently. He would just look off into space with a pensive look on his face and a pucker in his brow, and not say a word until Harry said or did something to pull him out of it.

Finally, Tom seemed to heave a sigh and almost looked as if he were shaking his head to himself before he turned his focus back on the table in front of him.

"This is so bizarre," Tom muttered a few moments later as he looked down at the empty plate in front of him.

Harry smiled. "It really is. But you get used to it. Honestly it quickly becomes much more boring than weird."

"Yes, I've been anticipating that. I've actually made a few plans for some activities to keep me from completely losing my mind while stuck here."

Harry paused from reaching across the table to grab some scrambled eggs from a platter in the center of the table, and looked curiously over at Tom. "Oh?"

"Mm, yes," Tom said distractedly as he piled some healthy portions of several items on offer onto his plate.

"Are you going to elaborate?" Harry asked, rolling his eyes.

"Well, for years I've wanted to actually start really organizing and writing down some of the spells I've created over the years. I've debated the value to actually writing two different spellbooks. One for the more innocuous spells I've crafted that the general public might still benefit from - of which there are many - and another with the less legally approved ones - honestly I'd probably have to split that into several different volumes for different branches of

magic. But the general spellcraft book could probably be published, if I bother to take it that far. However I've simply never had the time to do it, and it's honestly never been high enough on my priorities to warrant setting aside the time needed for such a task. Now, however, I suspect I'm going to have an exorbitant amount of free time. So..." Tom trailed off and shrugged.

Harry stared at him for a moment before a wide smile broke out across his face. "Hah, that's brilliant. Wish I'd thought of something like that to keep me busy, actually."

"You could always finally start putting together your own Grimoire," Tom proposed.

Harry blinked at him as if he'd just had a significant dawning realization. "Merlin, I'm a bloody idiot. I could have been doing that all these years."

Tom rolled his eyes skyward and shook his head.

Harry chuckled and sighed. You know... speaking of you writing a book, can you imagine if you wrote a textbook that was one day used at Hogwarts? Won't let you teach here, but they'd teach from your book." Harry snickered.

Tom glanced over at him and arched a single brow but there was a look of amused interest on his face for a moment before he chuckled lightly under his breath. "That would be amusing."

At that moment Terry Boot came over and sat down in the empty spot on Harry's other side and began to grab some food.

"Mornin' Harry," he said with a yawn. "Merlin, you two are up early."

"I wanted to get a head start on showing Dom around," Harry said. Tom's eyes narrowed and he glared slightly at Harry, which only earned him a teasing grin in return.

"Just to clarify," Tom began, "Just because Harry calls me Dom does not mean I approve of the nickname. I prefer Dominick."

Harry snickered.

Terry looked curiously between the two of them for a moment before shrugging it off and returning to his task of piling his plate with some bacon and hash.

More students slowly filled the hall and the four heads of house finally appeared and started making their way down each of the house tables with the student's timetables. Professor Flitwick greeted Tom enthusiastically and welcomed him to Ravenclaw house before making his way down to the end where all of the first years (that had managed to find the Great Hall) had huddled together.

The second years first class of the day was Charms with the Hufflepuffs followed by History of Magic. After lunch they had Transfiguration with the Gryffindors and then Defense against the Dark Arts with the Slytherins.

"Defense with the Slytherins," Tom mused with a small approving nod.

"I think that Remus likes to make sure Slytherins and Ravenclaws are paired up for his classes. Can you imagine if it were with either of the other houses? The Slytherins and Gryffindors would start a war, and the Slytherins would scare the crap out of the Hufflepuffs."

Tom chuckled before leaning in close. "Merrythought taught each house separately, what's the deal with doubling things up like this?"

Harry shrugged. "They're understaffed, honestly. None of the teachers have assistants anymore. It's weird."

Tom looked at Harry with an almost incredulous expression. "None of them?"

Harry shook his head. "As far as I can tell, nope. Remus certainly doesn't. At first I thought maybe they only had teacher assistants for the NEWT classes, but after asking some of the upper years, even those don't have any. And the classes are way smaller too. Most of the teachers won't take anyone with a OWL score lower than Exceeds Expectations into their NEWT classes."

Tom scoffed scornfully. "Dippet was a much better Headmaster. He at least kept this place running smoothly."

"Dumbledore has too many responsibilities," Harry said shaking his head. "International Federation of Wizards and being Head Mugwump of the Wizengamot - it's no wonder the school is in such a state. Just wait until you see History of Magic. It's horrendous."

"You two talking about Binns?" Kevin Entwistle asked from across the table and down a seat further from Harry.

Tom nearly did a double-take. "Binns?" He looked with a sort of demanding question in his eyes at Harry.

Harry snorted and nodded. "Yeah, he's still here," he said softly before speaking louder. "Apparently he died while sitting in the staff room between classes, then 'woke up' as a ghost and walked right out of his body to go teach his next class."

"And how long ago did this happen?" Tom asked incredulously.

"Early 80's I think," Harry said before taking a drink of some pumpkin juice.

"So he's been teaching as a ghost for more than a decade?" Tom exclaimed, stunned. "Is there a budget deficit or something? What possible reason could they have for not hiring an actual living professor to fill the post?"

Tom leaned back a bit with a disgusted look on his face before leaning in closer to Harry. "That man was a wretched bore when he was teaching fifty years ago."

"He's much worse now," Harry muttered and Tom grimaced deeply.

"I'd swear they're teaching even simpler concepts than when we were in second year," Tom mused in disgust as he let himself fall gracefully onto his bed. Harry climbed into his own and sat cross-legged before pulling his knapsack into his lap and digging around inside it. It was now Friday and they'd finished their last class of the week and had retreated to their dorm room for some peace and quiet while the rest of their dorm mates busied themselves somewhere else.

"I honestly thought the same thing last year," Harry said. "I managed to find an old copy of the Standard Book of Spells from our first time around and compared it to the one we're using now and they're almost identical. There's been a few revisions and they've updated some of the spells with more efficient versions, but overall, it's practically the exact same."

"That's pathetic," Tom groused with a sneer. He turned his head towards Harry and looked at him curiously. "What are you doing?"

"Homework."

"Are you serious?" Tom said incredulously. "Do it later. It's not like it'll be a challenge."

Harry snorted. "That's precisely why I'm doing it now. It's always a major chore since it's so mind-numbing. If I don't force myself to do it right off, I'll put it off and never bother. But it's only second-year stuff. It won't take me more than a half hour to power through the whole week's of work."

"Hmm..." Tom responded unconvinced.

Harry reached down to the gap between his bed and his bedside table where he'd placed a lap desk he'd had stored and shrunk down in his trunk. He knew he could move to his actual desk, but he didn't want to bother to climb out of the bed.

With the lap desk spread across his crossed legs, he pulled out his charms textbook and flipped it open to where he had a piece of parchment folded between two pages. On the parchment he'd written down the details of the assignment for later, not that he really needed the reminder. He pulled out a blank piece of parchment, and a self-inking quill and quickly started writing out the required information. Perfect memory certainly aided in speeding this process up, but being easy did not stop it from being mind-numbing or tedious.

He'd been scratching away on the parchment for several minutes when movement from Tom's bed caught his eye. He glanced over and found that Tom was laying on his side, elbow bent and hand propping his head up, and just staring at Harry with an uncharacteristically fond smile on his face.

Harry arched a single eyebrow in question, which only made Tom's smile widen.

Which was weird.

Tom didn't smile fondly at anything.

Harry chuckled. "You want something?"

"I love you."

Harry's hand seized up and dropped his quill as he stared at Tom in stunned silence. His chest felt tight and his breathing seemed to stop.

He snapped himself out of his stunned stupor an instant later and frowned deeply with worry. "Are you okay?"

Tom laughed, shook his head and ducked it down, smiling softly at the blue and bronze bedspread. "I can't tell you I love you?"

"Sure you can. You just never do," Harry said, shifting the desk off his lap and onto the bed before climbing off and coming over to sit on Tom's. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Tom reached out and brushed the backs of his knuckles against Harry's cheek. Harry's eyes fluttered shut and he leaned into the hand.

"I'm good," Tom said softly. "Really. I'm fine. Go back to your work."

"You expect me to be able to focus on homework after you say something like that?" Harry laughed shakily, still feeling unsteady by the uncharacteristic declaration.

"Are you going to say it back?" Tom asked, smirking.

Harry coughed out a laugh, shaking his head incredulously before bending down and capturing Tom's lips in a gentle kiss. He pulled back a moment later somewhat breathless and hovering only inches from Tom's face. "I love you."

Tom smiled softly before pulling Harry back down and kissed him much deeper. Harry moaned into Tom's mouth and started maneuvering his body around and then lifting one leg over Tom until he was straddling him, all without actually stopping the kiss. Tom wrapped his arms around Harry's back and rear and things quickly became rather heated. Harry whispered out 'love you's between kisses and ground his hips against Tom's, enjoying the friction and the warmth of being in Tom's arms.

The proximity ward went off first, but Harry didn't even notice it, he was so absorbed in their activities. So it was the sound of the door knob being turned that finally alerted him. Harry gasped and leapt off of Tom so fast that he ended up rolling right off the side of the bed and falling to the floor with a loud thump.

Tom sat up and looked over the side of the bed to see Harry laying there, looking stunned.

Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, and Michael Corner's voices filled the room first, but they were quickly masked out by Tom's hysterical laughter.

The three boys paused, looking over towards Tom and Harry for a moment before going back to whatever discussion they'd been having before, and heading over towards Corner's trunk to get some things.

Tom's laugh had subsided into snickering chuckles as Harry pulled himself up onto his knees and glared at Tom over the side of the bed. The glare was short lived however.

He couldn't remember the last time Tom had laughed like that. A good maniacal cackle was one thing, but this... this was different.

It was... unreal.

Sequel Chapter 3

The second week of school progressed in much the same way as the first. The Ravenclaw groups were started back up, and once again Harry's Slytherin friends joined in with Terry Boot, Su Li, and Padma Patil. The only real difference was that now Tom was with them as well.

Tom's behavior was erratic at best, and Harry felt very unsteady by how unpredictable it was becoming. None of it was bad per se, just... weird. Tom had plenty of moments where he was just as cold and distant and disinterested in the rest of the world as he usually was. His superiority complex was still in full swing, and he was often very bored. The social dynamic of Ravenclaw was a stark difference from Slytherin House, and Tom considered it entirely dull. Harry had a considerably greater patience than Tom did, and he'd gained a lot of 'friends' and influence simply by being willing to help others with intellectual problems and studies.

While Tom was actually a really good instructor when it came to making a person understand a complex subject, he didn't really have the patience to put up with actually instructing someone who was having such trouble. It was sort of a contradiction.

When it came to climbing the social ladder, Tom was much more accustomed to the games the Slytherins played, and in comparison, Ravenclaw was downright mundane.

All of this was completely within Harry's expectations of Tom's behavior upon getting to Hogwarts. It was the other stuff that was throwing him for a loop.

When Tom wasn't being his normal self, he seemed to oscillate between two different states. The first was the silent, pensive, and almost melancholy mood that Harry had seen Tom slip into more and more often since shortly before Harry's birthday. He often looked troubled, and the pucker in Tom's forehead was something Harry wasn't entirely accustomed to seeing. Tom had never been a worrier. In truth, the fact that Tom seemed to be displaying any open signs of emotion at all, and when there was no one watching that he was trying to fool, was one of the most uncharacteristic things of all.

The other end of the spectrum were these rare, yet still quite inexplicable moments of warmth or affection. Harry had almost wondered if Tom was messing with him, as he'd never seen Tom genuinely act happy in such a way. Never.

He'd done it as an act before. Tom was brilliant at acting. He could imitate all sorts of different behavior for whatever situations he needed, but it was always just that - an imitation.

It was actually making Harry properly worried.

The last time it had happened, he'd pointed it out to Tom, and the other had almost looked surprised, like he hadn't even realized he'd done anything odd. He proceeded to slip into the withdrawn, contemplative mood, and stay that way for most of the evening.

Harry had no idea what to make of it, and Tom was strongly reluctant to discuss it.

—

Second week also came with the house Quidditch tryouts. Harry was peripherally aware that a couple of his roommates tried out for the team, but none of them made it on. Draco 'tried out' for the Slytherin's only open position - Seeker - with a generous donation from Lucius of a full team set of Nimbus 2001 brooms. To no one's surprise, he'd made the team.

Draco was glowing with smug pride the day he announced to the study group that he would be Slytherin House's new Seeker. Tom was the only one in the group who had the nerve to point out that Draco had hardly earned his spot, and asked if the team had even made him try out, or if the brooms had been all they required.

This did not please Draco one little bit, and left him giving Tom the cold shoulder for much of the rest of the week.

Not that Tom gave a shit.

The only other incident of any note from the second week was the run-in that Harry had with Ron Weasley.

"Did you do something to her?!" Ron had demanded, seemingly out of no where, one day when Harry and Tom were alone in one of the covered outdoor crossways, leaning against the stone rail and looking out over the Black Lake in the distance.

Harry turned and stared at Weasley with utter confusion written across his face. "Huh? Who?"

"Ginny!" Weasley belted out as he continued to storm forward towards them.

"Whose Ginny?" Harry asked, bewildered.

"My sister!" Weasley bellowed, finally coming to a stop a mere foot from Harry. Tom turned and came to stand directly beside Harry with his arms crossed over his chest and his wand in one hand, tapping threateningly against his arm.

"Your sister? Why and how would I have done something to your sister?!" Harry asked.

"She should have been sorted into Gryffindor!"

Harry gaped at him. "You've got to be kidding me! How can you possibly rationalize blaming me for your sister's sorting?!"

"She's been acting weird ever since you lot visited!"

"And you blame Harry," Tom said in a deadpan tone. "You could just as easily blame me, couldn't you? I was there too, you know."

Ron turned his angry glare on Tom now. "Are you saying you did it?!"

Tom scoffed. "There's nothing to have supposedly done. You're being ridiculous. Has it not occurred to you that perhaps the hat put your sister into Slytherin because it thought she belonged there?"

"My sister is not a bloody Slytherin!" Ron growled.

"Uh... actually, the green and silver robes she's wearing would seem to disagree with you," Harry said, earning Weasley's glare back on him.

"She doesn't belong there!"

Harry huffed and rolled his eyes. "Fine, whatever. I still don't see how you can possibly think that either of us had anything to do with it. I mean - how the hell would either of us have any control over her sorting anyway. You think we bewitched the bloody Sorting Hat? In the Great Hall with everyone and the Headmaster watching, and yet no one noticed?"

"No, you did something to her. Like a - uh - a Confundus spell or something. When you lot were at the Burrow!"

Harry closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"But why would either of us do something so pointless?" Tom asked with quizzical amusement in his tone.

"Because he's evil!" Weasley said glaring and pointing accusingly at Harry.

Tom stared at Weasley for a moment as if waiting for a real answer or perhaps a punchline. Finally he looked at Harry incredulously. "Is he serious?"

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "Apparently not being sorted into Gryffindor means I'm evil."

Tom coughed out an amused sort of laugh. "That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard. Do you even hear yourself?" Tom asked Weasley before looking back to Harry. "Did you do something to him to earn this irrational anger, other than being sorted into the wrong house?"

"No. But after he'd been following and harassing me for a while last year I started pranking him to get him to back off."

Tom looked dubiously back at Ron who was thoroughly fuming now. "Did it work?"

Harry scoffed. "No. But at least his roommates stopped pestering me. They, at least, have some sense."

"I know that you —" Ron started, but Tom cut him off.

"This is ridiculous. Seriously, why are you so convinced that there's something evil about Harry?"

Ron glared at Tom for a moment but finally scrunched up his face a bit in thought before turning his focus back onto Harry. "Everyone always said that Harry Potter had to have some sort of special power and that's why you were able to beat You-Know-Who. They said you'd either have to be a really powerful Light wizard or a really powerful Dark wizard to ever stand a chance. Albus Dumbledore is the most powerful Light wizard alive and he couldn't even kill You-Know-Who! But somehow you did it when you were just a baby?! And then you show up here at Hogwarts and you're some sort of ridiculous prodigy and a genius with spells, but you get sorted into Ravenclaw, and have a bunch of Slytherin friends! You hang out with Draco bloody Malfoy! There's obviously not a bit of Light magic in you! So it's got to be the other way!"

"You are even stupider than I thought," Harry said with an absolute deadpan. "Do you even know anything about what Light magic actually is? Or is it just 'good magic versus evil magic' in your head? Like, Dark Magic is all about curses and pain, while Light magic must be all about healing and protection? Because you may be surprised to realize that Light magic can be pretty damn offensive and damaging, too. And for that matter, let me tell you - Albus Dumbledore is not a wizard who specializes in Light Magic. He specializes in Transfiguration and Alchemy. He's got a mastery in Dueling, Transfiguration, and studied in Fellowship under Nicholas Flamel to learn Alchemy. None of those things are specifically part of Light magic - or even remotely similar to Light magic. They're completely different branches of magic and have nothing in common."

Ron seemed to take a step back, unprepared for Harry's suddenly forceful retort.

"You want to know what makes Light magic, and Dark magic different from standard Charms?" Harry asked, rhetorically. "Sacrifice," he said firmly. "Regular spell-casting uses magic that you pull from within yourself. It's your magic and your magic alone, which is why there's a limit to how powerful regular spells can be.

"But Light and Dark magic can be many levels more powerful than standard magic because they can pull from outside sources for magic. The honest to real truth is that the biggest difference between Light and Dark magic is that with Dark magic you demand power from the forces around you, and you take it into yourself, while Light Magic you barter for.

"You promise it something in return for it letting you use it. For all of the pain and horror that is often associated with Dark Arts spells, few of them require ritual sacrifice. Light magic on the other hand, regularly requires it. That's right Weasley - loads of Light magic spells require you to kill something or someone in order to get the power you need to work the spells. So maybe you should try knowing a thing or two about the crap you spout before you go around making assumptions and accusations."

Weasley stood there, utterly dumbfounded and gaping like a dying fish.

Tom smirked with obvious amusement.

"I'm done here," Harry said with a firm sense of finality. "I didn't do anything to your damn sister. Maybe you should stop being such a biased git and actually talk to her. She's the exact same person as she was before she put that stupid hat on her head. But now, she's all alone. No one expected her in Slytherin. Her housemates probably don't know what to make of her

and won't go near her, or are teasing her relentlessly. And you, her brother, have judged her guilty just because she got sorted to a different house than you. How the fuck do you think that makes her feel? It's one thing for you to make all these idiotic, uninformed conclusions about a stranger like me, but to go and pull this shit on your own sister? You're even more of an asshole than I thought. You're pathetic."

Harry turned and began to storm away with Tom following behind him.

"Wait!" Weasley called out.

Harry stopped in his tracks, heaved out a frustrated breath and turned around, looking entirely unamused. "What?"

"How'd you kill You-Know-Who?"

Harry gaped for a moment before he started laughing. Finally he let out a tired sigh and shook his head. "I didn't. I was a bloody toddler. My Mum cast a Light Magic protection around me and sacrificed her own life to power it. That's why I survived. Happy?"

Weasley gawked at Harry before slowly nodding his head.

Harry huffed out another irritated breath, turned back around and stomped towards the castle with Tom beside him.

— —

"I'm stunned you've gone this long without maiming that boy," Tom mused dryly later on as the pair sat at a table in the back of the library with a privacy ward surrounding them.

Harry snorted. "So am I, sometimes."

"It is odd though."

"What is?"

"His sister ending up in Slytherin. To the best of my knowledge, there has never been a Weasley sorted to Slytherin. And the girl obviously didn't want to be sorted to Slytherin if her tears were any indication."

"Hmmm... yeah, I guess it is odd," Harry said with a shrug. "Hardly unheard of though. Sirius was the first Black sorted into Gryffindor."

"Sound point," Tom said with a conceding nod. "However, I believe that Sirius wanted to go to Gryffindor. He was actively rebelling against his family. And you and I are proof enough that if you argue strongly enough you can get the hat to put you where you want and not specifically where it thinks you belong."

"Maybe she did want it," Harry said with a shrug. "Who knows. It hardly matters, really."

"Hm... yes, I suppose you're right."

— —

The third week passed with very few noteworthy events, as far as Harry was concerned. Remus's furry little problem happened during this time, and Harry went down for about half the night, but left the rest of the watch up to Sirius, who was there as Padfoot.

Snape appeared to be pretending Harry didn't exist in classes, and had been wary enough of Tom's unknown connection to Harry that he'd extended this courtesy to him as well.

Up until this point, since Harry had been spending much of his time outside of classes with Tom, he hadn't been actively nurturing his many social acquaintances, and as the third week had begun, Tom seemed to have noticed Harry's frequent refusal of other people's requests for help or advice and had told Harry to stop turning it all down just for him.

Harry had actually been a bit caught off guard by this, as he had hardly expected Tom to encourage Harry to spend more of his free time helping his fellow students. But Tom pointed out that, while he did not enjoy Ravenclaw's personal brand of social ladder climbing, he did clearly see how it worked, and Harry had obviously been quite good at working his way up it the previous year.

Establishing a large and favorable network was part of the plan, after all, and while Tom hoped to eventually have the opportunity to get in better with the Slytherins, he said that Harry had already started getting in with the Ravenclaws quite well, and abandoning that progress would be a waste.

And so Harry started casually helping his fellow house mates again whenever asked or engaged. Tom was clearly bored out of his mind during the times when Harry was busy with other students, not to mention his overly-icy attitude towards any other students who tried to approach him when he was alone. Harry also couldn't help but notice that Tom seemed to be entering those blank, distracted, hazes more and more often.

By the last week of September, Harry had concluded it was time to seriously worry about what was going on with Tom - as it was obvious that it wasn't going to just go away. He'd been behaving in ways definitely outside of what Harry considered Tom's 'normal' behavior, and Harry realized he was having a much harder time reading Tom than he ever had before. He accepted, of course, that 'before' had been decades ago now, and it was ridiculous to honestly expect everything to just go back to the way it used to be... but some part of him had still somehow hoped it would, anyway.

Harry had known Tom all his life. They'd been virtually inseparable for more than forty years, and Harry had always been confident that he could read Tom better than anyone else. He knew what was going on in Tom's head, even when everyone else completely fell for the mask and the acting. Harry knew the real Tom.

But he was starting to fear that he'd lost his knack for reading Tom, because there were things about his behavior the last month or so, that he just could not get a feel for. And it had been happening more often - not less.

It was the last week of September and Harry and Tom were once again, blissfully alone in their dorm. It had seemed to be a particularly bad day for Tom, with him snapping more sharply at some of the other Ravenclaws, not to mention several rather snarky retorts to some Hufflepuffs in their Herbology class, that he usually would have been able to restrain, and put up a nice public front. With the two of them finally alone, Harry decided to broach what he knew was probably going to be a delicate subject.

"Hey... you know, if you don't want to be doing this, we don't have to."

Tom looked up from the journal where he'd been working on his spell book and stared at Harry with oblivious confusion.

"I mean Hogwarts," Harry clarified. "The whole, being-students thing. There's no denying that it fits into a brilliant little plan, but that doesn't mean we have to do it. If there's something else you want to be doing, I'm fine with packing up everything and just disappearing," Harry said softly. "We don't have to be doing this."

Tom looked at him with surprise and confusion written all over his face. "Why would you think I don't want to do this?"

"I don't know - you just seem so distant... you're just really... distracted, I suppose."

"I'm fine, Harry," Tom said flatly.

Harry held his eyes for several moments and realized he had no idea what was going on behind them. He used to be able to read Tom so well, but now it seemed he was missing some sort of key to unlock the mystery.

"Do you want to leave by yourself?" Harry asked shakily.

Tom's eyes sharpened. "What?"

"I mean, is it me? I nabbed you out of that shop in Diagon Alley and just sort of turned everything you had going on, upside down. You were doing things, I'm sure of it. You're always doing something specific, but you just dropped all of it and came away with me. If you need to go back to what you were doing... and... and you don't want me tagging along, I can hardly..." Harry trailed off, not finding the strength to really argue for something he so desperately didn't want to happen.

"Harry, that's absolutely absurd," Tom said firmly, sitting up straighter on his bed.

"But there's got to be something going on with you. The best I can figure is you really don't want to be here, and you're just trying to hide it from me. But this is only the beginning. We'll have to keep this up for six years."

Tom heaved a sigh and shuffled a bit in his position on the bed so he was more directly facing Harry. "I'm perfectly aware of how long we'll be doing this. I don't want to give up on this. Really. And I absolutely do not want to go anywhere without you."

"Then what is it?" Harry asked, almost pleadingly. "What's up with you? I can't read you. I've always been able to read you, but there's something throwing me off."

Tom sighed and ran a hand roughly through his hair, mussing it up a bit and causing Harry to smile fondly for a moment, despite his worry.

"It's... I don't know. I'm still trying to sort through it."

"We can sort it out together, you know."

Tom paused and looked directly into Harry's eyes for a long moment before his eyes darted down to the surface of the bed.

"Not yet. Just... give me a bit more time."

"Fine. But you do realize you've been acting weird, right?"

Tom chuckled and sighed. "Yeah... I know."

"Like... really weird."

Tom frowned and looked Harry in the eye. "Do you not like it?"

This question threw Harry off, as he hadn't expected anything like it.

"Well, I don't like that you seem so distant and discontent all the time, if that's what you mean."

"I'm not discontent... and that's not what I mean, anyway." Tom paused, sighed and shook his head. "I don't even know what... Never mind."

Harry huffed out a frustrating groan. "I get that I was gone a damn long time, and it's unreasonable for everything to just fall back into the way it used to be - I mean... everything has changed, so there's seriously no way for anything to be the same, but no matter what our environment was, you and me... that didn't change. I..." Harry trailed off, shaking his head slightly, simply unsure how to vocalize the root of all of his fears.

Tom's brows were knit together with concern - which was also very weird - and he was frowning at Harry, sitting across from him on the other bed. He closed his eyes for a moment before heaving a sigh and pushing himself up and off the bed.

"Let's go to the secret room. I don't want to risk our room mates coming back and interrupting us."

Harry perked up with curiosity more than anything else, and hopped off his own bed. The two climbed down the stairs of Ravenclaw tower, into the common room, and then out into the hall.

Penelope Clearwater, one of the Ravenclaw Prefects, gave them a piercing look as they left. It was only a half an hour till curfew, but she didn't make to stop them.

They made their way through the school and towards the seventh floor hall with the hanging tapestry of Barnabus the Barmy. Tom walked back and forth in front of the blank stretch of wall opposite the tapestry and a door appeared there. He led Harry inside and the door disappeared behind them.

The room was totally unfamiliar to Harry. It looked like they had just entered the sitting room of a small cottage, with the door they'd entered through being the front door. It was furnished with the right amount of warmth and clutter you would expect of a lived-in home. It had a fireplace in the center of one wall, and some cushioned seats opposite it, but they were directly facing each other, making them look slightly out of place with the rest of the furniture placement.

Tom walked directly over to one of the chairs and sat down. Harry followed his lead and sat in the other. Tom leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and pressing his hands together thoughtfully, in front of his face. Finally he heaved a heavy breath and let his hands fall loosely down in front of him.

"I've been dealing with something I hadn't anticipated," Tom said finally. "It actually started about a year ago, but I'd been suppressing it and... well, quite frankly, ignoring it, quite successfully up until very recently."

Tom shifted and leaned back in the chair, putting his hand up to his mouth and biting on his thumbnail with a thoughtful frown. "I... well, this is certainly not some sort of stark revelation to you, but I've never experienced emotions the way everyone else does. Emotions never seemed to be the same for me that they seemed to be for everyone else. I learned early on how to emulate the appearance of emotions, but they were never... well, real. I mastered the facial expressions, the body language, and tone of voice that were associated with various emotional responses, and I mastered using them when they seemed most socially appropriate. But... well, like I said. It wasn't real."

"Tom, I'm perfectly aware that you're a clinical sociopath. I rather doubt you would have ever respected me or allowed me to stick around if I hadn't been observant enough to pick up on that a very long time ago," Harry said with a deadpanned look.

Tom grinned and chuckled lightly, looking down at his lap for a moment.

"Have you seen any of the studies muggles have done more recently on people who have psychopathy?" Tom asked suddenly, looking up at Harry curiously.

Harry frowned. "Uh... no?"

"They've got these machines now that can visualize what areas of the brain are active and used during different activities and thoughts. They've done these studies where they take a bunch of... well, normal people, and put them all through a series of questions, designed to illicit emotional responses. Then they took people who have psychopathy and did the same thing and compared the results."

Harry's eyes raised into his forehead and he sat up a bit straighter. "Really?"

Tom nodded. "In regular, healthy people, there's a certain area of the brain that is always active during emotional situations. Personal experience of emotions, and experiencing empathy for other people's circumstances. But this area was virtually dead in the psychopaths. Their brains literally were..." he paused and sneered mildly, "they were deficient."

Harry's eyes widened with surprise that Tom would admit something like this, far more than at the revelation itself.

"Okay..." Harry said hesitantly, unsure what sort of response Tom was expecting from all of this.

"Dominic was not a psychopath."

Harry blinked at him with a confused frown for a moment, before a dawning sort of expression graced his face. "Wait... what exactly are you saying?" Harry asked cautiously.

Tom huffed and ran a hand through his hair. "The first year that I had this body, there really was no problem at all. I felt like myself. I suppose my new physical brain was capable of processing emotions like it's supposed to, but my... I don't know, I suppose you'd call it the physical-world extension of astral mind; it wasn't accustomed to that, and I never really accessed any of that. It never came up in any form that I noticed. But after I performed the ritual to restore my eidetic memory, I suddenly remembered the nine years of Dominic's life and things... started to change. I could remember emotions. I knew what they felt like, for the first time. It wasn't just this intellectual concept anymore. It was an almost tangible thing that I could remember and feel. It was terrifying and bizarre.

"So I used all my not-inconsiderable skill in occlumency to crush those memories and all of the emotions with them, into the dark recesses of my mind, and quite effectively ignored they even existed. But... well, once that part of my brain had been tapped into, little things kept cropping up from time to time. Occlumency is all about compartmentalizing thoughts and emotions. Suppressing them, or forcing them to have less importance in your mind, and for quite a good long while that was effective at stopping these... incidents," Tom practically sneered the word before heaving a rather defeated sounding sigh.

"And then Remus kept asking me all those damn questions about my childhood. I don't know why I didn't just lie. I could have just made up stories about Dominic's past, but I didn't. Part of my mind slipped into those memories and they were... comfortable." Tom closed his eyes and bent forward in his seat, resting his elbows on his knees and rubbing his hand over his forehead.

"Mum loved me," he whispered. "And I loved her. She was everything, and the trust was absolute. It was just the two of us, and we were a team. It was sometimes an unstable childhood, but it was a happy one. I felt safe..." he whispered before reaching up both hands and pressing them against his face roughly. "Gah, it's that sort of nonsense!" he growled out, finally sitting back up and looking entirely irritated with himself.

Harry gaped at him like a fish out of water. He didn't even know what to think... "How long have Dominic's memories felt like they were yours?"

Tom laughed humorlessly and leaned back in his chair almost listlessly. "They've felt that way from the beginning. Since I performed that damned ritual. It was an honest struggle to identify them all so I could sequester them all away in the back of my mind. There were times when I'd be sort of sorting through my memories and I'd come across one that a huge part of me was absolutely convinced was mine, but then I'd take a rational step back and it was utterly obvious that it wasn't. I think the scariest part of all of it was how easy it was to... lose myself, I suppose. At the very beginning, while still trying to separate Dominic's memories from mine, there were times where I couldn't be sure that I was me anymore."

"Bloody hell," Harry whispered.

"I was doing alright for a good long while, but... sometimes it was tempting to pull one of those memories of mum up... when I felt especially alone and didn't know why the fuck I was even bothering with..." Tom trailed off and looked away towards the fireplace with a scowl on his face.

"This is astounding," Harry muttered. "It probably is a lot like if a tether's filter were removed and past life memories were suddenly accessible. In a lot of ways, I imagine the mental process would be the exact same as what you're going through."

Tom rolled his eyes. "Thank you for your analysis," he drawled sarcastically.

"So, Remus asking you about Dominic's childhood got you thinking about them a lot more? That triggered more exposure to, and use of the emotion center of your brain?" Harry prodded, suddenly fascinated.

Tom huffed and nodded. "That and... being with you," he said quietly.

"Me?"

"When I realized who you were, I felt a veritable damn of emotions trying to crush me, and it was all I could do to suppress them. I'd been doing so well up until that point — or at least, I'd convinced myself I was. Mostly I just hadn't encountered much of anything that would illicit a strong emotional response. The fact that your reappearance made my efforts to push back all those undesired emotions more difficult actually made me angry, and I used that anger to try and maintain some level of control. But when I held you... when we kissed..."

Harry smiled softly and nodded encouragingly.

"More and more I let the emotions run free. I stopped fighting them. I stopped using occlumency against them at all when I was with you, and it was so... wonderful," Tom practically whispered, his voice was so soft.

"All those years, as we were growing up, and then as we aged and became intimate... I always knew that what I felt for you was significant, but no where near what you felt for me. You would tell me you loved me, and I couldn't find it in me to say it back because I didn't know if I did - I didn't know if I could - and I didn't want to lie to you. I was possessive of you, and protective, and proud... I was smug that you were mine. You were the only person that I didn't want to fool. You were the only person who knew me, and yet you still stayed.

What I felt for you was as close to love as I was capable of feeling, yet I knew it wasn't the same."

Tom glanced up at Harry as if some part of him were afraid of admitting this. Harry just smiled back softly.

"None of this is news to me Tom. I knew all of that. And I was okay with that. I chose you, and you chose me - that was all that mattered."

Tom snorted and shook his head. "Liar."

"What?" Harry said defensively.

Tom looked back up at Harry with a smirk on his lips. "I know it bothered you when I couldn't say it back. That I couldn't say that I loved you. It's why you stopped saying it to me. You didn't want to be disappointed."

Harry rolled his eyes and looked towards the fire. "It really didn't bother me that much Tom. And I could tell it made you uncomfortable when I said it. I knew better than to let that bother me."

"Yes, you did," Tom said softly. "The first time this last summer when I was holding you in my arms in bed, and you fell asleep and I was just laying there watching you, I realized... I realized I loved you. I really felt it. It was real and it was... wonderful."

Harry just watched Tom in silence, and swallowed a thick lump that had just materialized in his throat.

"That was when I first realized that part of me didn't want to fight these emotions back anymore. Part of me wanted to... I don't know... explore who I could be if I just... let this happen."

"Wow..." Harry whispered.

Tom chuckled weakly and shook his head. "But I couldn't make up my mind. I've been oscillating back and forth on the subject for more than a month now. One day I'll be absolutely positive that I want to keep them, and then another day I'll convince myself that I need to purge them completely. I've even gone so far as to research spells that would basically rewire my brain so I would go back to the way I was in my last body. But when I start to get close to something, I back out because I just can't do it."

"Why didn't you tell me any of this?" Harry asked, shaking his head in bewilderment.

"I don't know..." Tom rubbed his face with his hands and paused for a moment, staring into the fire. "Part of me wanted to make sure I made this decision for me and for what I wanted, not for anyone else. But then part of me realized that what I wanted was to be able to love you like I always wished I could, and like you always deserved. But what about my plans? What about my ambitions? I have no idea what effect this will have on all that. I was already

getting pangs of... of something, as I finished up the last few hospital and city centers I cursed."

Harry gaped. "Are you having second thoughts?" he asked incredulously.

Tom growled and rubbed both hands roughly through his hair. "I don't know. No. Yes... but no! It's too perfect! We don't even have to kill anyone! We can win through patience! Just let them die off naturally! If I let this damn emotional empathy crap to power on, this solution is the only solution that's really viable. What sort of emotions would start going through me if I tried to power through an actual combative war that involved mass casualties? I don't even know! What the hell do I do if I start to form an actual conscious!?"

Harry coughed out a laugh, but Tom just scowled at him.

"Look, Tom... I'm not a psychopath. I'm not even a sociopath. I have a conscious. I'm sure there are plenty of people who would consider my conscience rather warped, but it is there. Despite that, I've killed a fairly monumental number of people myself. Having a conscious does not stop a person from being able to kill other people. It just means you get to feel a little bad about it afterwards - and even that, you get desensitized to. But despite having a conscious, no matter what you did, or how crazy your plans were, I still stood by you the whole way."

"You argued against me every step of the way," Tom muttered.

Harry grinned. "You didn't have a conscience, so I had to be it for you," Harry said with a shrug.

Tom grinned back at him. "I think part of me was glad for that. You were my restraint when I didn't realize I needed it."

"I'm just saying... you're still you. Emotions or conscious... I don't think that you're going to change all that much. It'll just be you, but a bit less horrible to people. I think I can live with that."

"I haven't killed anyone in a year," Tom said, as if this were a horrible admission.

Harry gaped. "Well... okay. There's that."

Tom sighed again and let himself fall back in the seat again. "I didn't want to. I certainly had the opportunity, but I just... didn't want to."

"Well... honestly, that's probably a good thing."

"What if I wouldn't be able to do it, even when I needed to?" Tom asked, looking towards the ceiling with a horrified expression on his face.

"I rather doubt that would happen."

"What if I can't get the killing curse to work?" Tom asked, looking Harry in the face with an expression that seemed to legitimately show how much this concept bothered him. "You have

to really want them dead... what if I can't do that anymore?"

Harry's mouth floundered for a moment before he just shrugged. "I guess you'd really just have to wait and see. Honestly, your homicidal itch would have been rather bothersome with us here at school. I mean, you used to get antsy if you went a month without killing someone. I was starting to wonder if we should sneak off campus at some point and find some muggle hobo just to make sure you got it out of your system someplace far away, but it doesn't look like that's going to be a problem after all."

Tom rolled his eyes in an over dramatic fashion and slumped back in his chair again. He looked off to the side, resting his chin on his fist with his elbow propped up on the arm of the chair. "It doesn't worry you?"

"That you don't want to randomly and indiscriminately kill people for no reason anymore?" Harry asked, almost incredulously.

Tom rolled his eyes again, and then sighed. "No, not that. It doesn't worry you that this might change me too much? What if it changes me so much you don't..." he trailed off and then seemed to scowl at himself.

"You think I'm going to stop wanting you because you stopped being a clinical psychopath?" Harry asked with a cough of a laugh.

Tom glared at him. "It's already been bothering you - how I've been acting."

"What bothered me was that I had no bloody idea what was going on. I was wondering if you were messing with me, or if you had decided that you needed to pretend in front of me, which you never did before, and that terrified me. I get that I've been gone ages, so you could have slipped into the habit of putting an emotional front up more often because you didn't have anyone around that you could just be you around, and maybe it would take some time for you to get used to being around me again, but then it seemed to be happening more often, not less often.

"I was afraid you'd stopped trusting me, or something, and it was freaking me out. I mean, I could always get a read on you before. I always knew when you were faking for other people, because I knew you so well, but I couldn't tell that you were faking anymore! I was afraid either I'd lost my touch and couldn't read you anymore, or you'd just been without me for so long that... I don't know! But I was freaking out because I didn't know what was going on, not because you were being emotional."

"Circe, that's such a bizarre concept for me, even still," Tom muttered, shaking his head. "Me, being emotional. It's just... wrong."

Harry grinned and shrugged. "I don't know, now that I know what was going on, looking back over the last month... it's kind of incredible."

Tom scoffed and then sighed. "So what do you think I should do?"

"You mean, should you keep the emotions or get rid of them?" Harry asked for clarification.

"Yes that."

"I —" Harry's mouth floundered and he shook his head. "Like you said, this is a decision you have to make for you. It really comes down to what you want."

"I want to know what you want," Tom said firmly.

Harry bit his lower lip for a moment's thought before shrugging. "When you told me that you loved me, and I knew it was real, even though I didn't understand how... I think that was probably the happiest moment of my whole life. Both of my lives."

"So you'd like if I kept them?"

"I - guh... that's just not my right to dictate! Of course I'm gonna go with the selfish emotional response! How important is it to you that you retain that cool, impartial, rational part of your mind that wasn't influenced by 'foolish emotions'? You always prided yourself on your rational side... outside of those moments where you got all homicidal for no reason."

Tom sighed and stared at the fire for several long beats. "I think I'd already lost that to a greater extent."

Harry frowned. "How so?"

"After you died... I just... I lost it. I think fury became far more dominant than rationality. I just wanted to punish the whole world..."

"I'm so sorry," Harry said softly.

Tom scoffed. "You died to protect me, Harry. It's idiotic for you to apologize. I'll admit that a significant part of me was rather bitter that you'd never made a damn horcrux. I was angry about that for quite a long time after that, but now I really can't blame you for standing your ground."

Harry frowned slightly. "What do you mean by that?"

"I... I don't know," Tom said, sounding both tired and frustrated. "Maybe you were right," he said with a deep, displeased grimace, as if it were physically painful to admit this. "Maybe what I did was tantamount to mutilating my soul."

"Holy crap," Harry gaped. "This is a day to go down in the history books. That was one argument I was sure I'd never win!"

"Oh shut up, you little git."

Harry chuckled and curled up in his chair with his legs folded up loosely beneath him.

"I'm not saying I'd undo all of it... but perhaps the idea of splitting my soul into seven pieces was ill conceived."

"Wo-ow," Harry said, stretching it out for effect and earning another eye roll from Tom.

"In any case, I feel that we need to put some more effort into finding or developing better methods for protecting our immortality. It's obvious that both of our approaches are flawed. Mine kept me from dying, but I was trapped as an incorporeal spirit. Yours brought you back, but as a child, and after an unacceptable amount of time. Neither are truly effective."

"Well, we've got the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life now..."

"That extends life, but it does not protect you from physical harm. A person can have their life extended by the elixir for centuries and still get killed by the killing curse in battle, or a knife in the back. With the Elixir, you can recover from near death, but not death itself."

"Perhaps we can develop something that uses the stone, or the elixir," Harry mused.

Tom hummed in distracted agreement.

"Can I ask a question?" Harry asked.

"Of course."

"What is this room?" Harry asked with a bemused look on his face as he looked around the room they were sitting in.

Tom blinked for a moment and looked around before he chuckled and sighed. "It's the last home I... the last home that Dominic and his mother lived in."

Harry's brows raised into his forehead and he looked around the room again with a new level of interest. "Oh... wow. Er... what possessed you to ask the room to turn into this?"

Tom scowled and ran his hand through his hair, trying to smooth it back, but really only mussing it up further. "I don't think I did it consciously. I'm not even sure why it picked this. I just wanted a place where I could feel comfortable and safe to discuss things..."

"That's really fascinating."

Tom gave Harry a flat, mildly annoyed glare, but Harry only grinned back unapologetically.

"So what are you going to do?" Harry asked after the room had been silent except for the cracking fireplace, for several long beats.

Tom sighed and looked thoughtful for several moments longer. Finally he smiled softly and looked Harry in the eye. "I think I'm going to keep them. The emotions, I mean."

Harry couldn't help the wide grin that spread across his face. "This is going to be so much fun."

Tom barked out a short unamused laugh. "Oh really?"

"Yeah. I'm super curious how this is going to play out. Tom Riddle, with emotions. It's just so unreal, it's hard to believe. But you have been showing bits of emotions for more than a month, I just didn't think it was possible. Now I get what's going on."

"Don't expect me to get all lovey-dovey, or start caring about the stupid meaningless problems of every random child that we interact with on a daily basis."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, don't worry. I'm not."

Sequel Chapter 4

Tom sat on one of the many short couches that filled the Ravenclaw common room with a book someone had discarded to the small table beside him, and that he hadn't actually been reading, resting open in his lap and the and twirling his wand absently between his fingers, while he distractedly observed Harry. He was sitting at a small table with two other Ravenclaw students, explaining something or other that Tom didn't honestly care enough about to bother to find out. The funny thing was that the two students he was helping were both 5th years, and they were both taking his advice seriously. Tom had once worried that this was just asking for trouble as eventually someone would seriously start to question how a twelve-year-old knew so many advanced subjects, but Harry had made it work so far.

It seemed to be vaguely common knowledge that Harry had an eidetic memory - which Tom found amusing, actually. He himself had only subtly flaunted his real eidetic memory, during their original school days, and only in so much as to intimidate people when he found it most appropriate.

But Harry was using it as an excuse to explain away his ability to know so much, and thus, help with the educational tutoring of his peers. And in Ravenclaw house, that was a the most effective method for gaining their respect.

Ravenclaws and Slytherins were both known for being smart. That was something that Tom had always known. Both Eagles and Snakes sought knowledge and prided themselves on being clever. The biggest difference between the two was their motivation for gaining that knowledge. Ravenclaws sought knowledge for knowledge's sake. The goal was to know something. A Slytherin gained knowledge to advance some other goal. The knowledge was a tool to achieve some greater ambition.

His own, very real and substantial thirst for knowledge was the only reason he was able to convince the hat to put him in Ravenclaw. There was a part of him that had often sought knowledge for knowledge's sake, but more often it was just to make himself more powerful; more knowledgeable. He wanted to be the greatest. He was the greatest. And knowledge was power.

But to a Slytherin, academic-knowledge wasn't the only sort of knowledge that was important.

Tom's eyes slid off of Harry and back around the room. A subtle flick of his wand activated another eaves dropping spell. This one was centered on a group of sixth years sitting at a table along the far wall by the book cases. He had quickly slipped into his old habit of cycling through eavesdropping on the various groups of students every time he sat in the common room. He was always listening and cataloging. It had not only been a habit from back when he was a student in Slytherin, it had been necessary back when he was a student in Slytherin. Knowing as many details about the other students as possible had many advantages. He told Harry he wasn't going to start caring about these children's problems, but that certainly didn't mean he was going to ignore them.

Knowing personal details put you into a position to know what compliments to give people who you wanted to do something for you. Knowing personal details also put you into a position to know what you can use as blackmail, should that need arise. Ravenclaws probably wouldn't respond very well to blackmail, but they would also be more likely to back down when presented with effective blackmail, than a Slytherin would. And while a Slytherin would still be pissed, they might at least respect how you managed to get what you wanted.

Obviously Tom presently had no need to do blackmail anyone - yet. But it was best to start cataloging now, so he would have the information he needed later.

He had been doing this for some time longer when his attention was drawn away from a group of gossiping seventh year girls, by Harry, standing from his group of fifth years and finally making his way back towards Tom. He came over and dropped himself, unceremoniously, beside Tom on the couch and heaved a tired sigh.

"Being polite to morons is exhausting," he grumbled.

Tom snorted and then brought his wand up just enough to cast a localized privacy spell.

"You know," Harry said after a moment's thought, "I was thinking that I should probably approach Snape soon."

"Oh? Any particular reason?"

"Well, aside from standard class interactions, he's been avoiding me, and who knows what he thinks is up with you. And I've honestly had no news of what's been going on with Dumbledore since the end of last term. Remus doesn't seem to think Dumbledore is even really concerned with me, but of course, that's what Dumbledore would want him to think. Snape would be in the best position to know something. Additionally, it would be good to check and make sure Snape and I are still on the same page regarding his loyalties."

"Do you want to reveal my identity to him?" Tom asked curiously.

Harry frowned and twisted up his mouth in thought. "I don't know. Obviously, the fewer people who know who you are, the safer we are... Plus, I'm not sure if it would make him more careful to not screw up with Dumbledore, or if it would freak him out."

Tom scoffed. "Severus does not freak out."

Harry chuckled, "Well, not literally. But I mean - the equivalent of a freak out for Snape. Realizing that he's got the Dark Lord in his class might throw him off his game enough that his behavior change would be noticeable to others."

"Well, it's not as if he's not already suitably intimidated by you alone. Knowing who I am might not really be necessary to guarantee his continued loyalty," Tom suggested.

"So... just keep it a secret?"

This time it was Tom who was thoughtful. "I'm not entirely set on that idea either. Honestly, I'd like to more actively enlist Severus' services in experimenting with the Elixir. We still

haven't gotten any word from him on any work he's completed since you sent him that sample during the summer."

Harry hummed thoughtfully and nodded. "That's a good idea too."

"The sooner we start really exploring the Elixir's properties, the better. If I accomplish nothing else with these next five or six years wasting away in this school, I'd at least like to make some headway on a more effective immortality solution. Potions was never your specialty, so having Severus assist me in breaking down the elixir's components would be a considerable boon."

"Hey! I'm great with potions!" Harry said defensively.

"Yes, but you are no potions master," Tom rolled his eyes. "You put your true efforts into the branches that you really loved like the Dark Arts and Necromancy. You leaned enough about potions to be better than most others, but we both know it was never something you were passionate about."

Harry twisted up his mouth but then gave an conceding sort of shrug.

"Fine, fine. So get Snape to help you with the Elixir. You can get Dobby to bring you a few more vials from back home. We may have to sneak back in the next month to collect more of the elixir from the stone, but what we got over the summer should last us for a bit longer, depending on how much of it you blow through with your initial experiments."

"Yes, I think —" Tom began to speak but cut himself off as a rather fidgety young girl approached them and stood nervously in front of the couch they were perched upon. Tom made a subtle gesture with his hand and canceled the privacy spell.

"Er, yes?" Harry said to prod her on.

"Oh, um... I'm Felicity Eastchurch, and y-you're Harry Potter, r-right?"

Tom could see the flicker of annoyance in Harry's eyes and the momentary grimace grace he face before he masked it and forced it away.

"Uh... yes, I do believe so. Do you... need something?"

"Oh! Uhm... yeah, Penelope said you were helping Latisha with the color changing spell that Professor Flitwick has us first years working on right now?"

"Yeah, that was about two days ago, I think."

"Can you... um.. I mean, I can't quite get it... every time I try, everything turns puce. No matter what color I'm trying to get, all I ever get is puce."

Harry let out a small huff of a breath but gave the girl a stunningly believable sympathetic smile. "Yeah, sure." He turned to Tom with a questioning look in his eyes. "Unless you — ?"

"No, I'm fine Harry. Go help her."

Harry stood up and was about to walk the girl over to one of the tables when Tom set the book, that wasn't even his, back on the side table and stood up as well. "You know, I think I'm going to go for a walk. Get some fresh air."

Harry gave him a small nod. "Okay. See you soon?"

"I won't be gone long. I'll probably just make a trip down to the kitchens and bully some house elf into getting me something sweet. I'm feeling a bit lethargic."

"Alright. See you later."

Harry went off with the girl and Tom left the common room.

As he made his way through the mostly empty halls he debated between actually going to the kitchens, or making his way down to the dungeon to find Severus. He wasn't entirely sure he was convinced of Severus' loyalties to the point where he was honestly comfortable revealing his identity, and yet he also felt that knowing his identity would better guarantee that Severus wouldn't do anything stupid. He was also fairly convinced that Severus would find the opportunity to study Elixir of Life to be an incredible temptation. Tom had no idea if Severus would feel inclined to actually want any of the elixir for his own consumption, but he was willing to offer that up, if he believed it could be used to buy Severus' loyalties. The stone produced more than enough Elixir, and he and Harry weren't even consuming it yet, since neither of them were interested in prolonging their teen years.

Just the same, Tom was fairly sure that the opportunity to study the elixir would be far more enticing to Severus than the opportunity to consume it.

But they had, of course, already given Severus some of the elixir to do just that, and yet they hadn't heard a word back from the man since then. The more Tom thought about it, the more convinced he was that he needed to go press the issue.

He made his way down several flights of stairs and a few shortcuts behind various tapestries and suits of armor. He wasn't too far from reaching the great hall when a noise caught his attention and he froze in place. He perked up his hearing, listening intently for the sound again. It had been... like a distant whisper. He'd almost swear it had been...

"Umph!" Tom was suddenly knocked a step forward as something impacted with his back. Fortunately he was quick to catch his balance and spun in annoyance to find Ginny Weasley standing there, staring up at him with a horrified look in her eyes.

"I'm so sorry!" she gasped. "I... I wasn't looking where I was going."

"Obviously," Tom said, glaring down at her somewhat mildly.

"I'm really sorry!" she said again, bending down and grabbing her bag, which she had apparently dropped. "I really didn't mean to —"

"Yes, yes, it's fine," Tom said impatiently, waving off her apologies.

"Uhm... right," she said awkwardly, ducking her head and biting her lower lip. "I'll just... be going."

Gripping her bag to her chest as if it were some sort of stuffed animal she held on to to protect her from nightmares, she quickly ducked around him and made to bolt for the stairs towards the Great Hall.

"Wait!" Tom called out and she came to a halt and slowly turned around, looking like some animal caught unawares by a predator.

"You're Ginny, right?"

"Y-yes," she said quietly, nodding her head.

"We met at that... lunch thing, your mother invited me to."

"Yeah, I know."

Tom stared at her for a moment, unsure what he even wanted to say, while also knowing that some part of him wanted to say something.

"Your brother's a git," he finally settled on.

Ginny blinked at him, obviously not having expected this.

"Which one?"

"The second-year - Ronald."

"Oh... yeah, he is. What'd he do?" she asked.

Tom chuckled with a mildly exasperated sigh. "He had the audacity to accuse Harry and I of being the reason you were sorted into Slytherin."

Her face went from worried and confused to angry in an instant. "That idiot," she bit out.

"That's what I said."

She looked up at him and a shadow of a grin graced her lips before she shook her head somewhat incredulously. "How could my brother possibly blame you two for that?!"

"I cannot possibly fathom the inner workings of the mind of a moron," Tom drawled.

This time she fully giggled and actually smiled for a moment. "Your Dominic right?"

"That's right," Tom nodded.

"Well, I'm sorry my brother did that. Like you said - he's an idiot."

"You have no obligation to apologize for him. So how are you doing?"

"Doing?"

"In Slytherin."

A shadow passed over her face. "Um... fine," she said softly.

Tom chuckled. "That bad, huh?"

She let out a small bitter laugh and shrugged.

Tom observed her for a moment before speaking again. "Believe it or not, it's possible to go from the bottom of the bottoms in Slytherin House and still manage to climb to the top, so long as you learn to play the game."

"What if I don't want to play the game?" she said bitterly.

"Then you'll always be an outcast," Tom said with a simple shrug. "Being a Slytherin is hard. Everyone distrusts them. It's like an instant blemish. Everyone has preconceived assumptions about what 'sort of people all Slytherins are', and instantly judge you the second they see that snake on your robes and the green lining. The only people who won't do that, are other Slytherins. Slytherin house may play mind games and constantly partake in a power struggle to climb up the social hierarchy, but when it comes to going up against anyone outside the house, Slytherins stick together. You could be the worst of enemies with someone inside the house, but against any outsiders, they're a united front. If some Gryffindor started up with you, that person you're normally bitter enemies with would still come to your defense. Slytherins have house unity above and beyond the others because it's them against the world."

She gave him a strange look. "You'd think by the way you talk that you'd been a Slytherin."

Tom shook his head and shrugged. "No, I was just good friends with someone who was. He told me a lot about it. Look - the trick to surviving Slytherin is, first; stop pretending that you're not supposed to be there. They can tell you don't believe you belong. They look at you and your self-loathing, and they see any one of a hundred students from the other houses, who pre-judge and hate on Slytherin, except you're on the inside. They don't trust you because they don't feel like you're on their side. Second; start listening."

She frowned. "What's that mean?"

"Sit in the common room and just listen. Pay attention to all of the people around you and eavesdrop - but you've got to make sure you're subtle. If they realize you're eavesdropping, they'll get pissed. Both because you were doing it, and because you were bad enough at it to get caught."

"In any case, you need to listen for a couple different things. Now it seems obvious that you'd want to pick up on people's secrets for blackmail, but you can honestly get by without doing any of that, if you want. You'll never make it to the top, but you can still make it pretty far, only doing the other half of things. The most effective way to get started is to listen for the things people are proud of. Find out what they are bragging about. What are they interested

in? When the opportunity presents itself, you can go up to someone - preferably someone who is already decently successful at climbing the hierarchy - and compliment them. Say something like, 'I heard such-and-such talking about that charms demo, or that gobstones match, or whatever else they're into, 'and I'm really impressed' or, 'I think that's so cool'.

"The important thing is that you're not just complimenting them on something they're proud of, but you've now given them the impression that other people are talking about this supposedly impressive thing. Teenagers are constantly convinced that everyone else is talking about them behind their back. It's people's largest insecurity, no matter how confident they appear. But by giving them the impression that people are saying good things about them behind their back, you give them a huge ego boost and ease their subconscious fears. They'll feel better about themselves, and they'll associate you with that feeling. It'll make people like you. Or at least think of you favorably. Keep this up, and you'll eventually be invited into someone's social group."

"So, basically you're saying, kiss everyone's butt, and become someone's toady?" she grimaced.

"Believe it or not, the game can actually get fun. Everyone in Slytherin - at least the older students who have been doing it for a while - knows the game. Everyone sees it when they realize you're playing them. But if you're good at it, they'll appreciate your skill in it. It becomes like a giant inside-joke. It's the people who don't figure it out, who are looked down upon. The ones who don't learn the game and who show no talent in it, that get dismissed."

Ginny heaved a defeated sigh and shrugged. "I'm not sure I could really do that."

"Like I said, you don't have to just be an ass-kisser. Listening for people's secrets is always an option. That's a harder game to play and requires more finesse. I would recommend observing the older students as they play the game and pick up on what they're doing. Pay attention to the nuances of their interactions with each other. Use that as a guide."

She bit her lip and looked thoughtful. "I guess it won't hurt to just... listen. You know - with all of this, I'm surprised you didn't get sorted into Slytherin."

Tom chuckled and leaned in close and began to whisper. "Just between you and me, that's where the hat wanted me. I had to spend several minutes convincing it to put me in Ravenclaw."

"So you didn't want everyone to hate you for being a Slytherin?"

"Oh no, not at all," Tom said, waving his hand dismissively. "Honestly, I'd much rather be down in the dungeons. Ravenclaw is dreadfully boring. But Harry was already in Ravenclaw, and I refused to be separated from him."

"Oh..."

"Honestly I'm surprised that you weren't able to talk the hat out of putting you there. Usually when someone is that averse to a house, the hat will listen to the student's request. I mean, it put me in Ravenclaw just because I insisted."

Ginny pulled her lower lip between her teeth and looked down towards the floor, fidgeting. "I don't... I don't know what happened, honestly. It seems like a blur..."

"Hm," Tom made a small noise as he watched her, trying to wrap his mind around how this girl who so obviously didn't want, or even really belong in Slytherin, had managed to be sorted there.

"Well, whatever. You're there now, and the only real option is to try and make the best of a difficult situation. You were sorted into Slytherin for a reason, even if you can't see what that reason is right now. Look; if you run into any trouble, come find me. I'll see about asking Draco to look after you too."

"Malfoy?" Ginny asked incredulously. "There's no way that he'd help me out. I'm a filthy bloodtraitor," she mimed sarcastically with a sneer.

Tom chuckled. "He'll do it because I ask him to. Or at least, because Harry will. You're a Pureblood who was sorted into Slytherin. If you start to act like a Slytherin, it won't take much to turn the tables and get a little respect of your own."

"I'm not sure you really appreciate just how much they hate bloodtraitors."

"Hah. That friend of mine I told you about? Everyone thought he was a muggleborn. A muggleborn in Slytherin. How do you think he was treated?"

Her eyes widened with obvious horror.

"And by the time he graduated, he was at the top of the food chain. A filthy mudblood with no money or titles to his name had the loyalty of the heirs to some of the most powerful and influential pureblood families in the country. All because he mastered the game."

"Wow..."

"So honestly - it's not nearly so hopeless as it seems right now."

She looked thoughtful for a moment before a very small smile graced her lips. "Thank you. I'll keep that in mind." She paused for a moment before speaking again. "Why are you helping me?"

Tom smirked and shrugged. "Well, I suppose I could argue that we're extended family and apparently that's supposed to mean something. But honestly, it's just because I'd like to see your insensitive, obnoxious brother have to come to terms with his little sister not only being a Slytherin, but excelling at it."

She flushed but eventually grinned back. "Yeah. That'd really show him."

"Hey, so I'm heading down to speak with Professor Snape. Are you heading back to the dungeons?"

"Oh, yeah, I suppose so," she nodded. "I'd mostly just been wandering the halls to avoid going back to the common room... But I think I could head back now."

Tom smiled and nodded. "Then we can keep each other company on the way down."

—

They parted ways after Tom reached Snape's office and Tom waited as Ginny disappeared down the hall towards the Slytherin common room. He paused for a moment longer to wonder what had possessed him to bother doing that. He couldn't see any specific circumstances of significant value coming from making nice with the Weasley girl.

It certainly was true that he found it entirely amusing to think of a family that, as far as Tom was aware, had only ever produced Gryffindors, now popping out a Slytherin. And that brother of her's was exceedingly short-sighted and obnoxious.

Tom shook his head, dismissing the thought as it was of as little importance as any of the other random nonsense he'd observed his housemates obsessing over for the last month. He turned his attention to Severus' office door instead, and knocked.

Sequel Chapter 5

Severus Snape's school year had been going just fine, thank you very much. It was no better or worse than any other year, and he was fairly confident that this was primarily because he'd chosen to act as if Harry Potter no longer existed. Or Herekles Jude, or the Dark Lord's personal Necromancer, or the Dark Lords dead lover, or whatever the hell you wanted to call him. Severus had decided he was better off distancing himself. His life would just be simpler that way.

And while he acknowledged that this route meant giving up on the opportunity to study the most rare and sought after elixir ever created... well, it left a rather sour taste in his mouth, but he could live with it.

Eleven years ago, Lily had died and he'd gone to Dumbledore both devastated and angry. The old man was supposed to protect her. Severus had gone to Dumbledore specifically so that she would be protected. He'd turned traitor and put his life in ultimate jeopardy, spying on the Dark Lord for Lily's safety. Betraying the trust of the people that Severus himself had gone to school with - people he had considered as close to 'friends' as he'd ever had. He'd betrayed their confidence, and gone against his very own beliefs, all to protect Lily.

But that had failed. She had died, and he knew it was his fault. He'd been the one to tell the Dark Lord that blasted prophecy in the first place, and without that prophecy, Lily never would have been targeted. But it had only been a partial prophecy. How differently could things have been if he'd heard the whole thing?

Did the rest of the prophecy reveal the fact that Harry was Herekles? Obviously it didn't say so explicitly, since Dumbledore still had no suspicions of any such thing. But perhaps there would have been some clue in the wording that only the Dark Lord would have picked up on. If the Dark Lord had known that Harry Potter would turn out to be his dead lover reborn, Severus was fairly convinced that the man would not have wanted to kill him.

Lily would probably still be alive today.

But then again, maybe the rest of the prophecy would have made no difference at all.

The only way he'd ever know is if he could get Albus to tell him what it said, and he knew that was never going to happen.

For all of Dumbledore's claims to second chances, Severus knew the man would never truly trust Severus with his most sensitive secrets.

And he damn well shouldn't, seeing as how easily Severus had been swayed to consider switching sides - again.

But then again, when Dumbledore had first offered to vouch for Severus and protect him from Azkaban, and give him a position at Hogwarts, his one requirement was that Severus

swear an unbreakable vow to guarantee his loyalty to the cause. The specifics of the vow had been up to Severus, so long as Dumbledore was convinced it meant his continued loyalty.

The old man had been perfectly happy with Severus' vow to always do everything in his power to protect Lily's son. But then again, Dumbledore had obviously assumed that Lily's son would be on his side.

He couldn't possibly be more wrong.

If anything, Severus' vow now mandated that he switch sides again. At least it did, up until there was evidence that the Dark Lord was still intent on killing Harry Potter for some reason. Which he wasn't about to discount so long as the Dark Lord was still missing. The man had been entirely out of his damn mind the last time Severus had interacted with him.

Homicidal psychopath only just barely covered it.

Severus almost hoped that Potter never would find the Dark Lord - no matter how hard the little lunatic searched. It wasn't worth the risk. That prophecy had said that Potter would be the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord, and the Dark Lord did not take threats like that lightly.

But all of these were concerns that Severus had been trying with all of his might to push out of his mind. So long as Potter didn't appear to be in any danger, Severus was free to pretend he didn't exist.

The only hiccup to this plan had been the sudden and unexpected appearance of a new student.

Severus had been peripherally aware over the summer that a student was transferring into second year, as Minerva had required him to provide a test for the boy to take. But he had no interest in the details, and she knew that. She hadn't bothered to fill him in on any details pertaining to the boy, and Severus had been perfectly happy to remain ignorant.

His curiosity had been mildly piqued when Potter had not only made room for the boy beside him after the sorting, but had then seemed to focus on him quite a lot during the feast. But even then, Severus hadn't honestly paid much attention to it. Potter had been something of a social butterfly all last year, and making nice with a new student seemed perfectly within his character.

It was the fact that he was constantly with this Dominic Prewett boy that was out of character. Potter interacted with people from every house, and multiple years. He had many social-associates within Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, and was perfectly helpful with the Hufflepuffs he shared classes with. The man had even somehow become friendly with the Weasley Twins, and by extension, Severus had even seen him interacting genially with Lee Jordan a few times the previous year.

He seemed intent on showing just how open-minded and non-judgmental he was. He showed no outward signs of bias between the purebloods, halfbloods, or muggleborn. The perfect picture of open and helpful. But one thing he didn't do was spend an extensive amount of

time with any one person, or one group of people. He did not have a best friend, or group of close friends. The closest to that would probably be his Ravenclaw study group, combined with the small group of Slytherins who he had invited to join them at the start of the previous year. But even with this group, he rarely socialized with them excessively outside of their study sessions.

But this new boy... Severus had hardly seen them apart since school started. They were always together.

Severus had been filled in a bit, thanks to his colleagues and Lupin, that this new student had apparently known Potter in their youth. The story that they'd attended the same 'school for the gifted' during primary school did not convince Severus one bit.

But that left the question... who the hell was this boy?

It was nearing mid-October when Severus learned the answer to this question. He supposed, in retrospect, that part of him actually knew... or at least... suspected.

It was a Hogsmeade weekend, so the majority of the students had been out of the school, leaving the halls more empty than usual. It had been one of those gloriously inconsequential days where very few of his Slytherins had come to bother him with inane problems, and no students from the other houses had bothered him about classwork.

He'd managed to get two different potions brewed, uninterrupted, and was nearing the point where he would retire to his private quarters.

This is when he heard the knock on his office door.

Severus looked up from his work and glared at the door. He had honestly been hoping not a single interruption would come between him and his evening respite, but that hope had now been dashed.

Silently grumbling to himself, he stood up from his desk and walked over to the door. He pulled it open to find one of the two last people he'd want to see at his door.

"Mr. Prewett," Severus drawled, trying valiantly to conceal his sudden discomfort with the boy's unexpected appearance. "Do you.. need something?" he drawled in a way that made it clear that he was only asking this question because he had to, and not because he actually cared or wanted to know.

"Yes, Professor," the boy said, his head ducked slightly, looking up at Severus with the slightest hint of a smirk to his lips. "I was hoping that you and I could... speak?"

Severus narrowed his eyes at the boy. "I am very busy, Mr. Prewett, and my Office Hours end in five minutes."

"I promise I won't take too much of your time, sir. It is important."

Severus sneered, curling his lip in obvious displeasure. "I do not have the time to be bothering with the inane questions of a Ravenclaw. If this is not related to some immediate

class matter, I insist it be addressed later."

"Oh, no sir. I insist we address it, now." Prewett said with a sudden and unsettling sense of force behind his words. The look in his eyes also changed in a way that instantly put Severus on his guard. There was an unspoken threat in those eyes.

Such a demand from a student would normally be met with a very sharp and biting retort from Severus and the guarantee of a dock in house points, and yet some part deep inside him screamed for caution. There was something very wrong with this situation...

"I don't take kindly to that tone, Mr. Prewett," Severus said, but in a much less threatening tone than he would normally use in a situation like this.

"I don't take kindly to being made to wait," Prewett said with a blatantly false smile.

Alarm bells were going off, so Severus stepped back, holding the door open, and allowing the young man to enter. He closed the door behind him and cautiously walked around his desk towards his own chair, while the boy sat in the only chair opposite it. Severus eyed him warily as he slowly sat down in his seat.

Prewett, to his credit, did not look the least bit intimidated or perturbed. Severus had yet to see any normal second year student (or any year for that matter) enter his office and sit opposite him without looking at least unsettled. Prewett just looked bored; and as the seconds passed, that boredom was slowly morphing into visible impatience.

"What can I help you with, Mr. Prewett?" Severus said with a hint of sarcastic disinterest. Not nearly as much as usual, though.

"Is this room secure?"

Severus felt his nerves go up another notch, though he refrained from showing it.

"Of course," he bit out, dreading whatever was going to come next.

"I want a report, and any notes you may have made, on your investigations into the sample of the Elixir we gave you over the summer."

Severus' eyes narrowed. "If Potter wants to discuss sensitive subjects, he should come to me himself."

"Harry is busy. Besides, this project is more important to me than him; though we'll both benefit. I assume you didn't actually drink the elixir we sent, or else you would look considerably healthier than you do. So what did you discover from your examinations?"

Severus' eye twitched in irritation. "Why, pray tell, should I discuss this matter with you?"

The boy gave him a pandering smile that managed to look both terrifying and threatening. "Because I asked."

"Who are you?" Severus asked, regretting the question before it even left his lips.

The smile that had graced the boy's face melted into a devious smirk as the boy leaned back in his chair, crossed one leg over the knee of the other and brought his fingers together in front of him. The pose was... familiar.

"Who do you think I am?"

"I haven't the faintest clue who you are, but I'm assuming anyone who associates with Potter as closely as you do is probably more than he seems."

The grin spread. "Much more."

Severus sneered despite his better judgement. "I am not interested in playing games, boy. Unless you give me a sufficient enough reason to continue this discussion, I insist you leave."

The boy slowly sat forward, his eyes trained on Severus' and not once blinking.

"Hasshhheeeethssss," he hissed, still staring Severus in the eye, and still smirking.

Severus gasped and grabbed his left arm with his right. His teeth clenched together against the instinct to call out in pain at the sudden, searing fire he felt in his arm, concentrated on his Dark Mark. His eyes flew back up to the boy's and another gasp escaped his lips.

The boy's eyes were red, triumphant, and clearly amused as he watched Severus holding his arm against his stomach, hunched over slightly with the pain of it.

"Oh god," Severus whispered as a terrible dread flooded him.

The boy chuckled deviously, once again returning to leaning back casually in the chair. "Not quite, though I hope to get closer to such a distinction than any other wizard ever has."

"M-my L-lord," Severus stuttered out, still fighting against the pain in his forearm, and trying not to cringe further as he felt the heat begin to spread further up his arm.

"It feels like your veins are on fire, doesn't it?" he asked almost casually.

"My Lord... p-please... I had no idea —"

"Of course you didn't," he said almost dismissively. "Honestly, how could you? Who would look at me and think Dark Lord?" He snorted and sighed. "But when you have no body at all, and you come across a viable vessel to inhabit, you take what you can get. This body is the primary reason I didn't come back to Britain until very recently. And even then, I had no intention to stay here, except that Harry managed to find me and convince me that this lunacy—" he waved dismissively around the room, "-was a good idea," he shrugged and examined his finger nails with a bored sort of gesture while Severus continued to struggle against the searing pain, now throbbing through his shoulder.

"My Lord... please..." Severus bit out, hating himself that much more for resorting to begging.

"Hmm? Oh yes," he said and gave a dismissive wave of his hand in the air. The pain subsided instantly and Severus let out a heaving sigh of relief.

"Thank you, My Lord," Severus said, lowering his head in as much of a submissive pose as he could manage given that he was still sitting in his chair behind his desk.

"Now that we've got that out of the way, I want your report on whatever findings you made while examining the elixir."

"I... I'll get the notes to you right away, my Lord. I left them back at my home so as to not risk them being discovered by the headmaster."

"I can also supply you with more, if you used up the one we sent before. I would like to schedule times where we can work together on it, in fact. Breaking it down and identifying all of its properties and potential uses is of the utmost importance to me. The more I understand it, the more effective I can make use of it to serve my goals."

Severus swallowed a lump that had formed in his throat.

Regular meetings with the Dark Lord to study the Elixir of Life? He was torn between the tiny piece of him that was greatly enticed by that prospect, and the much larger part of him that was terrified by it. Not that he'd ever let anyone see his fear, of course.

"What goals do you have for it, if you don't mind me asking, my Lord?"

The boy - the Dark Lord - pierced him with a suspicious eye for a moment before replying. "It will depend a great deal on what my investigations turn up. I suspect I'll mostly rely on inspirations from what I discover about its properties. At this point I can only speculate on a few areas that I would like to use it, but I also have no way of knowing if any of those goals are realistic until I examine it further. I only had a few opportunities during the summer to work towards this goal, but seeing as how I've got the next six years with absolutely nothing substantial of value to do, I plan to focus a lot of my energies into this project."

"Very well, my Lord. If we are to meet regularly, a valid excuse will most likely be necessary. Given your exemplary behavior and performance in classes thus far, it's difficult to imagine regular detentions as the reason for the visits. Tutoring also seems unrealistic."

"My cover-story says that I never attended a magical school prior to this. Additionally I've partnered with Harry in every Potions lesson since the start of the year, so it could be easily explained that the consistent stellar outcome of our potions could be primarily attributed to his efforts. The argument could easily be made that I felt I needed more practical experience, as my knowledge thus far has been primarily theoretical. Therefore I came to you asking for the opportunity to get more brewing time under my belt. You don't have to claim to be tutoring me so much as sitting there, doing grading, while I brew all of the potions you are having your first years brew. Once a week, for the amount of time it would normally take to brew such potions. That should be sufficient time to get some work accomplished."

"You're alright with the suggestion that you need additional practice in potions?" Severus asked, almost skeptically.

The Dark Lord snorted. "Severus, I'm pretending to be a twelve year old boy. Everything I do is going to involve dumbing myself down. It's a persona, and the more realistic I can make it, the more effective it will be in the long run. As it is, a muggle-raised boy with no formal education, being as skilled as I am pretending to be is already difficult to believe. Suggesting that I need additional tutoring only makes me more believable."

"Of course. Very well, my Lord," Severus said, bowing his head again and wishing for this interaction to end so he could escape to his quarters and drown his nerves in bourbon. "Is there a particular time of the week that this would work best for you?"

"Whatever works best for you. Obviously a night where you are not holding some simpering child behind for a detention would be ideal. This work will require your focus and no witnesses."

"Thursday nights would work best, then," Severus admitted, hating that this meant giving up the one night each week where he ignored the little whelps and tried to relax for the evening.

"Good. Seven or eight o'clock?" he asked.

"Seven thirty would be best," Severus said.

"Very well." The Dark Lord in a child's body stood then and began to head towards the door, however he paused just before getting there and turned back to stare imperiously at Snape. "Oh, and Severus — should I sense even the slightest inkling that your loyalties are wavering again, or that you are going to Dumbledore behind our backs, I will make the pain you experienced in your arm feel like a day in the park. Every vein in your body will feel like it's on fire, searing you from the inside out, blistering your skin and rotting your flesh, causing unbearable agony until finally, you die a most horrible and painful death. Am I understood?"

Severus swallowed, using every ounce of self-control to keep his face impassive and knowing he was probably failing. He nodded. "Yes my Lord," he rasped.

"Good." And with that, he turned back to the door, opened it, and left the room.

Sequel Chapter 6

"I want you to ask Draco to look after Ginny Weasley."

Harry paused in mid-step and turned to look at Tom with a rather bewildered look. "Huh? Why?"

"Because I know he won't do it if I ask him," Tom said, rolling his eyes.

"Yeah, well... okay, fine. But why do you want him to do it in the first place?"

"She needs someone to watch her back," Tom said defensively, looking both embarrassed and annoyed.

Harry gave him a bemused smile. "Okay..." he said with dubious amusement. "I think Daphne would be a good one to ask as well."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, her younger sister is in first year Slytherin, so she's got to be sharing a dorm with Ginny. You could probably even ask Daphne yourself. She seems to respect you just about as much as she respects me, since you've been pretty helpful in the study sessions, too."

Tom hummed thoughtfully and nodded his head as the two began to walk forward again.

They'd left the Great Hall after dinner a good fifteen minutes ago and were lazily making their way back towards the Ravenclaw common room, though neither were in much of a hurry to get there right away.

"Have you tried slipping into Draco's mind?" Tom asked.

Harry frowned. "No... why would I?"

"He obviously treats you differently than seems normal. The Nott boy, too. I wonder if Lucius managed to let something slip."

"Hmm... I rather doubt it, but it wouldn't hurt to check I suppose so. The thing is that Draco's very good with his Occlumency. Lucius has probably been tutoring him for years on it. I could obviously get past it, I just doubt I could do it without him noticing I was there."

"Well then check the Nott boy. His father, Pascal, is certainly not an unskilled wizard, but his occlumency was always subpar. I don't doubt that he's instructed Theodore to some extent, but it's unlikely he compares to Lucius' son."

Harry shrugged, not tremendously concerned about the matter.

"Harry!" Terry Boot called from further up the hall, jogging towards them from the direction of Ravenclaw Tower.

"Hey Terry," Harry said as they reached each other, mid-way.

"Aren't you guys going to the dueling club meeting?" Terry asked, looking excited.

Harry blinked at him. "The what?"

Terry huffed with apparent exasperation. "The dueling club! It's first meeting is tonight! It's been posted on the notice board since the last week of September!"

"Really? Huh. Guess I missed it," Harry said with a disinterested tone that clearly annoyed Terry if his overly dramatic eye roll was anything to go by.

"You've gotta come!"

"Why? I already know how to duel well enough," Harry said shrugging. "Dom, too," he added with a sideways jerk of his head.

Terry rolled his eyes again. "Well of course you would. But all the more reason for you to come! You could give a demo!"

"Er... yeah, I don't think so."

Harry and Tom began to walk forward again and Terry groaned in frustration. "Come on! It'll be fun! You don't even have to participate, just come. It's not like you've got anything better to do tonight. I know you're caught up on all your homework."

Harry paused again and screwed up his mouth a bit. He turned to Tom and raised a single questioning eyebrow up his forehead.

Tom sighed and shrugged disinterested. "I don't particularly mind."

"Fine. So who's running this thing?" Harry asked Terry.

"Professor Lupin and Professor Flitwick."

The group turned and began heading back down towards the Great Hall, which, according to Terry, had been setup for the club as soon as dinner had ended. By the time they arrived, it had been just over twenty minutes since dinner had ended, and there was already a crowd beginning to gather inside.

All of the house tables had been removed, and a raised platform was placed in the center of the hall.

Su Li and Padma were already there, talking with Daphne. Harry nudged Tom in the side and nodded towards them, giving Tom a questioning look.

Tom sighed and gave a small shrug, so Harry guided Terry over towards the girls. Anthony Goldstein joined up with them, and began talking with Terry, excitedly, over what might happen in the club.

"Merlin, I wish I'd ended up in you guy's study group," Anthony said glumly after a minute had passed and Terry had mentioned some project he'd been getting help from Su Li and Padma with.

"Oh?" Daphne asked, her curiosity piqued, especially since she and the other Slytherins wouldn't have normally been in the study group at all, if it weren't for Harry inviting them at the start of the previous school year.

"Yeah, well, I'm stuck in a group with Entwistle and Granger," Anthony said with the sort of emphasis that clearly said how obviously awful the arrangement was.

"Aren't they both muggleborn?" Daphne asked, her face screwed up a bit, though not too strongly as she glanced hesitantly towards Tom.

"Yeah, they are," Anthony said with a sigh. "I mean, when I first got assigned to them, I was afraid I'd have to carry the group, since two muggleborn would probably barely know what they were doing, you know? Of course, it turns out Granger is a nutter whose obsessed with reading every book she can get her hands on. Entwistle isn't bad, but... well, there are still plenty of things that he just doesn't get sometimes, you know? Granger is probably worse though, because she thinks she knows everything."

Harry snorted. "No kidding," he murmured beneath his breath.

"Granger is the one whose always waving her arm about like a loon, isn't she?" Tom asked Harry.

"Yup," Harry said, popping the 'P'.

"She's got something against you, doesn't she?" Tom asked with an inkling of amusement in his eye.

"Hm? Oh... I suppose so," Harry said, scrunching up his face. "I've never quite figured out what her problem is, to be honest."

"She's always scowling at you, whenever you're called on in classes to answer something," Tom said in an observational tone.

"Yeah, I think it has something to do with not knowing as much as me," Harry said thoughtfully.

Daphne snorted and rolled her eyes. "I've only got a couple classes with Granger, but she's definitely a nuisance in them. It's like she takes personal offense if someone else gets to answer a question instead of her."

"It's like she's obsessed with proving that she's better than everyone else, but she can't prove she's better than Harry, because she's not," Padma offered with a small eye roll.

"Daphne, I was wondering if I could ask you for something," Tom asked, as Anthony and Terry slipped into a discussion about something else a moment later.

"Hmm?" she asked, looking mildly surprised that Tom was addressing her.

"It will probably seem to be something of an odd request, but I'd like you to humor me."

"Okay... what?" she asked, looking mildly bemused.

"Ginny Weasley was sorted into Slytherin this year, and as I understand it, you've got a younger sister in first year this year, so I assume they're sharing a dorm?"

"Oh yeah - Astoria has mentioned her a couple times."

"Good things, or bad?"

"Er... I wouldn't exactly say that there was anything 'good' mentioned."

"That's what I assumed. I was hoping to convince a few Slytherins to make an effort to look after her a bit."

Daphne looked both surprised and dubious. "Any particular reason why?"

"Her brother pissed me off," Tom said with a shrug. "He had the idiotic audacity to accuse Harry and I of somehow having cursed or confunded his sister, causing the hat to sort her into Slytherin, even though we only met once over the summer, and neither of us even spoke to her. Plus - neither of us are in Slytherin, so... I just don't get his logic. I rather doubt he's capable of logic. In any case, I thought it would be amusing to actually play some role in helping her to become a better Slytherin, just to spite the moronic little git."

Daphne snorted out a short little amused sound. "So let me get this straight - you're hoping to get the Weasley girl to... I guess, you want her accepted in Slytherin to the point where she's proud of the house, instead of acting like a terrified little self-loathing leper, just to mess with her brother? And by brother, I assume you're talking about the one in our year, right?"

"Yeah, Ronald."

She chuckled, shook her head with amusement and then shrugged. "I can get behind that, I suppose. I'll see if I can convince Astoria to help. It might be a bit tricky, as it doesn't sound like any of the girls in their year are very fond of her. She'll have to be making an effort too, of course."

"I've already talked with her about trying harder. Hopefully she'll take it to heart and welcome any assistance."

By this point, a decent sized crowd had gathered in the Great Hall, circling around the raised platform in the center. Harry could see Lupin further back against the wall where the doorway to the antechamber that the first years waited in before the sorting at the start of each year, was. He was talking with Professor Flitwick and they appeared to be getting ready to do something.

Finally they made their way through the crowd and to the platform where Professor Flitwick conjured a wooden footstool with a wave of his wand and climbed on top of so he was even

with Remus' shoulders.

Remus raised his wand and some sparks shot from the tip, drawing in the crowd's attention and bringing quiet to the hall.

They began with a general welcome followed by an overview of the technical specifications of organized 'dueling'. Professor Flitwick talked a bit about the most well known dueling tournaments held each year, and then about the amateur level tournaments held for younger students, going on to say any of the older students who showed promise could sign up to participate in a small school tournament towards the end of the year, as well as qualify for participation in the Dueling League's junior level tournament that would start in the early spring.

But first, of course, Remus went on, they had to actually learn to duel. He said they'd begin with the disarming spell, and gave a quick demonstration of the proper wand movement and pronunciation for Expelliarmus. He and Flitwick stood at opposite ends of the dueling platform, and demonstrated proper dueling stances and went over some of the rules, then Flitwick demo'd casting Expelliarmus on Remus, followed a minute later by Remus doing the same against Professor Flitwick.

They then asked for a volunteer from the crowd.

Harry was not the least bit surprised when the most vocal and enthusiastic volunteer ended up being Granger. He knew that Remus had a soft-spot for her - most likely because he'd been quite a bookworm in his own day - so Harry wasn't all that surprised when Remus picked her from the crowd.

Remus showed her the wand movement one more time but she seemed to be insisting that she knew it already, so he moved to stand at one end of the platform to let her try and attack him. But she stopped him and asked, instead, if she could call upon one of the other students to be her opponent.

"If someone in the crowd is willing, that's perfectly fine," Remus said with a conceding nod. He turned, as if he were about to ask for a second volunteer when Granger turned to the crowd first.

"I challenge Harry Potter!" she called out, clearly catching Remus off guard and bringing the hall to almost total silence. Eyes from all around seemed to search out for Harry, but seeing as how Granger was staring right at him, they all found him fairly quickly.

Harry closed his eyes and tried to breath slowly to calm the annoyance he felt like angry static in his head.

"Is she mental?" Su Li snickered to Padma just behind Harry.

"Oh - well, if Mr. Potter is interested..." Professor Flitwick seemed to be saying with a mixture of hesitation and excitement from beside the platform where he was standing on his stool again.

Harry opened his eyes again, pushing a slow breath out his nose and met eyes with Granger. She was staring at him with a defiant glare, clearly daring him to meet her challenge.

"What do you think this is about?" Tom whispered to Harry.

"I have no idea," Harry growled.

"You have to do it."

Harry looked over at Tom incredulously. "What? Why?"

"She's a bloody muggleborn, Harry. You can't —"

"Fine, fine," Harry grumbled, waving his hand at Tom's obvious argument dismissively and grudgingly pushing forward through the readily parting crowd towards the stage.

All eyes followed him as he climbed up onto the end of the platform opposite where Granger was standing.

"Do you need me to demonstrate the wand movements?" Remus asked Harry, though it was obvious he wasn't expecting Harry to say that he did. Harry just shook his head and drew out his wand, turning to face Granger.

She had a look of utter determination on her face and Harry heaved another annoyed sigh lightly to himself. He figured he'd just deflect her first spell and then when she went to cast her second, he'd disarm her and be done with it.

Remus stepped down as Flitwick stepped up to stand in the center of the platform between Harry and Granger. He instructed them to bow to each other and explained that they should just try to disarm each other, before stepping back down and raising each of his hands.

He brought them down in a sweeping motion to signal the begin of the duel. Granger instantly jabbed her wand out in the proper motion while shouting out Expelliarmus! Harry stood motionless with his wand at the ready. As the bright red light flew towards him, Harry made a quick, almost dismissive sort of jerk of his wand and the red light of her spell seemed deflected off to the side where it dissipated instantly.

Granger's eyes widened and her lips parted with apparent surprise. The surprise was instantly replaced with fierce determination.

The crowd oo'd and gasped at whatever it was Harry had apparently done as Granger once again assumed an attack position and began to move her wand through the air. Harry's eyes sharpened as he instantly saw that she wasn't performing the movement for the disarming charm.

"Serpensortia!" she called out with one final jab forward, sending a three foot long constrictor soaring from the tip of her wand.

Harry gaped at the snake for a moment before looking up at Granger with a rather stunned look on his face. Granger, for her part, looked entirely proud of herself. Harry looked at her

as if he were seriously questioning her sanity.

The crowd gasped and many backed away from the stage several steps - Harry noted they were nearly all Gryffindors or Hufflepuffs and rolled his eyes at him. It wasn't even venomous. It was a bloody constrictor for Merlin's sake.

He looked back at Granger and she seemed to be silently daring him to do something and Harry narrowed his eyes suspiciously at her for a moment before turning his gaze back on the snake. He moved his lips quietly vocalizing the spell for the sake of appearances and waved his wand at the snake that was currently hiss profanities and working its way down the platform towards Harry's feet, and the snake transformed into one of those long narrow muggle party balloons. As soon as the transfiguration was complete, he flicked his wand again and the balloon popped from one end, sending it flying through the air in several loops before falling down into the crowd.

Granger looked entirely disappointed. Harry glared at her, took one determined step forward and made a lightening fast jerk of his wand, sending out a red flash and causing her wand to go flying into the air before she even realized that he'd cast a spell at all. He called out 'expeliarmus' for the sake of appearances, but technically he'd cast the spell before he bothered to vocalize anything - not that anyone watching would notice.

The crowd cheered.

Harry gave Granger one last narrow-eyed glare before rolling his eyes and jumping down off the platform to walk back over to Tom and the others.

Several people congratulated Harry on his way back, patting him on the back and giving small cheers or remarks on casting, but he ignored them.

He was peripherally aware that Granger had gotten down off the platform and disappeared into the crowd somewhere, but he didn't pay her any mind. He stood silently next to Tom as another round of volunteers were called for, and the attention of the masses was drawn towards this new distraction.

"What the hell was up with that?" Tom whispered into Harry's ear.

"I have no fucking clue, but I'm going to find out."

Sequel Chapter 7

Harry walked into the library with a purpose. He made his way directly towards one of the tables in the furthest back corner and found Granger sitting there, surrounded by books and parchment scattered across the table. He flicked his wand subtly at his side, throwing up a sound muffling ward and a notice-me-not charm that would persuade anyone who might come by to pay them no mind.

He strode directly up to her table, pulled out a chair opposite her and sat down without so much as pausing for a greeting or permission to sit.

He folded his arms on the table, leaned forward, and stared at her in silence.

She watched him warily for a moment before putting her quill down and tilting up her chin imperiously.

"Can I help you with something?" she asked in a haughty tone.

"What the hell was that all about?"

"I have no idea what you're referring to. Perhaps you should be more specific," Granger said airily.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "What the hell was up with conjuring a snake? Are you trying to suggest I shouldn't be a Ravenclaw or something? Just because I'm friends with some Slytherins? Because I'm fed up enough with Weasley constantly going on about how I'm secretly evil or something. I'd almost think you were trying to curry favor with the Slytherins with that spell, since the other Ravenclaws clearly aren't all that fond of you, but you're muggleborn, so you've got no realistic chances there."

She looked affronted now and reared back with a mixture of anger and hurt in her eyes before she masked it with her sheer determination.

"I know you're a parselmouth," she declared defiantly.

Harry jerked back and looked at her as if she were completely out of her mind. Internally he was just shocked.

"A parselmouth!? What the hell would give you a ludicrous idea like that?!" he exclaimed.

"I saw you reading that book," she said and a look of triumph filled her eyes.

Harry just arched a single incredulous eyebrow at her. "I read a lot of books, Granger. You're going to have to be more specific.

"There was a book you were reading once in the common room, late at night. It was written in parselscript!"

Harry made himself too look utterly bewildered. "What the hell is parselscript?"

She huffed. "It's the written form of parseltongue!"

"And you know what it looks like... how?"

"I saw it in a book!"

"Maybe you're the one who's the secret parselmouth then," Harry said, rolling his eyes, "since you apparently own a book with parselscript in it."

"The book was 'The Wonderful, the Weird, and the Woefully Wicked Wizards who Changed the World', by William ap Gwilym in the chapter on Herpo the Foul. He's listed as one of the earliest known parselmouths and it had a section from some letter he'd written to another wizard, that was written in parselscript. It looked just like what I saw in the book you were reading!" She declared this with the sense of finality she did whenever she quoted some book that she determined made her right and anyone who disagreed, wrong.

"Look, I don't speak parseltongue, and I don't read parselscript, so I don't know what you saw, but it wasn't that."

"But I saw it!"

Harry rolled his eyes dramatically and huffed out a frustrated breath. "I seriously have no idea what you're talking about! But I do own a couple books that I bought from this wizard down Knockturn Alley that he said had charms on them to prevent anyone from reading over your shoulder. I've never tested them out by having someone else read them and then trying to take a peak myself, to see what it looks like, but maybe that's what you saw me reading."

"The letters were little squiggly snakes," she said again as if this were concrete proof.

"Or maybe the letters were just jumbled and squiggly to make sure you couldn't read it over my shoulder," Harry retorted.

"But I saw —!"

"Granger! Seriously, listen to yourself. How is it even possible for me to be a parselmouth?" Harry asked, incredulously. "Parseltongue is something inherited. My mum was muggleborn, so that's a dead-end. And she definitely wasn't just the descendent from a generation or two of squibs, because I met my muggle family and, unfortunately, they were definitely muggles.

"On my dad's side, you've got Potter and Black blood. And I'm sure some would point at the Blacks and want to go - 'Aha! The Black were a bunch of Dark Wizards, right?' but that's clearly not the source either, or else Draco, and Millicent Bulstrode, and that Longbottom kid from Gryffindor, and the Gamp girl in Hufflepuff - oh, and the bloody Weasleys, would all be secret parselmouths too, since they're all descended from the same line of Blacks that I am, too. Namely, Phineas Nigellus, who might I add, was a Headmaster of Hogwarts, and there's definitely no record of him being a parselmouth.

"So - the Potters then?" Harry asked rhetorically. "The Potters were all secretly Parselmouths and no one ever knew? The Potters have been sorted into Gryffindor for generations. I went back five generations in the Hogwarts year books, and every one of them were Gryffindors, and there was definitely not a single mention of any special affinity for snakes.

"I'm - not - a - parselmouth!" he finally concluded with a sense of finality.

"But I —" Granger started to protest again.

"No! Granger, I'm serious. You're being irrational! You see me reading one book that you apparently can't read over my shoulder, and you suddenly consider that concrete evidence that I speak a language that, by all rights and logic, I should be absolutely incapable of speaking? It's irrational. You're just protesting now because you don't want to be proven wrong."

She scowled and frowned deeply at him, but at least she didn't move to protest further.

Harry blew out a long, frustrated sigh before ruffling his hand through his hair and realizing a moment later that he'd mussed up the low ponytail he had it tied into. Distractedly, he pulled the tie out and began to put it back while looking distantly at the wall behind her. Finally he focused on her again. "What possessed you to try and summon a snake during the dueling club?"

"I wanted to see if you'd speak to it," she said in a quiet, annoyed tone.

"If I were secretly hiding the fact that I'm a parselmouth, why would I blow it by speaking to some snake in front of most of the school? What sense does that make?"

She scowled and blew out a snort of air through her nose while petulantly folding her arms over her chest.

"Even more, it was a bloody constrictor. That's hardly even a threat. Now if it had been a king cobra or something, there would have been a greater sense of danger involved —"

"I wasn't going to conjure something actually dangerous!" she protested, looking affronted. "There were students everywhere! There's no telling what could have happened!"

Harry rolled his eyes. "My point exactly. Honestly though, I don't get why you're so... I don't know - so obsessed with me. I definitely don't take you for one of those weird fangirls that seem to follow me around in packs and giggle when they think I'm not looking. And before this, at least, I hadn't pegged you for a nutter like Weasley, where he's hung up on some irrational notion that if I'm not in Gryffindor, I must therefore be evil," Harry said with another dramatic gesture of exasperation.

Granger remained silent for a moment, scowling mildly now, but still looking rather disgruntled. Finally she spoke. "I just know you're hiding things."

"So?" Harry said with an exaggerated shrug. "Who isn't hiding things? Besides, just because there are things you don't know about me, doesn't mean that they're things I'm keeping secret

from you. I just never considered you a person who warranted discussing those things with. I have no idea where you're from or what your muggle parents do - does that mean you're keeping secrets?"

"They live in Worthing, West Sussex, and they're both Dentists," she declared almost defiantly.

"See? Was that so hard? I asked for information, and you gave it. Have you once tried actually asking me anything?" Harry asked pointedly.

She went a bit pink in the face at this.

"People have this thing called personal privacy. My life is excessively in the public domain due to the circumstances of my parents death, and that sucks. As a result, I like to keep private things, private. There's nothing sinister going on here, Granger. You're just looking for something interesting where there's nothing but ordinary. You're imagining things where nothing exists. Please just... just calm down, and for Merlin's sake, leave me alone."

At this, Harry stood up, giving her an entirely disappointed sort of look that made her sink into her chair, looking like a guilty puppy. He turned and walked away, not giving her a backward glance. He dispelled his wards as he walked through their boundaries and heaved a quiet sigh, hoping that would be enough to get her off his back for a while.

— —

Tom entered the Ravenclaw common room and heaved a bothered sigh. Harry was off to track down Granger, and Tom was bored. His first impulse was to go isolate himself somewhere that wouldn't involve interacting with these children any, but another part of him had been thinking that he'd been a bit too anti-social since coming back to Hogwarts.

The problem was that he really wasn't interested in bothering with trying to gain the affections of the Ravenclaws. They were just... so boring.

He'd been thinking more and more that he ought to start making efforts to get in with the Slytherins more, yet another part of him seemed to lean towards caution in gaining any sort of notoriety for only associating with Slytherins. Their goal was, after all, to stay under Dumbledore's radar until a reasonable opportunity to kill the bastard without getting caught presented itself, or they graduated. Tom, being Harry Potter's closest friend, would undoubtedly remain under the man's scrutiny, and if he considered 'Dominic' suspicious, it would only lessen any opportunities Tom might find to finally make the bastard pay for all he'd done.

Thus, Tom felt rather trapped. He had no desire to socialize with the Ravenclaws because they were boring, but felt as if it weren't entirely safe to try socializing with the Slytherins. The truth of the matter was that the older Slytherins probably wouldn't want to pay him any mind, anyway. He was supposed to be a twelve-year old, and he'd been sorted into Ravenclaw. And while it wasn't common knowledge, the official story did say that he'd been raised like a muggle which would only lessen the Slytherin's interest in him, should they find

out. Tom's family name was mildly compelling, in that he was the last male in a line that had otherwise been assumed lost, but that was not enough to garner any real interest.

Heaving a resigned sigh, Tom stepped further into the common room and sat down on the nearest available chair. His satchel fell to the floor beside the chair and he just let his head lay back against the squashy headrest for a moment while he slowly breathed, trying to clear his thoughts.

His thoughts got jumbled a lot more often than they used to, and he knew this only because if he focused on remembering the clarity with which he used to think and comparing it to how he most often felt now, he could tell there was a notable difference. He'd always known that emotions complicated things, and had often used that knowledge against others, as well as to justify to himself the surety with which he held his own superiority over them.

There was still a significant part of him that felt he had been better before all of these emotions had begun to cloud his judgement and thought processes. He was less now, than he had been then. And yet part of him couldn't entirely agree with that belief. And another part of him seemed to acknowledge that he was probably 'less' now than he had been, but perhaps that wasn't really all that bad.

But then another part of him felt like he was weaker now, and that was shit, but he wasn't going to do anything about it anyway, so he'd just have to deal with it.

That was probably the most dominant part, if he were being honest. He'd come to terms with the degree of inferiority he'd now adopted as part of this new body, and he was just going to make the best of it, and try not let it compromise his goals too much.

Thinking about these bothersome emotions, Tom knew that the few social interactions he'd bothered enduring with his fellow students were entirely inspired by random bursts of some emotion or another. The whole thing with Ginny Weasley was probably some sort of emotional response. It was true that he'd enjoy rubbing Ronald Weasley's face in it, if his sister were to become an accomplished Slytherin, but it was also true that that was hardly the main inspiration for trying to help her out.

What the real inspiration was, however, he honestly couldn't put his finger on.

Emotions were strange, and he was still rather inexperienced with making sense of the noise he now found in his head.

"You know, you're recovering quite nicely," a light, curious sounding voice spoke, drawing Tom out of his troubled lull.

He raised his head and frowned in mild confusion, unsure if the voice was actually speaking to him or not. He found that the chair he had dropped himself into was directly opposite another armchair - this one currently occupied by a 1st year girl with feathery blond hair, and overly-wide eyes that gave her the appearance that she was in a constant state of surprise. She also appeared to be wearing a string of corks around her neck, and her earrings resembled dirigible plums. Or perhaps, radishes, it was difficult to tell from this distance.

"I'm sorry, were you speaking to me?" Tom asked.

"Oh yes, I was," she said with a dreamy smile and a lulling nod of her head.

Tom frowned deeper as he went over the words she'd spoken. "Recovering from what?" he asked.

"The Powriewisp haunting you suffered."

"The... what?"

"Prowiewisp."

He stared at her for a long moment, waiting to see if the girl would explain what this was supposed to mean, but she only continued to stare at him.

"I have read a great many books and investigated a fairly significant number of magical creatures, but I have never heard of any such creature before," Tom stated.

"Oh, they're quite troublesome. Rather awful, even," she said, looking very serious indeed, for someone with such a quizzical appearance.

"And you think that I was being haunted by one of these things?" Tom asked, feeling mildly amused at this point.

"Mmm, yes," she said, humming with thoughtful interest and nodding her head again. "It's marks are still on you, but they're fading."

At this point, he couldn't help but wondering what the devil this girl was talking about. She wasn't lying to him, he'd always been able to pick up on that sort of thing without even really trying. He had been scanning the surface of people's minds for deception so consistently, for so long, that he did it almost unconsciously now. He was fairly sure he would have noticed if the girl was trying to play some sort of prank on him.

"And what exactly is a Prowiewisp?"

"Why, they're the spirits of old Redcaps who died because their hats dried out. But since they're dead, they can't kill people anymore, so they haunt someone and try to make them do it instead."

Tom blinked at her for a moment of stunned shock. "I — wait, what?" He pushed out a moment later, trying to look appropriately disbelieving, and not as unsettled as he really felt.

"Did it never try to make you kill someone?"

"I - No! I have no idea what you're talking about!" he exclaimed.

"Oh. Well that's good then," she said with a vague sort of smile before leaning back in her chair and beginning to read a magazine she was holding in her lap.

Tom gaped at her for several moments longer. One part of him was all for the idea of ignoring this clearly insane girl and pretending this bizarre conversation never happened, but a more pragmatic part insisted that he find out what the hell these 'signs' were that she said she could see on him that apparently lead her to believe he'd once had the inclination to kill people.

Tom knew quite well what a Redcap was. They were rather nasty, and murderous little creatures that liked to inhabit old castles and similarly old stone buildings. They were called Redcaps because of the hats they wore upon their heads, which were dyed with the blood of their victims. It was said that if a Redcap's hat were to dry out - in other words, if they failed to kill regularly enough - they themselves would die. However he had never heard anything about Redcaps sticking around as some sort of ghost and haunting people.

"Wait - I'm sorry, but what made you think I'd been haunted by one of these things? What signs?" Tom asked, drawing the strange girl's attention back away from her magazine.

"There's a faint image of a dunter around your head. But it's nearly gone. And you seem to have a mild infestation of wrackspurts, and wrackspurts would never be anywhere near a powiewisp, so it's clearly gone now."

Okay, she was obviously insane.

"Dunter is just another name for Redcaps," he stated emphatically.

"A dunter is a circlet that the Redcap's hat sits upon," she said, with just as much conviction.

Tom reached up and massaged his temple before rubbing away at his face to fight off the headache he felt threatening to come on.

"Am I to understand that all of these 'things' you can see, are actually invisible?"

"Most people think that thestrals are invisible. That doesn't mean they aren't there."

Tom paused at this and examined her more closely. "You can touch and feel a thestral, even if you can't see it," Tom pointed out.

"You can see a wrackspurt if you have the right aid to help you."

"What the devil is a wrackspurt?"

"Wrackspurts are little creatures that like to float into a person's ears, making their head go all fuzzy," she replied, sounding just as convinced of this bit of information as was possible.

"R-ight," Tom said, drawing the word out, in a disbelieving, yet humoring sort of tone.

She went back to her magazine and Tom continued to watch her curiously for several moments longer before he sighed, shook his head, and decided to try and ignore her for the time being. However he also made a mental note to try and find out some information about the girl. He honestly didn't pay much attention to the first years, as their daily problems were even more banal and mundane than those of the older students, which were already exceedingly boring to him.

"Are you Dominic?" her voice broke into his mind again and he once again turned his full attention on her, feeling mildly uneasy with her asking his name.

"Yes," he answered cautiously.

"You were nice to Ginny," she said, smiling serenely.

He blinked. "You know Ginny?"

"We grew up near each other. We would play together when she was tired of putting up with her brothers."

"Oh. Okay."

"She's been much happier since you spoke to her."

"Oh... well... I'm glad, I suppose," Tom replied haltingly, not entirely sure how to respond to such a statement. Or any of her statements, for that matter. If this were all part of some game he was playing, with scripted roles in his head, and specific goals, he was sure he'd know exactly how to respond to get exactly what he wanted out of the situation. Except that he didn't want anything out of them, and had no clear intentions behind his interactions with Ginny Weasley. His lack of understanding his own motives, and the rather staggeringly confounding nature of his interactions with this strange girl left him feeling lost for words.

Her eyes seemed to drift away at that point and landed upon a clock on the wall above the large hearth. She stared at it for a moment before closing the magazine in her lap and standing up. "I should go. My group is meeting for study group today and if I don't arrive early, they tend to hide from me."

"Wait - what's your name?" Tom asked.

"Luna."

"Well, goodbye Luna."

"Goodbye Dominic."

Sequel Chapter 8

"You don't honestly think that some Redcap's ghost has been haunting you since childhood, causing you to randomly feel extra homicidal, do you?" Harry asked, clearly highly amused by this suggestion.

Tom rolled his eyes. "Of course not. That's idiotic. It's still bizarre though."

"It's hardly been six weeks since school started and Loony Lovegood is already known for being a bit bizarre," Harry said with a light chuckle.

"So you've heard of this girl?"

"Just a bit. The other first years don't seem to think very highly of her, and they're all gossiping little twats who seem to enjoy spending their study-time badmouthing people to make themselves feel superior. Of course... I suppose that's a bit of the pot calling the kettle black there, but you get my point."

"We are superior to them," Tom drawled. "They're all children with entirely unwarranted superiority complexes who think being sorted into Ravenclaw means that they're clever by default, even though hardly any of them are."

Harry just chuckled and shrugged non-committally.

"How did things go with Granger, by the way?" Tom asked, rolling onto his side and propping his head up with his hand and his elbow against the bed. He and Harry were the only boys in their dorm at the moment, though that probably wouldn't last for much longer as curfew had just recently passed.

"Eh, as well as could be hoped, I suppose. Apparently she summoned that snake because she somehow worked out in her head that I'm a parselmouth."

Tom pushed himself more upright. "How the bloody hell did she work that out?"

Harry grimaced slightly. "Apparently one of the few times I actually risked reading one of the parselscript books out in the common room, she noticed."

"Bloody hell, Harry! What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking that there was no way in hell that anyone would know what the devil parselscript looked like," Harry said defensively.

"Harry, we're in Ravenclaw. These people live for useless obscure knowledge."

Harry huffed out an annoyed, yet defeated, breath. "Yeah..." he grumbled. "It's just that everyone else was up here, and the common room was practically empty at the time..."

"It doesn't matter," Tom said with a sigh as he rolled onto his back and looked up at the canopy over his bed. "Did you diffuse the situation with Granger?"

"Yeah, I think so. I told her I've got a couple books charmed with secrecy spells to prevent people from reading over your shoulder, and that's probably what she saw."

"Did she buy it?"

"I think it put enough doubt in her mind to get her to second-guess her confidence on the matter."

"Well, hopefully that will be sufficient," Tom grumbled. He was quiet for a moment as his face twisted up with thought. "How the devil did she expect conjuring a snake in front of the whole bloody school, would make you reveal that you were a parselmouth?"

Harry snorted. "That's what I said! I thought she was supposed to be all reason and black-and-white book-logic. Bloody idiot if you ask me."

"I wouldn't call her an idiot, exactly," Tom said thoughtfully. "She's actually remarkably bright for a twelve year old."

"She's thirteen. I think her birthday is in September or something."

Tom rolled his eyes. "Whatever. Honestly, I find her mildly impressive, if not for her shortfalls in personality."

Harry turned and looked at Tom as if he were questioning his sanity. "You do realize she's a muggleborn, right? You are saying these things about a muggleborn."

Tom glared at Harry for a moment. "Yes, I'm aware. If anything, that adds to it. She's top in all her classes, if you don't take us into account, and I suspect her relentless drive to surpass your class performance has pushed her even further than she would have normally. And the girl did recognize parselscript. To be completely honest, that is fairly impressive."

"I thought all Ravenclaws were driven by the pursuit of obscure knowledge," Harry drawled sarcastically.

Tom reached behind his head, grabbed one of the pillows stacked there, and threw it across the gap between their beds, hitting Harry square in the face.

After a disoriented moment, Harry burst into a fit of laughter. He grabbed the pillow that had assaulted him and tossed it back, but Tom made a bored gesture with his hand and deflected the pillow mid-air, sending it flying across the room.

This really only spurred on Harry's apparent amusement, as his giggles continued on for several moments longer. Finally he sighed happily and rolled over onto his own back, lacing his fingers behind his head. "She apparently saw a sample of parselscript in some bio on Harpo the Foul."

Tom sat up a bit straighter and raised a curious eyebrow. "She was reading up on Harpo the Foul?" he asked, sounding intrigued.

"I'd be less interested in that fact and more cautious. Harpo the Foul is known, among numerous other Dark Arts, for being the first wizard to make a horcrux."

"Any books left in this school that might mention that achievement, would only mention the word Horcrux in passing. None of them go into describing what a Horcrux actually is," Tom said dismissively.

"And what exactly do you think someone like Granger does when she comes across a word she doesn't know the meaning of?" Harry asked, arching an eyebrow.

"She'd try to track down it's meaning; but she can't. I've checked the library's restricted section - the books I once referenced that described the details and the procedures are no longer there. No doubt Dumbledore removed them all."

Harry sat up fully now and frowned deeply. "Did it look like he removed those books specifically, or just some large chunk of Dark Arts books?"

"I'm not entirely sure, honestly. There definitely appeared to be a number of books missing - not just the two that actually detailed horcruxes."

"Hmm... well those two were especially nasty books, and they had plenty of things in them outside of their details on horcruxes..." Harry said hesitantly.

"You're thinking Dumbledore might have some idea that I created horcruxes?" Tom asked sounding both curious and skeptical.

"Hopefully not..." Harry said quietly, still looking thoughtful. "But he did have the opportunity to examine my scar after the incident, and no doubt he did quite a lot of digging after you disappeared that night... Remus and Sirius have both told me that Dumbledore's convinced that you were never really dead, but honestly, what would give him that impression? Why would he be so positive that you weren't dead unless he had some idea as to why you weren't dead?"

Tom hummed thoughtfully, sounding a bit more honestly concerned this time. "Well, it's certainly something to keep in mind. Just the same, there's no way he'd be able to figure out the objects I made into horcruxes, let alone find them. He wouldn't know how many I made either."

"Him destroying even one of your horcruxes is unacceptable," Harry stated emphatically. "Right now your soul is split apart in ways that is honestly, dangerous and idiotic, but at least it's still whole. Stretched, but whole. If one of those pieces is actually destroyed it will cause irreparable harm. It could destabilize the whole thing."

Tom heaved a sigh and fell back on his bed, looking pensively up at his canopy. "I've been debating fetching the diadem."

Harry frowned. "What for?"

"I was thinking I'd try reincorporating that piece."

Harry's brows raised into his forehead. "Any particular reason why?"

"I need a test subject. I need to see what reabsorption does to the vessel. If the diadem itself remains perfectly in tact and doesn't appear to have suffered any ill effects during the move, then I'll begin seriously investigating what steps would be needed to try pulling the horcrux out of your forehead."

"Ah," Harry said in a dawning understanding. "Yeah... that might not be a bad idea. No real hurry though. It's not like there's been any ill effects from this thing hanging out with me," Harry shrugged.

Tom frowned and shook his head. "Perhaps not yet, but this is totally unprecedented. I don't want to run the risk of it trying to take control of your body from you, or feeding off of your magic in an attempt to free itself."

"Free itself?"

"Well, I don't know if the piece in you would be capable of it, but I did investigate the possibility of such a thing when I was making adjustments to the Diary horcrux."

"Oh, you mean that idiotic plan to reopen the chamber," Harry rolled his eyes.

Tom gave him a mild glare but sighed and nodded. "Yes, that. Theoretically, that horcrux could drain the energy from someone and use it to gain independence. At least, that was the idea. No idea if it would actually work."

"Intentionally arranging it so that a piece of your soul could gain independent awareness... I still can't fathom how you ever thought that that might be a good idea."

Tom glared mildly at Harry before heaving a small sigh. "I can't quite see the logic in it anymore either. It's strange... I perfectly remember what I was thinking at the time, and it seemed like a solid enough plan back then. However when I look back at it now, none of it seems even remotely reasonable. It's things like this that make me wonder just how much I've been changed by being in this body and taking on Dominic's memories... I don't feel like I've changed all that much, and it seems entirely unreasonable that nine years of a child's life should affect me all that much. But then I come across something like this and have to admit that I definitely have changed. It's a very unsettling prospect."

"Well..." Harry began hesitantly, "from where I'm standing, it seems to have softened over a few of your sharper edges, but you're still you underneath that. You were always a bit to... sharp and jagged... that doesn't sound right. Like, you were solid as steel with razor edges, and you never questioned things once you'd decided it was the correct action. You had absolute confidence in yourself - which was certainly a boon at times, but... well as you fully know, I didn't always share that confidence, and we had our share of epic rows because of it. I could get you to relent on some things, but it wasn't because I managed to change your

mind - you were still positive that you were right — it was just that I nagged you enough that you gave me a few concessions on things you felt you could be willing to bend on.

"Which honestly was always one of those signs to me that showed me just how much you cared about me. You still thought you were right and I was wrong, but you gave me what I wanted anyway. You would never do that for anyone. But you did it for me, and that meant a lot to me. But still, it was like hitting a solid wall with you before on some matters, while now the walls are still there, but there's a door in them that can be opened... this metaphor isn't making any sense, is it?"

Tom snorted and smiled at Harry fondly while shaking his head. "Not really, but I understand."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Well, at least you didn't take offense at all that. I'm pretty sure that before all of this, if I'd said something like that, you would have gotten angry, or at least really annoyed and been moody for a while."

Tom signed again, going back to staring at the canopy over his bed. "As long as you continue to think this is a good thing... I'll... I'll stick with it."

"Don't do it just for me," Harry said softly. "I loved you before, and I'll still love you if you decide you want to try and go back to the way you used to be. I'm just glad to finally have you back at all."

Tom let his head roll to the side and he smiled softly at Harry. "Words cannot describe how relieved and... and happy I am, to have you back, as well. I'd given up all hope. I was sure I had lost you forever, and the world was a bleak and meaningless place without you."

Harry smiled softly. "I Love you, Tom-cat," Harry teased, trying to lighten the mood and force away the thick lump that was threatening to form in his throat.

Tom snorted and rolled his eyes. "Love you too, darling, you annoying little bastard."

Sequel Chapter 9

AN: This chapter contains a sex scene. If you're not comfortable with that, you're safe getting up to the point where stuff starts to get heated, and just skipping the rest of the chapter. Next chapter picks up right from where the adult content ends.

— —

It was a Saturday and both Harry and Tom were in a notably foul mood. Both were moody for the same reason, and yet neither of them had yet broached the subject that was as cause for it.

It was Halloween, and the whole bloody school was excited and twittering about in anxious anticipation for the feast that would start in less than an hours time. The Great Hall was decked out in floating jack-o-lanterns, and conjured bats filled the air. Ghosts from far and wide had been gathering in the school for some event being held by the Gryffindor House ghost, down in the dungeons somewhere, but neither Tom, nor Harry, were really paying it all any mind. Instead, they'd spent the afternoon, trying to keep themselves busy and distracted.

But now they had each run out of things to do, and were sitting in the Ravenclaw Common Room brooding.

Tom huffed out a frustrated sounding breath and stood up rather suddenly. Harry looked up at him curiously.

"I'm not going to that bloody feast," he declared simply.

"Wasn't entirely feeling it either, to be honest," Harry said.

"Come on," Tom said reaching down and grabbing Harry's arm by the wrist.

Harry laughed a bit at the sudden and unexpected gesture as Tom hauled him out of his seat and began dragging him towards the door to the common room. Harry sped his pace up so that Tom was no longer dragging him. "Okay, I'm fine with that. Mind telling me where we're going?"

Tom stopped suddenly and Harry bumped into his back. Tom turned around suddenly and he had a gleam in his eyes that made Harry pause.

"You've still got that aging potion, right?"

Harry blinked at him. "Uh - yeah?"

"Go get some."

"How much?"

"Enough for an hour for each of us."

Harry arched a curious brow but grinned. "Okay." He turned and headed towards the stairs, jogging up them, two steps at a time. It took less than a minute for him to reappear at the top of the staircase and rush back down holding two small corked vials in his hand. He waved them at Tom.

"Got it."

"Great," Tom smirked, grabbed Harry's arm again, and actually left the common room this time.

Harry asked again what was going on, but Tom didn't answer, instead just leading him through the halls until they reached the familiar stretch of corridor on the seventh floor, where the tapestry of Barnabus the Barmy hung.

Tom walked back and forth three times until a door appeared, and he ushered Harry inside.

Harry paused only a couple feet in before a smile broke out on his face and he let out an appreciative whistle.

He turned and grinned back at Tom. "Are you trying to seduce me?" Harry asked playfully.

"Seduction implies reluctance. You and I both need this," Tom whispered huskily as he circled around Harry until his back was now facing the large king-sized bed in the center of the room. He reached out with both hands, taking Harry's and began walking backwards, leading Harry further into the room.

The large bed was draped loosely with sheer emerald fabric, and covered in a satin-looking bedspread featuring a diamond-harlequin pattern of green and silver colors. It was the epitome of a Slytherin-inspired color scheme, but in contrast to all of the green, the floor was littered with red rose petals. Candles were placed all around the room in various locations - some on tall candelabra stands, others in small plates on the floor, and on various pieces of furniture, like low tables and a bookshelf.

"I'm sick of snogging in broom cupboards, and rushed handjobs in the dorm when the others aren't there," Tom said softly as he moved forward, getting close enough that his breath feathered over Harry's nose and lips.

"You think you're sick of it? I'm the one that can't quite get manage to get his body to overcome that last little hurdle half the time. Idiotic prepubescent body. Do you have any idea how frustrating th—"

Tom pushed forward, capturing Harry's lips with his own and cutting Harry off. They moaned into each others mouths for a moment before breaking apart and staring into each others eyes.

"Potion," they both said at the same time, causing both to grin and chuckle lightly after.

Harry held out the two vials and Tom took one from him.

"Be warned. It hurts like fuck," Harry said as Tom flicked the cork out with his thumb.

"An aging potion that hurts?" Tom asked, curiously.

"It's not your normal run-of-the-mill aging potion. It legit ages every part of your body - it's not just a temporary magical transfiguration. But you de-age back after it wears off - which also hurts like hell. It was the only way to get the trace spell to properly dispel, which is why I had Snape brew it."

"Ah - well, I would have had to do this sooner or later anyway," Tom said with a crooked smirk. "Got to get rid of this damn thing anyway, may as well do it now. Besides, I might just want to make this a regular thing if it goes well."

Harry chuckled and pushed out the cork from his vial as well. "Well, bottoms up," Harry said, holding the vial to his lips. Tom mimicked the motion and the two of them tipped back their heads and downed the small portion of potion at the same time.

A couple beats passed before they both doubled over in pain.

"Oh shit," Harry managed to hiss as he furiously began to undo his belt and slip out of his trousers while also fighting against the painful growth and stretching of his bones and muscles.

Tom, fortunately, spelled his clothes with automatic resizing charms in order to always have the best fit and they grew with him, not that he was paying all of this much mind as he was presently on his hands and knees, keening out through clenched teeth.

As quickly as it had all started, it ended, and both of them were panting with the exertion and pain.

Harry heaved a moan and rolled over so he was sitting on his bum with his arms stretched out behind him, holding his weight. Tom, still on his knees, groaned as he pushed himself up and then sat on his feet, kneeling and panting.

"You weren't kidding," Tom groaned but then came up short. "Oh bloody hell, that's so much better," Tom said, taking in his considerably deeper voice.

Harry laughed. "Yeah, the high pitched kid voice is definitely one part I'm looking forward to growing out of."

"Mmm... I'm definitely looking forward to it now as well. Merlin, you're going to age well," Tom said, eyeing Harry up and down.

Harry's shirt was exceedingly tight against his chest and especially his shoulders and he grimaced as he quickly began unbuttoning it. "I'm going to pop a seam on this damn shirt."

Tom chuckled. "Not like it's hard to mend. Honestly, you should just use an automatic sizing charm like I do."

"I like a looser fit than you do," Harry said, rolling his eyes and struggling to get the shirt off his arms.

"Mmm... I definitely like," Tom drawled, leering at Harry.

Harry laughed. "Hey, no fair. Why am I the only one stripping here?"

Tom chuckled and pushed himself up and stood to his full height. "Oh brilliant," he said with an obvious air of relief. "I was afraid I'd end up short. Dominic's mum was only four feet and eleven inches. I wonder how long it'll take before I hit a decent growth spurt."

"Then his dad must have been tall, because you're definitely a lot taller than her." Harry finally managed to get the last sleeve off and tossed his shirt to the side. He finished kicking off his trousers and stood up, so he was facing Tom and scowled mildly. "I swear I'm destined to always be shorter than you," he pouted, coming to stand in front of Tom and finding himself a good five inches shorter.

Tom grinned. "I prefer it that way."

"Of course you do," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"You know, you really don't have to keep your hair this long, if you don't want to," Tom said musingly as he spent a moment examining Harry's aged features. "I know you always hated long hair before, and I figured the only reason you do it now is because you're afraid you'll resemble Charles Potter if you cut it short."

"I resemble James Potter even more," Harry mumbled. "Honestly, the length makes it more manageable. When it's short, it's like chaos. I cannot tame it at all. Bloody nuisance."

Tom grinned. "I don't know, I think I'd like the wild mess. I think it might look good on you," Tom reached up and ran his hand along Harry's face and up, carding his fingers into Harry's hair. He slid them out and reached back to undo the leather strap Harry was using to tie his hair into a low ponytail, letting the hair fall loose, just barely dusting his shoulders. "I think it would frame your face nicely."

Harry eyed him curiously. "You really want me to cut it? I... well, honestly I was sort of afraid that my appearance would... you know... remind you of... things. With me looking so much like James Potter and all."

"I'm fine, Harry. The last thing you should be doing is tip-toeing around the fact that I was an idiot and killed your parents because of partially over-heard prophecy. I am the one who owes you curtesy and consideration regarding them, not the other way around. But you should only cut it if you want to. Honestly, there's not much of a risk. If you get a haircut and don't like it, we'll just brew you a hair growth tonic and put things back to this length."

Harry chuckled and shrugged. "I suppose there's no arguing with that," Harry said as he reached up and began undoing the buttons on Tom's shirt, quickly beginning to expose the other man's skin. "Mmm... oh yes, now this is what I'm talking about. So much better," Harry said silkily as he began to trace his fingers over the other man's considerably more filled out and broad chest, spreading the shirt wide with one hand while the other continued to undo buttons. "Gods, I want you naked," he rasped as he bent down and traced his lips along Tom's collarbone.

Tom carded his hand into Harry's hair again, pulling his head up and capturing Harry's lips in a hungry kiss, as his free hand went down and began undoing his button-fly trousers.

They broke apart, both grinning like fools. "Great Circe, I feel so much less indecent kissing you when you don't look like a bloody twelve year old.

"Like decency has ever really bothered you," Harry drawled with a smirk as he managed to undo the final button of Tom's shirt and reached up to push the shirt off Tom's shoulders. Tom stretched his arms back, letting the shirt fall loosely onto the floor before reaching back in front and popping the last button on his trousers. They were quickly pushed off his narrow hips, and kicked off somewhere to the side in the room, leaving the two of them in nothing but their pants and socks.

Their lips crashed together and a familiar fire began to burn deep in Harry's groin, and in his chest, along with the overwhelming need and desire for the other man. It has been so long. Hands groped and grasped, and skin pressed against skin, as the need they each felt began to reach a fever pitch. They were grinding against each other and kissing desperately with only brief breaks for air and the occasional nip at a jawline, ear or neck.

They pulled apart again and Harry quickly reached down and began quickly fumbling to get his pants off. Tom smirked and came to a complete halt, and just stood and watched.

"I seem to be the only one stripping again," Harry said in a sing-song voice as his turgid clock was released from the confines of his pants and the troublesome garment was finally done away with.

"Just enjoying the view."

Harry stood straight up and smirked at Tom. "Satisfactory?"

"Very."

"You're turn."

Tom walked backwards towards the bed while Harry drove him further towards it. Tom finally reached down and did away with his own final piece of covering and Harry chuckled and grinned. "Great Merlin, I think you may be larger than you were in our last lives."

"By all technical measures, I'm still on my first life."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Semantics."

Tom chuckled and leered down at Harry. "So... bigger, eh?"

"Marginally," Harry said, taking a step forward, closing the gap between them.

Tom grasped Harry's shoulders and managed to turn them around before pushing Harry back onto the bed and jumping on top.

Harry laughed for only a moment before his mouth was once again captured in a deep, heated kiss.

Moans, sighs and gasps filled the air as they maneuvered their way further to the center of the large bed.

While in the middle of a face consuming kiss, Tom reached his hand back aimlessly towards the area of the room where they'd undressed moments ago, and waved his hand. His trousers rustled on the ground and a moment later Tom's wand flew out from the pile of cloth and directly into his hand.

He pulled back from Harry enough to wave his wand towards his other hand, conjuring a small pool of a clear liquid into his palm. He began stroking Harry's shaft, earning a keening moan from the man. He continued this motion while the wand was now pointed down, between Harry's legs and another non-verbal spell was cast.

Harry gasped and arched up off the bed a bit before another pleased moan escaped his lips.

"I get to top next time," Harry rasped between pants as he tilted his head up and looked down at Tom, who was presently kneeling between Harry's now spread legs. Tom tossed his wand to the side, paused in pumping Harry's cock long enough to rub his hands together, spreading the lubricant between them and then beginning to stroke his own cock and Harry's at the same time.

A stuttered breath, intermixed lightly with a groan escaped Tom's lips as he let his head lull back and his eyes to slip closed for a moment. He basked in the pleasure for a moment longer before focusing on Harry again.

"Of course luv. But I go first."

Harry let out a rasping laugh that mostly was swallowed up in his throat as Tom did some sort of twisting motion with his wrist that managed to get just the right sort of friction against Harry's glans and shaft.

Tom ceased stroking himself and reached down, pushing Harry's legs up and wide before searching out the small tight pucker of Harry's arse. It was already cleaned and lubed, thanks to the earlier spell, but that didn't negate the need for prep, especially since this body had never done anything like this before. There hadn't been any penetrative interactions between them up until now. They both held concerns for doing such things with their normal, underdeveloped bodies, not to mention other awkward obstacles. Besides, fellatio, handjobs, and a lot of snogging, had been more than enough to get Tom off, and he had finally managed to get Harry to climax a few times, though he'd still had a couple instances of difficulty getting to the finish line even since then. Tom had gone so far as to suggest turning to a spell to speed up puberty a bit, but Harry hadn't been confident enough on what sort of effects that might have and had held off.

But now there was nothing standing in their way, and they were both really fucking horny.

"Gods, Tom, just do it," Harry growled, his back arching off the bed as another spike of pleasure, and a powerful wave of arousal and need worked its way through him.

"I have no intention of our first time together like this, since bloody 1966 being painful for you. Especially considering, as you pointed out, I'm even larger now than before. Unless you've been fingering your own arse and using butt plugs without telling me, I'm going to take my time, so shut it and spread."

Harry laughed and smiled up at Tom with a mixture of love, mirth, and lust, across his face. He pulled his legs up and let his head fall back and his eyes fall partially shut as he felt Tom's finger beginning to work its way up his arse. Halting breaths shuddered their way out from between his parted lips and his back made small involuntary arching movements as Tom got deeper and began to hit some sensitive nerves. A second finger was worked in and Tom spent some time stretching, massaging, and coaxing the tight ring of muscles to relax.

"Uhhnn... Tom," Harry moaned, feeling like his whole body was being wound tight with need. "Gods... seriously... that's good enough. Please," he whined.

Tom actually made a whimpering sound deep in his throat, his own patience at its limit. He pulled his fingers out, earning a small keening gasp from Harry, and then bent forward over Harry and captured his lips, deeply exploring Harry's mouth with his tongue for several long moments before pulling back with a gasp.

He moved back down, kneeling between Harry's legs and pulling them up around him while positioning his cock at Harry's entrance. He pushed in slowly at first, pausing at any slight indication of discomfort on Harry's part, holding still thanks only to a tremendous force of willpower, until he was sure Harry had adjusted enough for him to press on.

He slid in easily enough then pulled back before starting a series of shallow thrusts. Tom's head fell forward and his lips parted with heavy gasping breaths as he was overwhelmed with the warmth and the tightness.

Harry moaned and grunted with each thrust, just taking in the intensity of it and the feeling of fullness for a long moment before reaching down between them and starting to work his own cock.

Tom shifted his legs and weight, and angled his hips before making a deeper thrust, earning a startled and desperate gasp and groan from Harry.

"Oh, fuck! Yes, Tom - you found it. Shit, yes... oh..." Harry called out, with startled pleasure.

Tom grunted through clenched teeth as he had to focus to hold off what would be an entirely premature ejaculation, and continued thrusting and soaking up the all encompassing bliss.

Tom moaned and bent forward, seizing Harry's lips in another kiss while continuing his rhythmic movement. He broke back with a gasp and held his eyes closed against the climax he felt threatening to consume him.

Harry reached up with his free hand and fisted Tom's hair, pulling him back down as he bent upwards, kissing him deeply. Finally he broke the kiss with a desperate gasp, letting his head fall back and having to fight to keep his eyes from closing.

"I'm - ah... ah... I'm close," Harry panted, working his cock in time with Tom's thrusts.

"Oh thank god," Tom moaned, letting his head fall onto Harry's chest as he grunted and continued to rocket his hips forward, earning another gasping moan from Harry as he once again hit the other man's prostate.

"Ungh... ah..." Harry gasped and arched up off the bed with his mouth parted in a silent scream as his body jerked and twitched, and Tom felt the warm dampness of Harry's cum hit his chest and stomach.

Harry's sphincter muscles tightened with the intensity of his orgasm, pushing Tom over the edge. Tom saw lights behind his eyelids and his whole body wracked with spasms from the power of his climax.

His body shook and twitched for several moments longer, before his body calmed and it was as if all of his energy left him and he slid out, melting into Harry's side, beside him on the bed.

"Oh gods, that was... brilliant," Tom rasped between pants.

Harry let out a breathy chuckle, panting quite deeply himself, as his legs fell limply onto the bed and he let his arms fall loosely to his sides, his left arm already pinned beneath Tom, as the other man had fallen down upon it.

"Brilliant. Yes... definitely," Harry panted, grinning widely and turning his head to look over at Tom. "I vote this become a regular thing."

Tom laughed and nodded. "Motion seconded. How much of that aging potion do you have?"

"Plenty. It was a decent sized cauldron, and the doses are tiny."

"Brilliant."

Sequel Chapter 10

The two spent the remainder of their hour, lazing around the room, primarily laying naked in bed and talking. The room Tom had called forth had included a shower, and they eventually made their way into it to clean up. They held each other and exchanged several gentle kisses, but it was a much calmer and relaxed atmosphere now. A stark contrast the the heated desperation of earlier.

The aging reversion came on rather suddenly, and it was just as unpleasant changing back as it had been to age up in the first place. They gathered up their clothes and dressed slowly, both reluctant to bother returning to the real world on the other side of the doors. But eventually, they did, and the pair left the room behind to wander the halls.

"We could probably catch the tail end of the feast if we wanted," Harry said, not sounding entirely convinced by his own suggestion.

"No, I don't think so. But a trip to the kitchens seems a worthwhile endeavor."

Harry grinned. "Ah, now there's an idea I can get behind."

The pair made their ways through the empty corridors, and down the grand staircases.

Tom stopped first. "Wait," he said rather suddenly, reaching out and placing a hand on Harry's shoulder to stop him from going any further.

Harry frowned in confusion and looked back at Tom, but his eyes quickly glazed over with a distant sort of confusion. He looked around, trying to pinpoint the source of what he was hearing.

A distant whisper.

"Rip... tear... kill..."

Harry almost didn't hear the hissing echo at first, but it didn't take more than a moment for it to register.

"...soo hungry... for so long..."

"Fuck," Tom whispered and bolted down the stairs with Harry instantly trailing after him.

"Tom, is that what I think it is?" Harry asked with wary panic starting to seep into his voice.

"It's impossible!" Tom said as he leapt the last two stairs onto the landing and made a hard right turn, down a corridor.

"Kill... time to kill..." the hissing voice continued, getting louder now as they approached the first floor.

Tom suddenly came to a skidding stop and Harry ran into his back.

"Ooff! Why'd you stop?"

Tom stood there with a calculating look on his face.

"What if... Harry, you have to switch completely to your Black Sight," Tom said, turning to face him.

"What about you?" Harry asked, a knot of panic forming in his chest.

"As an heir of Slytherin, I'm immune —"

"You were immune. You don't carry Slytherin's blood anymore!"

Tom came up short, a look of fear filling his eyes. "Shit."

"Is it really the basilisk?" Harry asked in a hushed whisper.

"She sounds the exact same as before... but how?"

"I'd like to know that too. Shit, it's getting louder," Harry said, turning and looking around in all directions. The voice sounded like it was coming from both behind and in front of them, echoing through the old stone castle walls in misleading ways.

"Close your damn eyes!" Tom hissed.

"Same to you!" Harry said back, closing his eyes while performing a few necromantic magic hand gestures to enhance the normal Black Sight he used, to a higher level of detail. Fortunately, Hogwarts was filled with so much magical energy, he could practically see everything even with his eyes closed. Everything was black with white pulsing patches of glowing light along every surface, and in every enchanted piece of ornamentry and architecture.

"Hold my shoulder," Harry ordered, and he felt Tom's hand grasp his shoulder. He began to walk as briskly down the hall as he could while making sure Tom didn't stumble as he trailed blindly directly behind him.

"We're almost to the bathroom," Harry whispered.

"Blood! I smell blood!"

"Shit, shit, shit," Harry whispered under his breath.

"Do you see any sign of the basilisk with your sight?" Tom whispered.

"No..." Harry said, moving forward even slower now.

"She's probably in the pipes between the walls."

"If there are pipes between the walls, why the bloody hell isn't there dozens of entrances to the damn chamber?" Harry asked, almost incredulously.

"They're enchanted. Only she can use them. It's some sort of magically expanded and restricted space. They're not really there, but they are. I never entirely understood it myself, I just figured out how to order her where to go, and meet her there from the outside."

Harry stopped suddenly and gasped.

"What?! What do you see?" Tom asked urgently.

"I just saw an incredibly bright blur. It's the same light I saw around her the last time I saw her down in the chamber when I got her venom for Snape. Then there was this light that appeared in the wall all of a sudden and she vanished through it. Now there's nothing."

"Where along the wall did she disappear?"

"Er... it's along the same side of the corridor as Myrtle's lav. Probably about halfway between us and the end of the hall."

"Then she's going back down into the chamber," Tom said with certainty. "Listen, the voice is fading too."

"So... safe to open our eyes?"

"It should be," Tom said.

Harry opened his eyes and looked around hesitantly for a moment before sucking in a sharp breath.

"Holy crap," he whispered and slowly began walking forward.

Tom did so as well, but with a slightly quicker pace, so he got in past Harry and came to a stop first.

There at the end of the hall, written in blood, in foot-high words on the wall between two windows, and shimmering in the light cast by the flaming torches, was a message.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR,
BEWARE.

"How is this possible," Tom spoke softly, frowning and shaking his head in disbelief. Suddenly his eyes widened and Harry glanced over at him just as some sort of epiphany clearly entered his mind. "The diary."

Harry's eyes widened. "You've got to be kidding!"

"It's the only explanation."

"Where did you leave it before... you know...?" Harry asked in a hush.

"I left it in Lucius' care," Tom whispered back.

"Lucius? Shit, you don't think that Draco could have come across it and brought it to Hogwarts?!"

"I would like to hope that Lucius would do a better job of keeping it safe. If he left it somewhere that his twelve year old son could just come across it, I would be desperately disappointed in him," Tom ground out in a sharp quiet voice.

Harry looked back up at the wall and noticed something else. Harry grimaced. Hanging from the torch bracket by her tail, was a cat.

"It's a cat," Tom said, seeing what Harry had now shifted his gaze to.

"She's petrified," Harry observed. He glanced down at the floor and found that it was wet with water, scattered in puddles across the stone tiles all the way back towards Myrtle's bathroom. "Guess she lucked out and caught sight of it through the water."

"It was probably intentional," Tom said, shaking his head. "I backed out several times before I finally got the courage to follow through with letting the beast actually kill someone, and even then it was more an accident than anything else. I hadn't expected Myrtle to be in that damn bathroom..."

Harry looked over at Tom with surprised eyes. "Seriously? Is that why there were so many petrifications? I thought it had to be an insane number of coincidences that could lead to every one of the affected students being petrified instead of killed."

Tom grimaced and looked away. "I kept backing out at the last minute, so when someone got close, I'd conjure a reflective surface, or cast a spell to draw their attention to a mirror, or some armor."

Harry let out a small, mostly surprised little laugh. "Blimey... I never knew."

Tom scowled. "I was embarrassed."

"Embarrassed that you didn't want to kill them?"

"Embarrassed that I chickened out," Tom hissed quietly.

"Well, if the basilisk just returned to the chamber, there's a decent chance that who ever summoned it is down there. If we hurry, we can probably catch them," Harry said, nodding his head towards Myrtle's bathroom.

Tom nodded in agreement. "Yes, but we must hurry."

The pair turned and took several water logged steps towards the loo before Tom stopped and grabbed Harry's shoulder.

"Damn it," Tom hissed.

Harry followed Tom's gaze and felt like groaning. A rustling din of well-fed and happy voices were slowly filling the air. A huge group of students began to appear from the staircase at the other end of the hall that came directly up from the Great Hall.

"The feast must have just ended," Harry groaned.

"If we run now, there's no question that we'll be accused of having a role in this."

"How the hell could anyone think that either of us had anything to do with this?"

"People are irrational, but mostly, I worry that Dumbledore will think that the horcrux within you possessed you and made you do this."

"Oh crap, that's actually a totally reasonable guess. But he's going to do that anyway. Whether we're caught here or not."

"It's best if he's the only suspicious one then," Tom said in one last rushed whisper before making to jog towards the oncoming group.

"You've got to hurry!" he called out to the crowd in an incredibly convincing terrified tone. "Something awful has happened!"

Harry came up beside him, looking horrified and confused as well. "Someone get a teacher!"

Assured that he had their attention, Tom turned and jogged back towards the wall at the end of the hall with the writing. He glanced back over his shoulder several times, in a panicky way, to make sure the others were following. Harry followed his lead, playing the confused and frightened second year that he was supposed to be.

The large group finally came upon the scene and there were gasps and frightened whispers to be heard all around.

Then someone shouted through the quiet.

"Enemies of the Heir, beware! You'll be next, Mudbloods!"

Harry's head jerked back and he found Draco had pushed his way to the front of the crowd and his normally controlled and sharp eyes were alive and his face was flushed. He grinned at the sight and then looked down at Harry as if he expected approval, but his face fell rather quickly and he seemed to force some sort of control upon himself as he recovered his usual public demeanor.

"What's going on here? What's going on?" Attracted no doubt by Malfoy's shout, Argus Filch came shouldering his way through the crowd. Then he saw the cat hanging from the light bracket and fell back, clutching his face in horror.

"My cat! My cat! What's happened to Mrs. Norris?" he shrieked.

Then his eyes fell from the cat, directly down to Harry and Tom.

"You!" he screeched, pointing accusingly. "You! You've murdered my cat! You've killed her! I'll kill you! I'll —"

"Are you bloody mad? We just got here! It was like this when we arrived!" Harry exclaimed.

"What possible reason would either of us have for attacking your cat?" Tom added, putting up a convincing front of fear and confusion.

"You've killed my cat! I'll have you strung up by your thumbs for this! I'll —"

"Argus!"

Dumbledore had arrived on the scene, followed by a number of other teachers. He swept past Filch, Harry and Tom, and went directly to the cat.

"I swear Professor, we had nothing to do with this!" Harry said, pleadingly.

"But where were you then!?" a voice called out from the crowd.

Harry turned to find Ron Weasley pushing his way to the front, where he took a moment to glare at Malfoy before turning his gaze on Harry.

"What?" Harry said, in confusion.

"You two weren't at the feast!" Weasley said loudly, a look of triumph on his face. "So where were you, then?"

"You honestly think that Harry would want to celebrate on this night, of all nights?" Tom asked incredulously. "If your parents had been murdered, would you want to spend the anniversary of their deaths surrounded by laughing children, gobbling down sweets? Are you a complete idiot, or just monumentally insensitive?"

The triumph left Weasley's face and it was replaced with a bright pink flush and a look of indignation mixed with embarrassment at being called out in front of so many people.

"Mr. Prewett!" McGonagall said in a scolding tone. Tom looked appropriately abashed and bowed his head a bit.

"Sorry Professor," he said.

"What about my cat!" Filch bellowed, practically sobbing.

Dumbledore removed the cat from the bracket and turned to face them.

"Come with me, Argus," he said to Filch. "You, too, Mr. Potter, Mr. Prewett."

"I swear it Professor! I just got here seconds before the rest of them! We were in the common room this whole time. We were just coming down to see if we could get some sandwiches from the house elves. We didn't do this!"

"And I am not accusing you of having done so. But as you said, you were the first on the scene. I would like to know what you saw. Now, come along."

Dumbledore turned and walked towards the crowd, and it quickly parted, letting him through, followed by Harry and Tom, Filch, McGonagall, Remus, and Snape.

"My office is just up the stairs, if you'd like to use it," Remus offered softly from beside the headmaster.

"Thank you, Remus," Dumbledore said.

The group quickly made their way up the flight of stairs and down a short corridor to Remus' office. Remus pulled the door open, ushering the group inside and closing it behind them, while Dumbledore made his way directly over to Remus' desk.

Dumbledore laid Mrs. Norris on the polished surface and began to examine her. Harry and Tom exchanged looks of annoyance and frustration before positioning themselves to the back of the group along the wall.

The tip of Dumbledore's long, crooked nose was barely an inch from Mrs. Norris's fur. He was looking at her closely through his half-moon spectacles, his long fingers gently prodding and poking. Professor McGonagall was bent almost as close, her eyes narrowed. Snape loomed behind them, glancing back towards Harry and Tom with concealed curiosity.

Filch was heaving dry, racking sobs, and Remus seemed to be attempting to console him.

Dumbledore began muttering softly under his breath and Harry recognized the detection spell, though he thought the man was being a bit overly thorough, since he had surely realized by now that the cat was petrified. It wasn't like the man had never seen this before. He wondered if perhaps the man was just putting on a show for Harry and Tom, thinking they'd be more impressed or something equally ridiculous.

At last Dumbledore straightened up.

"She's not dead, Argus," he said softly.

"Not dead?" choked Filch, looking through his fingers at Mrs. Norris. "But why's she all — all stiff and frozen?"

"She has been Petrified," said Dumbledore. "But how, I cannot say. . . ."

Harry internally snorted, though he didn't show it outwardly at all. He'd always wondered how no one had ever suspected it was a basilisk that Tom had used. The legend said it was a beast of some sort, and it was owned and raised by Slytherin, so some sort of serpent was honestly a fairly decent guess.

Harry had always wondered if Dumbledore actually did suspect what the creature was, but refrained from saying so aloud for fear of setting people to a panic. No doubt the parents would want to pull their students out of the school if they knew a giant basilisk could go slithering through enchanted pipes and access nearly any place in the school.

Yeah, now that he thought about it, Dumbledore probably had worked it out already.

"Ask them!" shrieked Filch, turning his blotched and tearstained face to Harry and Tom.

"No second year could have done this," said Dumbledore firmly. "Even one as prodigious as young Harry here. It would take Dark Magic of the most advanced sort, to accomplish something of this effect."

"Surly, Argus, you can't honestly think that Harry would do something like this?" Remus said.

"But they were there! And you heard that Weasley boy - they weren't at the feast!"

McGonagall turned her gaze to the two boys and raised a single arching eyebrow. "Not that I think either of you had anything to do with this, but I would like to know what the pair of you thought you were doing wandering the halls."

"I just... didn't want to be around everyone," Harry said, looking down at his feet and shrugged awkwardly.

"I wanted to keep Harry distracted. You know... keep his mind off of more unpleasant things. It's been two months since school started, but I still feel like I barely know my way around this labyrinth sometimes. I was getting him to show me around. The Weasley twins showed Harry a bunch of hidden passage ways and hidden doors last year, so we were basically just exploring all of those," Tom explained.

Dumbledore nodded and hummed. "Can you describe the scene when you first came upon it?"

"It was just like when you lot got there," Harry said with a shrug. "Water puddles on the floor, creepy writing on the wall, petrified cat."

Filch let out another noisy snuffle.

"And you saw no one else there?"

"No," Tom said, shaking his head. "The corridor was completely empty when we came upon it. It was only moments later when we heard the crowd coming from the Great Hall, and we ran to go get someone."

Dumbledore nodded again and turned his gaze once again on Harry.

Harry flinched as he felt the lightest feather touches of someone trying to slip into his mind. Panic whirled in him for a moment, as it was one thing to tease Snape by letting him see Harry's empty physical mindscape, but another thing entirely for Dumbledore to see it.

Harry instantly looked down and tried to look timid. Normally, an attempt of legilimency like that would include the slightest bit of compulsion to retain eye contact, but Harry had already shown a resistance to compulsion magic the previous year, so hopefully Dumbledore wouldn't get overly suspicious of it.

"Look, Mr. Filch," Harry began softly, "I'm terribly sorry about what happened to your cat, but I swear we had nothing to do with it," He looked up and met the nasty old man's gaze looking as sincere as any person could.

Filch's eyes were puffy and his face was red with grief and fury. He turned away from Harry and instead focused on Dumbledore. "My cat has been petrified! I want some punishment! I want whoever was responsible!"

"We will be able to cure her, Argus," Dumbledore said gently. "Professor Sprout recently managed to procure some mandrakes. As soon as they have reached their full size, I will have a potion made that will revive Mrs. Norris."

Filch's expression began to melt into one of hope and relief. Dumbledore turned his focus back on Harry and Tom and said, "You may go."

"Thank you sir," Harry said, bowing his head respectfully, to make sure the man didn't have a second go at his mind.

Harry and Tom turned and quickly left the room. They went down the corridor, behind a tapestry, through a narrow passage and out the other side before finding an unused classroom and ducking inside and throwing up a privacy ward.

"Do you think there's any chance the person who did this is still down there?" Harry asked.

Tom shook his head. "I sincerely doubt it. We could go check, but I'm not convinced we'll find much, and after what just happened, Dumbledore might have the portraits track our movement."

"Do you think the basilisk could help any with describing the person who released it?"

Tom looked skeptical. "Can't say for sure. It's worth a try, at least."

"Should we go tonight?"

"I don't think that would be wise."

Harry sighed and nodded. "Yeah, me either, I just wish we could. The idea of leaving this to stand as it is for any time makes me uneasy."

"Well, at least it should be a good six to eight weeks before another attack," Tom mused.

Harry looked at him skeptically. "What makes you say that?"

"The horcrux has to drain energy from its host, but it can't do it too quickly, or the host will become ill, and suspicious. On top of that, it should be trying to build a reserve of energy to use at the end of the year when it attempts to gain independence from the book. It probably took nearly all of its stored energy since the start of term just to control the student to do this."

"Two months of energy for one night of possession?" Harry asked, looking rather unimpressed.

Tom rolled his eyes. "I doubt this is the first and only time it's possessed its host. It didn't register with me at the time, but I heard someone mention that all of the roosters had been found dead last week. I know that long before I tried bringing the basilisk out, I made damn sure that all of the roosters were dead first. One crow and the basilisk would be dead."

"Okay... so it's likely to be awhile before the host is possessed again... honestly that kind of sucks, since my next plan for trying to figure out who it is, was to set my version of the marauder's map to tracking the movement of anyone who goes in or out of that bathroom."

"That's still a brilliant idea, it just might take some time to bare fruit."

"It's probably wise to question Draco tomorrow, too. If he doesn't have it, he still might have some knowledge of the diary. If that doesn't pan out, I'll see about arranging a meeting with Lucius in person. I don't want to risk putting anything about this in writing though."

"Sounds like a plan. I suppose we should get back up to the common room, now though."

"Yeah... awe, shit."

"What?"

"I was still hoping for those sandwiches," Harry pouted.

Tom blinked at him before smiling and chuckling. "Okay, let's go to the kitchens first, then we go back to Ravenclaw tower."

Harry grinned and nodded.

The ward was banished and they left the classroom, making their way back down several flights of stairs and past the great hall, back onto their original quest for nourishment.

Sequel Chapter 11

"Draco, I was wondering if I could have a word with you," Harry said, coming up from behind Draco as he had been walking down the hall with Crabbe and Goyle in tow, heading away from the Great Hall and towards the corridor that led down into the dungeons.

Draco paused and looked curiously at Harry before turning his eyes towards Crabbe and Goyle.

"Alone," Harry said pointedly.

Draco nodded quickly before looking back at the two larger boys flanking him. "Get lost."

Crabbe rolled his eyes, while Goyle just nodded, and the pair quickly left.

"Yes, Harry?" Draco asked, standing very tall and proper.

"Not here," Harry said, turning and walking away. Draco didn't even hesitate to follow and was instantly one step behind Harry as they made their way down a corridor, behind a tapestry, down another narrow hall, and coming out into an entirely unpopulated section of the castle where Harry pulled open a door and gestured Draco inside.

Draco came up short as he saw that Tom was sitting there waiting for them. He masked his surprise quickly enough and turned to look at Harry who was closing the door and casting a privacy ward.

"Have a seat, Draco," Harry said, gesturing to a chair that Harry and Tom had placed in the center of the room earlier. Opposite the seat were two more, with Tom already occupying one. Harry took the other.

Draco looked slightly wary but did as he was told.

"Draco, I need to ask you something, very important, and I want you to be honest with me," Harry said, leaning forward and putting his elbows on his knees. Tom was sitting up perfectly straight with one leg crossed over the knee of the other, looking calm and relaxed.

Confusion, concern, and curiosity warred in Draco's sharp silver eyes, but his face was otherwise impassive. "Yes, Harry, of course," Draco said with a curt nod of his head.

"Have you ever come across a book at your house - perhaps in your father's study, or in the room beneath the drawing room where he keeps his hidden dark arts artifacts - where ever. This book has a simple black faded cover with the year 1942 stamped on the leather of the cover, and has the name T. M. Riddle hand-written on the first page. The rest of it, is blank. It's a diary. Do you know this book?"

Draco's brow furrowed with obvious confusion. "No, I don't think so."

"So you don't have it here at the school?" Harry reiterated.

Draco raised a curious brow. "Er... no."

"Damn," Harry said, letting his head fall before reaching up and running a frustrated hand through his hair, which had the unfortunate effect of taking an awkward strip out from the thong he had it tied with. He huffed and spent a moment, fixing his hair while Tom put his leg down and looked more intently at Draco.

"Look at me, Draco," Tom said in a rather commanding tone, earning a vaguely irritated look from the blond.

"Excuse me? I —" Draco halted mid sentence as Tom crashed into his mind.

Harry watched at Draco sat there, mouth partially agape and eyes wide and unseeing, as Tom rifled through his mind with ease. And then it was done.

Draco physically jolted and nearly fell out of his chair before recovering himself. He looked at Tom with a utterly astonished expression for all of a moment before he bolted to his feet in fury.

"HOW DARE YOU!" Draco bellowed angrily. "I don't know who the hell you think —"

But Draco's angry triad died in his throat as he realized that Tom was now laughing.

He was chuckling and had one hand up, bent at the wrist and chuckling into his knuckles. Harry looked at him curiously.

"What?" Harry asked.

"I know why he treats you the way he does," Tom said, still laughing behind his hand.

Harry's eyebrow arched curiously. "Oh? Why?"

"He thinks you're me," Tom snickered.

"He thinks —" Harry began to echo in confusion before dawning understanding flashed though his eyes and he looked over at Draco. "You think I'm Voldemort?"

Draco flinched. "Wait, you're not?" he asked, a moment before his eyes got very large and he looked over at Tom, who as now smirking at him with his leg once again, bent up across his other knee. "What do you mean...?" he began to say in a hoarse voice.

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "No, Draco. I'm not the Dark Lord. Bloody hell, how the hell did you even get that idea in your head?"

Draco's head turned slowly, though his eyes remained glued on Tom for a moment longer before he looked back at Harry. "The way father treats you... the way his behavior suddenly shifted so dramatically. And how Severus's suddenly started treating you so differently last year. The first month or so of term last year, Terry said that you were Snape's constant punching bag - not that you responded - but then one day when he filled in for Lupin, you

stayed after class, and from that day on, he's... it just seemed like they both suddenly started treating you very differently. With respect and... and fear."

Harry chuckled and shrugged. "Well... yes, okay, you've got me there."

"You have got to start being more careful, Harry," Tom drawled. "I keep telling you, you're far too obvious."

"Look at you, Mr. Secrets! You did the same bloody thing with Snape - though he never mistreated you like he did me last year, so the contrast wasn't quite as obvious. Plus, you do realize that you just told Draco Malfoy that you're the Dark Lord?"

Tom rolled his eyes. "His occlumency is superb for his age. He put up a valiant fight, not that it made any difference against me of course. Besides, the Malfoys have always been valuable allies. He already believed he was serving the Dark Lord, anyway," Tom said, waving his hand dismissively.

"You're just tired of playing second-fiddle," Harry said teasingly. "He keeps treating me with all the respect and deference, and treating you like you're nobody, and you're fed up."

Tom scoffed and folded his arms across his chest in defiance of Harry's accusation.

"Wait - if he's the Dark Lord then... then who are you!?" Draco asked Harry, looking entirely flustered.

Tom cocked his head sideways, looking at Draco speculatively. "You've heard of Herakles Jude?" he asked, though it was more of a statement than a question.

"Of course. He's a legend. The Dark Lord's personal Necromancer. It's said that one year he gifted the Dark Lord an army of a thousand infiri for his birthday... er... for your b-birthday..." Draco faltered, looking even more flustered.

Harry laughed. "Wow, it's a thousand now, is it?"

"Remarkable how these stories get blown out of proportion," Tom drawled.

"It was only two hundred," Harry corrected, speaking to Draco. "I had a hell of a time keeping even that many a secret. I wanted it to be a surprise, but I'm sure you can imagine keeping secrets from this guy, is far from a simple task."

"You're..." Draco whispered in stunned horror.

"The Dark Lord's Necromancer," Harry said, standing and bowing with a flourish.

"H-how..." Draco said shakily, as he fell somewhat limply back down into his own seat, looking between the two of them.

"Well, as a necromancer, I engineered it so that whenever I die, I still get reborn into another body like usual, but still retain all of my knowledge and memories from my past life. Unfortunately, after I died back in '66, I got a little carried away in the astral plane and totally

lost track of time, so when I did get reborn, it was much later than I'd intended. I really had no intention of staying dead for fourteen years... so that was my bad. But when I did get reborn - ta da! Harry Potter. Believe me, it was quite a shock when I realized I had been reborn as a bloody Potter," Harry said, also resuming his own seat beside Tom.

Draco's mouth hung partially agape, and he nodded his head slowly, looking like he had only partially processed what Harry had just said. Then his eyes slipped over to Tom with an obvious but unspoken question.

Tom let out a mildly annoyed sigh and sat up straighter. "Back in '79, I was told of a prophecy that one of my followers partially overheard. It seemed to indicate that the future child of the Potters would be powerful enough to face me, thus making him appear a legitimate threat. Of course, in retrospect, it's clear that I vastly misinterpreted things... In any case, at the time, I saw him as a threat so I went after Harry, having no idea who he really was."

"And me being barely over a year old, I wasn't in much of a position to try and explain it to him," Harry added.

"The biggest problem is that back in '66 Harry died protecting me. He saved my life. He took a killing curse meant for me, thus I owed him a life debt, and this debt carried over to his second life. When I tried to kill him, it was in direct defiance of this life debt and thus, it rebounded on myself."

Draco's mouth fell open entirely and his eyes widened with sudden understanding. "That's why Harry survived the killing curse," Draco whispered.

"Fortunately, I had numerous precautions in place to protect myself from death, however, after the curse rebounded on me and destroyed my body, I was left without one, and found myself stuck that way for quite a few years. This body presented itself rather conveniently, and I took advantage of it at the most opportune moment. It was monumentally better than being a bodiless wraith, but being in the body of a child proved inconvenient enough that I decided to attend to other tasks before considering interacting with any of my old followers again.

"Harry, however, managed to find me last summer, and then proceeded to convince me that this-" Tom waved his hand absently, indicating the castle as a whole, "was a good idea."

"And now you know more than just about anyone else," Harry said to Draco, chuckling. "You're father doesn't even know Voldemort is back, in fact. So I suggest kissing his arse, because he obviously wants his ego stroked some, if he felt motivated enough to tell you all this."

"Harry," Tom snapped, clearly annoyed.

Harry just giggled and dodged a half-hearted swat from Tom.

"Oh my god," Draco whispered in a stunned voice.

"My Lord is sufficient," Tom drawled, examining his fingernails in a disinterested sort of gesture.

Harry snickered and rolled his eyes, earning a mild scowl from Tom.

"Heh... no, but seriously, actually calling him that here would be a bad idea. Obviously, the last thing we want is for anyone — especially Dumbledore — to realize who he is," Harry said to Draco.

"W-what do I call him?" Draco asked, looking nervous.

"Just keep calling him Dominick," Harry said with a shrug. "You still called me Harry, and you apparently thought that I was the Dark Lord. It's no different, except now you know for real."

"Right," Draco said somewhat shakily. "Wait, so... are you really a Prewett?"

Tom made a shrugging sort of gesture. "This body is, apparently. Was rather surprised by that to be honest. I almost feared this was a muggleborn body, since the mother was a muggle and the boy had no memories of ever knowing his father. But when it's 'magical boy of unknown blood status' versus, nothing, you take the body."

"Oh... wow," Draco said.

"So getting back on subject," Harry said, sitting forward a bit, "you're sure you've never seen that book? A fairly old-looking diary with a black leather cover? All of the pages would look blank except for the first one with T. M. Riddle written on it."

Draco looked more thoughtful now, but slowly shook his head anyway. "No, I'm sure I've never seen anything like that in my father's collection."

"He wouldn't keep it with the regular books," Tom said before mumbling, "or at least he damn well shouldn't."

"Should I write him and ask about it?" Draco asked.

"No," Harry said, shaking his head. "It's best if we don't have any written record pertaining to the book. I'll have to speak to him in person about it."

"Draco," Tom said, drawing Draco's attention back to him, "do you have any idea who might be behind opening the chamber?"

Draco's eyes widened with confusion. "Wait - I thought it was you? Or... well, I thought it was Harry, but..."

"No," Harry said, shaking his head. "It wasn't either of us... well, not directly. That book was created by him," he nodded his head towards Tom, "but it's not supposed to be here right now. This is actually really shit timing for it, actually."

"What does the book have to do with it?"

"The book can possess a person, and use them as a vessel to re-open the chamber," Tom explained with a bored sigh.

Draco's eyes widened again. "Oh."

"That book has to be in the school, somewhere," Harry went on. "It's the only explanation for the Chamber being opened again. That means that someone has it."

"It would be most effective against one of the younger students. Ideally, anyone older than third year would have enough sense not to interact with it enough for it to get a hold over them, but that's no guarantee. There are plenty of idiots in the older years as well," Tom said.

"In any case, we'd like it if you kept an eye out for anyone with a book like that," Harry concluded.

"I will," Draco said sitting forward and nodding enthusiastically. "So... you don't want the chamber re-opened, then?"

"Not right now, we certainly don't," Tom drawled. "Dumbledore knows that I was behind it the last time - though he never had any proof. He also knows that there's a connection between Harry and I — and by I, I mean, the Dark Lord — though he has no idea the full extent of it. In any case it wouldn't be a stretch for him to think that I'm somehow controlling Harry in some way to force him to open it, thus making Harry a very valid subject of suspicion from Dumbledore's vantage. The last thing we want is any unnecessary, extra, scrutiny."

Draco nodded in understanding. "Right. I've got it. I'll keep an eye out for it."

"Good," Tom said. "Now, we've got to decide what to do about Theodore."

Harry frowned in confusion and looked at Tom. "What about him?"

"Theodore is also under the impression that you're the Dark Lord," Tom explained, jerking his head towards Draco.

"Ah... I see," Harry said. "So the pair of you talked about this theory of yours?" he looked at Draco.

Draco flushed a bit. "We took every precaution on the few instances where we discussed it."

"I could test his occlumency, but I doubt it's as good as Draco's," Tom mused.

Draco's embarrassment shifted to barely concealed pride, and Harry watched as the young blond puffed out his chest a bit and raised his head higher.

"In any case, it's not a good idea to let him go on believing that I'm the Dark Lord," Harry said. "Especially if his occlumency is less than stellar."

"Though right now it's only a theory - he's had no confirmation one way or the other," Tom added.

"I could speak to him - tell him I was wrong," Draco offered.

"Yeah, but he'd want to know the origin of this change of mind," Harry pointed out.

Draco shrugged. "I could tell him that I asked you about the chamber and let it slip who I thought you were. But you told me I was wrong."

"It would be natural for Harry to deny something like that, even if it were true," Tom mused. "I think it may be more effective to tell him that you learned from your father that the Dark Lord is back in secret, and that it's clear that he and Harry are not one and the same."

Draco nodded slowly as he thought through the scenario he'd concoct. "Okay... should I mention anything about the Chamber?"

"You can," Harry said with a shrug. "Tell him I'm not behind it and I have no idea who is. It's the truth."

"Alright," Draco nodded firmly. "Is there anything else?"

"Not at the moment," Tom sighed. "If anything else comes up, we'll speak again."

"Yes, my Lord," Draco said with a slight bow of his head.

Harry glanced over and saw a pleased smirk curl Tom's lips before he sat a bit straighter. "Very good, Draco. And, not that I don't appreciate the gesture, but don't do it again while we're in Hogwarts."

"Of course," Draco said, still looking low and giving a tight nod of his head.

Sequel Chapter 12

The group disbanded soon after that, with Draco leaving to return to the Slytherin dungeon, and Harry and Tom to wander towards the first floor corridor where Myrtle's toilet was located. The letters scrawled on the wall in rooster blood were still there, as Filch was apparently having great difficulty figuring out how to remove them.

They casually wandered that stretch of corridor, subtly looking for any signs of monitoring spells, and any signs of casual witnesses. The hall was deserted, as no one was particularly keen on being there after what had happened.

"I think it's clear," Harry mused as they came to a stop near Myrtle's bathroom.

"As clear as we can hope for," Tom said with a sigh. "In any case, we need to get down there and examine it for any clues. I doubt we'll get much useful information out of the basilisk, but it's worth asking."

The pair turned and entered the bathroom as quietly as they could. Both were relieved to see no sign of Myrtle, and Tom quickly went over to the tap with the small snake carved into it and hissed out the parseltongue word for Open.

The sink dropped into the ground, revealing a large hole, and a long dark tunnel. Tom commanded for stairs and they appeared out of the tunnel wall and Tom and Harry quickly made their way down, with the entrance closing behind them, once they were low enough.

"It's so strange being back here after so long," Tom mused as they crouch-walked down the steep steps and finally made it to the bottom and out into the dank and dingy tunnel filled with the skeletal remains of various small creatures, at its base.

Harry chuckled, "Yeah, the first time I came down here last year was so weird. But I was excited to finally get a chance to check out some of those old parselscript books you were always so enthralled with."

"So how badly did you raid the library?" Tom asked with an almost exasperated sigh.

"Hey! You always said it was one of your biggest regrets that we never made off with more of the books down here when we had the chance," Harry said defensively. "I was getting them for you as much as for me. Besides, I didn't really take that many. I figured I'd have the next few years to come back down here and get more if need be."

"Of course that assumption was our problem last time," Tom said with a sigh. "It seemed like we'd always have a chance later... then everything sort of blew up in our faces."

"Blew up in your face, you mean," Harry said pointedly. "I was perfectly happy coming and going with total anonymity. You're the one that had to go and draw Dumbledore's ever-present gaze down upon us."

Tom turned and glared at Harry, but said nothing before huffing out an annoyed breath and increasing his pace.

"With that in mind, and considering the fact that the Chamber has been opened once again, perhaps we should avoid repeating our old mistake and remove more of the books while we're down here anyway," Tom said finally.

Harry shrugged. "Not a bad idea, honestly."

The pair finally made it to the end of the tunnel and were faced with the large ornate door that lead into the main chamber.

This time it was Harry who spoke in parseltongue to the door, giving Tom an accomplished little smirk as he'd done it. Tom just rolled his eyes and stepped through the door as soon as it had opened.

They were considerably more cautious once inside the chamber. The basilisk should be back in it's antechamber behind the mouth of the Slytherin statue, but there was no guarantee that whoever had opened the chamber this time had put it back when they were done.

The basilisk was no where to be seen, so the pair made their way over to the statue of Salazar Slytherin and Tom spoke the passphrase that pushed the statue aside, revealing the passage behind it.

Tom pulled out a pair protective glasses that looked mirrored from the front and on the side-guards, drawing Harry's curious gaze.

"Wait, what's that?" Harry asked.

"Enchanted vision filter."

"And you're sure that's going to work?" Harry asked dubiously.

"The theory is sound."

"But untested. I'm not particularly keen on the idea of you dying down here."

"I can't really die, Harry," Tom drawled.

Harry guffawed, "You can die enough for it to be a tremendous pain in the ass to get you back."

Tom sighed and reached into the inner pocket of his robes where he pulled out a cloth bag with a drawstring top. He pulled the top open and reached down inside it before pulling out something that was clearly struggling.

Harry's eyes widened as he saw that Tom was now holding a ferret. He held it with one hand while the other shoved the pouch back into his inner robes pocket. He then held the ferret out with his left hand and pointed his wand at it with his right. A moment later a pair of tiny

goggles appeared strapped around its head. The lenses were the same mirrored surface as the glasses Tom had on. He then held the still-struggling rodent up before Harry.

"Happy?"

"Yes. But I'll be the one offering this thing up to the basilisk. You keep your eyes shut until we have proof that this is going to work."

Tom sighed but nodded. Harry knew he was only objecting for appearances sake. Tom was cautious enough to know that doing anything reckless at this point would be stupid and wasteful. The fact that he'd prepared for this test by stuffing a bloody ferret into his pocket, was proof enough of that.

Harry took the ferret from Tom, closed his own eyes, and focused instead entirely on his Black Sight.

Tom's hand came up to grip his shoulder and the pair began to make their way down the short tunnel that led to the basilisk's nest.

Low rumbling and hissing sounds quickly became audible and a moment later Harry was slowing his pace and walking more cautiously towards the large glowing magical beast he could see before him.

"I've smelled you before," the hissing voice filled the foul smelling space. "You asked for my venom and scales last time you were here."

"Yes, that's right," Harry hissed back.

"Harry, the ferret," Tom said impatiently.

"We brought you a snack," Harry hissed to the basilisk. He held the ferret out in one hand. "I'd like to ask that you get a good look directly into its eyes first. I want to test the protective glasses we've put on it."

"Ssstrange, little humansss. Yesss, I'm looking at it now."

Harry focused on the ferret and wiggled it again, noting that it was still very much alive and not even petrified.

"And you're sure that it saw you too?"

"It isss clearly quite terrified of me. As it well ssshould be. It lookss small and ssscrawny, but the other didn't give me any meat."

"Other?" Harry asked, his curiosity piqued, as he reached out and removed the small goggles from the ferret and held it back out again. A very brief and terrified little squeak followed, instantly by the sensation of the small animal going limp in his hand. Harry tossed the ferret into the air, and the basilisk snapped it up in a flash and swallowed it down an instant later.

"The goggles were successful then?" Tom asked with interest.

"Certainly seems that way," Harry said back.

"Who iss this other one with you?" the basilisk asked.

"I am Tom," Tom spoke up himself. "I am Slytherin's last heir and I summoned you fifty years ago."

"You do not sssmell like Tom. But the other Tom didn't sssmell like Tom either."

"It's the other Tom we want to know about." Harry said quickly. "Can you tell us anything about him?"

"The other Tom woke me. Told me to come up to the school. Sssaid I would soon get to eat, but did not feed me. Sssoo hungry."

"We'll bring you more food, soon," Tom promised. "The other Tom isn't really me. It's just an impression of myself that I left in a book, so it could possess a student and use their body to set you free again. But the book has gotten out of my hands and I need to find it before things go any further. It wasn't supposed to wake you right now, and I need to stop it from happening again."

"Ssstop it from letting me out?"

"There is no threat to the school right now, and you're safer down here," Tom said firmly.

"You were never intended to eat the students, you told me so yourself, fifty years ago. I will bring you animals from the forest and you can go back to sleep. For now, we need to figure out which of the students has been possessed by the book."

"You will bring me food? Live food?"

"I promise. Are there any details you can give us about the other Tom?" Tom asked, growing impatient.

"The other Tom was very ssssmall," the basilisk said after a momentary pause.

"So probably a first year," Harry mused. "Was the other Tom male or female?"

"She won't know," Tom muttered.

"Femalesss are the child-baring onesss, yes?"

"Er... yes," Harry said.

"I cannot tell which of your kind bares the younglings," she said after a moment of thought.

Harry sighed and Tom just huffed out another frustrated breath.

"What about coloration? Light skin, dark skin; hair color?"

"Coloration?" she echoed, hissing out the word slowly and with confusion.

"She doesn't see colors," Tom said. "She only has light and dark retinal sensors, and infrared. She had binocular vision, so she can focus both her eyes on a single point, and has brilliant movement tracking, but that's it."

"So this really isn't going to do us any good," Harry said with a sigh.

"I didn't really expect it would..." Tom said tiredly. "Tell me, has the other Tom been down here more than once?" he asked the basilisk.

"The other Tom has been here three times."

"Three," Tom repeated, somewhat taken aback. "I'm surprised it already had enough energy to possess the host that many times."

"What sorts of things did the other Tom say to you?" Harry asked.

The basilisk seemed to lull its head in a swaying motion from side to side, causing blurring streaks of glowing white to trail through Harry's vision.

"The first visit; very little. The other Tom was only here for a few minutes, and only to make sure I was awake."

"Makes sense that it would keep the visit short," Tom mused.

"The second time, the other Tom told me that the roosters had been disposed of. The other Tom brought some of them down for me to eat, but they were already dead and cold. Very unsatisfying," the basilisk said in an annoyed sort of tone.

"And then the third time he told you to attack the cat?" Harry asked.

"The other Tom told me to come to the school and wait. Then the other Tom told me to stare into the puddle while he positioned the animal," the basilisk corrected.

"So he really did petrify the cat on purpose," Harry mused aloud.

"I told you it was intentional," Tom said.

"Even with a cat? You can't tell me that the horcrux in your diary chickened out about killing a cat," Harry said incredulously.

Tom looked back at Harry, and Harry assumed he was probably glaring at him, though his Black Sight couldn't distinguish such details.

"He did not chicken out," Tom grumped. "Killing the cat would have been too extreme. The Professors and Headmaster would react too strongly to a sign that the person was easily capable of killing something. This way it looks like petrification is a more likely outcome - which can be fixed, and inspires less panic. We don't want too strong of a reaction right off the bat. The students would be pulled out more quickly, and it would reduce the opportunities the diary had to actually kill some of the mudbloods."

Harry would have rolled his eyes, if he weren't already holding them closed anyway. Finally he heaved a small sigh and nodded. "Yeah, that does make some logical sense."

"How long ago was the first time the other Tom visited you?" Tom asked the basilisk.

"A fortnight."

"So all three visits happened during the last two weeks," Harry said.

"Sounds reasonable. Well, I suppose we ought to just go at this point. Not much more of any value we can get out of her," Tom said.

"I suppose so," Harry agreed with a sigh. "We're going to have to figure out a way to get some food down to her."

"That will be exceedingly difficult."

"Are you intending to just leave her without?" Harry asked, almost incredulously. "If she's starving, she's more likely to actually eat one of the students the next time your diary lets her out."

Tom shook his head. "She won't eat a student. Even when I told her to, she wouldn't."

"Huh?"

"Salazar set her to protect the students. He instructed her to never eat a student."

"But she'll kill one?"

"She'll look at one," Tom said with a shrug.

Harry snorted and this time he really did roll his eyes beneath his closed lids.

"She's a giant serpent. She knows her stare kills, but doesn't entirely equate that with violating her instruction to not eat a student."

"So it's a loophole."

"Basically," Tom said unapologetically.

"Great Merlin... and here everyone is under the impression that she's down here specifically to kill off the mudbloods... so she's really supposed to be a guardian of the school?"

"She's supposed to eat muggles. That's it, really. It was supposed to be at the headmaster's prerogative to call her out in times of need, but I suspect that Slytherin opted to leave her existence a secret after he had his falling out with Gryffindor."

"You never told me any of this back then!" Harry said with an incredulous laugh.

"If you will recall, we were having a bit of a falling out over this specific issue at the time. I was fairly committed to my task, and whether or not Slytherin actually intended the school to

be cleansed of the mudbloods or not, I intended to cleanse the school. I knew that if you knew the truth about why Slytherin put her down here, you'd attempt to talk me out of my task."

"And you feared I'd actually manage to talk you out of it, since I would have Slytherin's original intent behind my argument," Harry said knowingly.

Tom sighed concedingly.

"We are going to leave now. If the other Tom comes again, I want you to tell him that the real Tom was here and wants him to stop what he's doing. Tell him that it's interfering with my current plans. Can you do that for me?" Tom told the basilisk.

"I can," the basilisk replied. "You will bring live food?"

"Yes, of course," Tom said, appeasingly.

Harry sighed, making a mental note to try and find an actual way to get some sort of animal down here for her to eat.

Sequel Chapter 13

Harry set his quill down and waved his wand over the letter, drying the ink and causing it to fold into thirds. He reached up and grabbed one of the candles illuminating his desk in the Ravenclaw boys dormitory and tilted it over the letter so a small puddle of wax dripped onto its surface, over the edge of the top-flap of the folded parchment. The candle was returned to its holder while Harry reached into the box of writing supplies at the edge of his desk and pulled out a wax seal stamp. He pressed it into the puddle, holding it for a moment, and then rocking it back out.

The stamp featured the runic symbol *sowilo*. He'd actually seen the stamp for sale in a shop at some point, along with all of the other major runes, but this one in particular had caught his fancy, because it was the same shape as his scar and he found that mildly amusing.

The wax fully hardened a moment later and Harry picked the letter up and turned in his chair so he was facing the empty space between he and Tom's bed's. Tom was laying in his bed, his back propped up against a small mountain of pillows at the headboard, and with a book resting against one leg that he had bent up across the other. The book in question was one of the few Necromancy grimoires that Harry had bothered to bring to Hogwarts. Tom had taken to reading through it whenever there was a block of time guaranteed to have no other students about in their dorm.

It just so happened that there was a Ravenclaw Quidditch practice going on at the moment, and the rest of their dorm mates had all opted to go and watch.

"Done?" Tom asked casually, not bothering to take his eyes away from the book, as he flipped another page in the book.

"Yup," Harry said before calling out, "Dobby!"

A couple moments later there was a Pop sound, followed immediately by the appearance of the wrinkled little house elf Harry had acquired from Lucius a year earlier.

"Master has called for Dobby?!" the little elf exclaimed excitedly.

"Yes, Dobby. I need you to deliver this letter to Lucius Malfoy," Harry said, handing the letter down to the elf. "I don't want to risk using regular owl post. You can stay there and wait for a reply. I'd prefer to hear back as soon as possible. Obviously, make sure there's no one besides Dom and I around when you return."

"Yes Master!" the elf replied enthusiastically, accepting the letter, bowing deeply, and then disappearing with another pop.

"Hopefully we'll find out from Lucius who might have the book as soon as possible, and get this whole thing sorted out quickly," Tom said with a sigh, setting the book down on the bed beside him.

"Yeah... it's been three whole days since Halloween, and I'm getting antsy with the lack of progress," Harry replied.

It was a mere five minutes before Dobby returned, and when he reappeared, he looked utterly defeated. His back was hunched and his head bowed low, with his eyes seeming to sag even worse than usual. He looked like a kicked puppy, and Harry couldn't help but wonder what the bloody hell was wrong with the little runt.

"D-dobby i-is so s-sorry M-m-master," he whimpered out. "Dobby wasn't able t-to f-fullfill M-master's o-orders!" he ended with a sobbing wail as he broke down onto his knees, with great heaving breaths and big fat tears.

"Bloody hell," Harry exclaimed as he jumped out of bed and went over to the elf, now wailing about on the floor in the center of their dormitory.

Tom raised his wand and cast a spell towards the door to block any sound from getting out of the room. They always kept a localized muffling charm around their two beds, but the elf wasn't within that ward now, and the last thing they wanted was someone coming to investigate the noise.

"Dobby! Dobby!" Harry yelled, trying to get the sobbing creature's attention. "Shut up!" he said finally, and the elf's cries subsided into stuttering hiccoughs.

"Merlin's beard, what the devil is wrong with that thing?" Tom exclaimed, glaring towards the house elf.

"Dobby, just tell me what happened," Harry said in as patient a voice as he could manage, given the circumstances.

"M-Master told Dobby to give the letter to Master Lucius," Dobby said between snuffles. "But Dobby couldn't find master Lucius."

Harry's brows furrowed and he glanced over towards Tom, the two sharing a momentary confused look.

"Oh—kay..." Harry said in a drawn out tone. "Do you have any idea why you couldn't find him?"

"M-mistress Narcissa said he's in France!" Dobby exclaimed, looking as if this news signaled the coming end times.

"France?" Harry echoed almost incredulously.

Dobby sniffled some more and reached into his pillowcase tunic and pulled out two letters. One was the letter that Harry had given him earlier, but the other one, Dobby extended towards Harry now. "Mistress Narcissa said to give you this," he said.

Harry took it, looking at it curiously as he broke the seal and unfolded the letter. His eyes skimmed over the surface as Tom looked on impatiently.

"Well?" Tom asked, clearly annoyed.

Harry heaved a frustrated sigh. "Lucius went to France because the head of the Malfoy family branch there, died. It's resulted in a dispute over succession for the position as Head of House. Apparently there are two different blokes, both insisting they have an equal claim to the seat, as well as the primary titles and holdings that come along with it. Lucius has gone over to act as an intermediary of sorts, along with the family solicitor. Cissy doesn't expect him back until December 1st."

"You have got to be kidding," Tom drawled flatly.

"I wish I was." Harry moved back to his bed and sat down on it roughly, tossing Narcissa's letter aside. "I'm still not willing to say anything sensitive via owl, and especially not an owl that has to pass through the international post customs. But perhaps we could send a strongly worded recommendation that he get his arse back to England."

"Any correspondence of that sort would raise questions if ever discovered. And we know there are people who keep a close eye on Lucius due to his past associations with me," Tom said, shaking his head. "The possibility always exists that the letter could be intercepted. Even if it weren't, if anyone were to get the impression that Lucius ended his trip to France early, just because you asked him to come back... well, it would certainly raise some eyebrows."

"Are you suggestion we wait?" Harry asked, almost incredulously. "That's a whole month!"

"And there is virtually no chance of the diary absorbing enough energy from it's host to pull off another full possession in such a short span of time. We can continue to explore other avenues to determine who has the book while we wait for him to return to Great Britain on his own."

"What other avenues? This was the last one I had in mind," Harry asked.

"Harry, that diary is holding a piece of my soul. Can you honestly think of no way to try and track it down, given our combined skills? Seeing as how it's my soul, and you're a bloody necromancer. Nothing comes to mind?" Tom asked with a rather deadpanned expression.

Harry paused. "Oh," he said slowly, feeling rather foolish. "I suppose you've got a point."

"We've got time. We'll find the book, and if we don't, Lucius will be back soon enough that we should still be able to get it back before another incident occurs."

Harry heaved a sigh, but nodded. "Yeah, okay. I guess I'm just feeling really high strung over this. It just came out of no where. I hadn't planned for anything like this disrupting our plans so much."

"It's hardly like we have a plan in the first place, Harry. We're just going through the motions, as far as I can see. The 'plan' doesn't seem to extend any further than 'pretend to be students and try not to fall under too much scrutiny from Dumbledore. Aside from that, anything else is just filling time."

"So your weekly meetings with Snape to study the elixir are just filling time?" Harry asked.

"Basically," Tom rolled his eyes. "It's not like we've accomplished anything, anyway."

"Well, you've barely been doing it a month. Oh hey!" Harry turned and focused on Dobby again, who still looked like a guilty puppy, waiting for a scolding - or a good kick - from his master. "Dobby, we're running low on Elixir! Since I've got you here anyway, could you pop back to the house and check the collection bowl beneath the stone and bring me what's gathered?"

The house elf perked up instantly, clearly happy to have a new order to distract him from his failure in carrying out the last.

"Yes, Master Harry! Dobby will be doing it right now!" And with that, Dobby popped away.

"I don't need any right away, you know," Tom said.

"Yeah, but I needed him to get over the letter thing, or else he'll just go back to the house and start ironing his hands."

"Your house elf is completely mental, you know that don't you?"

Harry chuckled and shrugged. "Yes. But he's loyal. I seem to recall a number of your followers resembling that pattern as well."

"At least my loyal followers were wizards."

"Never under-estimate the power of a house elf."

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AN: The last batch of chapters were basically all posted in one day, so I've spoiled you lot. Unfortunately, this is as far as I've gotten so far, so you're in for another wait. Hopefully I'll get more time to write more and get some more chapters posted eventually.

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