

My own

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My own

by [Vivblom](#)

Summary

Decades have passed since the end of the war but life has not been kind to Harry. He had dreamt of more but every chance at happiness he'd ever had was ripped away from him. He longed to join his loved ones in the next life but even that was out of reach for him.

In a last attempt at dying, Harry bleeds out on the cold marble floor, praying to the gods to take him. Instead, he wakes up in his 14-year-old body.

With a manipulative old goat, a new improved Dark Lord, and a mission from Death, will this new life be worth living?

Harry isn't sure but he certainly doesn't want life to be easy for the ones who wronged him. Revenge has never tasted sweeter than when they don't know it's coming.

Notes

Hello whoever may read this! This is my first attempt at a fic and I've been debating releasing this but in the end it's more a challenge for me. But I really hope people enjoy this work! English is not my first language and I'm not too familiar with British English so if there are mistake, I'm sure there will be, please tell me and I'll fix them!

The first chapters are more backstory, I promise it'll get more interesting once he gets to Hogwarts! I'm also aware this story is a bit self indulgent but I think it became less so after like chapter 17/18. The plot is kinda basic as it's been done before in a different version, but I think I've added a few of my own twists to it. I'm really impatient so I can't really say "the story gets better you just have to read further" without it being totally hypocritical but it really does. Oh and the tone of the story and the written style changes quite a bit the further in you get. It starts out in a rather light and crackish tone but it's pretty different after like chapter 20(?). Guess I just got better? Not sure, I didn't even noticed anything had changed with my writing until I read the older chapters. Anyway, hope you enjoy it!

Death is just the beginning

Chapter Notes

Ok so I've been reading through the first couple chapters and noticed a lot of mistakes so I'm gonna be editing like the first 15 chapters in the coming days. I'm not gonna change the actual story or the wording or anything just fix the mistakes so just a warning if something seems different

1/5/23 I've edited the first seven chapters, hopefully not too many mistakes remain

2/5/23 chapter 8-10 edited

3/5/23 chapter 11 and 12 edited and updated. I will read through the rest of my published chapters but 1-12 were the ones I noticed had the most mistakes.

"I dream about being away

I dream of another life

I dream of being someone else

Not just someone, somebody

I never really thought about what I wanted out of this life but

But now

I wish I was dead.

I feel like an imposter

Am I real?

I don't think so.

There is little in this world that is real

Everything around me only exists because that's how my brain perceives it

Now I'm at the edge

I'm looking out

Looking for a third option

There isn't one I can perceive

I wish I was dead."

He had done it. Finally, after more than 50 years of trying, he had finally done it.

He had died.

Hundreds of attempts later, probably more (he couldn't really remember), and the only way for him to actually die was from a modified version of a ritual which entailed sacrificing one's life to the Ancient Greek gods.

At 134 years old, Harry was desperate. He threw himself into completing an Ancient Greek ritual he found by chance, meant to offer one's life to the gods. Harry planned to dedicate his offering to Thanatos, the personification of death. However, the ritual was ancient and outdated. It wouldn't work for him unless he modified it.

He worked for weeks to make sure everything was ready, that all his arithmancy equations were correct, and that the runes were drawn sufficiently and placed out correctly.

He collected rare ingredients for the potion he was supposed to drink before the ritual. The potion was meant to make him more connected to the wild magic around him, perhaps so he would suffer more as he died. Harry wasn't sure, but he was aware that the potion was needed, and he wouldn't risk substituting it for something else.

He brewed the needlessly complicated potion and hated every second of it. Despite having a good grasp of the subject after decades of having to brew his own potions, he really disliked the brewing process.

Finally, everything was ready. He was ready. After having lived on this Earth for 134 years, Harry felt more than ready to join his loved ones in death.

To perform this ritual, not only were runes needed, but also a ritual circle, and he spent ages drawing it. Carefully, he undressed, leaving all his clothes in the hallway, placing his wand on top of the pile, and closing the door to the ritual chamber. Nothing of the outside world was allowed to disrupt the ritual. Therefore, he could not have anything on his person. His beloved wand, the most loyal companion he'd had for decades, was left in the hallway. He felt slightly guilty for leaving it behind, but sacrifices had to be made. He stepped into the circle, knelt down in the middle, and was surrounded by runes, but paid them no mind. Finally, the time had come. He began...

The floor was covered in blood. He was losing blood rapidly. He was in so much pain that it was difficult to even feel his body. However, his mind was intact, and he prayed to every god that he would succeed. After what could have been minutes or hours, he felt the last of his consciousness slip away, and everything disappeared. His last thoughts were those of relief.

He honestly expected to fail again. Why this particular ritual had worked while literally dozens of others hadn't, he didn't know. He didn't really care, either. This had been his last hurrah, so to say. If this hadn't worked, he would have gotten inside a box and thrown it in the deepest part of the ocean. At least then he would be gone, kinda. Thankfully, that didn't happen, and now he was dead.

Wait.

If he was dead, why the bloody hell could he still think?

After dying and coming back to life for the first time, Harry felt empty and detached from his surroundings.

At first, he had thought it was due to trauma; after all, dying is a pretty traumatic event. But no. He had experienced severe trauma before, and it never left him feeling even close to what he felt now. Which was nothing.

He felt nothing. Well, not exactly nothing because he still felt slightly angry, though he wasn't sure at what.

Voldemort's death had changed quite a few things for Harry. Along with his lack of emotion, he was also no longer "Undesirable Number 1," so he was free to do what he wanted.

How great that he now lacked the want for anything in life. He knew, though, that he needed to be alone for a while, and that's how he ended up living in dusty, musty old Number 12 Grimmauld Place with a bitter, slightly insane house elf.

After the Battle of Hogwarts, he had asked for time alone and not to be disturbed. If someone needed to reach him, they could do so with an owl.

Of course, he wasn't left alone for long. Just a day after the battle ended, Hermione and Ron came knocking.

Harry never got what he wanted.

They first showed up through the floo (he closed the floo connection as soon as they left), asking him questions he didn't feel like answering.

"Harry, mate, we're worried. You shouldn't be alone after everything. You bloody well died, mate; that couldn't have been easy enough just to shake off. And then just leaving the battle like that, what the hell happened?" Ron asked after some quick hugs on Ron and Hermione's part. Harry barely paid any attention to it.

Hermione slapped Ron on the arm and huffed. "Ron, you need to be more considerate. Harry has been through something traumatic. What he needs now is our support and love. You shouldn't speak of his death so crudely." She turned toward Harry with frowned brows and concerned eyes. "Sorry, Harry. Just know that whatever you need, we are here for you, day and night. Whatever you need... So, Harry, how are you?"

Their insistence on checking on him, which he would have once found endearing and kind, now only annoyed and invaded his privacy.

Perhaps he should feel guilty for pushing them away. Old Harry certainly would have, but he no longer had the energy to care about their feelings and his lack of them.

There is something wrong with Harry. He knows it. He shouldn't feel this indifferent to people he loves (loved?). They are the most important people in his life, and he would have died for them.

He did die for them, but now, things are different.

The second thing that might have caused his emotional detachment is something he doesn't like to consider: the fact that he no longer has Voldemort's soul embedded in him. He hates this theory, as if he needs that monster's soul to feel emotions. It's ridiculous.

Harry doesn't need anyone. He never did.

Whenever he had tried to kill himself before, he truly couldn't. Not for a lack of trying, mind you, but because it was simply impossible. He had once thrown himself into an active volcano, and do you know what happened? He felt his body disintegrate, melt, and blend with the lava, but his mind remained conscious. He felt it all. He saw it all. How that works beats him.

So, if he was halfway to the loony bin, you will excuse him.

Dying for real the second time felt pretty much the same as the first time, but waking up from dying certainly wasn't the same the second time.

As Harry slowly felt his consciousness return to him, he despaired.

"FUCK, FUCK, FUCK!"

He really thought he had done it now. That death had finally accepted him and would greet him with open arms. Nope. No. He could feel his body again. So, FUCK, he was alive.

Slowly, he tried to move his fingers or toes or anything, really. But his body felt like it had been run over by a truck, and his mind was not faring much better.

After what must have been hours, he opened his eyes. Dark. He couldn't see for shit, so had he somehow gone blind?

Moving his arms still felt awful, but he needed to move sooner or later, and he would prefer to lie in bed. Harry froze. He felt something soft under his fingers, but he was sure he had died on the cold, hard marble floor, so where was he?

Slowly, he turned on his side and realized that he was lying on a small bed. Reaching with his arm, he felt for the edge of the bed and knocked his hand against something hard. A table.

Yes, that is most definitely a table and a lamp.

He turned it on and, relieved, he realized he could see. That relief lasted less than a second when he saw where the hell he was. His old bedroom at Privet Drive.

WHAT. THE. FUCK

He couldn't be back here. No, no, no, no, no.

"Calm down, fucking calm down," he told himself.

There is an explanation. Of course, there is. He might have done some accidental magic in his deathlike state and apparated...

To here? Not bloody likely.

This house is his hell on Earth. Why would he come here, even unconscious as he was?

Still mildly freaking out but a bit calmer, Harry noticed the clothes on his body. If you could even call them that, they were practically a tent on him. He quickly looked away. Weird, he hadn't owned muggle clothes in a century.

He then risked it and looked again. And again, because why the fuck was he so bloody small!

Ok, now he could freak out again. And he did, for a while.

At last, he stood up, walked towards the closet and opened it. On the inside of the door was a cracked mirror but no matter how cracked, he could still see.

He was young. Harry was used to being young, seeing as he stopped aging when he was barely 18. That's a story for later; no time to think about that now, seeing as he was bloody 14 again!

What the hell happened? How is he 14? 15 maybe, but still, how did he de-age?! One doesn't just bloody do that!

"Ok, ok, think Harry, think. You're back at Privet Drive in your 14-year-old body. What is the most obvious explanation?"

Time travel...

How is it possible? How could he have traveled back in time?

Theoretically, it's possible. Time magic and time travel weren't something Harry had spent much time studying. The last he read of it was probably in the 2040s, and he hadn't felt it was worth his time. Well, fuck, now he was regretting that.

"Ok, ok. Think."

Einstein's theory on general relativity suggested that the existence of wormholes was important somehow, that one could travel through time and space through one. That if you had two parallel universes and if you could somehow create a bridge through them, then you'd fall into one and go into the other.

There's also the many-worlds-theory in quantum mechanics that suggests every time a measure is made, the universe splits in half. And keeps on splitting every time an observation is made.

And so, maybe when Harry went back in time(!?), the river of time forked, and now there are two universes, similar but not the same. Anything he would do here, right now, would not affect the universe he came from, cause what's in the past cannot change. He really only creates a split in the river of time so it forks...

Dear Merlin, this is too much theoretical bullshit for Harry right now.

And that's only some muggle theories; he hadn't even gotten to the magical ones...

Harry slapped himself in the face. "You idiot, you're a wizard, use your magic." With no idea where his wand was, he cast a wandless Tempus.

2:16 AM, 3rd of July, 1995

1995?! So he somehow traveled back in time, but only his mind was along for the ride. Apparently, seeing as this is not the body he worked hard for.

Great, just great.

So, not time travel per se, maybe quantum jumping. But was that even proven? Last time Harry checked, it was more of a conspiracy theory than anything. But it made more sense.

Quantum jumping had to do with aligning one's consciousness with the same frequency as that of another universe. If Harry remembered correctly, it was something you had to focus your mind on, and you had to be extremely specific about the universe you wanted to end up in. So...

Wait. Could this be Death's doing? He had never interfered so obviously before, but maybe the fact that Harry offered his life to Thanatos in a sacred ritual gave Death more power to meddle?

Harry had no clue what the entity was capable of, but time travel? That didn't seem like its style.

Harry sighed, feeling lost in his own thoughts. There was no point in dwelling on this now.

What to do now? Having finished freaking out and with the panic subsiding, Harry was starting to feel embarrassed about it. He was, after all, 134 and hadn't panicked since he was about 40 years old.

Perhaps this body was affecting him? Hmm...

A plan, he needed a plan. (He doubted killing himself would work any better in this universe.)

Well, to start off with, perhaps gathering intelligence was necessary. If this was his past (but not really), then he needed to confirm it.

1995, the summer after the Triwizard Tournament. He was 14 soon to be 15. His current friends were limited to Hermione and Ron.

He was a Gryffindor...

Harry grimaced; he was no longer a Gryffindor and hadn't been for some time now. Well, whatever.

First, he needed to leave. No way in hell was he staying here with those pathetic Muggles he was unfortunate to have to call relatives.

He needed to see the master as well. He could help Harry, and thankfully, in 1995, he was still alive.

Alright, pack, and then get the hell out of here.

Harry lifted his fingers and was about to summon his stuff when he realized that the Trace was still bloody active if he was fourteen. Thankfully, it didn't register wandless magic, seeing as it confused it with accidental magic. If he wanted to use his wand, he would need to remove the Trace or get a new wand.

The Trace on his person was easy enough to get rid of; his magic would just need a few hours to burn it away without alerting the Ministry.

He huffed and sat back down on the bed, reaching for his magic, trying to locate the Trace upon it. After searching for a while, he came back empty-handed.

Why wasn't it on his person? It should be on him, unless the magic currently in this body was from the future with him and not a mixture of both? Or someone else had removed it from younger Harry's body.

Harry stood indecisively beside the bed, frowning and pressing his lips together in deep concentration.

The tournament was for adults, 17 or older only, but he had entered. Not willingly, but still in a magically binding way. Did magic declare him an adult?

Hmm. Stopping by Gringotts on his way to his master is a must now. He needs to know if he has access to his vaults and lordships. Lordships, Black, Sirius...

Shit, Sirius is alive!

No, no time to think about it now. It's time to pack.

Harry summoned his things, unfortunately forgetting where his belongings were, so he was now making a lot of noise breaking the cupboard door and the railing of the stairs. Oops.

Well, not like it matters.

Harry was sure that any second now, Vernon would come yelling at him for making so much noise. Quickly making sure everything was in the trunk, including the things under the floorboards, he transfigured his clothes and apparated.

A moment later, the bedroom door was slammed open, and a screaming Vernon entered, ready to beat the living crap out of his freakish nephew, only to find an empty room.

Past and Present Predicaments

Chapter Summary

Continuation of Gringotts and more backstory!

Chapter Notes

I'm trying to keep my chapters between 2500-4500 words and the first ones are a bit on the shorter side. Not sure how many chapters this story will be, I have planned out about 30 but I'm guessing around 40ish chapters in total. Enjoy!

The landing outside Gringotts is elegant, far too elegant for young Harry. Fortunately, it's 3 in the morning, and no one is around to see it.

With his hood pulled up, he walks up the stairs, reading the warning on the wall:

"Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn,
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there."

Harry chuckles quietly, reminiscing about the past. Riding out on a dragon, now that is Harry's sort of fun. Of course, at the time, it was anything but fun. How things change.

How he's changed.

Paying off the goblins after that show hadn't been fun. They are as greedy as described. Emptying almost all of the Black vault for the damage caused and the "emotional distress" it caused the goblin nation.

Harry huffs. Emotional distress, my ass. Goblins don't feel distress. Greedy bastards.

Still, he likes them more than people sometimes.

Entering the grand white marble building masquerading as a bank, he walked up to the nearest door flanked by a goblin guard clothed in a scarlet and gold uniform.

Harry nodded his head at the guard and received a surprised, stiff nod in return. The guard opened the door for Harry and froze as Harry passed by him.

As Harry entered the main hall, he was unaware of the guard's stare and his quick signal to the nearest goblin that flanked the wall behind the counters.

Harry walked confidently up to one of the counters. He had let his grip on his magic loosen a bit, and the effects he had on the goblins were immediately noticeable.

"Greetings, Master Goblin, I'm in need of a blood inheritance test and a meeting with the head accountants of the Black, Potter, and Peverell accounts," Harry demanded, but of course politely. He didn't want to upset the goblins during their first interaction. However, goblins preferred to keep the interactions short and to the point.

The goblin (was his name Nagnok? Harry couldn't really remember) seemed frozen in place, holding a quill as if he was about to write something down. Harry raised an eyebrow at him,

and he seemed to snap out of it. "Greetings, young master. Of course, follow me, and we will proceed."

The goblin (Nagnok?) jumped down from the counter and walked towards the far west wall. Harry was quick on his heels.

Harry, in the meantime, considered his options. If his guess was correct, and thanks to the tournament, he had been emancipated, he could take up his lordships. The only downside to that was that the ministry would be informed that a new lord had joined the Wizengamot. Hopefully, Harry remembered correctly that Dumbledore had already been kicked off as the Chief Warlock; otherwise, he was the first to be informed. Seeing as Harry would join as the new Black and Peverell (Potter didn't have a seat) lord, Dumbledore was sure to know it could only be Harry taking up those lordships.

Before Harry had enough time to decide how to proceed, they had arrived.

Nagnok (Harry was pretty sure that's his name) sat down behind the large desk in the room, and Harry, following his lead, sat down on the chair opposite from him.

Looking over Harry's appearance and trying to get a more accurate estimation of the young man's power, Nagnok could feel the danger emanating from him. Trying to hide his fear, Nagnok got started. "So, young master of death, are you familiar with how a blood inheritance test is conducted?"

Harry was not a naturally observant person, but after years of trauma, war, and later on in life, training, he could see the fear Nagnok was trying to conceal. He couldn't help but smirk; fear was always funny to observe.

Also, should he be surprised that the goblin already knew of his title? No. It's to be expected when he released his power near magical creatures; they could sense it.

Nagnok stiffened as he saw the smirk form. "Yes, I am well aware of what it entails. Shall we proceed?" Harry asked and moved his hand forward over the table.

Nagnok swallowed and reached for Harry's wrist. Holding it loosely, he slid a ritual dagger across the wrist. Blood started dripping down onto the enchanted parchment lying on the desk.

A pool of blood had formed, and Nagnok let go of Harry's hand and leaned back, happy to not be touching the master of death anymore.

Harry swiftly closed the cut. He held his non-bleeding hand over the wrist and let some of his magic free with the intent to heal. No words, no wand, no movements.

Nagnok had never seen such magic before, such wonderful, free, wild magic. He wanted to touch the magic, feel it. He felt himself leaning forward once again, but before he could reach out, Harry had drawn back his magic into him, keeping it locked away.

Embarrassment coursed through Nagnok. How could he have lost control of himself so easily? Harry, having seen all this, let an amused smile reach his face.

Words had formed on the parchment, and Harry looked pointedly at it until Nagnok seemed to come back to the world of the living. Grabbing the parchment quickly, Nagnok began to read over the information and soon felt his jaw drop. This was Harry Potter, the Harry Potter who was also the master of death. The wizarding world wouldn't know what hit them.

Inheritance test for:

Hadrian James Potter

Born: 31 July 1980

Age: 14 (134)

Blood status: half-blood

Father: James Fleamont Potter (deceased)

Mother: Lily Marie Potter née Evans (deceased)

Blood adopted father: Sirius Orion Black (unfit guardian)

Blood-Adopted: 1 august 1980

Godfather: Sirius Orion Black (unfit guardian)

Godmother: Alice Longbottom (unfit guardian)

Magical guardian: Albus Dumbledore (inactive)

Emancipation: 31 October 1994

Titles:

Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter (Paternal)

Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black (Blood-Adoption)

Lord of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell (Parental)

Heir to the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Slytherin (Maternal, Conquest)

Master of death

Vaults:

Trust Vault (Num. 12,313)

Potter Family Vault (Num. 356)

Potter Vault (Num. 11,998)

Black Family Vault (Num. 72)

Sirius Black Vault (Num. 11,201. Access upon owner's death)

Peverell Family Vault (Num. 7)

Peverell Storage Vault (Num. 8)

Slytherin Vault (Num. 3. Access upon owner's death)

Properties :

Potter Manor (Unplottable; unknown location)

Potter Cottage (Godric's Hollow, England)

Potter Summer House (Srinagar, India)

Black Castle (Wiltshire, England)

12 Grimmauld Place (Unplottable, England)

Black Summer Villa (Marseille, France)

Black Island (Pumpkin Island, North Keppel Island, Australia)

Peverell Castle (Unplottable; location unknown)

Slytherin Castle (Unplottable: location unknown)

Potions and compulsions detected

The goblin was frozen in place for the third time that morning. (Was it really morning at 3:21 am? Never mind.) Harry twisted his hand, and the parchment came flying into his open hand. He looked it over.

So, his theory had been proven; he was indeed emancipated. At last, something had gone right. This would be very helpful for future plans. He continued reading.

Hmm, some of this was not on his old inheritance test, so what had changed? For instance, the Blacks did not own an island in his world, and his official name was never Hadrian but Harrison. He kinda liked Hadrian better. And no magical blocks on him this time, how interesting.

“Everything seems to be in order. I would like a venenum test as well. I would like to deal with potion effects as soon as possible,” Harry calmly stated, as if getting spiked with potions and hit with compulsions was an everyday occurrence.

Nagnok startled. “Yes, of course. The fee for that particular test is 5 galleons.” Harry smirked; here, he thought the goblin would be too surprised to remember prices. He shouldn’t have underestimated their greed.

“An acceptable price. Add another 5 for the inheritance test and take it from the Peverell vault.” Never be anything but polite to the goblins if you wish to remain on their good side. They do, after all, guard your gold.

After a few silent minutes, the test was complete. The concept was the same as with the inheritance test, the only difference being the enchantments on the parchment.

Abilities, Potions, Compulsions and Blocks:

Parseltounge (paternal, maternal)

Parselmagic (paternal, maternal)

Metamorphmagus (blood adoption)

Compulsion charm: mistrust targeted to the word “Slytherin” and any associated to that word

Compulsion charm: mistrust towards adults and adult interference

Potions: imperium amicitia potion (active)

Potions: modified version of the befuddlement draught (active)

Huh, metamorphmagus. That didn’t happen before. Was this really not the same dimension as his last? Wasn’t he just in the past of his own world, or were there major differences? It didn’t seem like it; so far, he had only noticed small differences. He would have to contemplate this further later.

Harry wasn’t really surprised by the results. Honestly, he expected more. In addition to the current compulsions and potions, there had been a block of 30% to his core and loyalty potions keyed to most of the Weasley household, Hermione Granger, and of course, the man of the hour, Dumbledore.

The current compulsions were easy to get rid of; he’d just burn them out with his own magic. But the potions would be more annoying, especially the imperium amicitia potion, otherwise known as the liquid imperium potion. Of course, none of these potions affected Harry as he was now; his magic kept the effects at bay. Still, he wanted them out of his body, so he would

have to brew... he hates brewing. He could just buy the antidotes pre-made, but who knew what the idiot brewers could have done to the antidote.

And besides, the versions from his future were much better than what the current wizarding world could offer.

Having been thinking and planning for a couple of minutes, frowning as he did, he didn't notice the distress radiating from Nagnok.

"Is everything in order, Master of Death?" Nagnok asked quietly.

Harry looked up, surprised that he had forgotten about the goblin and nodded. "Yes, Nagnok, nothing I can't handle. I believe it's time to meet the head accountants?"

Nagnok nodded slowly, unsure if Harry was angry. "Follow me."

At 5:32 in the morning, Harry finally exited the building. He was exhausted. This had been the longest day of his life. First, he had jumped through time and space, then he had woken up at the fucking Dursleys', and then he had spent almost 2 hours going over financial records.

What a day. And it wasn't over yet.

Now wearing his three Lordship rings on his right hand, a bundle of documents and contracts under his arm, and with a fully loaded pouch of Galleons in his pocket, he was ready to hit the town.

First stop, Knockturn Alley.

As he walked through the quiet streets, he couldn't help but think of the meddlesome old bastard.

Growing up had made Harry realize that even though Dumbledore knew so much, he never said anything. The man had sat back and watched as the world, Harry's world, collapsed beneath them, and he had done nothing. Nothing. (Well, not nothing, seeing as he had dosed him with potions and put compulsions on Harry.)

Harry clenched his jaw, and his steps became more forceful as he continued to walk on.

Dumbledore was no hero, he was the villain. And he had made Harry into one too. For the "greater good."

Merlin, he hated that phrase. "Greater good," there was no greater good, you old pathetic goat. Clenching his fists, Harry willed his magic to calm down. Now was not the time to lose control.

No. The old man would get what was coming. Harry would make sure of it.

He had never gotten the opportunity to enact revenge in his old reality, but here, here the old man lived, and lived well. Harry would burn everything he held dear to the ground and dance upon the ashes of the coot's throne.

Feeling calmer after declaring his revenge, Harry straightened his back and determinedly walked towards the nearest apothecary.

He let his thoughts drift to different topics, and before he knew it, he was there.

What Harry loved about Knockturn was that most shops there kept open 24/7 so their shadier clientele didn't have to be seen there during the day.

He entered a small shabby shop named Fairy Wings and Other Things. How unique, Harry thought with a little snort.

It wasn't the biggest nor the best shop, but he was sure to find what he needed. Among brewing the antidote, he had also planned on brewing an eyesight potion and nutrition potions so he would be ready to later take the Valexo Valetudo potion and fix this horrible body.

First world

Harry had felt different after dying at Voldemort's hand, but he remembered how he used to feel before that, so he put on an act. At first, he did it for Hermione's sake. She was, after all, the only one who visited him anymore. Since joining the Aurors, Ron had had little time to spare, and that time he preferred to spend with his current fiancée, Hermione.

After a while, Harry knew that the act was as much for himself as it was for Hermione. Even if it wasn't real, it still made him feel somewhat normal to act as he used to. He wasn't ready to accept that he had changed.

Time moves on, and as the six-month mark for the end of the war passes, Harry feels less and less motivated to pretend that everything is alright. So, he stops.

When he finally admits to himself that something is wrong with him, with his soul, his magic starts acting up. He's turned 19 when it starts getting out of control.

His magic, which has always protected him and cared for him when no one else did, stops cooperating.

And Harry hides, isolating himself at Grimmauld place with only Kreacher for company. He blocks the Floo and silences the door. No one can enter.

And he won't leave.

It takes two years for his magic to start working again.

Year 1, he tried to force it, doing everything he could think of to get his magic to react. He started out easy enough by throwing things and trying to stop them from falling. Then he moved on to having Kreacher throw things at him to get his magic to subconsciously protect him, but no. Then he moved on to jumping down the stairs to get his magic to soften the fall. When that didn't work, he moved higher, to jumping off the roof.

That hurt. And it didn't work. He was running out of ideas.

He tried to recreate the same scenarios as when he was young and his accidental magic acted up. He directed Kreacher to sneak up on him and hit him with a frying pan, but it didn't work. He pissed off some lowlife thugs who then chased him down, in the hopes that his magic might apparate him away to safety. No such luck.

Year 1 was tough psychologically and physically.

Year 2, he tried a different approach. He let it be.

Instead, he focused on himself and his mind.

Harry has always been shit at Occlumency, but he was more determined now than ever. And he had more free time on his hands now than ever.

He meditated daily, saw a mind healer, and started doing things he used to love, like flying. Despite not feeling the same about the sport anymore, it was still calming and enjoyable. Being free and away from everything.

He started feeling better. His mind felt better, his emotions were slowly returning. His mind healer said it was important to "feel your feelings," which, to Harry, sounded ridiculous. He did try his best anyway.

He found it difficult to acknowledge his feelings when he didn't know what he felt.

Most of the time, Harry could identify if it's a positive or negative feeling, but he gets stuck when trying to specify what feeling it is.

It felt like relearning the most basic, fundamental shit even children know, but what other choice did he have?

He still didn't know why this had happened.

His mind healer was certain it was a state caused by the trauma experienced during war times. Harry didn't believe that, but he never said anything.

At the end of year 2, his Occlumency had improved tremendously. His mind wasn't an impenetrable wall, more like a high fence. If someone wanted to get through, they could, but those that just wanted to have a look wouldn't be able to see.

Satisfied with his work and feeling the best he had since the end of the war, it came as a surprise when his magic started reacting again.

Well aware he still wasn't at full strength but feeling in control of his magic, he decided it was time to end this self-imposed isolation.

Luna, who has been writing to Harry over the past two years but never receiving a reply in return, didn't seem surprised at all when Harry turned up.

Brewing and Breakdowns

Chapter Summary

Harry arrives at Peverell castle and starts brewing, summons some elves and has a minor breakdown.

Chapter Notes

I wrote the first seven chapters of this story in a week during Christmas and then didn't write for a while so if these first seven chapters are rather slow moving I'm sorry. I didn't want to delete anything or rewrite cause I do actually like it but just so you all know it moves a little quicker once he gets to hogwarts.

Peverell Castle was a mess.

Had it been this decaying and ominous in his time? No, not really. Sure, it was in bad shape when he visited it for the first time in the 2010s, but it had been a quick fix. This was not a quick fix.

It was ancient and made of dark stone with wooden doors. You could clearly see that this was an old, abandoned castle. Still, the structure was mostly intact, and the stone walls were strong and unforgiving. It stood as if conjured up from a child's nightmare, dark and looming, casting a shadow on the overgrown garden that surrounded it. The surrounding forest did nothing to brighten the place.

The inside of the castle was covered in a thick layer of dust. Cobwebs, almost as old as the castle, were on every windowsill, even though there were no spiders to be found. The whole place felt dead, lacking the magic it once had. All the rooms and corridors were empty except for the occasional broken chair or table pushed into a corner. A great hall completed the western wing of the castle. Floor-length windows bordered the hall, letting in a lot of light, but they were so dirty that you couldn't see what was going on outside.

Harry would need help if this was where he chose to settle down. Exhaustion hit him hard as he stepped into the master bedroom of the western wing. Waving his hand, he vanished the dust and cobwebs, and he transfigured the broken chair in the corner into a queen-sized bed. He was out as soon as he laid down and let his body relax.

...

With the sun shining through the windows, Harry squinted his eyes. Visions of the past day (maybe he should call it night?) assaulted him as he rose from the bed.

His mind was not as clear as it used to be. This body was affecting him. The brewing would have to start today if he wished to be back in his old, healthy body before summer ended. He needed to brew the antidote as well, so his system would be flushed of all current potions slowing him down.

With a plan for the hours ahead, Harry set out to look for the potions lab. It should be in the basement. He had never bothered to look for it before, just stopping by the castle once in a while to pick up some books or crash for the night.

Making his way through the maze of hallways, he thankfully found the stairs leading to the basement. The closer he got to the bottom of the stairs, the more it smelled of mildew. Ah, and here were the spiders, hiding in the corners. Oh, shit, was that a rat as well? Great... more ingredients if he ever needs rat spleen.

Having looked behind a couple of doors and found a room full of broken furniture, a dungeon with cells, a room with a bunch of shelves (food storage, maybe?), a wine cellar stocked with wine (yes, now he could get shit-faced drunk this evening), the ward-stone room (he would get to that after the potions), the elves' sleeping chambers, and then finally the potions lab. And he still had a couple of rooms left to look over later.

Stepping into the room, Harry felt the magic in the air. A preservation charm? Hmm, whoever left that, good job.

Harry reached forward to touch the bench in the middle of the room, but his hand was stopped. Oh, a protection enchantment as well. Did someone's kids try to nab some potions or something?

Waving his hand, Harry lifted the enchantment, and the room was in pretty good shape. It just needed an update. Snapping his fingers, furniture started moving around. He directed the two shelves to the wall furthest from the door, and the two workbenches into the middle of the room, facing each other. The only thing left to do was to vanish the remains of a half-finished potion, and Harry did that with a snap of his fingers.

There, all done.

Now to get started. Taking off his Mokeskin pouch from around his neck (he rebought one in Knockturn; he learned the hard way to always keep an emergency stash of all his things), he proceeded to pull out all the newly bought ingredients and equipment needed, such as a cauldron, a mortar and pestle, a brass scale, some stirring rods, a chopping board, and a knife.

Well done, Harry! You remembered everything! Give yourself a pat on the back!

Talking and having an inner monologue with himself had become the norm after so many years living in isolation. The only company he used to get was with the house-elf.

Oh! He should summon them after he's done. Not having to eat his own cooking, however delicious, would be nice.

Satisfied with his setup, Harry mentally prepared himself for the brewing he was going to be doing for the following hours.

Three hours later, Harry was stretching his back and groaning. Merlin, he hated brewing. So much effort, so much focusing and paying attention and being patient. And he had done all the potions simultaneously, which was even more demanding (but faster so worth it). Yuck, though he did hate it even more if he messed it up and had to do it all over again. Not this time though!

With the eye-healing potion, nutrition potions, and antidote complete, Harry quickly cleaned up the slight mess he'd made and added the potions to his Mokeskin pouch. He was planning on taking the antidote before bed, seeing as it worked best when the body was relaxed.

Now heading for the ward-stone room to reactivate the wards for this place. Maybe he should have done that sooner; he was pretty sure Dumbledore and the flaming chickens had noticed his disappearance. Well, whatever, it's not like they can track him. He had runes engraved on his bones to stop that—FUCK. No, he didn't. This wasn't his body. God dammit.

He couldn't do that ritual until he took the Valexo Valetudo potion and corrected years' worth of damage caused by childhood malnourishment. How freaking annoying.

Fine, he'd have to make a protective pendant with a mountain of enchantments and runes on it. "Uhhhh, so much work. I haven't put this much effort into anything in years," Harry complained. Well, he was just going to have to do it.

Entering the ward-stone room and walking up to the huge limestone engraved with thousands of tiny runes, Harry hovered his hand over it to get a feel for the magic in it. Yes, this would do quite nicely. No one would be able to get through the wards of the castle once he activated them. They would have to be physically keyed into the stone to even step on the grounds if Harry wasn't around to loosen the wards.

The Peverells who made this stone had also added a lot of fail-safes so that even if the wards were inactive, only those of Peverell blood could enter the castle. Apparently, Harry hadn't spotted the runes engraved around the entrance door. He'd have to check those out some other time. It was rather clever.

The use of limestone was also a good choice, considering that limestone is one of the few smart materials in the world, meaning it self-repairs. If a crack ever forms, only a drop of water is needed for the calcium in the stone to repair the crack. Practical.

Now that Harry had a clearer view of the different wards and ward layering, he put his hand on the stone and let his magic be absorbed by it, feeding it until the wards were as strong as they would ever get, stronger than even Hogwarts, thanks to Harry's never-ending supply of

magic. Harry then connected his magic and life force to the stone so he would be recognized as the lord of the household and be able to control the wards at any time with only his intent.

Done with that, Harry planned to call the house-elves so they could get started with cleaning the castle and cooking dinner.

Entering the sitting room, Harry transfigured the poor excuse of a sofa into a nice, comfy armchair and practically threw himself into it. After relaxing and almost falling asleep, he found the energy to summon the house-elves.

"I, Hadrian James Potter, Lord of the Houses of Potter, Black, and Peverell, summon to me all house-elves bound to my houses that do not currently serve a master," Harry spoke in a loud, commanding voice and waited.

Perhaps he didn't have any house-elves in this universe...

A few cracks echoed through the empty room, and about a dozen house-elves appeared.

With big, round eyes, they all looked at Harry, shocked to have been summoned after so many years. One brave old elf stepped forward.

"A new master has appeared after so many years. How can we be of service to the young master?" The very polite and well-spoken (how unusual) old elf asked.

Harry looked him over, noticing the dark circles under his eyes and the moth-eaten piece of cloth he wore. Drifting his eyes towards the others, he noticed they were in similar states. Had they not been taking care of themselves? Or couldn't they?

Clearing his throat, Harry spoke. "I'm Hadrian Potter. You may call me Master Hadrian. I am the Lord of the Houses of Potter, Black, and Peverell. Pleased to meet you all." He took a breath and continued. "I would like each of you to tell me your name and the house you serve."

The elves looked unsure and scared but proceeded to answer one by one.

"My name is Drippy, sir. I serve the noble House of Black, sir."

"I'm Niff, Master Hadrian, and House of Potter."

"I'm named Roji, sir. I serve the noble House of Black."

"Gruff, noble House of Black."

"I'm Bole, sir. House of Potter."

"Daisy, Master Hadrian, I serve the noble House of Black."

"I'm Fill, House of Potter."

"My name's Opie. I'm serving noble House of Black."

Finally, the last elf stepped forward, the brave elf that had spoken up first.

"My name is Soy, Master Hadrian. I serve the noble House of Black."

How the heck was Harry supposed to remember all these names? It's a good thing that remembering names of things, places, and people is not his best skill!

During the introduction, Harry noticed that there were no elves from the House of Peverell. Well, it's to be expected when there hadn't been a lord in over a century. If he remembers correctly, the last of the Peverells had been wiped out by Grindelwald during the war, though they hadn't been from the main line.

"Welcome, everyone, to Peverell Castle. As you can all see, it needs a lot of work, and I was hoping you could help me with that?" Harry asked instead of demanded. He wanted his house-elves to like him. It would be more useful in the future if they were loyal to him not out of duty but out of want.

They had all seemed to agree that Soy was the leader, and so he stepped forward. "Of course, Master Hadrian, whatever you need, we are here to help."

"Great, thank you, everyone. First off, I would like you to clean the west wing and the kitchen. You can divide the work among yourselves. I would also like for two of you to cook my meals and preferably be able to whip something up for dinner in a while. The garden outside also needs a good trimming, but it's not something urgent, so you can leave that until you have the time." Harry took a moment to think.

"I also have a couple of rules I would like you all to follow while being in my service. Firstly, you need to take care of yourselves. You all will need to make sure you rest, sleep, and eat enough. I would also like for everyone to be wearing matching uniforms and to make sure you're always clean and presentable. Secondly, if there is anything wrong, or you feel like you've done anything wrong, come to me, and we will find a solution. I don't want any of you to punish yourselves or get hurt in any way. Thirdly, if you ever wish to speak or make a request, come to me, and I'm sure we will be able to work something out."

"Now, any questions?" Harry asked, not really expecting anyone to ask anything.

One tiny elf, Drippy, raised her hand and, with Harry's nod of approval, spoke. "Drippy is with child, Master Hadrian. Drippy would like to be cooking."

"Oh, congratulations, Drippy! How wonderful. Yes, you could work in the kitchens if that's what you're most comfortable with right now. If you ever need rest or help, please talk to me, and it will be given." Harry tried to keep his voice warm and friendly to show all the house-elves he was no threat to them.

Drippy smiled and bowed. "Thank you, Master Hadrian."

With that, the elves got to work, with Soy dividing the work and directing the other elves.

It appeared that Drippy and Niff would be handling the cooking while the others did the cleaning. When the others got to work, Harry asked Soy to stay behind.

"So, I would like for you to be the head elf and make sure everything goes smoothly. Here is a money pouch connected to the Peverell vaults. It's limitless, and I would like you to use the money to decorate the castle as you see fit, preferably in natural colors with splashes of rich blue and emerald green. There is also a Peverell storage vault that might contain some decorative pieces. You have my permission to look through it. The money will also be used to buy food, and I would like you to stock up the potions lab with ingredients. Just the most common ones will do," Soy nodded, and Harry continued.

"I would also like you to turn three rooms in the west wing into a dueling room, a library, and a personal study if that's alright." Harry asked, a bit uncertain if he was giving the poor elf too much work.

"Of course, Master Hadrian. It will be done," Soy sounded calm and collected, so that's good.

"Thank you. Take all the time you need to complete the tasks."

As evening approached, Harry had almost completed the protective pendant. Just an hour or so more, and he would be done.

The elves had been very efficient during the last two hours. They had cleaned up all the rooms in the west wing and were now out shopping for furniture. You gotta love house-elf magic.

At seven o'clock on the dot, there was a crack in his room, and Niff appeared. "Dinner is served in the dining room, Master Hadrian."

"Thank you, Niff. Would you please show me the way? I'm not familiar enough with the layout of the castle."

Niff nodded and led the way. On their way there, Harry inspected the wing. It was perfectly clean, and with the wards activated, Harry could feel the magic current through the walls.

Not much furniture had been acquired yet, but Harry was sure that by the time he awoke tomorrow, it would be done.

As they approached the dining room, Harry observed the stained glass windows stretching from the floor up to the ceiling. A beautiful moving dragon could be seen flying across the three windows. The elves had somehow gotten their hands on a grand chandelier with similar coloring as the dragon. Underneath it was a large rectangular table in a dark wood, with carvings alongside the edges. Eight chairs in the same wood were placed around the table. Otherwise, the large room remained empty, with the exception of a fireplace and the farthest wall from the door.

The elves had truly outdone themselves.

After entering the room, Harry asked Niff to get Daisy so both could be informed that Harry was on a strict diet and was in need of nutrition potions.

Otherwise, dinner was a quiet affair, with Harry watching the dragon flying around.

After dinner, Harry completed the pendant and, as promised to himself, raided the wine cellar.

Thankfully, he still remembered to take the antidote before passing out.

Waking up with a pounding headache was not an unusual experience but still unpleasant.

Shower, he needed a shower. Did this place even have a bathroom?

“Uhhh, whatever. I need clothes, new clothes,” Harry mumbled to himself.

Pulling out young Harry’s trunk from his Mokeskin pouch, he started looking for acceptable clothing and found nothing.

Had his style always been this bad? Had everyone been oblivious to the kind of clothes Harry wore? No normal child would choose to wear this... They must have noticed something was wrong but chose to ignore it...

But you couldn't ignore it.

Not the shirts that hung over Harry’s thin shoulders and appeared more like dresses on him.

Not the pants that Harry could fit thrice into with how wide they were.

Not the torn sneakers that were practically falling apart with every step he took.

No, you couldn't not see it.

Someone must have seen. The Weasleys, who he spent weeks with during the summer, must have seen.

Mrs Weasley always complained about how he was dressed and how thin he was, but neither she nor anyone else ever did anything about it.

Well, fuck them! Fuck them all!

Now Harry was fucking angry. Of course, he knew they all saw the signs of his abuse, but they couldn't see him. All they saw was a tool, a savior, the fucking boy-who-lived, and he couldn't be abused.

He hadn't thought about his childhood in decades, but being back here, being a child once more, really brought all those nasty memories up to the surface.

Harry clenched his fist, trying to regain control over his magic, which had slowly been making itself known by draining the area around Harry of warmth, leaving in its stead ice growing like vines out of his body.

Perhaps he should have let some of his anger about this whole situation of being in the past out earlier so as not to let his anger control him now, but afterthoughts are a bitch. There's no time like the present to let some anger out.

Harry apparated to the nearby forest where no one could hear him and screamed.

"Nothing in this life or the last was my own, will be my own! I have been alive, fighting, not for my own sake but for others! I have given everything for the sake of others. Even my death was not my own.

NOTHING WILL EVER BE JUST MY OWN, MINE!

...I cannot go on in a world like this, I want to, no, I need to be free. I need to be my own person."

By this point, Harry had fallen to his knees and was clutching onto the grass. Harry lowered his voice and in a deathly cold tone continued. “No one will get in my way, no one will force my hand or stop me from doing what I want, and if they do, I will show them exactly how painful it is to be alive, never, never getting the sweet release of death.”

He cursed death, life, and Lady Magic.

Letting go of his hold on his magic, it consumed.

It devoured.

Sucking out all life around, like a vampire draining someone of blood. Harry closed his eyes and let it happen.

Harry had never been as light as everyone always assumed, even when he was young and naive, the darkness was always there in the background. Hiding, waiting, growing.

Harry's magical core had been gray. He knew that from the second he touched the diary and felt the same pull towards the dark magic as he did towards the light.

His magic now wasn't the same. After dying in that clearing in the Forbidden Forest, his magic began to shift. After those two years when his magic was messed up, it came back different.

Not light, not gray, not dark.

Different.

Not human.

Not magic a wizard could wield.

Opening his eyes, Harry breathed out. And in. And out.

Looking around, only dust remained where there once had been trees, grass, and life.

This.

This is what Harry had become.

Inhuman.

A monster.

A god.

....At least his headache was gone.

Now seated at the dining room table with the Daily Prophet in his hand, Harry felt alright. He had decided. No one would control him. Not that they could anyway.

Calmly drinking the tea Niff had served him, an owl tapped on the window. He waved his hand, opening the window. Didn't Dumbledore put a mail ward on him when he was 14?

Hmm, maybe not in this world or perhaps his magic had simply burned it away. His magic was very possessive that way, not letting anyone else's magic touch him.

Taking the letter from the owl, Harry gave it a piece of sausage and watched it fly away.

Where was Hedwig? Didn't she exist in this world or was she staying with someone else?

Pondering Hedwig's location, Harry let his magic touch the letter to make sure there was nothing harmful on it.

A mild compulsion charm and location tracker had been despoiled as soon as Harry Potter's name had been written down as the receiver.

A clever modification on the Taboo curse, if Harry was to say so himself. He was proud of that creation, having it be one of his first attempts at spell crafting. Essentially, it blocked any tracking spell meant to find Harry Potter. It didn't work if the person used a dark tracking ritual using Harry's blood or bodily fluid, but most light wizards and witches didn't even know how to perform those rituals. Anyway, he had his pendant to stop any such ritual from working.

Scoffing at the weak attempt at a compulsion charm meant to make the recipient more compliant to whatever was written, Harry opened the letter.

Hermione. He wasn't sure how he felt towards her anymore.

After all, he did once kill her...

For his own sake, avoiding her would be best. Even if it wasn't fair to her, Harry no longer felt any obligation towards her or the rest of humanity.

He took care of himself.

It was best that way.

And besides, he decided to be himself, and being himself ensured chaos would follow. It was best for them to stay away from him as well.

Harry was, however, slightly surprised she hadn't written sooner.

Dear Harry,

Where are you? We are all so worried, I do hope you're alright.

Whilst I was on vacation with my parents, I received a letter from Headmaster Dumbledore. He's so very worried and concerned for your safety. He's even out there looking for you himself!

Please come back, Harry!

Sirius must be climbing the walls with worry for you. Please come home, Harry!

Regardless of how things are with you and Ron, he and all the Weasleys are sure to be very worried for you as well.

I'm sure you can stay at the Burrow or with Sirius if you don't want to go back to your family.

We can figure something out, but you have to come home first!

Love,

Hermione

P.S. Headmaster Dumbledore said I could only send one letter before I get there, so please come home, and we can talk face to face!

Cute.

So the compulsion was to get him to come back. They seemed to be getting desperate. How funny.

Trying to guilt trip him using Sirius was a weak attempt at manipulation, and throwing in Ron like that was strange. "Regardless of how things are," what things? He couldn't remember anything happening with Ron during this time.

Another change in this universe. Did they have a fight after the tournament or something?

Also, why wasn't the old man and he grilled by the Prophet? Didn't the old man know Voldie was back? Surely, if he did, he would try to warn the public, as he did before?

Wait, was Voldie even back? This is a different universe after all...

Calling for Bole, he asked the elf to find him all the papers that had been published about Harry. He would start by reading those, and if he had time, he would read everything else that had been published in the past couple of years. Good thing he loved spending hours just reading about himself...

Right, back to the letter. Harry didn't really feel like replying now, maybe later. He was already stirring up chaos. Should he make things even more exciting?

How could he create more chaos for the old man and the flaming chickens? Harry snapped his fingers, and a vicious grin formed on his face.

He had the perfect idea.

Memories and Meetings

Chapter Summary

More of Harry's past is revealed. Harry gets a haircut, the order has a meeting and Harry gets an unexpected visitor in the night.

Chapter Notes

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

When Harry turned 22, he was ready to rejoin society again.

Walking around Diagon Alley as himself was not his finest move. After having been gone from Wizarding Britain since the day he defeated Voldemort, never having responded to any mail from the Ministry inviting him to galas or reward ceremonies or to join the Aurors, and burning any requests for interviews, he should have expected the chaos.

At first, people looked like they had seen a ghost. Fear and shock could be seen on most faces, but then it changed to excitement. Crowding around him like he was an angel that everyone wanted to feel the "divine power" of.

It was overwhelming, and Harry had fled, somehow ending up in Gringotts.

And while the crowd of people had been more than happy to see him, the same could not be said for the goblins.

Being led to an office after threats of torture and beheading, and promptly dumped in a chair, left Harry feeling even more overwhelmed.

If he didn't have a panic attack soon, he would be surprised.

Joined by the head goblin of the branch, Silverhook, Harry was informed of the money he owed due to the damage he and his friends caused.

Harry was flabbergasted by the amount. And taken aback when Silverhook also informed him that Hermione and Ron had put the debt on Harry's head.

The betrayal stung. Why hadn't they told him?

Silverhook went on to inform him that most of the Black fortune would cover the damage, and Harry didn't understand. He tried to explain that the Black fortune wasn't Harry's, but Silverhook only looked annoyed and asked Harry for his hand. Confused but not in any position to refuse, Harry held out his hand. Startled when Silverhook cut his wrist and let the blood drop down on the parchment.

That's when things got even worse.

The loyalty potions, the distrust potions, the compulsion, the blocks on his magic.

It was all too much. So Harry did what any sane person would do and fainted.

Exiting the building later, Harry was numb. With three new lordship rings on his fingers (and two more potential if he wanted them) and two fewer friends and a thousand tainted memories.

He contemplated forgiveness. They had been through so much together, did he really want to throw that away? But could he forgive it?

Is it really forgiveness if it's your only option? Is it really forgiveness if you never had the ability to enact revenge? Forgiveness is always to help the perpetrator and does nothing for the victim.

Moving on is different, but is it better?

Justice is a children's tale.

Taking up his place at the Wizardmon seemed like a good idea at the time. Like he would make a difference... he doesn't.

It's as corrupt as ever. Only now, it's the light that has blinded the people.

Bitterness creeps up on Harry, and by the time he's turned 27, he knows there's no helping those that do not want it.

He finally understands that when everyone agrees to the same lie, it becomes the truth.

He leaves England.

Harry, for all that he loves magic, despises it as well. What is the Muggle saying? "There's a fine line between love and hate."

Harry travels. Sees the world. It's so different than he imagined. So much better.

He discovers a new love for learning, for understanding.

While in Indonesia, he's taught about the theory of how everything is connected. The magic users call it the Greater Connection. Muggles, as Harry later discovers, call it quantum entanglement.

According to the Indonesian coven, the greater connection starts with your inner connection to your magic. For your magic to flourish, so must your body, mind, and soul.

Is that why his magic had been so chaotic?

Harry learns more. He learns all he can from different cultures around the world, but the greater connection theory sticks with him.

When he turns 29, he meets the master.

Who is this master, you might wonder? Harry doesn't know, and everyone he asks only answers in vague, unhelpful ways like "he is the master" or "the master is supreme."

Whatever that means.

The master must see something in Harry (or lack thereof) and asks him to stay a while. Harry does.

The master confirms Harry's thoughts. His magic is acting and had acted weird because it can't connect to him properly.

The master makes Harry a promise of helping him as much as he can.

They begin with the body. Thanks to years of childhood malnourishment, his body is weak, and his organs are failing. The only reason he's even standing is thanks to his magic. His bones are weak and brittle. His nerve endings are screwed, and his brain and intellect are impaired.

Thank you loving relatives.

It takes months of potions, dieting, and working out to correct all his issues.

Not even mentioning the agonizing pain he suffers through when he takes the last potion to fix all the “permanent” issues, such as his height, his build, his intellect, and his never-developed logical thinking and consequence apprehension.

He’s in a sort of coma for weeks while the matters correct themselves. When it’s finally over, Harry can’t recall ever feeling so good.

His body is light but developed. It doesn’t look like he’s stuck in the body of a teenager anymore. He’s taller, and the muscles he’s worked hard on gaining these last few months are finally visible. He’s finally a man. He looks good if he’s to say so himself.

Next comes the mind, which is much harder in Harry’s opinion. Letting the thoughts flow, acknowledging them, and letting them go is alright, but when it comes to some memories he had suppressed, he can’t do it.

It takes four years for Harry to be at peace with his mind and create good Occlumency walls around his mind.

Once you start working on yourself, you never stop. His body and mind have improved, but they will never be complete. Next, however... next is the soul.

The soul.

What soul?

...

He studies for a few more years. Everything he couldn’t concentrate on long enough before. He relearns a lot of things he thought were true, such as how a wizard can’t do complex

magic without a wand. Not true, he's seen old magical tribes do some amazing magic, all with wild magic.

The first time he saw it, he returned to his master and begged him to teach Harry, and he did.

He learned about healing from the Native American tribe he stumbled across.

He studied the old scripts in Alexandria, learning black magic and necromancy. The connection to that type of magic was instantaneous, and Harry learned not to ignore what his magic told him.

Seven years had passed, and Harry, now a completely different man, felt a need to return home. He returned home at 35, and that was the beginning of the end for Harry.

Harry spent the following days at Peverell Castle, by owl ordering robes, clothes, pre-made potions for healing and such, and books, lots of books. And of course, he read those books.

His eyes were coming along nicely, just two more days of drops, and he wouldn't need those awful glasses.

Should he grow out his hair again? It had been a lot easier to manage once it got past the shoulders. But it was also easier to control with that haircut Draco gave him. And Harry personally preferred shorter hair, not as much maintenance.

Alright, he'd get one of the elves to shave the sides of his hair short and keep it longer on top so the messiness would seem intentional. Harry remembered turning that style into a mohawk to piss off Draco. Chuckling quietly at the prissy face he used to make, Harry made his way to the sitting room.

Oh, had he forgotten to mention that he went to Gringotts and made them invest in a shit ton of IT companies, like Microsoft and Apple? He told them to invest in Amazon once it went public in a year or so as well. Never having a client ask them to invest in Muggle businesses (in the US or anywhere else), they were interested to find out how it worked and how much money could be made from it. "Well," Harry thought, "have fun following the American stock market! It's so easy and enjoyable!"

Having been in the sitting room reading for a few hours, Niff popped in with tea.

"Thank you, Niff," Harry said politely. Niff seemed to have gotten used to him now and simply nodded. But before she could leave, Harry asked a question.

"Hey, Niff, do you know if anyone is good at giving haircuts? I'm in desperate need of a new one."

"Niff will ask others. Be back in a moment." And she popped away only to return a minute later with Roji.

After having explained what he wanted done, Roji had conjured up scissors and a blade and got to work. Harry was slightly startled when the scissors flew towards him and started cutting. Ten minutes later, and it was done.

"Thank you, Roji. It is perfect, exactly what I wanted." Harry's delight was easy to see, and Roji seemed a bit uncomfortable with it being directed towards him. He bowed and popped away.

Now that it was done, Harry got back to reading, and thankfully, there had been a warming charm on the tea.

Harry couldn't really remember the last time he was this relaxed.

Unlike Harry, the Order was not relaxed.

They were indeed very stressed.

First Voldemort is back, then Harry disappears, and lastly, they get kicked out of their headquarters by the house itself.

(If Harry could see them now, he would be cackling hysterically.)

Now they had to conduct their meetings at the Burrow, which was way too cramped.

The only one not kicked out of Grimmauld Place had been Sirius. Why? They weren't sure, but they believed it had to do with blood.

The sun was shining in through the window above the sink, and the birds' song could be heard from outside. One would believe that on such a beautiful summer day, nothing could be wrong.

But oh, how things were wrong for them.

Everyone was gathered around the kitchen table, waiting for their beloved leader to show.

“Does anyone want tea?” Molly asked, trying to lighten the strained mood in the room.

“No thank you, Molly. I'm quite alright,” Remus said, always the polite one.

Before anyone else could respond, the floo lit up, and out stepped Dumbledore, followed by Snape.

“Forgive an old man’s tardiness. There were some matters to attend to,” said Dumbledore slowly, smiling lightly.

“Is everything alright, Albus?” Minerva asked, concern visible on her face. Dumbledore looked at her with his twinkling eyes and smiled.

“No need to worry, my dear. Just a small matter of fetching a letter from young Harry delivered to Miss Granger.”

All eyes seemed to light up and look towards him. Snape, however, scoffed and moved to the back of the room, hiding in the shadows.

“What does it say, Dumbledore? Is Harry okay? Is my godson safe?” Sirius was the first to question.

Dumbledore's eyes drifted to Sirius and calmly replied, “It would appear he’s indeed alright, if one is to trust what’s written in this letter. Perhaps it shall be best if I read it aloud.”
Dumbledore cleared his throat and continued.

“Hermione and whoever else may read this, I know you will, old man, and hey Padfoot!

I am safe and happy and healthy, no need for concern.

I will not tell you where I am because I’m not stupid.

I haven’t yet decided if returning to Hogwarts is in my best interest, so I suppose it shall be a surprise.

I would say 'do not look for me,' and that is what I wish you would do, but I know you, old man, and your flaming chickens will continue to hunt me down till the end of time so a child can fight your imaginary wars.

I believe that's all.

Ta ta,

Hadrian Potter."

The room was deathly quiet. Eyes were wide, and some even seemed angry. All at once, everyone started shouting.

"What the hell was that?"

"Arrogant, naive child will get himself killed if he doesn't have CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"Hey Padfoot, that was all he had to say. I need to find Harry!"

"There's no need for concern, of course, there is, the precious child is out there on his own. We have to find Harry quickly before something terrible happens!"

"Way to go Harry, that was awesome!"

"TONKS, that was not awesome! That arrogant little brat believes he knows best."

And on and on it went.

“SILENCE!” Dumbledore's voice could be heard throughout the house, shaking the walls from the vibrations of his magic.

“Now, everyone please, be quiet.” Dumbledore sighed as if he had the entire world upon his fragile shoulders.

“I have run as many tests as I can think of, and this is definitely Harry’s writing. It’s still unclear as to why he ran away, but the dear boy seems unwell. It is not like Harry to be so rude.” Another loud sigh left his mouth, but he powered through.

“Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels, but old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young. I’m sure young Harry is simply out having fun, believing nothing will happen to him. What he is not aware of is, of course, the return of the Dark Lord. Our first priority is his safe return to us. Do not forget that.” He said sternly, looking from each person until he saw them all shift and fidget.

“Now, do we have any leads on his location?”

Moody stood up and huffed. “Nothing has been found on the brat, he has simply vanished, which should be impossible for a schoolboy with no magic. Nothing from his house has proven any use either.” Frowning, he dropped back down onto the bench.

Shacklebolt went next. “The trace hasn't been activated, which means he isn’t using magic. I’ve asked around quietly amongst the aurors if there’s been any sighting of him, and there have been none.”

“I’ve asked the goblins if Harry has been by, but they aren’t very forthcoming with answers. Client privacy and all that.” Bill stated, looking concerned and slightly ill.

Dumbledore nodded his head and frowned. How could young Harry be so well hidden? He must have help, but from who?

"I believe it's justified to conclude that the dear boy has help. Who might offer assistance to young Harry?" Dumbledore asked the group.

No one answered, seeming to think it over and coming up empty.

Remus cleared his throat, and focus was instantly on him. Blushing lightly, he spoke. "If I may offer a personal observation of Harry?" He took a breath and looked toward Dumbledore, who nodded encouragingly.

"Harry does not generally trust adults. I believe I can name five adults who Harry would trust enough to help him run away, and they are all currently in this room. So it seems unlikely he has an adult helping him. Perhaps an older student?" Remus glanced at Sirius, who was looking down at the table, frowning, lips pressed into a tight line.

"Well, Black, where are you hiding the brat?" was asked in a cool, calm tone by Severus.

Sirius was not calm nor cool. "What the hell's that supposed to mean, Snivellus! Do you think I would sit here, worried out of my mind if I had Harry stashed in some shed somewhere! Maybe you're the one holding him hostage, you pathetic Death Eater!!"

"That's enough from both of you. We must try not to sink beneath our anguish but battle on," Dumbledore said before either could speak. Snape and Sirius seemed to settle down a bit at Dumbledore's disappointed eyes.

"For now, let's move on to other matters. Severus, has he reached out yet?" Everyone looked towards Snape at the Headmaster's question.

Snape seemed to become angrier at having all the attention on him, if his narrowed eyes were anything to go by. "No. I haven't felt anything from the mark. I questioned Lucius, who hasn't heard anything either."

Dumbledore seemed to deflate before their eyes at Severus' reply. "I'm afraid dark and terrible times lie ahead. Soon choices must be made between what is right and what is easy..." He straightened his back and focused his eyes.

"Moody, Shacklebolt, any whispers in the Ministry regarding his return?"

Nice things never last for Harry.

Waking up in the middle of the night because of a vision is never fun.

Stupid Death, always interfering at the worst times.

He hates their "clues" or whatever they are supposed to be.

In the dream, all Harry could really make out was the vague sense of urgency he felt, the importance of him being somewhere.

"Well, you'll have to be clearer than that, Death if you wish to convey anything!"

Harry wasn't actually sure these "visions" even were from Death, seeing as he never left a note or card or anything. But they always smelled of death, so he just chose to believe this was Death's way of trying to communicate.

Being the master of Death didn't really come with an instruction manual. Wouldn't that have been nice?

They didn't really feel like those visions he used to get from Voldie either. Voldie's were always painful and violently alarming. These newer visions were simply impressions of

feelings, places, or people.

They were a bitch to understand though.

It had been a couple of decades since he last had one, so it must be important.

Sighing out loud, he spoke in the hopes that Death could hear him. "Where exactly am I supposed to be? You have to send a location as well, Death. I don't magically know what you are thinking. I get it's important to be there soon, but do let me know where. Alright? Thank you, good night."

And with that, Harry closed his eyes and was dead to the world.

Chapter End Notes

Planning on releasing the first 10 chapters of this story during the week so you can kinda get a feeling for the story. After that updates will be slower.

Gatherings at Graveyards

Chapter Summary

The graveyard from Voldemorts pov and some of younger Harry's memories following the event.

Chapter Notes

Just so everything is clear, this is the younger Harry's memories not old Harry in young Harry's body. The graveyard happened before Hadrian arrived in the new world. Hadrian doesn't know any of this happened. Hope that makes it easier to follow, I'll have to come up with a better way to distinguish between young and older Harry...

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

Three weeks ago

Voldemort was buzzing with anxiety, anticipation, and excitement as the time neared.

Soon, he would have his body back. No longer would he be forced to rely upon the pathetic rat's substandard care, living in humiliation by not even being able to feed himself. Soon, he wouldn't need anyone's care. Soon, he'd be himself again.

All that was left was for the Potter boy to arrive.

Using the boy for the ritual was an ingenious idea on his part. With the child's blood running through his veins, the blood protection his mother somehow invoked would be null. And then, finally, vengeance would be his.

Potter would be his.

He would kill the brat, but only after he begged for it. They would all know how Potter begged for death, and how Voldemort, being a merciful lord, obliged.

Barty better be successful in his mission. Death would be the least of Crouch's concerns should he fail.

Minutes ticked by, and the silence became deafening. *Where is he!?* Voldemort thought.

A few meters away, a crack followed by a thump and a moan could be heard.

He's here! Voldemort thought. If he could grin, he would.

Wormtail, thankfully not a completely incompetent fool, was able to tie up the brat while he was still down.

The ritual proceeded as planned, and the last thing Lord Voldemort saw as he was dropped into the potion was Potter's terrified, bloodied face.

And then pain.

So much pain. So much worse than being separated from his body.

The water burned the temporary flesh away. He could feel himself being put back together, one painful piece at a time. And then he could breathe.

With a deep wheezing inhale, he hastily sat up.

Once more, Lord Voldemort had conquered death. As he stepped out of what remained of the potion, Voldemort felt exhilarated.

Alive at last.

He could feel the earth beneath his feet, the cold air blowing through his hair. The silk of his robe was soft against his skin. He was a man once more.

Looking over his body to make sure that the fool did everything right, he moved his hands across his arms, up to his neck, and over his face.

It was the skin of a body he had long ago forsaken. That of Tom Riddle.

He was a man and not a wraith anymore, and he even looked the part.

He had hypothesized this was a possible outcome but had not dwelled on the fact, seeing as it was a very slim chance of it occurring. He was unsure of the consequences this would have.

He felt off, something was off. Something was different, but not in the sense that he now had a functioning body, but in a different sense.

"My wand, Wormtail," he demanded, quickly taking it from him.

Transfiguring a gravestone into a full-sized mirror, he looked upon himself and was bewildered. Was this him?

Once upon a time, he too had succumbed to the social ideal of aesthetic appeal. And once more, he felt himself surrender.

He was visually appealing. Symmetry, contrast, proportions, balance, emphasis, unity, youth, he had it all.

Had he forgotten what he once looked like?

Getting lost in his own reflection like some Narcissus imposter, he forced his mind to focus on what was different, off about himself.

Nothing external, it would appear. Internal then. It would have to be examined later, for he did, after all, have an audience and some followers to summon.

Looking towards young Harry, the boy seemed dumbstruck, gazing down at the ground with wide eyes. Harry must have sensed eyes on him because a moment later, he was staring back at Voldemort, defiance clear in his gaze.

Voldemort smirked, amused by the boy's quick change in expression. Such defiance from someone so weak...

Slowly, he approached the boy, the smirk still etched on his lips. Harry eyed him up and down, searching for weaknesses or perhaps unable to resist his curiosity. A frown appeared between Harry's eyebrows.

Curious about Harry's thoughts, Voldemort leaned in as he stepped in front of him.

"How could someone so beautiful be such a fucking monster?" Harry's most prominent thought echoed through his mind.

Tom smirked, leaning closer until their faces were only a breath apart.

"Without morals, Darling," Voldemort whispered, almost brushing his lips against Harry's as he spoke. Suddenly, he took a step back and observed Harry.

A lovely blush had spread across Harry's cheeks. It was almost a waste to kill the boy when he could elicit such a reaction just by being close and using an endearment.

Did he need to kill the boy? Tied up as he was, he didn't seem like much of a threat anymore. Why had Tom been so afraid of him?

No, not of him, but of what he represented. The prophecy had foretold of Harry's power, but was it logical to believe in a half-heard prophecy? Hadn't he always valued logic above all else? What had changed?

Harry was almost as famous as he was nowadays, perhaps he could be of use. Doubtful, though, considering he was the reason Potter became an orphan.

An orphan, like he was.

Irritated by his own thoughts and their inconsistencies, he decided to move on by summoning his loyal followers.

As they popped into existence one after another, they gathered in a circle around him, with the boy a meter or so behind them.

"Welcome, my loyal friends. Thirteen years it's been, and yet, here you stand before me as though it were only yesterday. I confess myself disappointed. Not one of you tried to find me."

"And here we have six missing Death Eaters... three dead in my service. One, too cowardly to return... he will pay. One, who I believe has left me forever... he will be killed, of course... and one who remains my most faithful servant and who has already re-entered my service...."

As Voldemort continued his speech, no one paid attention to Harry until it was too late. Somehow, he had gotten loose and used wandless magic to summon his wand from Wormtail (incompetent fool!).

As Voldemort spotted the boy, Harry accioed the cup and disappeared.

Voldemort was astonished. "Such luck the brat has."

Quickly, that astonishment burned in the wake of his rage. He became furious and took that anger out on his faithful followers.

Once more, he'd lost what was his.

What no one had seen was Wormtail's wand move as he loosened the bindings on Harry's wrists. And no one would ever find out.

...

Harry, in shock as he returned, did not notice the cheering or the people approaching him or being led away towards the castle by Moody.

It was only after having a calming draught shoved down his throat that he became able to think once again.

Voldemort was back.

That was the only thought running through his head as Moody sat him down in a chair.

"What has happened, lad?" Moody was close, too close for comfort, but he had always been strange.

"Voldemort... he's back... he's alive once more."

"The Dark Lord has risen?!"

"Yes."

"Then I must go. It's time to return." Moody sounded excited, but Harry, still having a hard time processing what was going on, didn't think much of it. Or the fact that Moody was summoning all his things into a trunk.

But when a wand was held in front of his face, Harry started to suspect something was wrong.

"You are the Dark Lord's to kill, but I can't let you tell anyone else what you know." Moody sounded almost apologetic. Harry didn't understand.

"Obliviate." And the world went black.

...

Harry awoke to adults surrounding him.

"What's going on?" Harry grumbled quietly, but somehow everyone heard.

"Harry, my dear boy, what happened? Where is Moody?" Dumbledore seemed concerned, why, Harry didn't know.

"What do you mean Moody? How would I know where he is...?" Then Harry sat up so quickly that the adults startled and took a step back. In a panicked voice, Harry frantically spoke.

"Did I miss the final task, sir? Is my magic gone? Is that why I'm in the hospital wing?!" Harry was breathing quickly, too quickly.

"Move out of the way! I need to see my patient!" Madame Pomfrey came running with a potion in her hand. "Here, Harry, drink this."

As Harry swallowed the potion, everything seemed to slow down. Calm waves hit him as he laid back on the bed. But before he could close his eyes, Dumbledore continued talking.

"No, my dear boy, your magic is still there in you. It would seem you have been obliviated, Harry. Do you not remember competing and winning the tournament?" Dumbledore was concerned now, what had happened?

"No, sir, the last thing I remember is leaving the Great Hall." Harry was mumbling uncomprehendingly now.

"All of you, leave now. Mister Potter needs to rest. Get out of my wing," Madame Pomfrey waved her hands at them until they walked away.

As Harry was falling under Morpheus' hold, he heard a quiet conversation nearby.

"Do you believe this is the work of *Him*, Albus?"

"It is too early to tell, Minerva...."

And Harry was out like a light.

Voldemort was sitting in the armchair in front of the fireplace when he heard the distinct crack of someone Apparating.

Fully believing his wards would not let anyone without a Dark Mark in, he remained seated.

He let his magic go and feel towards the other person's magic, trying to determine if he recognized the signature of their magic.

It was Barty.

Voldemort grinned; he hadn't been able to do that in years. His magic felt stronger than ever now. It was of the greatest importance to figure out what had changed with him.

As Barty approached the door, Voldemort waved his wand and opened it, letting Barty know he was free to enter.

As soon as he stepped into the room, Barty knelt down and grinned excitedly.

“My Lord, it’s great to see you in the flesh once again. I bring some news from Hogwarts.”

Despite having lost Harry, Voldemort was feeling quite joyful this evening and decided to show Barty some gratitude for a job well done.

“Come join me, Barty.” Voldemort said in a surprisingly warm voice. Barty startled slightly at the tone, his eyes going wide in wonder as he apprehended what his lord just said.

While approaching the armchair opposite from his lord, Barty watched him for any signs of danger. Not seeing any, he slowly sat down.

“Now tell me what happened upon young Harry’s return.” Voldemort demanded, quite interested in the answer.

As Barty told, in detail, what had occurred that evening, Voldemort was unsure of how he felt.

On one hand, using an Obliviate was a wise choice seeing as it would prevent Harry from remembering his return, safeguarding their future. For his larger-scale objectives, it was a wise decision.

On the other hand, Harry's oblivion felt improper. He wanted the boy to remember what had happened. Wanted him to dwell upon his return. Remember how close they had been. How he had blushed from Voldemort calling him darling...

No. This was the best outcome.

Now he could work undisturbed in the shadows.

What Voldemort didn't know was that in three weeks, Harry would be gone forever...

Weeks had passed since that day and Voldemort finally had an idea as to why he was so different.

Mind, body, and... soul.

His soul.

How was it even possible that he had absorbed another piece of his soul without feeling remorse? It was something he had pondered.

Barty had filled him in on what transpired in the Chamber of Secrets during Harry's second year. Barty, the clever Ravenclaw that he was, had looked into the minds of every child in close proximity to Harry. Seeing as most of them were not followers of the old ways, they didn't know Occlumency. Very convenient indeed.

Having daily meetings with Barty so he could share his memories of Harry and those that he stole had been surprisingly pleasant. He had never noticed Barty's intellect or his keen observation skills. Though he would never tell a soul, Voldemort found Barty's dry sense of humor amusing.

Another thing that had changed consequent to the return of his biggest soul shard: he felt emotions. He had forgotten what emotions felt like. For years, all he had felt was anger, fear, and sick amusement for the suffering of others.

Joy, calmness, nostalgia, relief. All forgotten, now found.

He had forgotten a lot. His plans, his ideas, his goal. All forgotten in his madness. He now knew that he had been mad, insane. Not anymore.

At first, the thought of one less Horcrux protecting his immortality had been distressing, to say the least. He could now see that the positives outweighed the negatives, but he still feared for the others. They weren't as impervious to damage and destruction as he had previously thought, which could be ruinous.

Who knows what Dumbledore would be able to accomplish if he got his hands on them? If a young child with a sword had the power to free the soul shard without even being

consciously aware of what he was making happen, by Merlin, what could Dumbledore do? He needed to retrieve them.

While he wasn't sure what he would do with them once he had them, at least they would be safe. He needed to find them. Additionally, there was no need to draw attention at this point by spilling any blood. Any drop of magical blood spilt was a waste. As much as possible, he would avoid it in the future.

The gods know, he had spilled plenty already.

Of course, he wasn't so gullible as to think that discussions and political scheming would succeed in achieving freedom for the dark. No matter how he felt about it, war always involved casualties.

But now Voldemort was stronger and sharper than ever. He would prevail. There was nothing that could stop him. This time he would not lose.

As he contemplated plans for the future, a crack could be heard. Letting his magic free, he searched for the intruder.

Lucius.

Since Voldemort hadn't summoned him, Lucius must have discovered something significant for him to dare bother him.

A knock on the door. He waved his hand and let Lucius enter. Quick enough to have hurt his knee, Lucius was kneeling, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"My Lord, I bring with me important news of the Potter boy."

Eyes widened against his permission, how intriguing.

"Speak, Lucius. I haven't all day." He said in an even, emotionless tone.

"There are rumors among the Aurors, whispers really, that *Potter* is missing and has been for weeks." Lucius couldn't keep the venom out of his voice whenever he spoke of Harry, Voldemort found it amusing.

"It appears Dumbledore and his people are looking for him, so far with no success. Dumbledore has also failed to report Potter as missing to the law enforcement department."

Voldemort grinned involuntarily. Harry was missing, and because neither Dumbledore nor he had him, Harry was left to fend for himself. This was perfect. He would find him.

"That is most pleasant news, Lucius. Perhaps your punishment for losing my journal shall be forgotten. Am I not, after all, a merciful lord?"

As Lucius pleaded and praised him, Voldemort made plans to call his inner circle; they had a boy to catch.

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to thank everyone for your kind comments, I get really happy every time I see someone wrote something! It's so amazing to actually see people enjoy my writing! It's been years since I tried writing something and the last time I did I thought it was great and my teacher didn't like it at all so seeing all the comments gives me so much confidence and motivation! Thank you!!!

Death's Domain

Chapter Summary

A heist, kind of. A philosophical discussion and entering limbo to talk to Death.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is kinda all over the place. I wanted to include everything but I didn't want to drag it out anymore so it might feel a bit...choppy? Maybe. I tried my best! And anyways next chapter Harry goes back to Hogwarts! Hope you stick around

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

It was now July 11th, 1995.

Harry had been in the past for a week. He had completed taking the eye healing potion and had promptly thrown away his glasses. He had also upped his dose to two nutrition potions a day to speed things along.

Not his greatest idea, one potion a day was recommended, and now Harry knew why. Not only did it cause stomach cramps (not dangerous at least), but seeing as the potion added nutrients but also absorbed nutrients for the foods he ate, he was digesting food too quickly and, well... let's just say he spent quite some time in the loo.

Despite his stomach issues, he was gaining much-needed weight and felt ready to take the Valexo valetudo potion in a few weeks. So it was about time he went to the master.

The master and his pupils lived somewhere in Asia; he wasn't too sure where exactly. The only way someone could enter was if they knew of the temple's existence and had been taken there before. Thankfully, Harry had been there plenty of times.

To get there, he could use a portkey; however, they were highly regulated by the ministry. He could make one himself, but they were more trouble than they were worth for a one-time usage. A permanent portkey locked onto the master's temple would be more worthwhile.

But you couldn't just use any old boot as a key; you needed a very special, very rare type of crystal for it to be able to hold the magic needed. A painite. Rare and expensive. Sure, he had the money to spend, but stealing it would be more fun.

Oh! Like that Spanish muggle show he watched in the 2020s. A heist.

Okay, who did he know that would, in this time, own a painite? Didn't the Parkinsons have quite a few rare crystals? Not sure if painite was one of them, but Harry remembered hearing Pansy brag about it to Draco. Alright, he'd just have to steal them and find out.

No time like right now. Abandoning the half-finished book and summoning his cloak... cloak... his invisibility cloak! Harry smacked himself in the face, idiot! Harry had forgotten to summon the Hallows.

What an idiot. Why hadn't he done that the second he arrived in the past? How could he have forgotten about them?!

Harry slumped back into the armchair. Fine, he'll just do it now. "Come to me, my Hallows." And into existence popped a cloak, a ring, and a wand.

Well, at least now he didn't need to go wand shopping... And he got a free horcrux along with his ring... Maybe it would be useful in the future. He didn't really feel like thinking about it now. He'd have to come up with a plan regarding those later.

Honestly, at this point, Harry was so done with himself he just decided to ignore the fact that he had left his Hallows alone in this world for a week while they would have been able to feel his presence but not come to him... Scrunching his face up in guilt, he gently caressed the items.

“Please forgive me for my stupidity. I’m so sorry I left you all alone for a week.” The magic of the Hallows seemed to hum. Interpreting that as a “all is forgotten,” Harry focused on his current plan of breaking and entering.

Apparating would be too loud and would definitely set off the wards even if he could easily get through them. So that was out. Hmm... What to do?

Oh! He could shadow walk. Yes, that would be perfect.

Shadow walking was something he had learned during his study of necromancy in Alexandria. It was a method of travel that could only be used by natural necromancers, and thanks to Death, he was even more of a necromancer than natural necromancers. If that made sense...?

And now you might wonder, "Why doesn't Harry just shadow walk to the master?" The answer is simple: Harry doesn't feel like potentially getting lost for days in the shadows. Travelling to places in the same country was fine, even travelling to places abroad he'd recently been to was alright, kind of scary but overall fine. But travelling through the shadows to a place he hadn't visited in almost a hundred years, that was also hidden from the majority of the world, was not alright. He'd get lost. It was almost certain, and Harry didn't feel like risking it.

Alright, so that's how he got into the manor, then what?

Walk through the shadows to not set off the wards - the shadows weren't on the same plane of existence so wards wouldn't register him - find the crystal displays they were sure to have, and nab it.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Good enough."

So off he went.

Now with the most powerful artifacts in existence in his possession.

Well, that had been easy... how boring.

No one was even home.

He'd used shadows to travel like planned, looked through a few rooms until he found them, then promptly summoned all the crystals in the room. Of course, that set off the wards, but he'd just shadow walked out of there.

So boring. That was not at all like the Spanish muggle show.

Well, whatever. Now he had more crystals than needed. Let's see...

A couple of grandidierite, a quite big tanzanite, black opal, a few larimar, oh a taaffeite and a poudretteite, and his main prey, two pieces of painite.

No idea what to do with the rest of the crystals yet, Harry just added them to his moleskin pouch.

Seeing as he'd neglected his precious Elder Wand, he used it to create the permanent portkey. With the portkey complete, Harry added some things to his moleskin bag, informed the elves he'd be gone for a couple of weeks, and to come to him if anything happened. Then he activated the key and was off once more.

High up in the mountains of what Harry presumed was China lived the master. Harry was pretty sure the old man wasn't Chinese though...

The mountain had an abundance of smaller peaks - many odd-shaped - rock outcroppings, steep cliffs could be seen, and even though you could not see them, Harry was aware beautiful caves, ponds of various sizes, bubbling springs, and spring-fed streams existed in the mountain range. Quite a few other temples resided nearby, unaware that a large temple housing wizards and witches were their neighbor.

A fog thick enough that you couldn't see even 20 cm ahead covered the area in front of him. He closed his eyes and redirected his magic to his eyes so he could see the magic in the air, unknowingly making his eyes glow in Avada Kedavra green.

Through the fog, a temple emerged.

The temple - maybe Harry should call it a large estate? - varied in material from wood to brick to iron to stone, including more exotic materials such as glazed glass and crystal glass.

Walking through the fog and entering under the archway leading into the courtyard, Harry was greeted by a woman in what appeared to be a toga...?

"We weren't expecting guests today, who might you be?" she asked, seeming more curious than concerned about his sudden arrival.

"Hadrian Potter, Madame, I am here to see the master," Harry answered politely. If things turned out like they did in his world, this woman would become the next master, and Harry did not want to get on her bad side.

"Oh! All the way from England, are you? Oh chosen one, boy-who-lived, master of death... am I missing a title?" She walked towards him smirking.

"Hmm, in this dimension...you forgot Lord Potter-Black-Peverell," Harry smirked back.

Her eyes widened, and mouth opened slightly. "...in this dimension... yes, I suppose you must see the master..." she muttered. She straightened and turned around. "Follow me."

As they walked towards the master's quarters, Harry observed the surroundings, taking in as much as he could. Constant vigilance and all that rot.

Approaching the enormous double doors, the woman - second in command, Harry presumed - knocked. When they heard the quiet "enter," they went in.

The master looked pretty much the same as when Harry met him in the future, and that was almost 15 years from now. Did that mean the master aged well or that he had aged badly?

"Come join me, Harry. Gretchen, thank you for bringing him." That was a dismissal if he'd ever heard one. As Gretchen stepped out, Harry sat down on the floor and mirrored the master's cross-legged position.

Grey long hair and a short, well-kept beard were the most prominent features of the master. His eyes looked tired and wise, by knowing too much perhaps. He, as well, was clad in a toga-like robe.

Harry bowed his head slightly, then straightened. "Thank you for seeing me, master. I'm sure you have an idea of why I'm here... I'm in need of guidance. I have landed in the past of a world different from my own, and I'm not sure how to proceed."

The master scratched his chin and hummed. "Hmm, I had felt the disturbance in the wild magic and reckoned something out of this world had entered. I didn't know it was you, master of Death, who had caused it... you seek my guidance, but I cannot give it. What brought you here is beyond my scope of understanding. What I can give you is advice." The master looked at Harry, waiting to see if advice was welcome. Harry nodded.

"Wait and see. What has brought you here did so for a reason. It may be beyond our understanding for now, but in time your purpose will reveal itself... I'm assuming Death has visited you since entering this world?"

Should Harry be surprised by how much he knew?...no, but was he anyway?...yea.

“They visit in dreams, bringing with them vague images, feelings, and I cannot interpret them. I know I’m needed somewhere but not where... it’s rather frustrating.”

He nodded his head, seeming thoughtful. *"The only way to deal with an unfair world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion,"* the master quoted.

Harry snorted. "Sounds like me. Who said that?"

"A muggle, Albert Camus. Very clever and wise, although I do not always agree with him. He did say something I think is relevant now."

"In a universe suddenly divested of illusion and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Meaning what? I've lived too long, and now I see no positivity in the world and have lost my way in exile..."

The master smiled. "Stay for a while, Harry, and think on it some more, and we shall talk again. You may stay in your old chambers."

A week passed, and Harry picked up his old routine of waking up, going running, working out, eating breakfast, studying, eating lunch, practicing dueling, eating dinner, and then going to sleep. He joined the other dozen or so pupils during mealtimes and dueling practice - not that they were much of a challenge for Harry - but otherwise kept to himself. He thought about the master and his discussion enough to make his brain hurt, but still, he didn't understand. What was the master trying to teach him?

That the universe is cruel, unfair, and absurd? That nothing made sense when you lost the sense of home and comfort? He would talk to the master tonight.

Sitting in front of the master once more, Harry was uncertain and confused.

"So have you thought some more about our last talk?" the master asked, smiling. Was he amused at Harry's confusion? How rude.

Harry felt like pouting but was able to contain the urge and sighed instead. "I have, not that I've come up with much..."

"Go on, Harry."

"When you can see the world for what it is, you're lost, exiled because you cannot remember what matters, and you cannot hope for better because there is no better."

The master seemed to consider his thought. Harry couldn't tell whether the master agreed or not.

"Hmm, yes, I suppose that's what it would be for you... tell me, are you happy in life, Harry?"

"No," Harry answered without needing to consider. He hadn't been happy for a long, long time. He might have forgotten how.

Amusement he felt, joy and happiness not so much.

The master tilted his head slightly, his eyes sad, and his eyebrows furrowed. "The absurd. The absurdity of the world is what's being spoken of. We find ourselves as beings who desire meaning and purpose, only to be put into a world in which meaning seems absent. We live. We die and seemingly enter an eternity of non-being. Anything beyond that is hope, not knowledge. All the things we create and accomplish seem to go for naught. Our work, our lives, seem meaningless in light of our fate." The master paused for a moment and watched Harry's face for any sign of - well, anything, but he remained emotionless.

"That is the absurdity of man. You, Harry, are not a mere man. We live, we die, but you don't. Dying has no meaning to you; you have surpassed it, the mortality of man. The meaninglessness of life in the face of death." Whether the master actually believed that or was just trying to prove something to Harry was unknown.

"No...I have not surpassed death. Death has rejected me," Harry stated bitterly. "Death does not want me."

Tilting his head to the side as if he heard something interesting, the master replied, "Death and dying are not the same, Harry. I did not say you have surpassed death; I said you have surpassed dying. Are you not the master of Death, Harry? You know what that entails? You are no longer alone. Unlike us mortals, you are half of a whole. The other side of the same coin. If Death rejects you, it's because you reject Death. If you wish to understand them, you must let them understand you. If you wish for acceptance, you must accept them."

Harry had been the master of death since he was 17 years old. He had not wanted to accept it then, and he did not want to accept it now. "How do I do that? Accept Death when they took dying away from me? When they took away any chance of peace I had? I cannot find it in this world or the next." Harry felt like crying now; he could feel the tears gathering in his eyes.

"I cannot tell you how to accept Death; you must do that on your own. But might I suggest talking to them, going to them, to their realm to talk." The master smiled a small, sad smile, maybe trying to cheer Harry up or show support. It wasn't working.

"How can I go to them? They do not welcome me there. Every time I die, my body gets destroyed, but my mind stays here."

"You say they visit you in dreams? Why can they do that?" The master let Harry think on it, but Harry did not want to think, and perhaps the master saw that.

The master sighed. "Your consciousness stays while your body is destroyed, not because it's your mind that's tied to this realm, but your body. Your body can never leave this realm, and your consciousness needs the body so it stays here while your body reforms. But your mind is free; your consciousness can move. It will always come back in the end, but for a while, it can leave and go somewhere else."

Harry frowned, still depressed but now also thoughtful. "I need to move my consciousness into Death's realm, and then we can talk...?"

"Yes," the master replied simply.

"How does one do that? Meditate or enter my mindscape or what?" Harry was pretty sure that every time he talked with the master, he would end up confused.

Now, smiling gently, the Master said, "All and none. You have to enter a trance-like state while holding onto the part of your being that belongs to Death. Oh, and I would recommend having all the Hallows with you. It will be easier for you to find Death."

That night, lying in bed with his Hallows surrounding him, Harry thought about his connection to Death. How they would always be together, one and the same but different parts. How they were each other's, tied to the same fate of immortality.

Could he accept them? Dying and Death, the same but different. The concept or the entity. Dying, he had always accepted, welcomed even. But Death, the destroyer of worlds? The mortal end of all life? They were different.

Could he accept that Death was inevitable? That all things would at some point belong to Death? He had cursed death upon the dying of many. But did Death enforce dying, or was that life? Life is not living if it's endless. Dying is life's end. Death did not force dying upon us; it just embraced us. Man can force dying upon another. Isn't man and life more cruel than death by that logic?

"People speak sometimes about the bestial cruelty of man, but that is terribly unjust and offensive to beasts. No animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel." Ha, had Harry taken after the Master and started quoting Muggles? It would appear so.

Closing his eyes, Harry searched for whatever part of him was tied to Death. If he didn't know better, he would say the soul was the tie, but Harry had no soul left. Then there were only two things it could be: the mind or his magic.

Looking through his mind, finding nothing, he moved onto his magic. Finding the edge of the magical core, he worked his way inwards, feeling or imagining feeling along the smooth plane of his magic. It felt like a stream leading towards a waterfall or pond. He could feel himself getting closer to the core.

The stream became faster, crushing against him. He was swimming against the current, and although he logically knew he couldn't drown, it felt like he was. Pushing forward as hard as he could, the magic/stream got colder, thicker.

He was here. What he thought would be a pond turned out to be a never-ending ocean. He followed the cold water until it got freezing, and he knew he had found the tie. Letting himself sink, he grabbed onto it and felt his consciousness slip deeper and deeper down.

As he saw the bottom approaching, he believed he would settle there. With his head pointing down, he imagined he would hit it, but as his head touched the bottom, it shifted, and he was sucked through it. Landing on his back in a white room.

Limbo. He was here. As Harry sat up, he took a look around. It was no longer a white King's Cross station that he found himself in. No, it was the garden. Their garden.

Not knowing whether to smile, laugh, or cry, Harry decided it was best to ignore what Limbo looked like to him. Unsure of what to do, Harry called out quietly, "Death, are you here?"

No answer.

"Please, Death, I wish to talk. To accept you."

Harry could feel something change; the magic in the air thickened. The feeling of Death was encompassing.

When most would feel dread being among Death, Harry felt peace, calm, and divinity.

“Why have you come to accept me now, master?” The voice was low, too low for a human. Despite how quietly they had spoken, it echoed all around them. His voice sounded like a thousand different voices spoke all at once and out of sync.

As Harry turned to look upon Death, he couldn't help but gasp. Despite already knowing it, Harry couldn't help but think that was no man. That was a creature, an entity, a god.

Death was around 4 meters tall, with a flowing black robe covering him. You could not see their face as it looked to be covered by shadows. Harry thought that this was perhaps where the description of the Grim Reaper had originated from.

As Harry stood there stuck, frozen, Death spoke again.

“I had waited for a long time for a master, for a companion, another half, a friend, and you rejected me. I gave you a gift most mortals would have killed for. That mortals have killed for, and you tried to destroy it.”

Was Death angry? His voice didn't sound angry, and Harry couldn't see his face!

“I... I never asked for immortality. I never wanted that. I wished to be with my family, my loved ones... My husband. How could I abandon them when I could hear them screaming at me to come to them? ...When I had nothing left in the world of the living but myself. When I loved them... missed them. How could I not long to join them?”

Harry could feel the tears running down his face. He didn't care. He took a big breath.

“I still wish to join them, but I’ve accepted that it can’t happen. I’ve accepted not dying. I’ve accepted that I’m tied to you, and that it’s you and me forever...Can you accept me?” During his speech, he hadn’t been able to look at Death, staring at the ground instead. Facing his fear of rejection, he looked up at Death.

Death was quiet, still as a statue. Harry really wished he could see their face.

As if reading his mind, the shadows disappeared. His face, while resembling a human's, was not. His face was too white, almost pale blue, his eyes were black. They were beautiful, like a galaxy was living in them. Harry had a hard time looking away. His hair was as red as blood, reaching down the middle of the entity’s back. And then they smiled, a very gentle tiny smile. Like they weren’t sure how to do it.

Death was beautiful.

“*Death is the mother of beauty,*” Harry whispered unconsciously. When he realized he’d said that out loud, he felt a blush rise to his cheeks. But Harry couldn’t look away from Death.

Their smile became a little bigger, and Harry almost fell to the ground.

Death started to walk closer. With every step they took, they seemed to become smaller. Once they were centimeters from Harry, they were about 2 meters tall.

Harry had to lean his head back to be able to look them in the eye.

“And what is beauty, young master?” Death questioned.

Harry swallowed. “*Terror.*”

Death nodded their head and picked up the last thread of the conversation. "Master, I accepted you the moment you picked up all my Hallows. That is how you became my master." Death spoke.

"But...but aren't you angry at me? That I rejected you and tried to destroy your gift...?" Harry frowned in concern.

"No, master. I knew it would take time for your acceptance. I was willing to wait. You are mine, and I am yours forever. I could wait forever if I had to."

Harry felt the tears that had dried being replaced by new ones. "I'm sorry I left you alone. I won't leave you again, I promise," Harry swore.

Another smile grazed Death's lips. "Thank you, master." Harry couldn't help himself and practically tackled the being as he hugged him tight.

Harry wasn't sure why he felt so differently now than he did earlier. Maybe because he understood their connection now? Or because he had actually met the being now and saw that Death was just... just Death?

Death, never having received a hug before, tried to reciprocate, placing one hand on Harry's head and the other on his shoulder.

Harry, with his hands wrapped around Death's waist, just laughed at the awkward placing and stepped back.

"Death, place your hands around my waist." Doing as instructed, Death wrapped their arms around Harry, holding him close. As Harry tried to reach his hands up and wrap them around Death's neck, Death must have felt him struggling because he picked Harry up. Harry giggled quietly, a bit surprised.

He felt quite emotionally unstable and drained after their conversation, and it probably showed.

Wrapping his arms around Death's neck and burying his face in their neck and hair, Harry felt peaceful for the first time in a long while.

Chapter End Notes

Harry might be a bit quick to accept Death but there's more to it than you might think. More will be revealed about their relationship later.

And btw the lines about Death being beauty and beauty being terror is quoted from The secret history! The credit is all them I just built a little scene of my own around the lines and felt like it fitted well into the story. And I really love those lines, they always linger in my mind!

Taunts, Truces and Trains

Chapter Summary

Harry finishes his potions regimen, gets some tattoos, speaks more to death and meets some old acquaintances on his way to Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

Wasn't sure if I'd finish this tonight but somehow I did. I am rather tired so I hope I didn't make too many mistakes. Thank you for reading and interacting with this story!

As Harry wakes up from his visit with Death, he feels lighter.

After the hug, Death had explained that now that they had accepted each other, things would be different. Better.

To start with, they could now communicate through a mind link. When Death had tried to establish it, they had discovered - or rather, rediscovered - that Harry was a horcrux. How had that slipped his mind? Maybe because he hadn't really thought about Voldemort, to be honest. He wasn't even sure if Voldemort was alive in this dimension...

But back to the point, Death had been spitting mad when they felt it, and they had demanded, respectfully, that Harry remove it.

Harry had no idea how to, but apparently, being the master of Death also meant he could use Death's power, unlike how a necromancer mimicked it.

It also helped that the Horcrux was weak, having no other soul to live off of.

Should he be grateful for his lack of soul?

Death had shown him how to remove a soul from a body... It was way too easy. Dangerously easy...

He wanted to try it out... No, Harry! Later. You can do that later. Focus!

Holding a part of someone's soul in his hand was mind-blowing. Feeling the energy of it, how the life force sparkled like a little star.

Surreal... it was surreal.

As he cradled the little life to his chest, he couldn't let it go. It was so fragile, small, and helpless. And it needed him.

So, in an unusual display of kindness, he used the black opal from his heist as a container for the shard and turned it into a necklace to keep it close.

After that small bump, Death forged the mind link between them. All they had to do to reach each other was to push some magic at the connection, and it would open whenever they needed it.

Death also mentioned that, seeing as Harry now had access to their power, Harry might attract some unwanted attention from Death's creatures. Well, Harry would just deal with that when the time came.

During their talk, Harry asked why and how he ended up in a different dimension, but Death seemed as clueless as him... so much for godly powers.

Slightly annoyed at Harry for his dismissal of their powers, Death stated in an emotionless voice that they were not omnipotent. Death then proceeded to wake Harry up.

What a lovely host Death was...

Perhaps he should apologize. He'd do it later.

The day turned out like the others. Working out, reading, dueling, eating.

After dinner concluded, Harry went to tell the master of his success and to ask if the master could oversee the effects of the Valexo Valetudo potion Harry was taking tomorrow. Last time had not been pleasant, and the supervision had been entirely necessary.

Hopefully, he wouldn't be in a coma for too long this time.

As Harry once more laid in bed at the end of the day, he decided to open up the connection.

"Death, are you there?" Harry asked, projecting his voice into the link.

"I'm here," came Death's kind of frosty reply.

"I'm sorry I insulted you, Death. I did not mean to. I have been alone for quite some time and haven't needed to think through what I say. I was careless and unjust, and I'm sorry," Harry tried to push as much of his sincerity through the link as he could so Death would believe him.

Death sighed. "It's alright, master. No need to apologize. My reaction was too harsh. Did you call me tonight only to apologize?"

"That was the main reason, yes. I want us to be friends, but I'm not sure how to make that happen... so maybe we should talk every now and then and learn about each other?"

“I would like that, Master. Is there anything you wish to ask me?” Death asked.

“Yeah, I have a lot of questions, but first things first, please call me Harry. I’m as much your master as you are mine, and friends call each other by their first names or nicknames. What should I call you? Just calling you Death seems kinda impersonal...” Harry tried to come up with a good name for Death, but could only really come up with Mort or Morty. He supposed he could call Death his Greek name, Thanatos. But that didn’t sound right either.

“Of course, Harry. You may call me what you wish. I have been called many names since the beginning of time. The one that has the truest description of my existence is that of Thanatos, but my favorite of my names is Kali.”

Harry smiled, happy Death was sharing. “Alright, Kali it is then. Alright, my first question is what was the deal with all those visions?”

There was now only a week left before Hogwarts started, and Harry was planning on going after being pursued by Kali. Kali would not tell him any details as to why he needed to go, but was very adamant he needed to be there. Deciding to trust the god, Harry had agreed to go. But he would quit if it got too annoying or boring. And he’d stated as much to Death.

They had talked almost every night since that first night talk. Harry liked the talks, he enjoyed talking to Kali, who was such a complex and interesting being. They spoke of everything from what their favorite foods were (Harry’s is fish and chips, whilst Kali’s is mint chocolate chip ice cream) to what being a god was like. Harry was quickly starting to care for Kali.

Harry had taken the Valexo Valetudo potion, and it was worse than he’d remembered. He must have blocked it out after the first time. Thankfully, Kali had come to the rescue and loaned him some magic, which helped speed up the healing and rebuilding process, so he’d only been in a coma for 5 days.

Now, in a younger version of his healthy body, Harry was happy with how he looked.

He had reached his maximum height of 180 cm and was slender and slightly muscular; he would have to continue his training to get any bigger. His lanky knees and shoulders were gone, and his limbs no longer seemed uncomfortable in length. Although the defined muscles had replaced the formerly shrunken waist, it was still quite thin. Now that the wind didn't appear to be able to blow over him, his body appeared more solid.

His eyes were his most prominent feature, with their vibrant green color that pulled you in. His new hairstyle complemented his features nicely, and its deliberate messiness gave you an alluring impression as though he had just come from a tumultuous night with a lover. Now to complete the look, only the expensive, beautiful new robes were needed.

Harry knew he looked good.

Having also undergone the bone marking ritual a week after his coma had been ambitious. He only survived it thanks to being immortal. Now with thousands of tiny magical runes carved into his very bones, there was very little in this world that could hurt him.

Being inspired by the ritual, Harry had also begun branding his skin with different useful death markings that Kali had shown him. The language of the dead had been lost long ago, so having Kali teach him was amazing. The language was odd and difficult, but its connection to magic was much stronger than ordinary runes. The marks were needlessly difficult though, and progress was slow.

It was a work in progress, but he was quite satisfied with the few markings on his chest so far.

He had branded the mark for summoning the hellhounds and demons of the underworld. Death refused to call them that, preferring to refer to them as reapers. But after he projected an image of what they looked like to Harry, Harry refused to call them anything but demons. He had the mark for protection from bodily modifications. If he had to be around Dumbledore, it was best not to take any chances. And the last one he had was for enhancing his senses to magical life forces, meaning he could now see when someone was about to die. He kinda wanted to stab someone and see how long it would take before he saw their life force leave their body. He refrained from doing that, however. Harry might be cruel, but he disliked taking unnecessary lives.

One mark contained a lot of smaller symbols, so they took up a bit of space on his body. Two markings covered his chest, and the third covered one side of his ribs. Unless he wished to be covered in markings, it would be best to choose their meanings wisely.

Getting them done had taken about two days, and the whole process made him reek of death, so he would have to save more for when he was home and alone.

It would be so fun to show up at Hogwarts looking like this. He was sure to cause quite the upheaval.

The letter came three days before the term started. Apparently, the old fool had a difficult time finding a defense teacher this time around as well.

If Umbridge showed up again, she was dead.

Harry would rip the soul out of her body before she could even start her first class.

Don't get him wrong; he would hunt her down sooner or later anyway. He wanted revenge. It didn't matter if this Umbridge hadn't made his life miserable; he was sure she had made someone's life miserable.

Getting his school shopping done had been easy. No one could even recognize him without his glasses and the now very light scar covered by his fringe.

He could have tried his metamorphmagus ability out, but he wanted to get the shopping over with as quickly as possible and didn't feel like practicing that particular ability yet.

On his way to the shops, Harry spotted suspicious-looking people just standing around watching the surrounding area. Looking for him most likely. It was a rather crowded day, and

they would be lucky to spot him in this massive gathering even if he looked the same as he used to. Well, did it affect him? No. So why bother thinking about it?

The only thing that bothered him was the fact that he couldn't tell if they were Order members or Death Eaters...

He picked up a new trunk first, seeing as his old one was quite beat up, and a new school bag as well in matching black leather. Then he proceeded to pick up the required books, potion ingredients, quills, and parchment.

With the boring stuff out of the way, he headed to Eeylops Owl Emporium to pick up some food and treats for Hedwig, who Kali informed him had stayed at Hogwarts. As he headed to the food section of the store, he could hear quiet hissing coming from the back.

Walking toward the sound, Harry came upon two adorable little snakes. One was as white as snow with red eyes that reminded Harry of Voldemort's, and the other was as dark as the night sky with yellow eyes that reminded him of a basilisk.

As he approached them, they huddled together and looked up at him with big eyes, seeming threatened by the unknown man.

Harry smiled and hissed quietly. *"Hello, vicious vipers. Aren't you both the most beautiful serpents I've ever seen?"*

They both straightened up at hearing Harry speak. *"A speaker! I've only heard tales of such men from Mother. Have you come to take us away from this horrid place?"* the white snake asked in a desperate tone.

"If you wish, you may come with me. I am Harry, or Hadrian if you prefer. Shall I pick you two up then?" Harry asked.

This time, the black snake spoke. *"Please take us away from here, speaker. Wherever you go must be better. Hold out your arm, and we shall climb up."*

Harry proceeded to do just that, and the snakes slithered up around his arm until they hung around his neck like a weird sort of scarf. Well, at least they weren't fully grown and were still rather light.

He picked up some mice for them and food for Hedwig, and headed to the register.

"Do you have names yet, and what species are you two?" Harry asked the snakes.

They looked towards him, and the black one answered. *"We have had no need for names, but you may give them to us. We are magically bred black mambas, and our venom is lethal."*

Harry hummed and began thinking of names, not paying any attention to the man behind the register's stare. He paid and left.

"Are you both female and siblings?" Harry asked.

"Yes to both questions," they replied together.

"Then I believe I shall call you Nyx," he gestured towards the black one, *"and Selene. If those names are to your tastes?"* Harry asked.

"They will do," they replied together. Could all close siblings talk in sync?

Harry continued his shopping, entering Twilfitt and Tatting's. He would have preferred to do his clothing shopping abroad, but time was not on his side.

After having his measurements taken, Harry described what he was after, apart from the plain school robes, and told the tailor to send them to his home once finished.

Three days later, Harry stood among the sea of people in front of the Hogwarts train, observing his surroundings. His presence was unknown to the crowd. Having asked Kali about the Hallows had spiraled into a two-hour rant about the original brothers' stupidity. But it had also revealed some interesting information regarding the Hallows. For instance, they were adaptable to the will of their master.

Harry had tried it out a few times, using his will to change the Hallows. Their magic remained the same, but the forms they could take were endless. Very useful indeed.

The Elder Wand had insisted he started with it and easily changed to look like his old holly wand when he willed it. It had remained in that form for days now, and Harry suspected it would remain so until he willed it to change again.

So now, Harry had willed the cloak to change into the form of a black silk robe that wouldn't look any different from a normal high-end robe, willing it to hide his entire form.

He had arrived an hour early but refrained from boarding the train; he wanted to see the chickens running around. It was now close to boarding time, and they still weren't here.

Ah, speak of the devil, and he doth appear.

Why were they running so late? Had they been on the Muggle side of the platform?

A reasonable assumption on their part, Harry Potter shouldn't be able to do magic outside of school, after all.

They looked frazzled. Harry spotted Moody, Tonks, and Shacklebolt. Only using Aurors to not draw attention was smart.

Moody's eye twitched frantically from side to side, presumably scanning the area for Harry. Of course, his enchanted eye wouldn't be able to see through the magic of one of the most powerful artifacts in existence.

They huddled together and started searching, starting with the platform. Moody looked suspicious towards some of the Slytherin students and their parents. Harry could see his fingers twitch as if he wanted to reach for his wand and curse anyone with a dark core.

The Moody of his world had been so fucking hypocritical and prejudiced. Using the same spells as the Death Eaters, but because he was an Order member and fighting for the light, it was alright. It was justified. He was glad when Moody died, even when he'd been under the light's control. He'd been relieved when he died. The man always put him on edge and made him excessively angry whenever he spoke of someone even associated with the dark. The way he treated Sirius was the most unforgivable.

Harry sneered, such blatant prejudice.

Moody deserved some messing with.

Harry began by casting a spell on the magical eye with the Elder Wand. He aimed at Moody and waved it in a swirling pattern. As soon as he completed the spell, a loud shout could be heard, and all eyes turned towards the sound.

"GET AWAY, YOU MONSTERS! DEATH IS THE ONLY THING THAT AWAITS YOU SHOULD YOU COME NEAR!" His voice was high-pitched and cracked in the middle of the sentence.

Harry couldn't help but giggle at the display, though no one would hear him over Moody's yelling anyway. Moody was spitting mad and waving his wand frantically, his eyes wide with horror. Harry wasn't sure what Moody saw, but he had only put a variant of the nightmare curse on the eye.

Maybe the people he'd killed were coming back to haunt him? Harry certainly hoped so. It was a fitting punishment, and while the spell would wear off, the damage would be done. Moody would see them in the corner of his eyes, feel their stares and phantom touches. He wouldn't be able to forget. This was justified.

Tonks and Shacklebolt had come running back as soon as they heard Moody's frantic yelling.

Good, he sounded like a madman. If he wasn't asked to retire now, Harry would be surprised. Many pureblood families were witnessing the display, and Harry was certain they would push the Minister to get rid of Moody. He was, after all, "obviously unstable and a danger to the public." Harry grinned viciously. It was time to board the train.

Seeing that the Order was busy trying to calm down Moody and the remaining families were distracted, Harry willed his invisibility cloak to become visible again. Stepping up the stairs to board the train, Harry took a quick peek over his shoulder and met Shacklebolt's eyes. Harry smirked. He wasn't sure if the auror recognized him, but it didn't matter either way. The train was leaving the station.

He walked down the hallway, using his magic to sense if there were any magical people in the compartments he passed. As he neared the back of the train, Harry spotted a familiar head of short blonde hair.

Draco.

He had to see Draco again.

Of course, he knew logically that Draco was also at Hogwarts, but he hadn't wanted to dwell on that fact. Now he was regretting not having a plan when facing him. Harry was sure he wanted to end the rivalry at least. He wouldn't be able to stand hurting or being mean to a version of his dead husband.

Having made up his mind to extend his hand, Harry walked towards the direction Draco had headed in. If Harry had been more self-aware, he may have understood that running into Draco again would not only trigger memories of a Draco who was long dead, but it would also affect how he handled this Draco. Unfortunately, Harry wasn't the most self-aware when it came to Draco and would not recognise the mistake in projecting his emotions onto an unsuspecting boy. He wouldn't be aware that attempting to replace his husband with this younger version would be detrimental to both Draco and himself...

As he stepped in front of a compartment, the door was slammed open, and storming out came Draco, running right into Harry.

“Watch where you’re going, you-” As Draco looked up with wide, surprised eyes, Harry couldn’t stop the teasing smirk from reaching his lips.

“Hello, Draco,” Harry said in a teasing voice, continuing to smirk at Draco. At the impact of Draco bumping into him, Harry had steadied himself by putting a hand on Draco's waist. Draco had put up his hands to steady himself, and his hands now rested on Harry’s chest.

Draco seemed frozen in place, eyes still wide, and a lovely blush forming on his cheeks. He was quiet for about 10 seconds after Harry spoke until he seemed to snap out of it and gasped quietly.

Mouth moving, but no words came out until a confused, uncertain, “Potter?” left his lips.

Harry smiled wider, looking almost manic, his eyes sparkling with mirth. The amusement was clear in his voice. “In the flesh, funny how you ran into me when I was just looking for you.”

Draco was still shocked, seeming to not even register their quite intimate position. Draco didn’t seem to think this was real.

“Why are you looking for me?” Finally, something like suspicion entered his eyes, and he apparently became aware of how close they were if the darkening blush was anything to go by.

Pushing himself away from Harry and taking a step back, Draco continued eyeing Harry. Harry followed after him, taking a step forward. Draco frowned and leaned back against the wall to get more personal space. But Harry couldn't let him get away so he placed a hand on the wall behind Draco.

Draco glared, even as he felt the heat in his cheeks. What the hell had happened to Potter, why did he look like...like...that! Why was he hot now? That was totally unfair!

Harry smirked as if he'd followed Draco's train of thought. Draco quickly glanced to the side, avoiding any possible legilimency attempt.

"Well, Draco, I have been quite busy this summer and have reprioritised a few rather important matters. I would tell you all about it, but then I'd have to kill you." Harry joked. Draco did not find it funny. "Let's just say I have more important things to spend my time doing than participating in schoolboy rivalries. Therefore, I'm proposing a truce. I would like for us to put our differences aside and focus on what actually matters. Do you agree?" Harry asked, now smiling more gently at Draco.

Draco couldn't understand that expression. Why was Harry looking at him like he cared about him...and why was he proposing a truce?

"I will accept the terms if you agree to tell me what changed during the summer." Draco replied hesitantly.

Harry grinned at Draco. Such a Slytherin, don't do anything if you don't get something in return. "Sure, I'll tell you some, but if I'm to tell you about my life, we must at least try to be friends, so," Harry backed up a bit and held out his hand, "friends?"

Draco was still unsure of Harry's angle, but he'd always wanted to be close to Harry, so without much thought for concern, he gripped Harry's hand and shook it. He huffed in mock annoyance. "Fine, friends, I suppose."

Harry just grinned brighter and pulled Draco by the hand until they were almost chest to chest.

“We will be great friends, I’m sure.”

An Abrasive Approach

Chapter Summary

Talking to the Slytherins, talking to Luna, a surprise in the great hall and a confrontation.

Chapter Notes

Yay we're finally at Hogwarts, only a few more chapters before Voldie meets Harry! I'm so excited!! Hope you enjoy the chapter!

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

Draco might have been too hasty to accept Potter's (*"Call me Harry or Hadrian"*) offer of friendship.

Still slightly flustered and startled by the whole interaction, Draco wasn't sure how they ended up back in front of the compartment Draco had stormed out of less than 10 minutes ago.

Stupefied, Draco pulled open the door.

"Back so soon, Draco?" Blaise sounded amused. Then he saw who was close behind Draco. So close, in fact, that Draco could feel Harry's chest against his back.

What was up with all the touching? Harry Potter had stayed away from physical touch as much as possible, Draco had observed.

Draco couldn't see what sort of expression Harry displayed, but whatever he did made his housemates straighten and stiffen. They were watching Harry as if he was a threat.

"So lovely to see you all. Draco and I have made amends, and I would like to offer the same for all of you." Harry spoke in a clear, low voice.

Draco looked around the compartment. Pansy was frozen, Daphne looked shocked, Vincent and Greg just looked plain confused, Theo looked surprised, and Blaise was the only one who managed to keep up his mask of nonchalance. Draco could see the interest in his eyes, though; his pupils dilated and wide.

Turning around, uncomfortable with the glint in Blaise's eyes, he grabbed Harry's arm and shut the door behind them.

"If we're to talk, it's best to do so in private, Potter. Who knows-" Draco was suddenly cut off by a screeching sound.

"POTTER?! There's no way that's Potter!" Pansy sounded shell-shocked and seemed to believe it was some stupid joke.

Harry looked towards her, waving his hand and warding the compartment so they wouldn't be overheard or spied on. "Do you not recognise me? You wound me, Parkinson, and here I thought I was special enough to be remembered." Harry spoke in an overly dramatic way.

Pansy just looked from Draco to Harry and back to Draco.

"Tell me that isn't Potter, Draco! If I had known Potter would grow up to look like that, I would have been a lot nicer."

Before Draco could reply to Pansy's ridiculous statement, Blaise spoke up.

"Did you just perform wordless, wandless magic as though you were swatting away a fly?" Trying to keep his mask up, Blaise kept his voice flat. But Draco could see the awe radiating

off of him, and he was pretty sure Harry noticed as well.

Harry had a smug smirk on his face that made him look deviously attractive.

"I did." Harry simply replied, and to prove it, he once more waved his hand, and all the occupants startled as the compartment expanded.

Harry smiled, ignoring the awed looks, and sat down by the window beside Theo. Draco, still standing by the door, quickly sat down beside Pansy, across from Harry, Theo, and Daphne. Blaise sat beside Pansy closest to the door opposite Greg and Vince.

Theo looked at Harry with wide eyes full of wonder. "How'd you do that, Harry? Could you teach me?" He sounded overly familiar with Potter, but Draco wasn't sure how they knew each other.

Harry looked into Theo's eyes for a few seconds, seeming lost in thought. Draco saw the slight raised eyebrow, but it disappeared quickly.

"Well, how I did it was easy. I just willed my magic to do as I commanded. And regarding teaching you, sure, I could try. It's not something that can really be taught though. I'll explain more at our library study session," Harry told Theo. Everyone looked confused as Harry mentioned the study sessions.

"Library study sessions? Since when do you study with Potter, Theo?" Draco asked.

"Oh, I never really told you seeing as you disliked him and got worked up as soon as someone mentioned his name. But we used to meet at the library after dinner sometimes and do our homework together," Theo explained as if it was entirely normal.

Harry got a predatory look in his eyes and turned to look at Draco. It made Draco want to fidget, but he refrained from doing so.

“You got worked up every time someone mentioned me? I feel honoured being the center of your world even as rivals,” Harry spoke in a honeyed voice.

Draco could feel the intense blush on his cheeks and felt embarrassed that Harry had made him blush multiple times in less than an hour. Straightening up and glaring at Harry, trying to be intimidating but failing.

“Oh, please, I did not! Such a blatant lie you tell, Theo. And you are not the center of my world, Potter! As if you would ever have that honour,” Draco spoke in a slightly too high pitch.

Harry just smirked and hummed. “If you say so, dear.” And as Draco’s blush deepened at the endearment, Harry just grinned wider.

Pansy couldn’t help but laugh at Draco. “You’re as red as a tomato, Draco!” Pansy continued to laugh.

Draco felt like storming out again, seeming to sense that Harry switched the subject.

“So any idea who’ll be our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher this year? I presume someone from the Ministry seeing as the old man failed to secure a professor for the position,” Draco noticed Harry’s slight hardening tone as he mentioned Dumbledore, how very curious.

Harry appeared to be upset with the man, which the golden boy had never been before. Draco once again wondered what had happened during the summer for Harry to change so drastically.

How could someone go from a quiet, stubborn, and naive golden boy to becoming this confident, powerful man?

As Draco's thoughts drifted, he noticed the stares sent his way.

“What?” He asked defensively.

Blaise tilted his head to the side and raised an eyebrow. “Harry asked who the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher is, have you forgotten your father will be teaching this year?”

Draco had indeed forgotten, not that he would admit it out loud. "Of course not, Father will be a great teacher. He is there on the Minister's orders so he can conduct a report on the teachings of Hogwarts."

Harry looked contemplative and amused. "Lucius, huh? That will indeed be fun. Draco, would you mind terribly if I seduced your father?" Harry asked in a serious tone.

Draco spluttered. "What!? Of course not! He's a married man and he's my father! No way! No, you can't!" Draco sounded practically hysterical.

Harry couldn't keep the mask and started laughing loudly, gasping for breath. "You... you thought I would actually... that I would actually seduce him..." Harry said between laughs.

Finally calmed down, Harry said, "To be honest, he is pretty good looking, but no, Draco, I wouldn't. That was a joke, and you should have seen your face!" Harry started giggling then.

He should be angry at Harry for embarrassing him once more, but the most prominent thought in his mind was how beautiful Harry looked when he laughed freely. He didn't think he'd ever seen him laugh like that. He wasn't the only one looking at Harry funnily; apparently, the others were entranced by Harry's laugh as well.

"You're such a bastard, Harry," Draco said, not sounding as angry as intended, more playful.

Suddenly Harry turned and looked towards the door and stared at it intently. Waving his hand around, they felt the magic graze them. It was cool and icy, reminding Draco of how a Dementors' magic felt. It had the same feeling of death, but while Dementors brought fear, Harry's magic brought the feeling of peace.

Draco vividly remembered what Harry's magic felt like before the summer. Hot and burning, the opposite of now. It used to feel like getting too close to the sun; now it was as if he was submerged in a deep, dark, cold ocean.

Once Draco got a chance to be alone with Harry, he would demand answers.

"What did you do, Harry?" Theo asked, sounding curious.

Harry frowned and looked towards the door as a redhead passed, followed by brown curls.

"I felt their magical presence nearing and did not wish for them to notice me, so I placed an overpowered Notice-Me-Not charm on the door. And neither of them are strong-willed enough to see through it."

Harry's expression eased. "That reminds me, don't you two have Prefect duties?" He looked pointedly at Draco and Pansy.

Pansy shot up to her feet. "Shit, we're gonna be late! Let's go, Draco! See you all later!" She shouted as she dragged a reluctant Draco out of the compartment, Pureblood decorum forgotten.

The rest of the ride had been calm, Harry mostly spent his time reading and occasionally talking to Theo about school work. As they approached the platform, Harry covered his scar and cast a mild notice-me-not charm on himself. As a few people glanced at him curiously, their eyes couldn't seem to focus and they quickly lost interest.

But as Harry arrived at the Great Hall, it felt like coming home. Although more than a century had passed since he last set foot in here, the magical atmosphere was as enchanting as ever, and Harry couldn't help but feel a rush of nostalgia. Glancing around, he noticed someone he'd dearly missed - his little moon, Luna Lovegood. He removed the charm and Luna, who was already heading his way, approached him with a warm smile.

"Good to see you again, Hadrian," Luna said, her blue-grey eyes twinkling with joy. Harry couldn't help but smile back genuinely.

"Good to see you too, little moon. I have missed you," Harry replied.

"Me as well. I'm sorry for leaving you all alone after what happened," Luna said, her voice calm and aloof, but Harry noticed the sadness in her eyes.

He should have expected that Luna knew more than was possible. "How much?" Harry signed, unsure if he wanted Luna to remember the carnage he caused.

"Kali visited me this summer in a dream. They opened up the waves for me," Luna said, looking far away in her own world. Harry knew Luna better, though. She was taking in the magic of those around them, seeing if they were being listened in on. And he could feel the Slytherins trying to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"Everything?" Harry asked, not sure what he wanted the answer to be. If she knew everything, how would she see him?

"Everything," Luna replied, smiling genuinely, which made Harry relax slightly.

"Still open?" Harry asked.

"Mm yes, I believe they will stay that way for me," Luna said, looking up to the ceiling, lost in thought.

"Wow, little moon, that's a lot," Harry said, unsure if he could have handled that.

"Hmm, yes, but it's quite interesting as well. I like it," Luna said, smiling and seeming far away.

"So you've seen it, my...?" Harry wasn't sure how to formulate himself.

"Yes, it was a very sad beginning of the end. I didn't like it as much as the pursuit of pigs," Luna said, causing Harry to make a choked sound at her description of the aurors. Luna smirked.

"Yes...that was very...chaotic. Wasn't it?" Harry was surprised that Luna seemed so okay with everything, but he shrugged it off. Well, she was a seer and they were always a bit weird. In the best way, of course. Their perception of reality was different from ordinary wizards and witches.

"It's alright, Harry. I'm still yours, and you're still mine. We're each other's, yes?" Luna showed vulnerability, which was unusual for her.

"Yes," Harry replied quickly, without the need to think about it. He let out a relieved breath.

"Thank you, little moon... I'm sitting with you for the feast! Let's go find a seat," Harry said, turning towards the waiting Slytherins. "See you later!" And walked off with Luna.

As they headed towards the table, Harry took note of the panicked expression on some of the staff members' faces. They were undoubtedly keeping an eye out for him and hoping for his return but were unable to recognize him despite his presence. Too bad for them, the same Harry would never return.

Taking a look toward the Gryffindor table, he saw Hermione and Ron, who seemed uncomfortable, with the rest of the house leaning towards them and whispering questions, probably asking about his lack of presence.

As the first year sorting ceremony began, Harry's mind raced with anticipation. He couldn't wait to see the look on their faces.

As the headmaster stood to speak, the hat started speaking. "A RESORTING IS NEEDED. HARRY POTTER."

it announced, causing everyone in the Great Hall to freeze in shock. This was the third time Harry had been called out by the Sorting Hat since he started attending Hogwarts.

Despite the murmurs and whispers around the room, Harry couldn't help but feel amused at all the attention. He knew he looked different - taller, stronger, more confident - and he relished the thought of surprising everyone with what he had done.

As he made his way to the front of the room, he could hear the whispers growing louder. "Harry Potter? That's not Potter," he overheard one student say. "What happened to Potter?" asked another. "Wow, he's so hot!" A high pitched voice said. Most students seemed to be wondering the same thing. "Why is he getting resorted? How does that even happen?"

How did it happen, indeed? Harry smirked at the thought of what had occurred a week prior.

Harry knew Dumbledore would never let him get resorted, so he'd just have to go around him, straight to the source.

Harry had waited until Dumbledore had left the castle, then easily broken in with the help of his map and the Hallows. No one was the wiser.

He'd taken a quick look around the headmaster's office and found a few things of interest. A few vials of his blood were promptly destroyed and replaced with fakes, a handful of memories and books were copied, and a few trinkets tied to various magical signatures were tampered with.

Proceeding with his main task, Harry spoke with the hat and informed it of the outside interferences tied to his sorting and requested a new sorting now that said interferences were dealt with.

The hat didn't like being messed with and had readily agreed. After Harry told it of a certain old goat's part, the hat had promised not to inform the headmaster beforehand.

With a malicious grin on his face, Harry sat down in the chair and leaned back, his arms resting casually on the armrests. "Shall we begin, Professor?" he said, turning to face Professor McGonagall. The professors in attendance seemed to snap out of their shock, but Dumbledore still tried to maintain the appearance of control.

"My boy, there's no need for a resorting," he said, his voice wavering slightly. But Harry wasn't going to back down. He had waited too long for this moment.

The smile finally dropped from Harry's face as he turned to face the headmaster, his eyes cold and calculating. With a pureblood mask firmly in place, Harry spoke.

"You shall refer to me as Lord Potter as is decorum," Harry's voice was cold and unwavering as he addressed the headmaster. "I would allow Mr Potter whilst in school, but you will show me the respect that is required for the Lord of three of the most ancient houses."

The headmaster remained quiet, seemingly taken aback by Harry's demands. But Harry didn't falter. He turned his gaze towards the crowd of students, his eyes scanning the sea of faces.

"Now, let's not keep the students waiting, shall we, Professor?" Harry's words were calm, but there was a hint of impatience in his voice. He wasn't here to waste his time with petty formalities.

As the Sorting Hat was placed on the stool, Harry waited patiently for it to call out his name. But as the seconds ticked by, it became apparent that something was wrong. The hat didn't move. It didn't speak.

Growing tired of waiting, Harry waved his hand, and the hat flew out of the professor's hands and landed softly on his head. The Sorting Hat took no more than two seconds to decide before shouting out its verdict: "BETTER BE SLYTHERIN!"

The crowd erupted in outrage, but Harry wasn't surprised. He knew he wouldn't be sorted into Gryffindor, the house that had turned its back on him. No, he belonged in Slytherin, with the cunning and ambitious.

As he walked towards the Slytherin table, Harry could feel the tension in the air. The students were angry, confused, and even a little bit scared. But Harry wasn't intimidated. He knew what he wanted, and he was willing to fight for it.

"So, did you enjoy the show?" Harry asked, his eyes locked onto Draco's. He could sense the fear and nervousness radiating from the others, but he didn't care. He enjoyed messing with people.

Draco, the good pureblood heir, kept his composure in public, at least. "Yes, you put on quite the show. I thoroughly enjoyed the headmaster's reaction to your scolding." Draco frowned. "Which reminds me, to which houses do you hold the lordships?"

"I hold the lordships of the noble House of Potter, the ancient House of Black, and the most noble and ancient House of Peverell," Harry stated matter-of-factly, relishing in the shock and awe on the faces of the other students.

Pansy was the first to speak. "You're Lord Peverell? And Lord Black? How is that possible?!" Her half-shouted, half-whispered question was heard by the whole table.

The other tables were abuzz with heated conversations, but all eyes were on Harry, the Lord of three ancient and noble houses.

Harry smirked, his eyes shining with a dangerous glint. He hummed in confirmation, relishing the tension that hung heavy in the air. "Let's eat and discuss it when we have less of an audience," he said kindly, but his words seemed to have the opposite effect on the girl. She seemed to grow more agitated.

Draco, ever the jester, attempted to lighten the mood with a story about his summer adventures, but the tension persisted.

Finally, the first years were sent to bed, and the conversation continued in the Slytherin common room. Harry was itching for a confrontation, and when seventh-year Graham Montague approached him with his chest puffed out, Harry couldn't help the wicked grin that spread across his face.

"Who do you think you are, Potter? You don't belong among us purebloods, you filthy half-blood!" Montague spat.

Harry's grin only widened, his eyes flashing with deadly intent. "Pureblood?" he scoffed. "I don't see anything pure about you. Filthy morals, filthy ideals..." Harry's gaze locked onto Montague's, and the boy shivered as if a cold hand had touched his spine. "And such a filthy mind. So many impure thoughts in that head of yours."

Harry tilted his head to the side, a small, malicious smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "And your blood," he continued. "Not so pure, is it Graham? Shall I tell everyone about your mother's less-than-pure actions, which resulted in a not-so-pure you?"

Montague's face went ashen, and he spoke with a trembling voice. "Don't you speak about my mother. You don't know anything."

Harry leaned closer, his voice a low, menacing whisper. "Oh, but I do, Graham. I know everything there is to know about you. I have looked into your mind and soul, and I have judged you. I have seen everything."

Harry took a breath, letting his words sink in before continuing. "How would they feel if they knew you weren't even a Montague by blood? That your filthy mother slept with a filthy mudblood and gave you filthy blood? What would they think of a filthy liar like you?"

The Slytherins exchanged nervous glances, unsure of what to make of Harry's sudden viciousness. Montague's face was ashen, and he looked like he might faint.

"Aren't you supposed to be a savior, the hero?" he whispered.

Harry's eyes gleamed with a manic light, and his grin turned feral. "Nah," he said, his voice laced with deadly intent. "Why would I be a hero? That's so boring. Being a villain is so much more fun."

The room fell silent, the air thick with tension. Harry's face turned emotionless, his voice cold and steely. "If there is a light, I'm going to swallow it. If there is a hero, then I'm going to make them cry."

Chapter End Notes

It has come to my attention that I need to explain more of Harry's thought process so here it goes.

Harry is being way to flirty with Draco right now because he has a hard time differentiating his husband from this Draco. He's reminiscing his past but he's being way to pushy. He will realise in the coming chapters that he can't keep doing this to Draco and forcing himself onto him. I promise they will just be friends. Harry is more comfortable with Draco but fails to realise Draco isn't comfortable with him.

And in this chapter Harry referred to Montagues real father as a mudblood but he didn't say that word because he actually believes in blood purity. Any other time he refers to muggleborns he calls them muggleborns. Harry just wanted to piss him off as much as possible and he felt it would have more of an impact if he said mudblood. Montague is related to a muggleborn and Harry just wanted to rub in the fact that he is related to someone he despises, that he has the same blood he hates running through his veins. Harry doesn't care about blood status, he believes that muggleborn are essential to the survival of the wizarding community.

Hope that clarifies some things! Thank you for reading!

Damning the Doomed

Chapter Summary

A bit of backstory to Harry's past regarding Draco, a few murders and taunting some more Slytherins.

Warnings: torture and murder (not really explicit)

Chapter Notes

Finally I get to show you a bit of the past regarding Harry's and Draco's relationship and why Harry is slightly obsessed with him.

I personally really like this chapter, I hadn't planned when I started this story to go into detail regarding their relationship but I think it's important to see how Harry became the person he is and how he mistakes obsession for love thanks to that relationship.

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

First world, circa 2017-2024

After returning from his studies abroad, Harry had a naive notion that magical Britain might have changed for the better in his absence. But he was wrong, oh so wrong.

In fact, it had only gotten worse. The light's prejudice had only gotten worse. Dark families being ruthlessly targeted and suppressed. Raids and unjust arrests and killings were now common occurrences.

Despite Harry voicing his concerns about the current state of affairs, he was mostly ignored and sometimes even attacked himself. It was a bleak and dismal time, with no sign of any hope on the horizon.

But then, a beacon of light appeared in the form of Luna Lovegood. She was an angel among them, helping countless people who had been subjected to this sort of behaviour. Luna would

take them in, offering them safety and shelter, while also taking note of all injustices conducted and publishing her findings for all to see.

It was after one of these raids that Luna reconnected with Draco Malfoy, who had recently lost his wife Astoria. Her death had been blamed on Draco, even though there was no evidence to support it. The light had been desperate for a reason to shun and terrorize him, and even his son Scorpius wasn't safe living with him anymore. The poor boy had to move in with his dead mother's parents at the young age of 10.

Luna and Draco became good friends, and Harry was surprised to see them talking and laughing together when he returned. Although he had opened his mind to all kinds of magic and different beings since his youth, he was still surprised to find himself befriending Draco.

Harry still remembers their first interaction upon his return...

Draco was seated outside in a lawn chair next to Luna when Harry entered. Harry felt amused by Draco's attempt to keep his cool upon seeing him, despite the nerves he could feel radiating off him. After greeting Luna with a quick hug, Harry turned to Draco and exchanged pleasantries.

"So, how have things been here?" Harry asked, glancing between Luna and Draco. Draco quickly understood what he was insinuating and blushed, while Luna giggled.

"What-what, no, we're not- we haven't-" Draco stuttered, flustered by Harry's teasing.

"Since when did Draco Malfoy stutter and blush from a little teasing? My, my, have you gone soft in old age?" Harry smirked, his eyes sparkling with mirth.

Draco glared at Harry, hating to be made to look like a fool. "At least I've outgrown my childish behavior. Such immature teasing is just tragic. Even your face is still childlike Potter." He countered, unable to resist taking a jab at Harry's youthful appearance. But then he noticed how young Harry actually looked, despite nearing their 40s. It was as if he hadn't aged at all, with no wrinkles, stubble, or sunken features. He looked like a very young adult,

or perhaps even an older teen. How was that possible, when Draco certainly didn't look the same as he did in his early 20s?

Harry appeared lost in thought, but Draco could see the contemplative expression on his face. "Yes, I do look quite young, I'm aware. I wasn't expecting anyone other than Luna, so I forwent my usual glamours," Harry spoke, watching Draco closely to make sure he didn't alarm him.

Draco seemed more perplexed than anything and raised his questions. "Is this a new spell, an eternal youth elixir, or something? You haven't aged. It's difficult to tell, given that your body and facial structure have changed, but you're still the same age as when you left Britain."

Taking a deep breath to stall for time, Harry decided not to reveal the truth for now. "I haven't aged since I left, no. Why that is, I cannot tell you. Perhaps in the future, I'll feel inclined to do so, but right now, it's not important. This fact isn't widely known to the public. In fact, the only person aware of my apparent eternal youth is Luna, so I would prefer it if you kept this to yourself," Harry said, staring Draco straight in the eye with a firm and commanding voice.

Of course, Harry told Draco the truth less than a year later when they began dating.

After their first meeting at Luna's house, Harry and Draco kept bumping into each other "coincidentally" at various places like the Ministry and Diagon Alley. Harry started looking forward to these encounters so much that he arranged for them to happen. After a month of such meetings, Harry finally asked Draco out. Even when Draco wasn't the good kind of special, he was still the center of Harry's attention.

Draco, who had also "coincidentally" run into Harry, quickly accepted. After the first date, a second quickly followed, and then a third, a fourth, and a fifth... Their love was explosive, passionate, and intoxicating. They brought out the best and worst in each other, completely surrendering their souls to one another. Harry had never felt so alive, so complete, so happy. He thought that happiness would last forever, but he was wrong.

After two years of being together, Harry finally proposed to Draco, creating the most magical and unforgettable moment. He had planned everything down to the last detail, a beautiful picnic under their favorite tree, fireworks, and the perfect ring. A white gold band with a

black diamond in the center, two alexandrite stones on each side of the diamond to represent Draco's birthstone, and two rubies on the sides of the alexandrite to represent Harry.

Draco had been waiting for Harry to propose, so he wasn't too surprised when the fireworks went off and Harry pulled out a ring box.

"Draco, you are my everything, you are what I dreamt of when I was young and you are still my dream now. Having all my dreams come true, the one I want next to me is you. When I look at you I feel it, when I look at you I've come home. I love you not only for who you are but also for who I become when we are together, you are pretty much my only anchor to sanity. I love you. Regardless of what has happened in the past, what you have done, or what you do... I'll love you forever. I swear it."

Harry exhaled slowly and looked lovingly into Draco's wet eyes while he continued.

"I choose you. And I'll choose you over and over and over. Without pause, without a doubt, in a heartbeat. I'll choose you. If I know what love is it's only because I met you. Draco, will you marry me?" Harry was pretty close to tears himself but tried to keep himself together. Draco had no such inclination and was openly crying.

Draco laughed quietly, breathlessly. And smiled as the tears rolled down his cheeks. "Of course I'll marry you, you idiot." Harry grinned and laughed with happiness.

The summer of 2020 they had married. Choosing to have a small, intimate wedding consisting of only Luna, Scorpius, and Pansy. For four blissful years, they were happy, complete, and they felt like a family. But their happiness was short-lived. The suspicions and accusations began to rise when a group of dark wizards started to gather for protests. The Ministry rounded up anyone with even the slightest connection to the group, and unfortunately, Draco was one of them.

Draco was held in suspicion for weeks, and Harry was livid, determined to break him out of custody illegally. But on Draco's insistence, Harry took the legal, lengthy route. After fighting and proving Draco's innocence, he was finally released. Draco came home, beaten and starved, but alive. Harry was ready to seek revenge on those who had hurt Draco, but Draco stopped him.

After the war, Draco's heart had softened, the brutalities of his past now only a distant memory. He had never been one for physical violence, preferring instead to hurl barbs and insults with a cold and calculated tongue. But after being forced to participate in unspeakable horrors, Draco refused to take part in such depravity again. The thought of Harry, his beloved husband, partaking in such atrocities was enough to make dread burn deep in his stomach. So he begged Harry to refrain, and Harry, always eager to please him, held back.

The summer crept by at a sluggish pace. Harry had been anticipating another attack from their enemies, hoping to seek vengeance. But the summer passed by relatively uneventfully. Without their jobs at the Ministry (which they both had quit the moment tensions started rising), they had ample time to spend together, and they cherished every moment they had.

Rumors about Harry began circulating throughout their world, but they both dismissed them as ridiculous. Harry, a dark lord? It was preposterous. After all he had been through, there was no way Harry would ever willingly follow in Voldemort's footsteps. But the thought lingered in Harry's mind, and he turned to Luna for guidance.

As they lounged on the lush grass, Harry struggled to find the words to express his fears.

"What haunts you, Harry? What are you afraid of?" Luna prodded gently.

Harry gazed up at the clouds drifting overhead, trying to steady his thoughts. "All I ever wanted was to be treated like a human being. But in this world of hatred and bigotry, I should have known better. I thought there was a chance for change, but now I'm not so sure. Hope can be a cruel mistress."

As they watched a cloud shaped like a serpent slither across the sky, Harry continued. "Hope can sustain you through the darkest of times, but when it's misplaced, it can be a fatal wound. It's like bleeding out, until there's nothing left."

Harry was letting his guard down, revealing his deepest fears to Luna. "But hopelessness is even worse. It's like drowning, the water closing in around you until there's no escape. Luna, I feel like something terrible is going to happen. Something I won't be able to stop."

Tragically, that terrible event came to pass on Samhain 2024.

Draco, the love of his life, was brutally murdered.

Harry remembered little of what happened next. He felt their marriage bond snap, felt his heart shatter into a million pieces. He apparated straight home and found Draco under their tree, lifeless and cold. The world spun out of control as Harry's screams echoed through the empty fields.

He cried out for Draco, begged for him to come back. But there was only silence.

And then, a seething rage took hold of Harry. He swore an oath of revenge and began his hunt, determined to make his enemies pay for what they had taken from him.

Searching.

Finding.

Torturing.

He remembers their dying words, their pleas and their excuses, the ones he had so mercilessly snuffed out. The weight of their lives on his shoulders was a burden he carried heavily not because he'd killed them but because he'd broken his promise to Draco.

The guilt was suffocating, he'd promised Draco not to sink this low, yet Harry could not stop himself from reliving those moments. The memories of his victims haunted him day and night, driving him to the brink of madness.

He had killed so many, half of the ministry, and now he had found the one who had fired the killing curse. They were hiding, cowering in a corner of a rotting old house. He could see the fear in their eyes as he approached, relishing in the power he held over them.

He remembers himself smirking and bragging.

“You wanted a dark lord,

Well here I am.

And fine... if you want a dark lord so bad,

I'll be the best damn dark lord you've ever seen.

You want me to be a villain,

I'll be a villain.

You will regret it though.

Not that you will live long enough to see what your actions have caused upon the world.

Just remember this is all your fault.

It's funny though,

The only thing that stopped me for killing everyone in the first place was Draco.

And you took him away from me.

....

I killed them all.

They're dead.

Every single one of them.

Dead.

Not a single one left.

I slaughtered them like animals!

And I didn't even hate them.

But I hate you.

So your death will be even more gruesome.

Are you afraid now Ron?

You should be,

But I'll start with your beloved.

It's only fair isn't it?

After all you took mine,

So I will take yours."

He remembered her pleading and begging, and their rants and excuses, but it was his own smirk and boastful words that haunted him the most. He had become the dark lord they had feared, the villain he had promised to be.

He had taken everything from them, and now he reveled in the agony of his final victim. Ron was tied up, forced to watch as Harry mercilessly killed Hermione. He had wanted her to suffer, to feel every moment of her pain, and he had made sure that Ron saw it all.

Harry knew he was a monster, but he could not help himself. He had never known kindness or happiness, only pain and loss. The world had taken everything from him, and now he was taking it all back, one life at a time.

He tortured Ron for hours, the screams and pleas falling on deaf ears. He cut him, burned him, ripped his limbs from his body, drowned him, suffocated him, and cursed him. Harry took pleasure in the pain he inflicted, knowing that it was his own way of seeking revenge.

It was a cruel way to die, but Ron deserved it. Harry had used his own version of the nightmare curse, a fitting end for the man who had taken everything from him. The curse would take a couple of hours to be completed, but by the end of it, nothing of the person Ron once was would remain. He would feel as his mind slipped away, as the nightmares grew graver and more visions appeared with time. Stuck in an endless loop off his worst nightmare for what felt like eternity.

As the sun set and rose again, Harry finally let him go. The weight of his guilt and the pain of his victims were still with him, but for the first time in a long time, he felt a glimmer of something else. Maybe it was regret, or maybe it was something else entirely, but he knew one thing for sure - this world did not deserve to be saved.

He'd become what he once dreaded the most, he'd become a monster, a murderer, a villain.

Second world, 1995

Heading up the stairs to the dorm, Harry could feel the weight of their fearful looks boring into his back. But he didn't care. Let them fear him, as long as they left him alone and respected him, he had nothing to fear from them. After all, they were just children, and Harry had no intention of hurting them.

As he entered the dorm, he looked around, taking in his new surroundings. The Slytherin dorm was a lot nicer than Gryffindor's and bigger too. Four beds meant two dorms for all the fifth-year boys. Harry was lucky enough to share with Draco, Blaise, and Theo. Apparently, they didn't want to share with Crabbe and Goyle. Now why would that be?

He made his way towards the empty four-poster bed, with its Slytherin green curtains adorned with small embroideries of snakes. A dark wooden nightstand stood by its side, and his new trunk was placed at the end of the bed. A bookshelf and a desk were a few steps away.

He could hear subdued footsteps behind him, but he didn't turn around. Instead, he sat down at the desk and waited. Draco, Blaise, and Theo soon entered.

Draco, true to his arrogant nature, spoke first. "What the hell was that, Potter?! What did you say to Graham? He was still deathly pale once you left."

Harry didn't like Draco's tone. He didn't like demands, and Draco was getting too close to demanding answers. Harry could feel his temper starting to flare up.

"It was a simple demonstration of a small fraction of what I am capable of," Harry said, his voice dripping with confidence. "What I spoke to Graham about is none of your concern at the moment. They wanted to test me, so I showed them that there are no tests that will work on me."

Blaise, being the most composed of the three, spoke calmly. "Making enemies with all the Slytherins is not a smart move. They will come for you despite knowing you are more powerful than them. They will come in numbers, most likely unexpectedly."

Harry smirked and drew back his magic, causing the poor boys to shake with fear. "Unlike some people, I don't doubt myself or my ability to take on multiple people in the case of an ambush."

But Blaise wasn't done yet. "You're not invincible."

Harry's smug smile widened. "I'm very close."

Draco scoffed. "Yeah, sure you're a god amongst us weak humans," he muttered under his breath. Harry heard him and started to laugh uncontrollably. His emotions were getting the best of him, switching from murderous anger to uncontrollable laughter in an instant. But Harry didn't care. He felt alive, like he was finally free from the constraints that had held him down for so long.

Still laughing Harry got up and walked towards Draco with sure steps, his laughter getting quieter and quieter the closer he got. With a half smile on his lips he leaned forward until they were almost breathing in each other's air. With a teasing tone he said, "If you wish to know just how godlike...powers I have I'd be more than willing to show you. I must warn you though quite a few have screamed for god when I've shown them exactly what that entails."

A blush was quickly spreading across Draco's cheeks despite not being a hundred percent sure of what exactly Harry was insinuating. With his mouth slightly open Draco looked adorable, thought Harry and he voiced his thoughts.

“When you blush like that it really makes me want to coo at you.” Harry said with a grin.

Blaise couldn't contain himself anymore and burst out laughing. “Oh Merlin, I've never seen him so flushed. Gods, you're gonna be hilarious to have around Harry.”

Harry smirked at Blaise, turning back to Draco he gently pushed his chin up and closed his mouth.

Chapter End Notes

I read through this chapter and chapter 10 so many times it all started to blur together and I couldn't really spot any mistakes so if there are any major things wrong let me know!

Prominent Persuasions

Chapter Summary

Harry comes to a realisation, is called up to the headmasters office and argues. Shows off to the Slytherins, has an interesting potions class and discovers something different about this world.

Chapter Notes

Really like this chapter as well, hope you do too! I felt like posting both of chapter 9 and 10 together so here you go.

Was inspired by a TikTok for one of the lines, you'll most likely recognise it lol.

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

As the morning sun cast its warm glow on Harry, he stood in front of the mirror and admired himself in his new Hogwarts robes. The emerald green of the Slytherin crest complimented his striking eyes, making them pop. He felt good, like he could conquer the world.

But suddenly, he felt someone's presence behind him. Looking behind him using the mirror, Harry found Draco standing there, looking at him with an expression that was difficult to read. Harry smirked at his reflection in the mirror and then turned to face Draco.

“Good morning Dragon,” Harry teased Draco with a nickname he knew would embarrass him.

Draco's reaction was as adorable as expected. He blushed and his left eye twitched, pouting slightly as he spoke. “Good morning Po-Harry. Why do you insist on teasing me now? You have never done so in the previous years.”

“Well, I suppose I was too blind to see how endearing your reactions are. Now my eyes are open and how could I resist when you blush so prettily,” Harry said, stepping forward into

Draco's space and reaching for his face as if to touch him but stopping himself at the last moment. Draco looked uncomfortable and flustered, seconds away from fleeing.

As Harry looked at Draco, he began to frown. This wasn't his Draco, the one he loved with all his heart. He didn't want to force himself on this innocent child, make him uncomfortable or anxious. He wanted this Draco to be whole, pure, and happy. Harry didn't want to have to see him dead again.

He'd made Draco uncomfortable and confused. Harry knew what unwanted attention felt like, and he hated it. How could he put another person through that? Realising what he had been doing, Harry felt sick to his stomach. He had been acting anything but sane, deluding himself into believing that this was his Draco. But it would never be. He had been selfish, putting his wants and needs before anyone else's, especially Draco's. Harry couldn't let this continue.

Harry realised then that he had to make things right, for Draco's sake. He wanted to be a part of his life, but he couldn't do it at the expense of Draco's happiness. He vowed to himself that he would make sure this Draco lived a life he would be proud of, even if it meant he wasn't in it.

As he grew quiet in front of Draco, Harry appeared lost in thought, with a sad expression on his face. But before he could say anything, Draco reached out and poked him on the arm, pulling him back from his thoughts.

Harry's hand trembled as he reached out to touch Draco's cheek once more, his eyes fixated on the blonde's face. A small smile crept across his lips as he savored the sensation of human contact. Was he touch-starved? Maybe. But he didn't care. As long as Draco was comfortable with it, he wouldn't be able to resist the occasional touch.

Draco's eyes widened in surprise as Harry's fingers brushed over his cheekbone, a gentle touch that was unfamiliar to him. Only his mother had ever touched him with such tenderness. Despite his initial discomfort, he found himself welcoming the warmth and comfort of Harry's touch.

Harry's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Is this alright, Draco? If I do something that makes you uncomfortable, please tell me. It's just... you make me feel content, and I want to be near

you, and to make sure you're happy and protected." Harry's thumb continued to caress Draco's cheek as he spoke, his gaze never leaving Draco's.

Draco's eyes narrowed, but he made no move to pull away from Harry's touch. "You do not need to protect me. I can protect myself," he said, his voice soft and guarded. "I do not mind the touches as long as you keep them...appropriate." He glanced away from Harry's gaze, his lips pressed into a thin line.

Harry's smile was genuine as he withdrew his hand. He was relieved that Draco was accepting his newfound affection, despite his erratic behavior lately. "I know you can. Come, let's head to breakfast." He grabbed Draco's hand and pulled him towards the common room.

Their brief moment of happiness was cut short when they were stopped by Snape, who demanded Harry's presence in the headmaster's office. Snape's eyes widened as he caught sight of their intertwined hands, a moment of disbelief flashing across his face before he composed himself.

Harry chose to ignore Snape's reaction and instead adopted a polite tone. "Now, professor? Should we get going then?"

Snape narrowed his eyes at him but found no reason to reprimand him. He turned around and walked towards the door. Harry took that as confirmation and dropped Draco's hand.

"I'll see you later, Dragon."

"Bye, Harry."

The walk to the headmaster's office was quiet and tense. Harry was not bothered by it and chose to ignore the professor's narrow-eyed stare. He had more important things to think about than a bigoted, self-centered, obsessive dungeon bat.

As they neared, Harry thought about what he should do. He knew he couldn't play the part of the golden boy anymore, pretending to be someone he wasn't was too exhausting. The weight of his past experiences had left him too old and jaded for that. But lying and deceiving when necessary? That he could do.

As he climbed the stairs with Snape and neared the office, Harry still hadn't decided on his approach. He knew he couldn't afford to be outright aggressive or hostile, no matter how much he wanted to. That would only be counterproductive. But he also knew that the old man no longer held any power over him. Now, it was Harry who had the power.

When they arrived, Snape spoke the password and they entered. But instead of waiting for the usual three knocks, Harry pushed the door open with his magic and strode in, Snape following silently behind. The headmaster was startled by their sudden entrance, his surprise quickly replaced by his usual fake grandfatherly smile, filled with fake concern and fake gentleness.

Despite his unease, Harry sat down and put on a mask of fake confusion as Dumbledore prepared to question him about his sudden disappearance from his relatives' house. It was a test of wills, and Harry knew he had to be careful with his answers.

"My boy, how lovely to see you again. It is unfortunate it has to be under such dire circumstances." He looked weary and sighed loudly.

Harry put on a mask of fake confusion as he sat down. "Whatever do you mean, Headmaster?"

Dumbledore's eyes filled with pity and disappointment. "Why did you leave your relative's house, Harry? It was a very reckless and immature move on, and it made us all very worried, my dear boy. Where did you go, Harry?"

Harry tilted his head and contemplated an answer: tell the truth or lie? Easy, lie. "I-I wanted to see my girlfriend, headmaster," Harry lied, trying to sound as convincing as possible. "She had invited me to her house and asked me to stay the summer there. I didn't want to stay with my relatives and I didn't want to be alone, and spending time with her is amazing. So of course I chose the better option. I didn't tell you or anyone because I knew that if I did, you would come and drag me back to those despicable muggles." Harry couldn't help but spit out

the last two words. And as for choosing to make up a fake girlfriend, well, it would throw them off, and it would be fun watching them trying to find a nonexistent person.

The headmaster's eyes widened with surprise at Harry's bold lie. "A girlfriend? Who might that be? I don't believe I saw you at the Burrow, and I did ask Miss Weasley about your whereabouts, and she was clueless. I do not like being lied to, my--"

Harry abruptly interrupted the old man's rambling, not wanting to hear another word about Ginny. His voice was laced with surprise and disgust as he spoke, "Ginny, no way! She has never been my girlfriend and she never will be. Yuck. That's just wrong. No, no. I met my girlfriend last year during the tournament, and we've been together ever since. I spent the summer with her and her parents."

The old man seemed slightly irritated at being cut off, but his curiosity was clearly piqued. He leaned forward in his chair, causing it to creak. "Then what's the name of this young lady? I would really like to speak to her parents and her. It's imperative they understand the situation and won't do anything foolish."

Harry couldn't help but inwardly laugh at the old man's transparent agenda. He wondered how he could have ever fallen for the man's kind words and soft looks when he was younger. "I can't tell you that. It's for their safety. They don't want to be brought into the limelight, and I'm inclined to agree with them. It's best they remain unknown. Was there anything else you wanted to speak about, Headmaster?" Harry was eager to move on from this uncomfortable conversation.

Dumbledore could see the stubborn set in Harry's shoulders and knew that he wouldn't get any more information on the subject. He would have to find out on his own. With a deep sigh, he leaned back in his chair and continued, "Having to leave your friends and your house must be hard, my dear boy. I'm sure what happened was simply a misunderstanding. It can be rectified easily, thankfully."

Harry didn't buy it. He had already made up his mind and was determined to stay in Slytherin. He smiled innocently and replied, "Thank you for your concern, Headmaster, but it's unnecessary. I'm quite happy in my new house. It was, after all, the house I was meant to be in."

But Dumbledore wasn't ready to give up yet. "Harry, I believe it would be best if we did another resorting so you can head back to Gryffindor." He smiled as if it was the best idea in the world. He didn't think that Harry would outright refuse him; after all, he had never done so before.

Harry tilted his head to the side, his expression cold and unfeeling. "No, I won't do that. Slytherin is my house, has always been my house. And if you hadn't meddled with my sorting in the first place, it would have been my house from the beginning."

For a moment, Harry could see the anger in Dumbledore's eyes, but it was quickly replaced by sadness. The old man lowered his eyes and exhaled heavily. "Yes, I did what I had to for the greater good, my boy. The consequences of our actions are always so complicated and diverse that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed. I did not foresee this future, for instance, but things happen that are out of our control."

Harry was furious. The man was admitting it all, as if he believed that Harry would just forgive and forget. No way.

"You admit you interfered with my sorting and that's all you have to say? That things happen out of our control!? You meddle and try to control my life for what? The greater good!? There is no greater good! Are you naive enough to believe that?" Harry's voice was laced with anger as he confronted the headmaster, who was becoming more agitated by the second. Harry didn't care. He wanted to tell the old fool exactly what he thought of his "greater good."

"First, individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the greater good, and second, the justice principles that define these rights cannot be based on any particular ideal of what it is to live a happy life. The fact that the rights provide a fair framework within which people and groups can choose their own goals and ends while yet allowing others the same freedom is what justifies them, not the fact that they maximize the general welfare or in any other way advance the good." Harry delivered his argument with conviction, his eyes blazing with passion.

He paused for a moment, taking a deep breath before continuing. Dumbledore didn't have time to contemplate what Harry said before he continued on.

“Now, if all you brought me here to do was question me on my whereabouts and scold me for being sorted into the house of evil, as you see it, then I believe I shall take my leave. Do not summon me again unless it's related to my education.”

Harry turned to leave, walking towards the door, leaving Dumbledore wide-eyed and bewildered.

“Oh, and by the way, if you haven't been informed, I am dropping divination and joining classes for arithmancy and runes. Good day.”

Harry stepped out of the room before anyone could comprehend what had just happened.

Meanwhile, Draco and his friends had been in the great hall trying to enjoy their breakfast.

Draco's thoughts had been occupied by the green-eyed boy since meeting him on the train yesterday. What had he done to Harry to make him feel content in his presence? It was strange. Draco hadn't really felt much towards Harry before the train. They had only spoken a few times and the conversations had been tense and forced. Draco had chosen to ignore Harry, seeing as he was friends with that insufferable weasel. But Harry had always been quiet, never saying anything hurtful, but never defending him either, just observed. So this total change in attitude had thrown him off.

Before starting Hogwarts, Draco had been excited to befriend the famous Boy Who Lived, but he had been sorely disappointed when the real Harry had appeared. Draco had found him lacking in all but magical power. He had, of course, offered his hand, and Harry had shaken it in greeting, but friendship had never developed.

So going from zero to a hundred was indeed strange. He wasn't sure why Harry felt so comfortable with him. Draco himself was flustered by the constant teasing and flirting, but it was nice to be noticed and paid attention to. When Harry had caressed his face with such gentleness and tenderness, he had felt warm and seen by Harry. But he wasn't sure what he felt about the boy. He didn't want to lose this new friendship. It felt important and like it could develop into something amazing, so he wouldn't let this new Harry go.

Still, he was unsure as to what Harry wanted. The flirting and teasing were innocent but still clear. If Harry wanted a romantic relationship between them, Draco wasn't sure he could offer that. Draco had come to terms with the fact that he didn't really care about the gender of his partner too much, but he was well aware his parents weren't as lax in that regard.

Draco Malfoy was torn between duty and his heart's desire. He was expected to marry a pureblood woman from a good family, and he was prepared to do just that. Duty before romance, family before anyone else. But as he sat next to Harry, his thoughts were in turmoil. He hoped that Harry could accept that he was content with their current friendship and didn't wish for more than innocent teasing and light touches.

As Draco contemplated how he was going to tell Harry his thoughts, the messy-haired boy sat down next to him. Harry's presence was a soothing balm, and Draco couldn't help but steal glances at him. If you only looked at Harry's expression, you would believe he was calm and relaxed. But if you looked closely, you could spot the tenseness in his shoulders and the clenching of his fists.

Before Draco could ask if he was alright, Blaise interrupted. "Where have you been, Harry? Breakfast is almost over," he spoke in a light, curious tone.

Harry looked at the other occupants of the table and smirked. "Oh, you know, just confronting old deceptive goats as one does," he said amused.

"He was in the headmaster's office, he was summoned this morning," Draco spoke before anyone could question Harry's weird statement.

Harry looked at Draco and pouted. "Must you ruin my fun?"

Smirking at Harry's pout, Draco answered in a deadpan voice, "Yes."

Harry squinted at him, the pout still on his lips. Draco could see the moment Harry decided to mess with him again, the slight twinkle that entered Harry's eyes was a familiar one.

"Such a meanie, little dragon," Harry said in a childish tone, with a hint of amusement.

Blaise promptly choked on his bite of food and started cackling. "Little dragon?! That's hilarious, from now on that's the only thing I'm gonna call you," Blaise giggled lightly whilst the others regained some of their dignity and only smiled deviously at Draco.

Draco sighed loudly and let his head fall onto the table with a smack. "It was my mother's childhood nickname for me...how Harry found that out, I have no idea."

"It's just a talent of mine, dear. I know everything there is to know about everything," Harry smirked at Draco and patted his head consolingly.

Pansy perked up at that. She was the gossip queen of Slytherin, and if Harry had valuable gossip, she needed to know. "What else do you know?" she asked.

Harry looked towards her. "Well, pretty much anything. I just need to look at someone, and I know their secrets. Want a demonstration?" Harry looked maliciously around the table, daring anyone to accept.

Blaise, the intrigued fool, volunteered, and Harry swiftly focused his attention on him. "The first woman you ever slept with was a friend of your mother's. You had tried to seduce her for years, you started when you were 13," Harry smirked, his focus solely on Blaise. "That's illegal, you know."

Blaise felt his eyes widen at his secret being revealed, thankful Harry hadn't picked one of the more damaging secrets. And it wasn't like Blaise was embarrassed by this secret, and Harry hadn't even spoken her name. For his or her sake, Blaise wasn't sure. As he looked around at his friends, he couldn't help but wonder what secrets Harry knew about them.

Pansy was in utter shock. She bombarded Blaise with a flurry of questions about the woman's identity, but Blaise refused to answer.

Pansy was livid. "Blaise, what that woman did was not only illegal, but also morally wrong. Even if you were the one who seduced her, she's an adult and should know better."

Blaise appeared disinterested in the conversation. "There's nothing to say, Pansy. What's done is done, and I don't regret it. But if my mother found out, she would skin the woman alive."

The tension grew thicker by the second, but Harry knew just how to break it. "Pansy, let me show you what I can do. I promise it'll be fun."

Pansy was hesitant at first, but her curiosity got the better of her. As Harry began to speak, her eyes widened and her cheeks turned bright red. How could he possibly know that embarrassing secret about her childhood?

"When you were younger you begged your parents to have another child since you wanted a sibling and every time your parents asked why you wanted a sibling you refused to answer because you were embarrassed by the reason..."

How could he know this, she never even told Draco!

"You wanted a sibling so you could dress them up as a doll and pretend they were your child."

Pansy was mortified, while the others chuckled at her childish antics. "Okay, I get it," she said, embarrassed. "You have a talent. Just don't do that to me again."

Harry grinned mischievously, but before he could say anything, Theo interrupted. "Hey, have we gotten our schedules yet?"

"No," Draco replied, "but Snape usually hands them out at the beginning of breakfast. I wonder what's taking him so long."

Harry realised it was his fault. "Snape was with me earlier for my meeting with the goat. Sorry if I caused the delay."

Draco's concern was palpable. "Did everything go okay?"

Harry's warm smile put him at ease. "Yeah, everything went smoothly. No need to worry, dragon."

Draco feigned annoyance. "I'm not worried. I just want to be prepared for your whining."

Harry laughed at Draco's fake expression of offense.

"No, no damaging consequences... but you should all be on your guard around him." Harry ended the sentence in seriousness.

The Slytherins glanced at each other before Pansy answered.

"We are always on guard with him. Who knows what ridiculous accusations he'll throw our way if we're not careful."

Harry nodded his head in agreement.

"Just remember the next time someone says Dumbledore wouldn't do that. Oh yes he would."

During the day, Harry was scrutinized more than ever. Some people looked at him with curiosity, while others directed outright hatred and hostility his way. However, Harry had grown accustomed to this treatment during his first life. This worlds Harry was not very

confrontational, so nobody really expected him to respond to their threats or accusations. When Harry glared back at them or let his magic flare out, people seemed to back off. If someone later decided to become physical, Harry would show them exactly why that was the stupidest idea. He wouldn't tolerate anyone's crap anymore.

As always, classes were boring, except for potions class. Snape had been avoiding eye contact with Harry for the entire lesson, probably happy to pretend he didn't exist. But as the class was about to end, Snape lingered around Harry's desk, maybe hoping to scold him for making a mistake. As Harry looked up at him, Snape took his chance and dived into Harry's mind. Well... he tried to.

He didn't get very far.

Harry's walls were impenetrable, like diving head-first into a brick wall. Snape looked dumbfounded and actually stumbled a step. For a moment, it seemed like he had no idea what had just happened. But a moment later, it was like nothing had happened. Snape was scolding and glaring at Harry once again.

Harry tried to contain his glee, but his lips twitched, and he was sure Snape noticed. Not that Harry cared, though. The look on Snape's face had been hilarious.

Snape, on the other hand, was both angry and befuddled. How could the brat have such magnificent shields? It would take years, decades even, to build such impenetrable walls, and the brat was barely fifteen. Even his own occlumency shields hadn't developed that quickly. It had taken him more than fifteen years to reach the level he was at now. And still, if someone powerful enough wasn't afraid to damage his mind, they could get into Severus' mind.

Having such shields wasn't possible. It simply wasn't possible. Who had helped him? Who had enough power to build such walls? The only answer that came to mind was... Voldemort.

But that was insane.

The Dark Lord was dead, and even if he was alive, he wouldn't help the brat. He wanted to kill him. Potter wouldn't have accepted the help either way.

This needed more investigation. Perhaps he should bring this up with Albus. No, he needed more information first before he made any accusations. Besides, no one would believe the brat was capable of such difficult magic.

As Harry and the gang headed toward the common room after a day of classes, Harry remembered something from his first life and smirked.

"Hey, Draco, want to make a bet?" Harry beamed at him.

Draco scrutinized Harry with suspicion. "What kind of bet?"

"Just a little one... I bet you I can get into the common room without using the password," Harry said confidently.

Draco sneered. "That's impossible. Fine, I'll take your bet. What are the stakes?"

Harry tilted his head to the side, still smiling. "Just a boon."

"Anything?" Draco asked.

"Anything," Harry confirmed.

The others looked on in interest as they neared the hidden door. Theo was pretty sure Harry would somehow pull this off, but he wasn't sure how. Harry always did the impossible.

As they stopped in front of the wall, Harry turned to Draco, who raised an eyebrow.

"Well, get on with it, Potter," he huffed in fake annoyance.

Harry smirked victoriously at Draco and maintained eye contact as he spoke.

"Open," he said.

Only it wasn't in English.

A hitched breath could be heard as the walls groaned open.

As he looked around, Harry noticed the stunned expressions. Oops, did they not know?

"Ha-Harry, that was parseltongue?" Theo whispered, frozen in place from fear or amazement, it was unclear.

"How can you speak parseltongue?! You shouldn't be able to do that," Draco's voice had risen an octave.

Harry pretended nothing was out of the ordinary and smiled.

"So, it appears I won the bet."

Chapter End Notes

Alright 10 chapters posted in a week. It's been rather stressful but I promised so I delivered. I won't update as often going forward. I plan on updating once a week, maybe 2 times if I have the time but otherwise I will post on Saturdays or Sundays going forward.

Two more chapters until they meet!!

Hope you continue following this story. Thank you all for your lovely comments and support!!! Love you all!

Deception of the Devoted

Chapter Summary

Confrontation with old acquaintances, defence class with a fearful professor and an interrupted meeting with Death.

Chapter Notes

So I just finished writing chapter 18 and it probably the best thing I've written in my life, my god I can't wait for when I share it. It will be some time but in the meantime enjoy this unscheduled chapter!

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

The past week had been unusually peaceful for Harry. He had spent some quality time with Luna and gotten to know the Slytherins better. But as they say, all good things must come to an end, and for Harry, the end came sooner than he had anticipated.

After staying up late into the night planning for the future and testing out his newfound powers with Kali, Harry stumbled into the Great Hall feeling like he hadn't slept in days. It was just typical that Weasley would choose today to confront him. Of course, he had known it was coming; Ron practically had smoke coming out of his ears by the end of the week.

As Harry slowly made his way towards the Slytherin table, he noticed that Luna was sitting with Draco. Did she know what was about to happen? Not really in the mood to deal with childish tantrums, Harry proceeded to sit down by Luna and grab a cup of tea. Unfortunately for him -or Ron, seeing as now Harry was annoyed- he didn't get to take a sip of it before a pesky voice interrupted him.

Without warning, Ron started shouting, "You traitor! Why did you leave us for these...these...fucking snakes?!" His voice echoed throughout the Great Hall, and students from every house turned to stare.

Harry took a deep breath, bracing himself for the argument he knew was coming, and for having to reason with an idiot.

"Traitor?" Harry replied calmly. "Weren't you the first one to betray me? And why does it matter? We're not friends anymore. The Slytherins are my friends now, and I won't stand for anyone disrespecting them. So if that's all you've got, it's best you leave."

The condescending tone was noted by Ron, and it infuriated him even more. His face went as red as a tomato, and his teeth clenched too tightly.

Ron was not backing down. He was like a dog with a bone. "I said I was sorry! What more do you want? Those snakes are not your friends! They're tricking you! They tricked you into getting sorted into Slytherin. You belong in Gryffindor, just like your parents."

Low blow, Ron. Not that he really cared for what his parents would think of him. He never knew them, so why would he base his life on the potential disappointments he might cause his long-dead parents? But still, using someone's dead parents against them was not cool. Apparently, he wasn't the only one to think that, if the angry expression on the Slytherins' and surrounding students' faces was anything to go by.

Ron continued his tirade, oblivious to the angry expressions on the faces of the surrounding students. "What would your parents think if they knew you were consorting with the enemy? You have to demand a resort so you can go back to Gryffindor, your home!"

Harry was just slightly bored and irritated. Honestly, he had hoped this world's Ron would be better. This one would never have to be on the frontlines of a battlefield, fighting for his life against the dark and therefore further fortifying his twisted beliefs that all dark wizards are bad. This Ron knew nothing of war and hardship, and still, he was a condescending bastard for no reason, judging people based on their core and house, and not on their actions. Harry's hate for Ron was slowly returning, and if Ron continued on this path, Harry would end him.

"The crumple-horned snorkraks are having a feast, and they will drown their victims in honey glazed coal." Luna spoke up for the first time, and all attention was turned to her. Everyone looked at her in confusion and pity, except Harry. Harry looked concerned.

“Is it undeniable? Nothing can stop it?” Harry asked, not sure if he was upset for the children. If Harry understood Luna correctly, Ron and Hermione were too far gone already, and they would not stop believing the old coot's lies.

Luna looked towards the enchanted ceiling, looking mesmerized by the moving clouds. “Hmm undeniable. The snorkraks are too deep, there is no remedy.” Luna nodded her head as if to confirm it for herself.

“What are you talking about? There is no such thing as a snorkraks.” Hermione decided this was the perfect moment to interject.

“Does something have to be seen to be real? Air isn't seen, still it's there. We can't see China. Does that mean it's not real?” Luna asked, sounding genuinely confused.

Hermione huffed and crossed her arms but didn't answer.

Perhaps Harry should try harder in class so he could outperform Hermione and annoy her.... Yes, that would be fun.

Hermione then focused her attention on Harry and spoke in a haughty tone. “While I don't agree with everything Ron said, we are your friends, not them, and you belong in Gryffindor. You are not a Slytherin like them. You are good.”

Well, now he was starting to get a headache.

“I'm gonna make this abundantly clear so you understand,” Harry said, his patience wearing thin. “We are not friends anymore. We have grown apart, and I'm fine with that. I'm good with that. I don't want to be friends anymore. And secondly, I am a Slytherin. I've always been a Slytherin. I've done my best to meet everyone's expectations of what a golden boy should be, but I'm done. I'm not the golden boy, I'm not the savior. If it hadn't been for outside interference, I would have been sorted into Slytherin in the first year.” Harry spoke once more to them like they were complete idiots who couldn't comprehend the simplest of statements.

“Now then, we have nothing more to discuss. Leave so I can eat my breakfast in peace.” Harry turned away from them, determined to finish his breakfast in peace.

But no, of course, it couldn't be that simple.

“No! We are not done here! You are our friend! I won't let those slimy snakes steal you away! I will not-“ Harry had had enough. He quickly silenced Ron, he did not seem to notice at first, but when he did, he looked about ready to jump them.

Harry, already predicting his movements, put up a variant of the shielding charm that was meant to stop not only magic but physical attacks as well.

What no one other than Hermione and the Slytherins seemed to notice was that Harry had done all of this wandlessly and wordlessly.

She was astonished and quickly dragged Ron away before things could escalate. Ron was back to being as red as a tomato and was now waving his fist around like a brute.

Deciding not to look a gift horse in the mouth, he proceeded to eat his breakfast, not paying attention to the looks he was receiving from the old coot and Granger.

“Harry, are you alright?” Draco asked quietly.

Harry looked towards him in confusion.

“I am fine, dragon. Why wouldn't I be?”

Draco reached out and touched Harry's hand lightly.

“Well... they were your friends, won't you miss them?” Draco asked.

Harry tilted his head to the side.

“We haven't been friends for a long time now, I hold no devotion to them. You are my friends now, so why does it matter if I don't have them? I don't want them. I won't miss them.” His tone was even as he spoke, no indication that what he said was untrue. Draco frowned and looked down, seeming lost in thought.

Harry, meanwhile, was planning to call Kali to ask if they had influenced Draco somehow. Draco was too docile, too nice, too understanding to truly be the spoiled little brat he was supposed to be. No matter the reality, Harry was certain Narcissa would have spoiled her only child rotten. That was just the kind of woman she was. Had she been alive with the birth of Scorpius, that child wouldn't have turned out the humble person he was.

Harry had a rising suspicion that Draco's behavior had something to do with Kali. Kali wouldn't have given Draco any specific memories, that would be careless, but perhaps emotions, if they could do that. Harry was still fuzzy on the details of Kali's powers.

Pansy's cheerful voice brought him out of his thoughts.

“Come on, boys, time to head to class. It's Lord Malfoy's first class with us!”

As they neared the classroom, Draco gripped Harry's arm and brought him to a stop.

“Please don't seduce my father,” Draco pleaded.

Harry was confused by the sudden plea. Why would he- oh right. Teasing Draco was fun, and having Lucius as an ally would be useful, but Harry wouldn't actually sleep with him to get what he wanted. No, there were easier ways.

“The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it,” Harry quoted, aware Draco wouldn’t recognize the Muggle quote.

Draco groaned but dragged a smiling Harry towards the lesson.

As they neared the classroom, they heard quiet hissing. Harry looked around, trying to spot Selene and Nyx. Following the sound of their hissing, he saw them hiding behind armor.

“What have you guys been up to?” Harry asked in Parseltongue as he bent down to retrieve them.

“We followed the white-haired, smelly man, he left the nest a little while ago,” Nyx hissed back at him as they both settled on his shoulders.

“Hmm, we will speak more of what you saw at a later time. Thank you for your hard work, Nyx, Selene.” Harry petted them on their heads as he turned back to a dazed Draco.

Harry looked at Draco's face and couldn't help but smirk at his expression. His eyes were dilated, and his cheeks slightly flushed.

Harry's smirk widened as he stepped closer to Draco. Harry couldn't help but tease him. Who knew Draco had a Parseltongue kink?

"Draco... why don't we go and have some... fun?" Harry purred, his voice low and seductive, as he reached out to touch Draco's cheek with a sly smile. The air between them sizzled with an electric tension, and Draco found himself blushing uncontrollably despite not understanding what Harry just said.

Harry's eyes trailed slowly down Draco's body, making him feel both exposed and desired in a way he had never experienced before. He struggled to find words, completely taken aback

by the sudden shift in their dynamic.

"Draco darling, are you okay?" Harry's husky voice pulled Draco out of his daze, and he stumbled over his words, his face as red as a tomato.

Harry couldn't help but chuckle, enjoying the effect he had on the normally composed Slytherin. But their moment was abruptly interrupted by the sound of the classroom door opening, and Lucius stepped out, looking disturbed.

Harry knew exactly what Lucius was thinking, and he intended to use it to his advantage.

As they entered the classroom, Harry noticed that the only seats available were at the front. "How convenient," he thought with a mischievous glint in his eye.

Lucius was a skilled teacher, but there was something cold and distant about him that Harry couldn't quite put his finger on. He seemed to be constantly scrutinizing Harry and Draco, throwing fleeting glances in their direction.

Despite the tense atmosphere, class continued on, and Harry found himself lost in thought. This world was different from the one he knew, Harry had scanned through most of his housemates' minds to determine the differences between the worlds and had discovered that people seemed slightly nicer here, not plagued as much by the last war. He wasn't sure why that was. But he couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy at how much better everyone seemed to have it. Lucius had managed to break free from the cycle of abuse, and he had saved Draco from a terrible fate.

But even as Harry acknowledged this, he couldn't help the bitterness that crept into his heart. Why did they get to be happy when he had suffered so much? It didn't seem fair.

Class had finally ended, but Lucius had asked Draco and Harry to stay behind. As they approached the professor's desk, Lucius turned his eyes to Harry, and without hesitation, Harry dove into the professor's mind. He kept his presence unknown to Lucius, biding his time until the perfect moment, and then, in a daring move, he let his intrusion be known.

Lucius' eyes widened in shock, and Harry felt his occlumency walls slam up, but it was too late. Alarm quickly made itself present in Lucius' magic, and he quickly grabbed Draco and shoved him behind him, raising his wand at Harry, his eyes wide with fear and panic. Draco was startled, but he obediently allowed himself to be hidden behind his father's back.

“Who are you?!” Lucius practically screamed at Harry, his wand still pointed directly at him.

Harry felt a taunting smirk tug at his lips as he stared down the length of Lucius' pointed wand, feeling no fear whatsoever.

“What are you doing father?” Draco questioned quietly, sensing the tension and danger in the air.

“Quiet, Draco! Stay behind me,” Lucius hissed, his attention completely focused on Harry.

But Harry couldn't help himself, and he chuckled darkly, reveling in the thrill of the moment.

“Who am I? You know who I am, Lucius. I am Harry Potter. Lord Potter-Black-Peverell. The boy who lived. The saviour of the wizarding world. The prophesied destroyer of the Dark Lord. The golden child.”

Harry tilted his head to the side, his eyes glinting with a dangerous bloodlust.

“No. You can not be Harry Potter. Harry Potter isn't a parselmouth, he isn't a Slytherin, he isn't this skilled with magic.” Lucius straightened his back, getting ready for a confrontation, tightening his grip on his wand.

Harry clicked his tongue and tutted, waving his hand and easily disarming Lucius of his wand. As he caught the wand mid-air, Harry spoke in a taunting voice.

“Such recklessness, Lucius. I expected better of you. Such Gryffindor behaviour is unbecoming of a man of your status.”

Harry relaxed his shoulders, letting a calm smile claim his face.

“Come, Draco. Time to get to class. Lucius, tell him I’d like a meeting, alright? Good day, Professor.” Harry levitated Lucius' wand over to his desk and they proceeded to exit the classroom, leaving Lucius to contemplate his fate. As they walked away, Draco couldn't help but glance back, noticing the unnatural paleness and stillness of his father, realizing that Harry had truly shaken him to his core.

Lucius, meanwhile, decided he needed to speak to his lord.

As night fell, Harry was nowhere to be found in the dormitory, his bed, or the common room. He had other plans for the night. He needed to speak with Death and see them, so he required a place to meditate and enter his mindscape. The room of requirement would suffice until he had time to renovate the chamber.

Perhaps he should explore the chamber? He didn't have time to do so in his previous life. Salazar Slytherin must have concealed more than just a basilisk down there... perhaps books and artifacts as well.

Requesting a replica of his gathering room at Peverell Castle from the room, Harry stepped inside and found exactly what he had asked for. He settled into his most comfortable armchair and got to work.

As he sunk deeper and deeper into his mind, he felt his consciousness connecting with Death's, but something was tugging at him. Something that refused to let him go, that didn't want him to leave. What the hell was that?!

With a sudden jolt, Harry was brought back to the surface, gasping for air.

“What just happened?” Harry whispers to himself. As he looked down at his hands he saw something glowing at his chest. The pendant, Tom's soul shard. It had pulled him back! How could it do that? It shouldn't have a consciousness right now.

"Death, Kali," Harry called out through the legilimency connection he had with Death, knowing he wouldn't be able to see Kali.

"I'm here, Harry. I felt you approaching, but you left quickly. Why?" Kali asked, sounding puzzled.

"The pendant, his soul. It dragged me back... it's not supposed to do that, right?" Harry asked, his calm tone masking his inner turmoil. He didn't like the idea of the soul shard somehow controlling him.

Death hummed and fell silent for a moment.

"No, it's not supposed to do that. Horcruxes are fragments of the soul, not the consciousness. Even though the two are linked, the consciousness clings to the soul and remains with the main part. I suppose that if the horcrux was close enough to the main soul part, it could reconnect and mimic the appearance of its consciousness. This is all highly theoretical; I've never had to deal with the idiocy of humans..."

Death took a deep breath, and Harry remained silent as Kali spoke.

"The soul in the pendant was closely tied to the soul of the body you're presently inhabiting. Even if the body no longer has a soul, thanks to your journey into this world, the pendant still yearns for the prior soul. It could be attempting to link to your non-existent soul but encountering your consciousness instead..." Kali trailed off and fell silent.

"But why did it try to prevent me from seeing you?" Harry was a little baffled.

"It wanted to keep you, I suppose. Perhaps it became frightened when it sensed you drifting and tried to hold on to you. Either we need to create a new ward to block its influence, or we need to dispose of it... I'm still not sure what you plan to do with it," Kali's voice sounded hesitant, as if he didn't want to bring up the future.

Harry was at a loss for words. He had no plan for the soul shards, he just collected them aimlessly. Why did he even bother keeping them safe? Was it out of a sense of duty or responsibility? He couldn't quite put his finger on it.

But then he realized something. He didn't care about Voldemort, but he cared about Tom Riddle. He saw a reflection of himself in the younger boy, both growing up in similar circumstances. Harry knew that he and Tom could have easily ended up on the same path if it weren't for the manipulation of Dumbledore.

Harry felt an urge to save Tom Riddle. It was a sudden realisation, something he hadn't really thought about before. He wished someone had saved him in his darkest moments.

"I can't just destroy the soul shards," Harry said aloud, lost in thought. "We'll need to create a spell or something. Maybe a rune or a death marking? Do you have any that could work or that we can adapt?" he asked Kali.

Kali replied, "There are thousands of different markings, but only about a hundred are used for protection or enclosure. I'll have to do some research before we proceed. It's best if you keep the pendant in your pouch until we know how it affects you."

As Harry was about to leave, he brought up the topic of Draco. "You did something to him, didn't you?" Harry accused Kali.

He sensed Kali mentally cringe, which was strange. "I didn't hurt him or influence him too much. I simply made his feelings towards you more amenable. I let him feel a fraction of what he used to feel in your presence so he wouldn't hurt you."

Harry was disappointed. "Kali, you can't do that. He isn't my Draco, and he never will be. I want him in my life, but not like this. You need to stop influencing him."

"I stopped influencing him after the first week. What he feels now is his own emotions. He genuinely likes you, Harry," Kali said apologetically.

Harry let out a sigh and ran his hand through his hair. He was exhausted, and he still had a lot to do tonight. "Okay, thank you for your concern, Kali. But you can't do that to anyone else, understood? You haven't influenced anyone else other than Draco and Luna, right?" Harry asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

Kali reassured him. "No, I haven't. Luna is a seer, and she would have sensed your presence sooner or later. Your existence will change things, and those who are sensitive to magic will notice it."

Finally, Harry brought up the subject that had been on his mind for a while. "What happened to the Harry that occupied this body before me?" he asked Death hesitantly.

Death hesitated before answering, afraid of how Harry would react. "The previous Harry has left the world of the living and joined me in limbo. He hasn't passed on yet, still clinging to life desperately but unable to grasp it. For now, he's in limbo with the other lost souls, and I'm doing my best to guide him. But it will take some time before he can move on."

Hearing this only made Harry feel more conflicted. Would he have clung onto life if he had known what was to come? With what happened to him and his loved one in the future, would he still hold on to hope? Fifteen-year-old Harry would have, there was no doubt about it. He had been too stubborn and too desperate to do anything but force himself to keep living. Perhaps out of spite, but still, he wouldn't have left willingly. Yet, he felt that this was a more merciful fate than what would have happened had young Harry stayed. Anyway, it wasn't like he had chosen to be here; he was also forced into a situation he didn't want to be in. He had no choice, and neither did young Harry. He would let it go for now and pray to the gods that Harry's soul would be able to move on soon.

"Thank you for telling me, Kali. I need to get going now so I can accomplish my task tonight," Harry said, slightly conflicted about his feelings, but keeping a polite tone.

“Of course, my dear master. I will never lie to you. Goodnight, Harry. Have a fruitful hunt,” Kali replied, their amusement clear in their voice. They would enjoy watching Harry later tonight.

“Goodnight, Kali. I will.”

As he ended the conversation, Harry stood up and stretched. He had been sitting for a long time.

Time to get going, Harry thought, smirking venomously. This was going to be a fun night, he realised, as he stepped through the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be posted on Saturday and I'm so excited for it!!! Finally they meet!

Engrossing Encounters and their Effects

Chapter Summary

A new post in the Prophet, ramblings of a previous madman, a letter and its consequences and finally a meeting.

Chapter Notes

Yayyy we're finally at their first meeting! I'm kinda nervous about this chapter and I had a hard time deciding on how their first meeting should go so please tell me what you think about it!

Hope you enjoy!

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

UNDERSECRETARY DOLORES UMBRIDGE FOUND DEAD: Suspected werewolf attack

By Andy Smudgley

On the evening of September 12th, Dolores Umbridge, Undersecretary to the Minister, was found dead in her home. This was no natural death, however, and Madame Umbridge is believed to have been murdered. We have confirmed with the head Auror, Amelia Bones, that this was not an ordinary death. Madame Bones had the following to say about the murder: "At first, we thought it was a straightforward murder, but closer inspection revealed what looked like claw marks on her body. We are currently operating under the hypothesis that a werewolf attacked. Although we think retaliation was the motivation, we can't be sure until the perpetrator or perpetrators are found." Madame Umbridge's primary responsibility at the Ministry was aiding Minister Fudge with various initiatives, however, Dolores had her own special interests in the Ministry regarding werewolves which is what might have led to her horrendous death...

How interesting, a werewolf attack. Although there had been no reports of planned attacks on Umbridge, he couldn't rule out the possibility that she was the target of a personal vendetta. Her work on the werewolf regulations was pretty gruesome, and coming from him that was significant. No matter, he didn't care if she died. She possibly might have made a good pawn, but her temperament made it impossible to even consider accepting her into the fold.

As he took a sip of his morning tea, he put down the copy of today's Prophet. He had more important things to focus his mind on, for instance, why hadn't Dumbledore been shouting from the rooftops that he was back? He must have his suspicions, and the old coot would have warned the public if he could. Wouldn't he do anything for his greater good after all?

Despite how much Voldemort despises the old man, he knew even the coot had his set of principles, mostly the principle that he could make a difference in this world. However small, it would be for the greater good. And Voldemort hated the greater good, he didn't believe in it. Many atrocities had been done in the name of the greater good. Yes, yes, how hypocritical of him to speak of atrocities when he had committed so many himself, but his had been done for a cause more justified than the broad notices that made up the wholeness of the greater good.

Dumbledore believed he could do no bad if it was in the belief of the greater good, for love and peace. He had stagnated the improvement of their world, and Voldemort would never forgive that. No matter how harsh the punishment, the cost of speaking out for the truth will always be less than the soul-damaging cost of silence. His soul had suffered already; he wouldn't make it suffer more than necessary for the sake of greedy, misguided old men. Again he was aware he was one as well.

Voldemort's darkness is different from Dumbledore's darkness in that he was able to acknowledge his own badness while Dumbledore is occupied with covering his mirror reflection with a white linen sheet. Voldemort's sins are different from his in that he's aware of them, whereas Dumbledore has been deceived by false beliefs he has created himself. Voldemort learned at a young age that dwelling in the dark sea of obscurity was what he needed to do, and that whatever creature might enter he would devour and rip the flesh from the bones and consume them. The darkness has been a home to him when he'd lacked the most basic of abodes; he knows in the dark, he is beautiful like no other, basking in the despair forced upon him. But Dumbledore is naive. His white rays battled to dispel the darkness, yet he was consumed by it. He sought to manipulate a world that existed long before humans, all while denying that he too had succumbed to it.

Voldemort, on the other hand, found solace in renunciation. He knew that doing so served a higher purpose beyond himself. He made no pretense of acting for the betterment of the world; he did it for his people and for the darkness being pushed to the depth of the ocean.

But the ones who made the greatest sacrifices were those who lost their lives in the war for the darkness. Though for the dead, the outcome of the war and the winner hardly mattered. They all make sacrifices, and tragic events occur frequently in their lives. Despite everything, Voldemort could always choose contentment. He saw no sense in feeling guilty for his part in anyone's death or suffering, nor for the pain he endured while being molded into the person he was now.

They decide for themselves what is right and wrong, good and evil. Voldemort believed, as he once told Harry Potter, that there was no good and evil, only power and those too weak to seek it. Some people abide by the law out of fear, while others do so out of a sense of duty. In his opinion, no light magic had the power to transform a "bad" person into a "good" one or save a "good" one from harm.

Dumbledore and Voldemort were polar opposites.

But what if evil wasn't real? What if man created it, leaving them powerless to overcome anything but their own limitations? The ongoing conflict between their desires, willpower, and decisions is what truly matters. The concept of good and evil is a construct created by the powerful as a means of control. No man has the power to decide what is good and evil, but Voldemort was no mere mortal. He didn't bend to the rules of men.

The soft sound of hissing brought him out of his spiraling thoughts. Lately, he had been able to focus more, but certain topics still clouded his mind.

"Master, what has you lost in thought?" Nagini inquired. If snakes could display concern, she certainly did.

"Nothing of importance, my dear," Voldemort breathed out. *"We are expecting a guest soon, Nagini."*

Nagini perked up. *"One to eat?"*

He huffed out a quiet laugh. Seeing as he was alone with only his dearest companion, he felt no need to hide. *"No, unfortunately not. You shall have your treat later, Nagini."*

A small, affectionate smile grazed his lips as he watched Nagini slither towards him. It dropped as soon as a quiet knock was heard at the door.

He had felt the presence approaching, but his magic was not up to par as it was before his fall. His connection to his magic was weakened. It was something he'd need to build up once more. The exercises were long-drawn and tedious, but they were extremely necessary if he planned on gaining the same amount of power as in the last war.

"Enter, Lucius," he said in an emotionless tone as he waved his hand and the door opened.

Lucius hurried in and dropped to his knees.

"My Lord, I bring news about Potter," Lucius spoke slowly, the nerves radiating off him and annoying Voldemort. Respect, loyalty, and obedience were what he wanted in his followers, not this insufferable weakling.

"Stand, Lucius, and proceed," Voldemort demanded.

Quickly standing, Lucius spoke in a clearer voice. "The child has been resorted to Slytherin, my lord, and has openly defied Dumbledore and his former friends."

Hands twitching and mind freezing, Voldemort remained silent for a moment.

"The children have been at the school for over a week, yes? Then why haven't you reported this earlier?" he spoke in a tone that promised pain.

Lucius unconsciously started shaking and twitching, most likely remembering the consequences of his past mistakes. He dropped to his knees, head bowed forward.

"Forgive me, Lord. The old man has been keeping a very close watch on me. Every time I leave my chambers, I can feel the eyes watching me..." Lucius trailed off.

"What else haven't you told me?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

"Before my first lesson with them, I went to look for Draco and saw the two of them together. Potter was speaking in Parseltongue to two snakes. I thought he was possessed, so I confronted him after class, seeing as my son could be in danger. I had my wand on him, but he didn't falter in the least. He went through my mind, and he told me he was himself. Then he requested an audience with you, my lord."

Before Lucius could say anything else, his lord forced his way into his mind. Voldemort did not tell him what he was going to do; he was entirely focused on seeing this memory. Lucius had probably expected this sooner or later and had left his Occlumency walls down, so his lord had free access, and it wouldn't hurt as badly.

The more Voldemort watched, the more entranced he became. This child was strong and capable, a force to be reckoned with, and nothing like the child he had encountered at the graveyard. Potter had always been headstrong and fearless, and now it was confidence, seeing as he had the skills to back up his behavior. After watching the memory in the classroom, Voldemort proceeded to watch all memories he could find where Potter was present.

He needed to meet this new version.

He was intrigued.

This new child felt dark, way too dark to be natural.

He would agree to Potter's request for an audience. How could he not when this child could be useful? And if he wasn't, well, it would be easier to kill him if he was near.

Thankfully, Lucius was free to leave later that evening with the only thing to show for his visit with his lord, a letter, instead of the usual rattling shakes and twitches. He had absolutely no idea what his lord had written in the letter and how he'd responded to Potter. The only instructions he'd been given were to observe Potter but otherwise remain out of his way. No direct contact with Potter was allowed unless he was about to betray them by telling others about them.

As he neared his chambers to retire for the night, he was surprised to see Draco by the door.

Why was he here? It was after curfew on a school night. As he neared, he saw the scrunched-up expression on his son's face. Draco looked concerned.

"Draco, what's wrong?" Lucius asked quietly but somehow still startling Draco.

"Nothing, father. I just wished to see you. Let's talk in your chambers." Draco rushed out.

They sat down on the sofa facing the fireplace together. Lucius looked over his son to make sure there were no physical injuries present. When he spotted none, he asked Draco once more what was wrong.

Draco huffed out a breath and spoke slowly as if not to upset his father.

"I'm not sure if I imagined it, but I felt an intrusion in my mind a week ago. No one was around, and I'm not sure what happened, but I can't stop thinking about it. So, I need you to look at my Occlumency shields and make sure something isn't wrong."

Lucius had grown more and more concerned as Draco spoke, and quickly did as he asked. After thoroughly checking his son's mind, he did not come across anything alarming. The only thing of note was the rapidly growing emotions Lucius could feel towards Potter.

That was not ideal. If they ended up at war with the Light, what would Potter do? Join the Dark or the Light? If he chose to be against them, Draco would not be able to harm him. Draco was already a sensitive and kind-hearted soul; he would not harm those he considered friends. Where would that leave Draco? Stuck in between duty and love... Merlin, Lucius hoped his son wouldn't fall in love with Potter.

It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are, but Draco was too young to have formed consistent values.

"Father, is everything alright?" Draco's voice brought him back from his drifting thoughts.

"Yes, Dragon, no issues. No foreign magics, no irregularities in your memories. I'm unsure what it was you felt," Lucius tried to reassure Draco.

"Alright, thank you, Father. I must have imagined it... so where were you this evening?" Draco tilted his head questionably.

Lucius was unsure if he was allowed to tell his son about the meeting with his lord. Not that he would tell him anyway, as it was dangerous for him to know such information. He wouldn't put his son in unnecessary danger.

"It's not of importance, Draco... There is something you can do for me, however. Please deliver this letter to Potter, and utmost discretion is imperative." Lucius reached into his robes pocket and retrieved a small, white, inauspicious letter.

Draco hesitantly reached for it.

"Of course, Father. I will get it to him."

As Draco left his father and headed down to the Slytherin dorms, he consciously stopped himself from ripping the letter open and reading it.

Harry was not in the dorms when he arrived, which had become the norm lately.

By the time morning came, Harry was nowhere to be found. Draco had scoured the castle and come up empty. It was a Saturday, so thankfully no classes were held. After searching for what felt like hours -but was actually an hour- Draco called it quits and decided to wait for Harry. The sneaky new Slytherin always turned up at least once a day to tease him.

Harry, meanwhile, was busy experimenting with his newfound powers. Most nights for the past few weeks, he'd spent trying to control his magic - well, Death's and his magic, to be precise. He'd practiced raising the dead, reading creatures' life force (he'd try humans later), and manipulating their development.

The only thing he was struggling with after weeks of solid practice, both during the summer and at Hogwarts, was manipulating their development. Now, one might ask, why the hell do you want to manipulate someone's bodily development? Well, the short answer is if he mastered it, he could change someone's physical age. Again, why would Harry need to do that?

Honestly, he just thought it would be fun to turn someone (cough, cough, Dumbledore or Snape) into a child.

But it would be useful for himself as well. He could age himself up permanently and not be stuck as a seventeen-year-old for the rest of his life as he'd been in the last. Right now, he was in the body of a fifteen-year-old, and Death had informed him that once he reached seventeen, it would stop aging, which would be annoying.

The process was slow, however. He'd managed to age a bird, but he'd no control over how much he aged it. He'd unfortunately aged it till it was nothing more than bones.

And making someone younger seemed even more daunting. Kali had said it required extreme control over how much magic you used to not do it too fast. So he needed to practice precision and patience with his magic.

Thankfully, he had a basic understanding of how to do that, and with the help of Kali, he'd come up with a good way to help him control even the smallest part of his magic.

He started by dulling all senses other than his magical sense, so his focus couldn't drift, and he'd not be distracted. He'd use wandless, wordless magic as he summoned a big rock. Never moving a muscle, only controlling his magic with his will. He'd then force his magic to break it apart piece by piece until it was nothing more than fine dust. He'd then levitate each individual small grain of sand into different patterns. Levitating it over his head, around his body, into different shapes, and finally having it hover in front of himself to heat it up to the point it melted. As it remained hot, he'd shape it into different creatures. Once he was happy with his glass creation, he'd open his eyes and look. The first few ones didn't turn out too great, but he'd really gotten the hang of it now. His latest creation was a beautiful Hungarian Horntail he'd planned on gifting to his dragon.

During his studies of death magic, he'd learned that while resurrection was frighteningly easy, it had consequences. First off, the person he'd resurrect would be tied to his person, forced to follow his will. Secondly, if he waited to resurrect someone after 48 hours of being dead, their body would be dead. They'd slowly feel themselves rot away in a broken body unable to leave this world, seeing as their soul was tied to his magic. Of course, he could release them by killing them, but it was dreadfully painful for him.

Well, whatever, not like he planned on using that particular skill.

As he returned to the common room, he was cornered by Draco as he took his first step into their dorms.

"Where have you been? I've been looking for you for ages!" Draco complained in an irritated voice.

"Ah, I was out hunting down the elusive giant squid in the lake." Harry replied, sarcasm dripping from his voice. He could feel his lips twitch as he tried to keep his expression natural.

"Not funny, Potter. Here, take this." Draco scowled at Harry, pressing a letter to his chest.

“Thank you, dear. I have something for you as well.” Harry handed Draco the miniature glass dragon he’d decided to animate to imitate a real dragon.

Draco carefully took the dragon into his hand as it flexed its wings, preparing to take off. Draco looked at it in amazement.

“Wow, where did you get this? It’s beautiful.” Draco whispered, his previous anger forgotten as he gazed in awe at the magnificent dragon sculpture.

Harry leaned in, his hand settling on Draco’s neck as he ran his thumb across Draco’s jawline. “I made it myself. A dragon for my dragon. Quite fitting, don’t you think?” Harry teased, his voice filled with fondness.

Draco blushed, a small smile gracing his lips. “Thank you,” he murmured softly, his eyes never leaving the beautiful sculpture.

Harry took Draco’s hand, bringing it to his lips and placing a gentle kiss on it. “You’re welcome, my Dragon,” he said with a grin.

Harry Potter,

Your request for an audience with me is intriguing, and so I will grant it.

Since it may be difficult for you to meet, I suggest you choose the time, and I will select the location.

Once you have made your decision, pass on the information to Lucius.

You are to come alone and not tell anyone of this meeting.

Lord Voldemort

Harry couldn't help but snicker to himself at the thought of Voldemort granting him the power to choose something. Was it bad that he was feeling a little excited? He had taken a gamble by reaching out to the Dark Lord, unsure of what kind of response he would receive. Yet here he was, intrigued by this new version of Voldemort, eager to learn what was different in this world and what the Dark Lord had planned. It was all out of curiosity, of course; Harry had no intention of saving the wizarding world from Voldemort again.

He longed to meet Voldemort as soon as possible, but knew it was not wise to meet in person. If he upset the Dark Lord, he would be met with the Cruciatus Curse - a tedious and painful experience, to say the least. Although there was nothing Voldemort could do to kill or seriously harm Harry, he didn't want their first meeting to be filled with curses and death threats. It was perhaps overly optimistic of Harry to expect otherwise.

Nevertheless, Harry had a plan to avoid a violent meeting. Later that evening, as Voldemort was drifting off to sleep, he felt a slight tug in his mind, which quickly turned into a strong pull that dragged him from his bed. He fell and fell, until his feet finally touched the ground once more. As panic began to set in, Voldemort forced himself to remain calm, assessing the situation logically. He reached for his wand, but it was nowhere to be found. He tried to access his magic, but it was blocked. Dread filled his being. What had happened? How did he get here?

This place was unsettling. It was different from anything Voldemort had ever experienced before. The room was hazy, distorted, almost like a dream. But he knew better. This was someone's dreamscape, and he was trapped in it.

He looked around, taking in the ordinary sitting room with its bland furnishings, empty bookshelf, and blank paintings. The window on the far wall offered no escape, as it was unnaturally dark outside. And without his magic, he felt utterly helpless.

But just as the fear began to turn to anger, another figure materialized across the room. Voldemort could not make out any distinct features, as if the person was shrouded in shadows.

"Who are you? Why have you brought me here?!" Voldemort demanded, his fury palpable.

Voldemort had always prided himself in being a person of cold logic, rational, never giving in to his emotions. Growing up in a unloved environment had forced him to adapt to his feeling having no importance to his circumstances. His control over his emotions had been near perfect during childhood and early teenage years but everything changed when he made his first horcrux.

He knew he was risking his control, his mind but what choice did he have. Survive or die. Those were his options and as all humans do he chose to live even at the cost of a half life.

The shadowy figure replied in cold indifference, "Me? What does it matter, my name is buried and gone."

But Voldemort wasn't about to let him get away with that. "Soon you will be too if you don't answer my questions," he snapped back.

Meanwhile, Harry was having a mental breakdown. He had seen this person in Lucius' mind, but seeing him through someone else's memories was different. The man looked human, like Tom Riddle. And Harry could feel his resolve crumbling, feel the possessiveness and desire curling in his chest.

He didn't understand these feelings. They were consuming and empty, making him want everything and nothing all at once. He wanted to devour Tom, to touch him, to hurt him. He wanted to consume him until there was nothing left.

Seconds passed as Harry searched Tom's face for a reason for his blinding feelings. But he couldn't look away. He was utterly consumed by this man, and he didn't know what to do about it.

He is perfection.

What is this feeling?

“Found you.” Harry whispered to himself as he looked upon the most powerful dark wizard in the world (well, except for him).

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, he cleared his throat sharply to focus.

“Why I have brought you here is simple: to talk. I asked for a meeting, and you granted one. Of course, this is probably not what you had in mind.” Harry couldn’t help but smirk.

“Harry Potter? Why can I not see you?” Voldemort seemed to be running through his options, deciding on the best course of action.

“Oh, my apologies.” Harry waved his hand, and the shadows receded.

Voldemort took his time studying Harry. The child certainly didn’t look like a child anymore. Seeing him through memories didn’t do Harry justice. He was startlingly beautiful, too perfect to be natural. His eyes were his most prominent feature, a chilling killing curse green that Voldemort couldn’t take his eyes off. He didn’t recall the boy having such striking eyes. He wanted to spoon them out of his head and keep them in a jar on his shelf to look at whenever he wanted.

The memories of the boy in the graveyard could not be compared to this Harry Potter. The changes were too severe to truly understand. How did this change come about? What had happened while he was missing during the summer? A few months were not enough to change a person so fully. Perhaps the child he’d seen in the graveyard had been the fake, but again, he wasn’t convinced. The child had displayed genuine fear, and as he looked into his mind, briefly, he felt no deceit. Only time would tell, and Voldemort had never been one for patience, but to solve this mystery, perhaps he could be.

“This is not what I agreed to, Potter,” Voldemort hissed at him.

Neither had moved a meter since they arrived, as if an unspoken rule was set between them to keep as much distance as possible.

Harry broke that rule when he took a step forward, heading towards the armchair.

“I’m aware, Voldemort, but I’m also aware that if we had this conversation in real life, it would end in death.” Harry said as he sat down.

“I wanted to keep this conversation...friendly. And worthwhile.” Harry spoke, leaning back, looking all too casual.

Voldemort couldn’t help but scoff. “Friendly? No. Productive? Perhaps. How about you tell me what has changed? The golden boy wouldn’t willingly drag the Dark Lord into his mind.”

Harry contemplated the question, not rising to Voldemort's bait. It was probably best to start at the beginning. So, in his best storytelling voice, Harry proceeded to tell a story.

“Long ago, this naive fool of a man set about devising a new era. The fool dreamt of bringing forth the light into the world. But instead, he created me.”

Voldemort frowned at Harry, irritation clear in his features. “Do not taunt me, Potter!”

“I am not, fine fine. What has changed for me is simple: I want the old man dead,” Harry spoke in a sharp voice with anger coating his words.

"Now, what has Dumbledore done to anger his precious savior?" Voldemort seemed to find that particularly funny, his emotions switching too fast for Harry to follow.

"His grievances against me are far too many, so I shall tell you just the main ones. Firstly, he did the same thing to me as he did to you and Snape, leaving me with abusive Muggles knowing they were abusive. Secondly, once I arrived in the wizarding world, he put compulsions on me and potioned me to make me easier to control. Thirdly, he has raised me like a pig for slaughter, seeing as I have to die in order for you to die." No emotion was present in Harry's voice; he had long since come to terms with what happened to him.

Voldemort, however, was stunned. The old coot had left him with abusive Muggles, potioned him, and planned his death. Dumbledore was even more despicable than Voldemort remembered. That the man had done that to his own people... he needed to die.

"Some men are not meant for life. It is better if they're struck down where they stand. Some men don't deserve to be alive. It might be unjust for me to make that decision, but I have made it, and the world will be a better place without Dumbledore in it," Harry voiced his thoughts exactly.

Perhaps they had more in common than Voldemort previously believed. He wanted to know if they had more things in common. Potter had wished to keep this conversation friendly, and who was he to deny such a request?

"I am curious about your thoughts on Muggles," Tom asked, leaning forward as if to better hear Harry's answer. He had finally decided to sit down.

If Harry was surprised by the sudden change in topic, he didn't show it. Harry took his time considering the question. Finally, with a nod of his head as if he had decided something for himself, he answered.

"I believe humanity, as a whole, is evil to the core. And I believe that if I choose to, I have the right to destroy them all."

"What happened to make the golden boy turn into such a bitter, cynical person? A person who hated humanity so much he would rather destroy it than see it thrive? Despite the wrongdoing done to you, I thought you'd be a kind-hearted person."

While very intrigued by this side of his prophesied enemy, Voldemort did his best to appear casual.

Harry looked into Voldemort's eyes, no emotion displayed on his face and eyes as cold as ice, he chose not to answer the last statement. He'd show Voldemort what kind of person he was.

"Who said I hate them? I pity them. But their existence has no bearing on my own. They do not matter. They are expendable. Inessential. If they become an annoyance, I will obliterate them."

"Such a hero," was spoken sarcastically by Voldemort.

Harry finally smiled. Not a nice happy one, but a small, bitter smile.

"Don't you think hero's become the best villains? Heroes die heroic deaths but the hero that survives long enough becomes the villain. And besides, the role of the villain is only decided by who tells the story and this is my story."

"So if this is your story as you say, you don't see yourself as the villain?" Voldemort asked, honestly too curious to stop himself from asking questions.

Harry laughed.

"Of course I'm the villain. I'm not the hero that saved the world. I am the villain who survived it. I'm not proud of all I did but I would do it again, does that not make me the villain? I think it does."

"Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth." Was said quietly as if Voldemort was uncertain if he wanted Harry to hear him. Harry heard.

“Quoting muggles now are we, how unexpected.”

“Well you are not the only one with hidden depth.”

Was Voldemort joking? How curious.

“Hidden depth? Nothing about me is hidden. I’m as open and truthful as anyone else.”
Harry’s lips twitched upwards slightly.

Voldemort would have rolled his eyes if it wasn’t so uncultured.

“What a double meaning. As truthful as anyone else. No one is truthful or as truthful as they pretend to be and truth is rarely pure and simple enough to be considered the whole truth.”
Voldemort was getting more comfortable, Harry noted, he’d relaxed back in his seat. Or at least that was what he wanted Harry to think, it was difficult to tell with Voldie.

Harry smirked. “When everyone agrees to the same lie it becomes the truth...However much I like discussing philosophy with you perhaps now is not the time. There are, after all, more important matters that we need to discuss.”

"Heroes becoming villains, the role of the villain being decided by who tells the story...I must admit, I find your perspective on this quite intriguing," Voldemort said, leaning forward in his seat.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I'm glad you find my worldview entertaining, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm the villain in this story."

The Dark Lord chuckled. "Ah, but who gets to decide who the villain is? Society? History? The victors?"

Harry's lips curved into a wry smile. "I suppose you have a point. But that still doesn't absolve me of my actions. I've done things that most people would consider evil."

"Ah, but that's where it gets interesting, doesn't it?" Voldemort leaned back in his chair, his crimson eyes glittering with amusement. "The definition of good and evil is subjective. What some may consider evil, others may see as necessary. It all depends on your point of view."

Harry's smile faded. "I don't know if I agree with that. Killing innocent people, torturing others...I can't justify those actions, no matter what the circumstances were."

"Ah, but there's the rub. Can any of us truly claim to be completely innocent? We all have blood on our hands, one way or another."

Harry's expression turned cold. "Don't try to justify what I've done. I know what I am."

Voldemort chuckled. "I'm not justifying anything, Potter. I'm simply pointing out that there's more to morality than black and white. But enough about that. What else do you wish to discuss?"

Chapter End Notes

So as you might have noticed Voldie is a lot more sane in this fic but he's not kind nor fair. He's a hypocrite and a delusions man with a god complex but he's is quite good at hiding behind the persona of someone with a milder personality...but so is Harry.

I could have written so much more about their thoughts about each other but I wanted to save some things for later.

Please give me feedback on this chapter and their meeting so if you felt something was off I can get it right next time!

Overcoming Obsessions and Obnoxious Opponents

Chapter Summary

A developing obsession, insulting accusations, a meeting between servant and Master and ruffled lions.

Chapter Notes

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

A few days had passed since their meeting and still Harry could not get it out of his mind. Well more like he couldn't get *him* out of his mind.

All extremes of feelings are allied with madness and he makes Harry feel the most extreme of all, always had. Before it had been rage now it was something else, something he didn't understand.

Where these feelings came from was unknown, the second he laid eyes on him this thirst became insatiable. He craved him, breathed him, saw only him and now he wished their souls touched again.

It was an obsession. The overwhelming need to be close, so close, he wished he could melt into him, absorb him and walk around with him encased in his skin forever. Harry felt like he was going insane.

And this obsession wasn't going away either, Harry could feel it, as they meet more often it will only grow. It's only getting stronger, more addictive as the days without him pass. The more time he spent without him the more he realized his feelings were not shallow, they ran deeply. The only question was on what level they ran, emotionally, sexually, romantically?

Voldemort was undeniably attractive in his current form but physical attraction could not account for what he was feeling. Sexually, of course he wanted him. It left him burning and churning inside to imagine such a situation but at the same time it left this disgusting taste in

his mouth to submit to such desires. To be controlled by such human weaknesses, he would not crumble under the tension of sexual desire. He wouldn't.

Was this the horcrux influence? He did still wear it around his neck everyday...but no. His magic would have burnt it to pieces had it tried to corrupt his mind. No one could get that close.

So if not for the horcrux then what? He did not understand. These feelings were new in the way they presented themselves. The obsession had always been there but it had taken the form of hatred and loathing now it took the shape of attachment. Should he suffocate these feelings or let them burn?

What was it Luna told him once upon a time: "Emotions that are suppressed never go away. They are buried alive and will eventually reappear in more repulsive ways."

What she said was of course true. Harry knew that pushing it down would only make it hurt more in the end. He had after all suppressed his feelings regarding the ministry and look what happened to his Draco and later what Harry had done to them in return.

No, suppressing them would do no good. But acting on them was inexcusable.

He needed to seek out Luna. Fortunately he didn't need to look far seeing as she was waiting outside the common room door.

"How'd you even know where the Slytherin common room is?" Harry questioned but was not really surprised to see her here.

Luna smiled mysteriously at Harry.

"The nargles told me. They also told me you needed to see me?" Luna tilted her head to the side and got a far away look in her eyes.

Harry suspected Kali was the one to tell her.

“Yes, let’s head to ROR and talk there.”

Harry asked the room for the Ravenclaw common room, he was curious to see if it looked the same as the last time he’d seen it. It did.

As they settled into the sofa beside each other, Luna was the one to break the silence.

“Kali told me you have a bit of a dilemma..?” Luna’s eyes were weirdly focused.

“I met with Voldemort but I guess you know that... I was surprised to see him so sane and... and human looking.” Harry chose his words carefully.

Luna just smiled at him knowingly.

“Yes he is quite the handsome man if you disregard the inside. Only surprised were you? You felt nothing else?”

Harry let out a deep breath. There was no hiding from Luna, especially not when Death was helping her.

“You’re too perceptive little moon. But yes his appearance was very...pleasing to look at. He brought out a side of me I am unfamiliar with.” Harry spoke solemnly.

“What did he make you feel, Harry?” Luna asked.

“Obsession, attachment... desire...I did not like it.” His brows unconsciously pulled together in annoyance at himself.

“No I suppose you wouldn’t...” Luna leaned back and looked towards the ceiling. “Harry you must understand the two of you are connected regardless of how much you try to separate yourself from him. What is between you is undeniable. Fate has brought you together once more but it’s your choice what happens next.”

“What if I-I don’t want anything to happen between us?” Harry questioned.

“It won’t, it’s your decision but I suggest you stay away from him if that’s what you want.” Luna looked back at him as she spoke.

“I don’t know what I want. I still want to meet with him. See what he has planned and what kind of person he is with more of a soul.” Harry confessed, concerned for his own sanity.

Luna tilted her head to the side. “More of a soul?”

“Oh yea, it’s just a theory but I think he’s absorbed some of his soul. I’m not sure how but the most likely theory is he used the diary somehow. It’s the only explanation I can think of that would account for his new-found sanity and human appearance.”

“Hmm I see. So you want to meet him to confirm this theory amongst other things?” Luna smiled, no judgment in her eyes.

Harry nodded.

“Then you meet with him again. You wait and see and decide after meeting with him if you want to see him again. Take it day by day. No need to rush.” Luna spoke kindly.

Harry knew Luna would know what to do, she was wise beyond her years. Harry leaned over and pulled her to his side, hugging her.

“Thank you my moon, you are truly amazing. Now let’s go see Hedwig, I feel really bad I forgot about visiting her. I’ve gotta bring a lot of treats to make it up to her.”

A month had gone by quickly at Hogwarts and a week had passed since Voldemort and Harry’s meeting and Harry planned to see him again soon.

He had given Voldemort time to process what he’d told him before. Voldemort hadn’t been too happy when Harry said he would never join the death eaters and that he would sooner kill them all than join them.

Hopefully Voldemort had forgotten that particular part of their meeting and wouldn’t be too angered still... well he’d have to make a tactical plan for their next meeting. But that has to wait until after class.

Classes were going as usual, way too easy and anything but stimulating. He’d easily impressed the teachers seeing as he had more experience than any of them. He’d perfectly performed all the spells on his first try (what they thought was his first try) and knew all the theory by heart.

The teacher had at first questioned if he was somehow cheating but after testing him plenty of times by asking him unprompted questions that he answered perfectly they seemed to decide he simply hadn’t tried in previous years or that he’d hidden his talents.

Now Harry was by no means stupid when he was younger, his mind simply hadn’t developed properly thanks to his relatives loving care. But even when he was properly developed and in the best shape of his life his intellect had only been slightly above average. Thanks to years of studying, experience and potions and spells he’d invented to sharpen his mind, he’d become what most would describe as a genius. Of course he never felt this way himself, he was just old and had had more time than most. Not that they knew that.

With his new-found genius status Granger had become a huge annoyance. So far she'd just thrown disrespectful remarks his way or told the professors he was cheating so he had tolerated it. But as the DADA class ended, where he had dominated, she was apparently not able to keep quiet anymore.

Harry was just on his way out with his new friends when she called out his name.

“HARRY JAMES POTTER STOP RIGHT THERE!” Everyone stopped at her shouting but Harry decided it was best to ignore her, he wasn't allowed to though seeing as she grabbed his arm harshly.

“Let go of my arm Granger or you will no longer be able to use that hand.” Harry warned her. Apparently the underlying threat wasn't unheard and she quickly let go.

She looked shocked at his tone but a moment later she had gathered herself and wore a determined expression.

“How are you cheating? You need to stop! It's unfair to the other students who are actually smart!” She spoke in a superior voice as if there was no one else that was as smart as her.

Harry quickly lost his temper and his grip on his magic. The air became so cold the students started to shiver and rub their hands and arms.

“Are you so stupid you can't even comprehend the fact that others are more intelligent than you? You are nothing special Granger. What you know you have memorized from books. Being able to read does not make you clever Granger. Quoting other people and having no idea how to form your own opinions and conclusions doesn't make you superior. You are nothing.” Harry spoke in a cold indifferent voice, looking her right in the eye.

Then he lifted his chin and looked down at her with a smug smirk on his lips.

“Besides you're not even top of any class, my friends and I hold that honour.”

Hermione looked close to tears as she opened her mouth to yell once more but before she got the chance she was interrupted.

“Do tell what kind of evidence you have that Mister Potter is cheating. You wouldn’t go around spewing out unfounded accusations now would you, Miss Granger?” Lucius stepped out from the corner, most likely having been listening in the whole time.

She seemed to unconsciously straighten her back in the presence of a professor. Harry would have scoffed if he didn’t think doing that now would be unwise.

“Of course not professor, I know he is cheating because no one gets that good that quickly. He must be cheating, it’s the only logical explanation. I don’t know how he does it, maybe a memory charm or an illusion spell making whatever source he uses to answer the questions invisible to us but I know he’s doing something!” Hermione ranted, was she so frustrated she didn’t even notice that she actually was only spewing out unfounded accusations?

Lucius seemed to agree with him. “Those are not facts, Miss Granger. They are assumptions. Mister Potter has upped his grades thanks to motivation and hard work. Plenty of professors have tested it themselves so if you don’t wish to accuse the staff of being incompetent fools who are being deceived by a 15 year old I suggest you keep those thoughts to yourself. And the next time I hear you bad mouthing Mister Potter it will be a week of detention. For now, 20 points from Gryffindor.”

Lucius tried to keep the sneer of his face but Harry could see his lips twitching and brows spasm.

Harry tried to contain his own smirk.

Granger was dumbfounded, for being as smart as she claimed she could be idiotically naive.

Her mouth pressed together as if to stop herself from arguing, at least she knew when she had lost. She quickly turned on her heels with a furious glare Harry's way and left.

Harry looked at Lucius who felt eyes on him and looked back before remembering what happened the last time he looked into the demon child's eyes.

“Thank you *professor*, how very noble of you to come to my rescue.” Harry teased in a low voice, emphasising the word professor making Lucius feel like Potter wanted to call him something else.

Lucius was slightly unnerved but was doing an admirable job at not showing his discomfort at Harry's tone.

The rest of the surrounding Slytherins could do nothing but observe the weird dynamic between the student and professor.

“Well yes- it's-it is my job to protect the students. I shall be on my way now, I have a class to teach.” Lucius chose to ignore the obvious stutter and quickly retreated but not before he heard Harry call out after him.

“Until later, Lucius.”

Harry had been at Hogwarts for a while now and it had been both great and utterly boring to be back. He had missed the magic and the feeling he got in the school but having to be around the people almost didn't make it worth it.

Almost.

But Hogwarts had more to offer and Harry had been taking advantage of that for the past month. The Room of requirement and the chamber of Salazar Slytherin were his main focuses.

Now that he had gained unlimited access to the Slytherin common room he had looked relentlessly for another way leading to the chamber. Salazar must have created a different path than one going through a girls bathroom. So far Harry had found nothing on the upper levels of the common room but he had a growing suspicion Salazar had placed the other entrance in their communal bathroom.

As midnight approached Harry laid in bed and was reading his latest book from the chamber. One on the difference between using the latin variations of spell incantations versus parseltongue in relation with the latin incarnation of spells. It stated that by combining the two languages the opponent would be helpless to the spells, not being able to counter nor understand. Harry had learnt of this before but still it was an interesting read. It was fascinating to see it written from the perspective of an actual parselmouth, the ones he had read before had only been theoretical hypotheses done by non parselmouths.

“Master, we found something.” Harry looked down and saw Nyx climbing up the end of the bed.

“What have you found my dear?” Harry asked.

Settling around Harry’s shoulder Nyx spoke. *“We found an empty space behind one of the walls in the hot room. Selene is exploring it. Come.”* Nyx demanded and Harry obliged.

Entering the “hot room” or what most referred to as the showers, Harry followed Nyx.

“Here master.” She had stopped before an normal looking wall just to the left of the shower stalls.

“Open.” Harry hissed and the wall slid open with a grinding sound. Harry cringed, hopefully no one heard that.

Casting a couple of detection charms on the opening to make sure nothing would hinder him. There was nothing, all parselmouths were so stupidly sure that no one but their descendants would be able to enter.

Following the dark corridor down and down and down, Harry came upon stairs and at the bottom of them, a door.

“Open.” But it didn’t.

Hmm, what could it be? Harry reached out with his magic and felt blood wards. Oh that’s kinda annoying. Maybe blood wasn’t needed, magic might be enough. Harry grabbed the pendant hanging around his neck. Thankfully Death had put some death markings combined with runes on it so it couldn’t leach off of him anymore but that didn’t stop Harry from leaching off of its magic.

Pulling some of Tom's magic into his palm, Harry pushed it at the door. Thankfully Tom's connection to his family magic was strong and could bypass the blood ward.

What lay inside was magnificent. Books as far as Harry could see and old parchments spread out on the nearby desk and armchair. Yes, this would be a great night.

The next morning came all too quickly and Harry grumpily left the library/office. Throwing some refreshing charms on himself and transfiguring his robes to new ones. Harry was not looking forward to the day of classes.

Dropping into the seat next to Draco, Harry grabbed some hot tea.

“Where have you been Potter?” Pansy inquired, too curious to keep quiet.

“Out fighting your father.” Harry drawled, not really caring if she heard or not.

“What?!” Pansy shrieked.

Harry couldn't help the tiny smirk. "Don't get your knickers in a twist, Pansy."

Pansy narrowed her eyes and spoke with fake anger. "You're a daft cunt Potter."

The chuckle that left Harry's lips was unintentional but it made her smile as well.

"What got you in such a mood this morning?" Blaise teased.

"Didn't get much sleep last night." Harry leaned back with a smug smile in place, trying to imply more fun than what actually happened.

Blaise's smile widened at the implication. "Oh, did someone get lucky last night?"

"I'm not one to kiss and tell." Harry spoke in a low honeyed voice.

Blaise looked over at Draco but saw no other emotion in his eyes other than mild discomfort which was surprising. He'd expected Draco to be jealous and upset, maybe he'd misjudged their relationship.

Harry followed Blaise's gaze and threw an arm over Draco's shoulder leaning into his side. His lips were a breath away from Draco's ear as he spoke.

"Don't worry Dragon, you're still my favourite." Harry spoke in a husky voice meant to tease Draco.

"Are you trying to make me blush Harry?" Draco asked, completely unfazed with Harry's attempt. Harry needed to step up his game apparently.

"You do blush so prettily darling." Harry smirked at him, keeping intense eye contact.

“If you two are done flirting, we have a proposition for you Harry.” Theo spoke up.

Harry turned back to the whole group and continued to eat his breakfast, it was important to eat enough if he wanted to keep this physic.

“Well, call me intrigued. What do you propose Theo?”

“It’s no secret you’re the best seeker in the school and whilst we have a seeker, Draco has so generously offered to step down from the position of seeker and become a chaser if you decide to join the team.” Theo spoke loud enough for the whole table to hear him, purposefully, Harry was sure.

“Whilst it is a most generous offer I’m afraid I’ll have to decline. It’s going to be a very busy year with the OLWs, not even accounting for my own projects and I would just not be able to dedicate the time to the sport that it deserves.” Harry honestly didn’t have much interest in participating in quidditch. If he had to play against school children, it would be much too easy.

The students at the table let out disappointed sighs at Harry’s announcement.

“However I’d been more than happy to train with you, my dragon, from time to time and I’ll even agree to be the backup seeker if I’m excused from participating in practices.”

Flint, who was the captain, agreed.

The human race's avarice strikes Harry as weird. As long as they believe they can get what they want from you, people will like you. Or for however long they believe you to be the person they want you to be. But Harry has learnt to enjoy interacting with people because of all the unpredictable changes they bring, the thoughts they have, the warmth that turns into cold, and the cold that turns into warmth. People are the worst of beings yet they desire each other.

Lucius was dreading this meeting. He'd gone against orders and he knew there would be a price to pay. He wasn't even sure why he'd helped Potter. The boy could clearly handle himself.

But getting on Potter's good side could only be positive.

He hoped his Lord saw it this way.

"Enter Lucius." Lucius hadn't even had time to knock yet, it seems the dark lord was in a hurry. Was that good or bad for Lucius?

Dropping to his knees the second the door closed he saw the Dark Lord was standing by the window, overlooking the garden.

Lucius dared a glance at his face, hoping to catch a glimpse of what painful future awaited him but instead of anger he saw his lord frowning and looking deep in thought.

His lord had never displayed his feelings so casually. It made Lucius even more apprehensive.

"Speak Lucius." Was said in a short clipped tone.

"My Lord, I spoke to the Potter boy today. It was not planned, my Lord and I beg for your mercy." Lucius pleaded, he knew he looked pathetic right now.

Finally Voldemort looked towards his follower and walked hastily towards him.

“Show me.” That was all the warning Lucius got before Voldemort forced his way into his mind. At least this time his Lord had warned him.

After resurfacing Voldemort looked conflicted.

Potter seemed to have positive feelings towards Lucius which, while displayed earlier, Voldemort had taken into account as false. Now they seemed genuine, at least in the way that Lucius amused Potter. It was clear as day that Potter was just playing with Lucius but still it could be useful for his followers to assert himself into Potter's life.

It would certainly give him more information on the brat. And after their last meeting Voldemort needed to be more prepared.

He had been completely blindsided by the prompt method of summoning him and he was still not able to understand how the boy had done it.

It needed more consideration. The boy shouldn't be powerful enough to do any kind of mind magic. Perhaps it had been dark magic but Voldemort doubted Potter had enough control to use it.

He was brought back from his thoughts as the door slowly opened and Nagini came slithering in. Lucius stiffened immediately upon noticing her entrance.

“Master, why are you in a bad mood?” Nagini hissed.

“We shall talk about it later.” Voldemort hissed back with finality.

“Lucius, you will endear yourself to the Potter boy and gain his trust. Any information you receive you will bring to me, understood?”

“Yes, my Lord.” Lucius said quietly, quickly retreating as Voldemort dismissed him.

“Now then master, what did the trembling blonde say?” Nagini picked up the conversation as Lucius left.

“Nothing of importance my dear, I saw a memory of Potter and it made me think.” Voldemort leaned back in the chair by the desk and let out a breath.

“Has the boy shaken you so?” He imagined she was trying to show concern.

“My stubbornness prevents me from ever allowing myself to be shaken by another person's will. Every time someone tries to intimidate me, my determination always increases.”

Voldemort didn't mind sharing his feelings with Nagini, it was not like she could or would tell anyone.

“Still it means the boy affects you enough to destabilise your mood, in a positive or negative way would you say?” Nagini had once upon a time been a human and it showed in the way she was able to express herself and understand human emotions. She was, however, a slave to the instinctive nature of a snake.

“Positive or negative? Neither I would say. You are right in that he upsets the balance of my emotions. After my return they have been unstable on their own and he affects me. Still I wish to see him again, he has become a rather interesting character and as you know I rarely feel interest for another human.” Voldemort spoke in a modulated tone.

“Then you shall see him again.” It wasn't a question that Nagini voiced, it was a fact.

“Yes.”

Harry had ditched the gang as they all left the great hall after dinner. He wanted some time alone to gather his thoughts for tonight's meeting.

As he came up the stairs planning to go to the ROR he came face to face with four sixth year Gryffindors he recognised from the quidditch team. They did not look happy.

“So I heard you joined up with the snake team Potter, isn’t it enough you betrayed the whole house now you have to join their quidditch team as well!?” One of the idiot boys practically yelled.

Gods, why did all teenagers have to be such drama queens.

Harry leans in, eyebrows scrunched and eyes concerned. “Do you need a time out?”

Harry thought he was hilarious but the idiots didn’t seem to agree. Their faces had gone even more tense, their jaws clenched and their eyes promised pain.

“You think you are funny Potter!?” One of the boys roared, what was his name-John-Johnny-Jones! Right, a muggleborn.

“You’re pathetic, you’ll come crawling back to us, begging to be a Gryffindor again.” The short one Harry didn’t know the name of hissed at him, looking at him with a rage filled glare.

“Well, that was hurtful. I was going to give you a nasty look, but I see that you already have one.” Harry continued to joke around, not taking them seriously.

Harry was certain they were gonna throw curses at him but he wouldn’t attack first. They were still children and Harry didn’t tend to enjoy hurting children but he wouldn’t let anyone walk all over him.

“Shut up freak! You’ll quit the team or there will be consequences.” Jones could barely speak from how tightly he was clenching his jaw. His hand twitched as if he wanted to curse him.

Harry lost some of his amusement at *that* word. No one had been allowed to call him that in years and get away with it.

“Why so concerned about me potentially having joined my house team? So afraid of losing? Where’s your courage, Lions?” Harry had a malicious smile on his lips and wide eyes that made him look slightly crazed.

Harry felt the shift in their magic, it was rising to the surface, reacting to his threatening magic in the air.

He took a step forward and they backed up a step on instinct. Harry couldn’t help but smile at their fear, it was such a wonderful feeling to be the most powerful in the room, well universe.

The one who was yet to speak did so now. “Back off Potter or we’ll be forced to teach you a lesson!”

His voice was trembling slightly but Harry could see he didn’t know why. Like most teenagers, these boys had no control over their magic and could not understand what it was they were sensing. Their body’s reacting instinctively without their control. They did not know how to sense another’s magic, they could not see the threat that was in front of them.

“Teach me a lesson? I’m sure that will be fun for you.” The low cold tone he used made the hairs on the back of their necks stand and Harry could see them tense.

Before one of them could react Harry, without them noticing, put up a disillusionment charm around the area and a ward meant to make people forget why they were going that way and turn back. He didn’t want to be interrupted.

The boys glanced at each other before turning back to Harry with a determined expression.

The first spell was expected, what was not expected was how incredibly weak it was. Were they distracted by his magic or were they just this weak?

Harry didn't need to move a muscle to put up a light shield that easily repelled the spell.

They seemed to become more encouraged by their failure however and kept throwing weak spells at him simultaneously.

It was so frustratingly boring Harry didn't even bother throwing back any spells at them. He just kept his shield up and walked slowly towards them.

More spells were thrown as he neared. They were trying to step up their game but their magic was already draining and Harry knew they couldn't keep going for much longer. They backed up as Harry neared, shouting at him to fight back, that he was a coward, a traitor, a backstabber, pretty much all they could think of. Perhaps hoping to distract him.

Not that it would work.

He'd heard much worse.

However much Harry liked a good chase and however fun it was to play with your food, they were just too pathetic to really bother with.

Raising his hand and closing his fist, their knees gave out and they collapsed to the ground. Two of them were still throwing curses at him whilst the other two trembled. Harry waved his hand and the wands came flying out of their hands into his.

Still on their knees and unable to get up, Harry neared once more.

"So how do you think that went? Did you teach me a lesson, lions?" Tilting his head to the side as if confused but his face was blank.

No one spoke, instead the two “brave” ones glared.

Enough fun.

Harry put them all under the tickling charm, what most people didn't take into consideration is that all spells could be deadly if you want them to be. Take the tickling charm for instance, whilst appearing innocent, one only needed to add more strength and hold it for longer and the victim would slowly suffocate and the light tickling would feel like needles stabbing into you all over your body.

Harry quite liked this charm.

Having them under the spell until they were begging for him to stop, seeing the tears streaming down their cheeks and their lips becoming blue was beautiful.

As he stopped the spell they all took a staggering breath and curled into themselves, not being able to speak or breath properly.

Harry gave them a minute to collect themselves.

They glanced up at Harry with fearful wet eyes and Harry's smile was sadistic. His eyes were glowing in an eerily similar way to the killing curse.

Them at his feet, powerless, helpless, it made such a lovely picture.

But all fun must come to an end.

Before leaving Harry took precautions against them spilling his secrets to anyone else. They wouldn't be able to speak of what he did or said to them but they could warn others that

Harry was dangerous and should be avoided.

Prefect.

Now hopefully word would spread not to mess with him.

But if it didn't, Harry wouldn't really mind, he could have some more fun.

Chapter End Notes

I've been really busy this week because I've had to work a lot of overtime so I only have one chapter for you guys. And I didn't have time edit this as much as I usually do so if there are mistakes please tell me! Thank you all for you support and comments, they keep me going!

Love you all!

Tantalising Truths

Chapter Summary

Plans are forged, meetings are conducted where reverting truths are revealed and a new article startles the masses.

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for reading and commenting! And thank you to those that point out my mistakes and help me improve this story! Love you all ♥♥♥

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

People were avoiding him so his plan had worked. Word had spread that messing with Harry would not be a good idea. And he couldn't be happier about it.

By now the whole school had heard some version of the story and whilst Gryffindor and Hufflepuff seemed to look at him with fear and suspicion, Ravenclaw and Slytherin looked at him with confusion and awe. He didn't mind the looks seeing as no one was brave enough to confront him about it.

He didn't even mind the hate he saw in the eyes of his former friends. He hated them as well, it was only fair the hatred was mutual.

So far the old man hadn't summoned him or tried to force an encounter, that wouldn't last though. The coot would hear about it sooner rather than later and if he didn't infer personally he would send his lackeys on Harry.

Harry knew the old man had his own set of morals and rules, principles he was a stickler for. Everything he did, he did for his version of the greater good. A more forgiving person would perhaps pity the fool who's so stuck in his ways he couldn't even understand that crimes committed in the name of the greater good were still crimes. Harry was no longer a forgiving

and understanding person. He had given everything for others and he would no longer suffer for the sake of them.

Is it selfish or instinctual for someone to care about their own well-being? Harry wasn't the kind of person to sacrifice himself for the greater good, well not anymore, and most people wouldn't either. Only those with self-destructive tendencies would willingly die for a cause such as the supposed greater good. It's a personal decision influenced by upbringing, beliefs, and values and Harry's didn't fit into the box that Dumbledore had spent Harry's whole life trying to force him into.

Harry would judge Dumbledore. He would sentence him and then finally execute him. Death was certainly not a mercy when Harry was involved but still it was too quick, too easy for Harry to be satisfied. No, before moving on to the next existence, the old coot would lose everything he valued in this one.

And what he valued most was his reputation. One's reputation is incredibly valuable and can have a significant impact on their success and influence, Dumbledore had certainly built it up carefully. Everything he'd done in public had been to gain his oh so great reputation and he'd guarded it with his life so far. In Harry's last life Dumbledore had willingly thrown it out for the sake of the greater good but perhaps he'd assumed he'd gain it back ten fold once the truth of Voldemort's return was revealed. To win the war the importance of maintaining a positive reputation by carefully managing one's actions, behaviors, and relationships with others is imperative. A good reputation can help to build alliances, gain trust and respect, and increase one's power and influence. Conversely, a bad reputation can damage one's credibility, limit opportunities, and make it difficult to achieve success. That's where Harry would hit first. Start with small rumours first and watch the cracks form, then throw the last rock and watch it all shatter.

Harry could feel his thoughts spiralling into the dark. It had been happening too often since his arrival in this world.

He needed to shift his focus to something else before his magic started reacting to his dark thoughts.

The first thing that came to mind was Voldemort. He should be a sore spot for Harry as well but somehow wasn't. Despite him having tried to kill Harry plenty of times and actually succeeding once, Harry held no unforgiving feelings towards the Dark Lord. Unlike

Dumbledore, Voldemort hadn't planned out his whole childhood, wrapped his personality to the point Harry didn't even know who he was and he'd never tried to control Harry. Voldemort's sins had only been those of threat and murder attempts, something Harry could understand himself. He certainly committed his own sins after the death of Voldemort. And in the end had it not been Harry who killed Voldemort? That made them even in Harry's books.

The meeting he had planned with Voldemort had been postponed after his run in with the Gryffindors. A few days had passed since then, perhaps it was time to plan a new meeting.

He had enough magic to do it once more and he felt prepared enough to face him. This new version of Voldemort was unpredictable, however Harry was pretty good at improvising if he could say so himself.

Alright then, he'd meet with Voldemort tonight.

The day passed slowly, nothing seeming to grab his interest like the coming meeting. His fellow Slytherins had noticed his distracted mind but decided it was best ignored. Harry appreciated that, he didn't need friends who forced his hand and pressured him to speak when he didn't wish to.

Wow, his standards for friendship were screwed. Granger and weasel had messed him up more than he had thought.

Finally night came and Harry quickly sped through his night routine and headed to bed.

Grabbing the rune covered pendant around his neck Harry drifted into a calm meditation, forcing the soul piece along for the ride. Using it to guide him to its main part and once located, to grab ahold of it and pull.

Harry was settled into the same armchair as before when Voldemort arrived.

“Fancy meeting you here oh mighty Dark Lord.” Harry was clearly amused and had no plan to hide it.

“Potter, why have you dragged me here once more?” With his teeth grinding together Voldemort proceeded to settle into the opposite armchair.

“I simply wished to speak. We have matters to discuss don’t we?” Harry kept his tone light and airy.

“You made it abundantly clear you have no intention of joining my death eaters. I believe there is no need to speak further.” He was apparently still angry about their last meeting and at being summoned so abruptly, Harry could tell by his clenched fists and frowned brows.

“Come on now Voldemort you are just as intrigued about me as I am about you. Yes I have no desire to be placed below you in any ranking and forced to obey your command but does that mean we cannot speak? Even when it might give you valuable information?” Harry tilted his head, regarding Voldemort.

“Such as?” Having to ask Harry questions seemed to pain Voldemort.

“Well to begin with, aren’t you curious as to how I have summoned you here and how I knew you were still alive and well? Let’s get to know each other and perhaps you shall be surprised about what you learn.” Harry leaned forward towards Voldemort.

Harry wanted to touch his face and squeeze his cheeks. Such annoying thoughts at a time like this.

“Our last meeting was productive, don’t you agree? How about a game, a question for a question?” Harry smirked, trying to entice Voldie was fun.

Taking his time deliberating, Voldemort however much he didn’t want to indulge the boy, wanted answers.

“Fine, let's play your game. You will tell the truth or pain will befall you.” Voldemort had calmed in his decision to play the game and proceeded to relax into the armchair.

Harry snapped his fingers and a tea tray popped into existence on the table between them.

“So dramatic Voldemort, I guess that's a Dark Lord thing though. I will speak the truth but you will grant me the same courtesy in return.” Harry's statement left no room for objection.

Harry snapped his fingers once more and a sphere that looked similar to a crystal ball hovered above each of their heads.

“This is a creation of mine. The spheres will change colour to red if you lie and stay white if we speak the truth. It will also turn green if we leave something out that we believe is imperative to the truth. Of course you can refuse to answer a question but what is the point of this game if we do not answer.” Harry gestured to the balls above them and watched as Voldemort narrowed his eyes at his explanation.

“You invented something Potter? Colour me surprised and here all I had heard about you was that you were average in every way...well disregarding this year.” Perhaps Voldemort was trying to be mocking to provoke a reaction by insulting Harry's intellect. Harry didn't really care. It was expected.

“To hide insecurities you turn them into angered insults. My my Voldemort, here I thought you'd outgrown such tendencies.” Harry said with a teasing smile.

Voldemort did not find it funny, if he had his magic Harry was certain a little red curse would have been thrown his way. The surprise was that Voldemort hadn't resorted to physical attacks yet.

“Let's start this game. Last time we spoke you said Dumbledore had raised you like a pig for slaughter and that in order for me to die you had to die, what did you mean by that?” Voldemort was trying hard to conceal the fury in his tone caused by Harry's previous statement. Harry was once more surprised by his restraint.

Harry reached forward and grabbed a cup of tea, pouring in some milk while he was at it, contemplating what to tell Voldemort.

“I meant it exactly as it sounded. For you to die I had to die. Dumbledore has always known about this fact, since the day you killed my parents and turned your wand at me for the first time.” Harry spoke as Voldemort regarded the sphere, it didn’t change. If Voldemort had posed a more specific question it would have turned green. “Do you know why I survived and if so how?” Harry posed his question, well it was more like two questions in one but whatever.

Voldemort also picked up on that fact but chose to disregard it for now. “No, I do not know why or how you survived. I had theories but all are disproven now.” Clenching his fist was the only sign that Voldemort was upset by his lack of knowledge. “Do you know why and how you survived?”

“Yes I know how and why.” Harry could have stopped there; he technically wasn’t breaking the rules but he wanted Voldemort to understand.

“Now before I tell you, you have to promise to not interrupt before I’m finished with the story.” Harry looked Voldemort in the eyes but when the other remained quiet and unmoving Harry raised an eyebrow.

“Fine.” Voldemort spoke in a short clipped tone.

“There are plenty of factors that went into what happened that night. Firstly, you chose Samhain as the night to attack, a mistake on your part. The veil between the living and dead is at its thinnest and the magic of this world and the other blend together. It helped in reaching the requirements that needed to be met for what happened to happen. Secondly, you didn’t hear the whole prophecy. Huge flounder on your part once more. If you had known the whole thing you would have chosen to act differently. Thirdly, you underestimated a mother’s love for her child and the ingenuity of a muggleborn.”

Harry took a sip of his tea and gestured with his hand for Voldemort to help himself to whatever was on the tray. Voldemort simply regarded him with concealed contempt and

anger, remaining as unmoving as a statue.

“There is more at play here than just those three facts but it is of no importance to you. So, as you know, the soul, mind and magic of oneself is connected. And if one of them becomes unstable the others will follow. You had torn your soul to pieces and the mind had followed, the magic would have been next had you lived. The horcruxes were another mistake, what they grant is not immortality, only prolonging. Do you honestly believe Death would have left you alone when you had messed with them, I can tell you that they wouldn’t have... now back to the actual point. You had messed up your soul and it was unstable, Death had their sights on you, you didn’t know that if you tried to kill me you would set the prophecy in motion and my mother had used a talent of hers she had sworn never to use again, blood magic.”

Voldemort's eyes had widened as Harry confessed to his mother's darker talents, he wanted to deny it, to yell at Harry that none of that was the truth. That he didn’t make mistakes, that Death wasn’t after him. That muggleborns couldn’t perform such dark magic but the sphere hadn’t changed colour. Of course he wasn’t fool enough to trust that Potter couldn’t manipulate his own creation...however what Potter had said made sense. If anything was to be said about the Dark Lord it was that he valued logic over all other forms.

“My mother performed a ritual she and Snape had worked on but never completed or tested. It made it so my blood would protect me from those of Slytherin blood. Now, how she got your blood I have no idea. Of course blood magic, despite how powerful it is, isn't all powerful. It should not be able to stop a killing curse. Yet it did. As the killing curse was cast at me it rebounded at you. This you have Death to thank for. They saw an opportunity and took it. As the curse hit you, you were torn out of your body and in the process your soul, which was already unstable, became even more so. I’m guessing you had planned to use my death as a sacrifice for your next horcrux... part of your soul split from you once more and decided to cling on to the only magical thing in the room, me.” Harry was kinda tired from having spoken so much, it was necessary however.

Voldemort was stunned. Harry Potter had a piece of his soul in him. It couldn’t be. It was impossible. A living human being couldn’t be a horcrux... “*for you to die I had to die*” was what the child said earlier. “*I had to die.*” Had to-had to. Not have to. Had to.

“You had to die. That was what you said not *I have to die for you to die. I had to*, was what you said.” Voldemort mumbled quietly, still Harry heard him.

Harry smiled a little amused smile at Voldemort's shocked state.

“I believe it’s my turn to ask a question now, so have you ever been in love before?” Harry asked leaning forward as if this was the most important piece of information to know at the moment, not the world bending information he had spoken of less than five minutes earlier.

In his bewildered state Voldemort didn’t even hesitate before answering. “No I haven’t.” He said but he wasn’t present at the moment.

Harry hummed and thought it over. He had been curious if Dumbledore had been wrong on that front of Tom Riddle's history but apparently not. Still this didn’t mean Voldemort was incapable of love or had ever been.

“You said *I had to die*. In past tense meaning it no longer applies, how is that possible? Do you not need to die for me to die or have you already died and come back?” Voldemort seemed to be coming back to reality, his eyes focused on Harry once more.

“It means I don’t have to die for you to die. The horcrux is no longer in me, I removed it.” Harry spoke in a matter of fact tone.

“Removed it or destroyed it?” Voldemort was trying to hide the rising fear that he had lost another horcrux.

Harry leaned back and closed his eyes, very tired of this conversation. “I removed it, it is safe. No one will be able to harm it unless I allow it. And I won’t.” The game was forgotten and the spheres of no importance anymore.

Voldemort hadn’t moved a centimeter during this whole conversation, trying to contain himself and not lash out at Harry most likely. But now he rose to his feet and neared Harry. Harry didn’t move, just watched him approaching.

Voldemort stopped a few steps away from him. A frown and tight pressed lips marking his face.

“Why? Why have you not destroyed it, it appears you know how and still you’ve kept it safe. If this is your way of having a hold on me it will not work. I do not bend to the wills of others.” Voldemort's confusion made way for aggression, as most of his feelings did.

Harry slowly stood up and walked towards Voldemort. If he just moved his hand upwards slightly he would touch him.

Up close the man was even more breathtakingly beautiful. Even with the frown and tense expression he was the most gorgeous person Harry had ever seen. It was almost unfair that someone who looked like an angel or a Greek god could be so vile on the inside. Not that Harry minded too much, he wasn't too beautiful on the inside either. He could feel his hands twitch, he wanted to touch such a creature.

Harry wants to make him smile. What would he look like, he wonders. Beautiful probably considering the rest of the prat. A laugh from those lips could sustain Harry forever.

As his mind left the conversation behind in the face of such beauty, so did his control. The emotionless expression he usually wore had given way to desire and possessiveness and it was clear to see.

His eyes hadn't left Voldemort's face since he stepped forward which was why he easily noticed the slight widening of Voldemort's eyes. Surprise flashed on his face for a brief moment but was quickly replaced by curiosity.

His iron grip crumbled with the open curiosity on Voldemort's face. He looked adorable, should one call a grown dark lord that? He reached out with his hand slowly, giving Voldemort time to stop him. His hand was not stopped and gently cupped the side of Voldemort's face, stroking along his cheekbone with his thumb.

This was a bad move. Harry was aware of it, but his self-control had long since been lost. There was just something about Voldemort that caused Harry to abandon reason in favor of

impulse. This would be used against him, he knew it would be, but it would be fun to watch Voldemort flounder.

“How could I not want to keep something so beautiful safe.” Harry spoke gently, quietly. Trying not to startle him out of his paralyzed state.

Harry looked at him for a moment longer before he dropped his hand and stepped backwards.

“It is time to wake now.” And they did.

RETIRED AUROR ALASTOR “MAD EYE” MOODY POISONED IN HIS OWN HOME: DEAD AT 63

By Rita Skeeter

My dear readers it is with utmost sorrow that I have to inform you of the death of renowned auror Alastor Moody. Moody was credited with over 150 arrests and was imperative to the end of the Dark Lord's reign. He single-handedly captured a majority of wanted death eaters after the fall of you-know-who and will be sorely missed. (More on Moody's past on page 14.) Aurors arrived at Mad Eye's residence at approximately two o'clock in the morning on the 12th of October, after the former auror's warning ward had been activated. Moody had, in preparation for an attack, keyed his house wards to a friend in the auror force so that should the unimaginable happen they would be quick to respond. After many years in the force Moody had gained plenty of enemies who would like to enact revenge and in the end it appears someone succeeded. While the cause of death has officially been listed as poisoning this reporter has heard some rumours that there is plenty more to the murder. It is speculated that the auror was tortured extensively before the poison was administered, now the question remains did the culprit want information or was this an act of revenge? This dedicated report will not rest until the truth is found....

Harry had arrived at the great hall just in time for the Daily Prophet to arrive and was very glad he hadn't missed it.

The reactions to the news of the death were amusing. Most of the students were still unaware that the man who had been teaching them last year had in fact not been Alastor Moody but

Barty Crouch Jr. Those that didn't know the truth seemed uncaring of the death, brushing it aside as a revenge killing.

The ones that knew Moody, mainly the professors and his old friends, seemed devastated. Harry wasn't too sure why, it wasn't like Moody had been a likable man or even vitally important. Harry looked up at the professors table and observed the different reactions.

Snape was stoic, showing no sign that he even knew Moody. Lucius' eyes were bright with joy which he was trying and failing to conceal so he simply bent his head down and ate. Minerva looked shocked more than anything, time had not been kind to her and this seemed to age her up further.

The funniest reaction however was Dumbledore. Whilst most would look at him and see sadness and grief Harry could see the hidden confusion and anger in his eyes and body language. His shoulders were too stiff to be from grief, his limbs locked and unmoving and his lips tilted down too much to be genuine. He looked like he wanted to curse and cause a scene, perhaps blow off some steam by destroying the great hall but he wouldn't, he couldn't. He hadn't performed any magic since Harry got back to Hogwarts. Harry suspected it was due to his lack of the elder wand which was in Harry's possession since the summer. Dumbledore most likely used his old wand now but refused to show the masses he'd lost his precious elder wand. It would be rather embarrassing to admit it was stolen and Dumbledore had a reputation to maintain.

Back to his previous thoughts, Harry had made sure he wouldn't have heard of the news before the masses. The warning ward had been triggered after Moody's last breath and Harry had made certain that the one on call had been Amelia Bones herself. She had no obligations to the old man and would not ensure him knowing before handling everything according to protocol. She would have called in those she trusted most to help with this case and kept the others in the dark. This was a need to know kind of case and she would have liked to keep it under wraps in the beginning stages of the investigation. Too bad Harry had ruined those plans.

Before he had left the house -it was perhaps too generous to call *that* construction a house- he had taken the liberty to photograph the scene and send it to an interested party. Namely Rita Skeeter, who couldn't resist publishing an intriguing story even at the risk of her job. The photos were not present in the article and Harry suspected she saved those for a rainy day so to say.

Harry turned his eyes upon his own table and friends. Their masks were in place but elation was buzzing in the air, his friends were exchanging glances thinking they were being discreet.

Harry waved his hand and put up a muffle charm along with a charm to make it appear as if they were speaking about normal topics if anyone decided to listen in.

“So what are the glances about?” Harry asked the group, they all froze at the question.

“Nothing Harry, just curious as to what killed the infamous auror.” Pansy spoke.

Harry could tell that wasn't all but chose to disregard the secrecy for now.

“He was killed by ricin after being tortured with various different dark magics. Isn't it funny he should die from the thing he feared the most. Poisoning.” Harry's eyes held amusement in them but otherwise his face remained impassive.

The Slytherins looked at him with dread and concern.

“How do you know that Harry?” Draco whispered. Not even his father would have that information as quickly, not unless he'd been there himself...but that was absurd, laughable really. Harry couldn't do that, he couldn't. While many things, Harry wasn't a murderer.

Harry simply smiled at them and shrugged his shoulders. “Being the boy-who-lived comes with some perks you know.” Harry joked.

No one else seemed to find it funny. Harry's smile was too fake and his body was too relaxed, as if he was doing it consciously.

Harry knew what effect he was having on the children and whilst he didn't want to terrify them, messing with them was amusing.

“Want more details? Like how he was tortured or how long it took or if he put up a fight?” Harry spoke in a teasing tone as if joking but if they asked he would answer truthfully.

Blaise rolled his eyes and continued eating his breakfast. “Haha Harry you’re so funny.” He spoke before his first bite.

“I know, I’m hilarious.” Harry said in a serious tone that made the others lose some tension and caused Pansy to snort.

As they all began to eat breakfast Harry’s thoughts were occupied. The article and everyone’s reactions to it had given him an idea. An idea that was sure to stir up some trouble for Dumbledore and be fun for Harry.

He needed to gather information and proof if he wanted to pull this off and also find out if some blackmail info would still work in this world. This meant he’d need to take more nightly expeditions and whilst he didn’t really need sleep it was still nice to get the occasional rest but whatever. Priorities. The first step of his revenge plan had been to mess with them and he’d been very quiet so far. Just trying to settle into this new world but time was ticking he needed to get a move on. Tonight will be a long night. But it would be worth it.

And if it meant Voldemort would inevitably be pleased as well, it was of no importance.

Chapter End Notes

So I started editing chapter 15 but couldn’t get it done today so I will probably post in sometime during the week! Hope you enjoyed this chapter though!

Surprisingly Sane Suggestions

Chapter Summary

Dumbledore contemplates and calls for backup, Voldemort and Harry have a surprisingly enlightening conversation and requests are made.

Chapter Notes

An unscheduled chapter! I've had some free time to edit so here you go, hope you enjoy it! Thank you for reading!

The current school year had proven to be quite troublesome for Dumbledore, as things had not gone according to plan. In fact, even before September arrived, things had already started to go awry. It all began when Harry made the reckless decision to run away, unaware of the danger he was putting himself in and the time and resources it would take to find him. Resources that could have been utilized to hinder the rise of Tom Riddle and the Dark.

However, Dumbledore could not solely blame the child. He knew that leaving Harry on his aunt and uncle's doorstep was condemning him to ten years of darkness and difficulties, but it had to be done for the betterment of all wizards and witches. Dumbledore understood that one life sacrificed for the safety of thousands was a worthy sacrifice, even if Harry may not see it that way if the truth were to be revealed.

Despite Dumbledore's hopes that Harry would come to his senses, he had been out of control since his return. It had been over a month, and there was no indication that Harry could handle the situation on his own. It was clear that he needed guidance, and Dumbledore would have to enlighten him on what was truly important. His friends would assist in this endeavor.

A knock on the door interrupted Dumbledore's thoughts. He knew who it was; he had felt their presence approaching but hesitating to knock. As the headmaster of Hogwarts, he was keyed into all existing wards in the school, including the one at the entrance to the stairs leading up to his office.

"Come in." He spoke gently but loudly.

In walked Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley, looking anxious and concerned. Hermione kept her back straight and stiff, while Ron hunched his back and fidgeted with the hem of his orange shirt.

"Headmaster Dumbledore, good to see you, sir." Hermione greeted him politely. Dumbledore appreciated her respect for authority, as it made her more compliant in following instructions.

"Good to see both of you. Please have a seat." He gestured towards the chairs opposite him, and then to the lemon drop bowl. However, they both politely declined, despite Ron's gaze lingering on the candy.

Hermione kept her eyes fixed on the headmaster, while Ron avoided his gaze, intimidated by him. Dumbledore understood that Ron suffered from an inferiority complex, having to live up to the names of his older brothers. While this could be useful, the recklessness and jealousy that came with it had compromised many of Dumbledore's plans regarding Harry.

"Is there something wrong, Headmaster?" Hermione's voice wavered with anxiety, as she was not skilled at hiding her emotions.

Dumbledore leaned back and sighed. "Unfortunately, my dear girl, we have a problem of utmost importance, namely Harry. His behavior is concerning. He spends much of his time with children from dark families and consequently, their views. It's not healthy for him."

Taking a deep breath, Dumbledore continued, disappointment evident in his eyes. "Since his resorting, you have lost touch with him, children. But for the betterment of the future, you need to guide him back to the light. The poor boy seems to have lost his way."

Hermione frowned and looked away, while Ron appeared mildly annoyed. "We will do our best, Headmaster." Hermione promised with sincerity, but Ron did not seem convinced.

"But he has been avoiding us as well! How are we supposed to get close to him when he spends all his time with the slimy snakes, acting like one of them!" Ron's outburst caused his face to turn crimson, but as he stared at Dumbledore, the cause of his redness changed from anger to shame.

"Do not worry dear children, he will find his way back to you and the light. We will make sure of it."

The classes were over for the day and Harry was heading to the library with Draco and Theo when he was stopped by a quiet hissing.

"Master! Master, we bring news of the old goat, the weasel, and worm." Selene hissed, coming out of one of the vents in the wall.

As Harry had stopped, so had his two human companions. Speaking in the library with Selene and Nyx would not be a good idea, the other houses remained unaware of his gift. So they needed to relocate.

"Let's head somewhere different, gentlemen, something has come up." Harry spoke without a sense of urgency or concern. Draco and Theo glanced at each other and shrugged, they didn't particularly want to study anyway.

He led the way to the seventh floor, and as they neared the portrait of the dancing trolls, Draco was growing impatient with Harry's lack of explanation.

"Why are we here, Harry? There's nothing over here, and what did your snakes want?" Draco's tone was a bit close to demanding, but Harry could hear the concern beneath it, so he let it go.

"Just watch, Dragon."

Harry walked in front of the wall three times, thinking of his office at home.

As the door appeared, Harry could hear two small gasps behind him. His lips twitched in amusement.

“Let’s go.” He said as he pushed the door open, gesturing for them to follow.

“Where are we?” Theo whispered in wonder, looking around the large room filled with bookshelves and various peculiar objects.

“Welcome to the Room of Requirement or the Come and Go Room. It takes the shape of whatever you need it to be.” Harry spoke in a showman's voice, gesturing around himself before throwing himself into his office chair behind the desk.

“Now please sit and start on the homework. I need to speak to these two ladies first.”

Draco and Theo sat down on the sofa and put their stuff on the table while Harry leaned back and petted his precious companions.

“*Now, what have you seen, my darlings?*” Harry hissed at his snakes, keeping it down so as not to disturb his friends.

“*The goat called for the weasel and worm and told them to get close to you, and the weasel shrieked.*” Selene started.

“*He told them he would make sure you saw the light again and that if it had to be done, he would use the smelly stuff on you.*” Nyx continued. By smelly stuff, Harry assumed she was referring to potions.

“They told him they would spy on you and report back and try to be your friend again.”
Selene hissed.

Harry couldn't help the snort that escaped him, him being friends with them again? The thought of being friends with them was so laughable that it was almost ludicrous. Over his dead body, quite literally, since he was immortal. What was the old goat thinking? There was no way in hell this would work, and Dumbledore must know it, so why even attempt it? Was it an attempt to distract him or annoy him, or had he simply lost his mind?

With a calm and collected tone, Harry turned to his snakes. *“Thank you for helping me keep an eye on the old man. Did you hear anything else of importance?”*

“The old man said he would speak with you soon and see how to go from there.” Nyx hissed before sliding down from Harry's neck and slithering towards the warmth of the fireplace. Selene was quick to follow her, indicating that their conversation was over.

Harry pondered his next move for a moment before concluding that it didn't matter. He was confident that nothing they attempted would work, and if they resorted to illegal tactics, Harry wouldn't hesitate to press charges. With a sense of indifference, Harry strolled over to Theo and Draco and pulled out his homework, ready to start working.

As Harry and Voldemort sat across from each other, the atmosphere in the room was tense. The last time they had met in this room a lot of uncomfortable topics had been brought up. The chairs they sat in now were newer, their bright colors contrasting with the somber mood in the air. Voldemort noticed this, but he chose not to comment on it, as it was inconsequential compared to what they were there to discuss.

Harry, always the one to break the silence, spoke first. “Hello Voldemort.”

“Hello Potter.” Voldemort said, his voice devoid of any warmth. Harry couldn't tell if it was fake or not.

And he was not one to back down easily. “Aren’t you gonna say anything?” Harry asked teasingly.

Voldemort raised an eyebrow. “Are you expecting a thank you for showing common courtesy?”

“Didn’t you like it?” Harry leaned forward determined to get a reaction from the Dark Lord.

Voldemort tilted his head to the side regarding Harry with a blank expression. “All the letter said was “See you later.”

“No, no, you forgot a word, it said see you later Voldie. Don’t you like your new nickname?” Harry asked with a half smirk in a husky voice.

Harry had made Lucius deliver a letter prior to this meeting so Voldemort wouldn’t be able to complain about the abrupt summoning.

Choosing not to answer, Voldemort simply stared at Harry, his expression unreadable. Harry persisted, determined to break through Voldemort's silent façade. Harry lost.

“Uh, fine.” Harry threw himself backwards in the chair dramatically. “You’re no fun.”

“How long are you planning to drag out these meetings?” Voldemort asked after a few minutes of silence and simply watching each other.

“Until I know everything I need to.” Harry replied, his voice firm.

“How frustratingly vague. Fine, what do you want?” Voldemort asked in fake nonchalance.

“I want a lot of things but how about we start with what your plans are if you win the war?” Harry asked, watching Voldemort's face for any sign of discomfort. But to Harry's surprise,

Voldemort remained unfazed.

“A question for a question?” Voldemort answered back.

Harry huffed out a breath, really acting like the teenager he was pretending to be. “Fine.” He said as he brought back the spheres he’d invented.

Voldemort then proceeded to propose a series of ideas to Harry, with the intention of improving the state of the wizarding world. He suggested legalizing dark magic, but with the caveat that only trained individuals could practice it freely and without monitoring. Additionally, he recommended the construction of a preschool for muggleborn children to educate them about the wizarding world at an earlier age, installing more classes at Hogwarts, enforcing laws to protect dark creatures, and mandating muggle classes for purebloods to better understand the potential threat posed by the muggle world.

Furthermore, Voldemort proposed strengthening the wards around wizarding communities to prevent any unauthorized exposure and restrict access to the muggle world only with the ministry’s approval. After graduating from Hogwarts, witches and wizards would have to choose between the wizarding and muggle world, and if they selected the latter, their magic would be bound, and secrecy wards would be placed on them.

Harry was taken aback by the thoroughness of Voldemort's plan, which he had clearly spent a considerable amount of time crafting. Although he sensed that Voldemort was withholding some details, he was reluctant to pry further but what was the worst that could happen.

“Wow, you certainly had that all prepared.” Harry said in disbelief. “But your sphere is green so you must be leaving something out.”

“I’m leaving out plenty, you don’t need all the details. I have given you an answer that is more thorough than what I have given anyone else. You needn’t know more.” Voldemort spoke with slight annoyance.

"The wizarding world is in dire need of change, and I believe that I have the answers to its problems."

"But what about the risks involved with legalizing dark magic?" Harry asked. "Surely, there's a danger in allowing untrained individuals to practice it."

"Of course." Voldemort acknowledged. "That's why I propose that only those who are educated in the subject should be allowed to practice it freely and those who are still under training would be under strict monitoring, to ensure that they are not using it for malicious purposes."

"And what about the muggleborns?" Harry asked. "I agree that they need to be educated about the wizarding world, but isn't segregating them at a young age a bit extreme?" Harry actually agreed with this but wanted to hear Voldemort's arguments.

"Not at all." Voldemort countered. "Muggleborns often struggle to adapt to our world, and they face discrimination from purebloods who consider them inferior. By creating a preschool for muggleborns, we can ensure that they receive a proper education and are given the tools they need to succeed in our world."

"I see your point." Harry said, nodding slowly. "But what about the purebloods? Won't they object to mandatory muggle classes?"

"Of course they will." Voldemort agreed. "But it's necessary to ensure that they understand the threat that muggles pose to our world. It's time for us to move past our prejudices and work towards a more united wizarding world."

"I do agree with most of what you said. I certainly would have benefitted from some of your ideas." Harry's thoughts drifted as his mind slipped back into his horrid childhood.

Despite the pain of his past, Harry felt strangely detached from it, and he had long ago made peace with his past, although he had never forgotten or forgiven his abusers.

Strength isn't something you're born with, it's something that's forged. A strong person will have a painful past. You don't reach the type of rationality and sense of mind without something in you being broken.

He believed that his experiences had made him stronger, and they had given him a unique perspective on the wizarding world and how it needed to change.

“How so?” It was now Voldemorts turn to lean forward in interest.

Would telling him about his childhood be smart? Harry wasn't sure but perhaps it could unite them, they had after all suffered similarly at the hands of muggles. Admitting a weakness was always a dangerous gamble, hopefully the risk paid off.

“My childhood was not all rainbows and sunshine as I think you believe. My guardians, if you can even call them that, hate anything abnormal and magic was on top of their despise list so you can imagine how they felt about me.” It had been decades since those days hunted him and having his revenge had certainly helped the healing.

As they continued to speak about Voldemort's ideas for after the war Harry couldn't help but agree to most of Voldies propositions and improvements. The wizarding community was in dire need of change and he could bring it. Harry personally had no intentions of rejoining the coming war but still he could appreciate a good discussion.

“If you ever need my help all you have to do is ask prettily and I will help you as much as I can.” Harry spoke sincerely.

“Sweet child, what could you offer me that I don't already have access to?” Voldie teased.

Harry could feel fluttering in his stomach at Voldemort's teasing tone and the enderment, despite being called a child, maybe he had a weird kink. Huh, didn't know that. He'd have to find out another time.

“Plenty. I hold over 10 seats at the wizardmong and if you have forgotten I am the boy who lived and that comes with certain privileges.” Was said in a matter of fact tone.

“Sure.” If Voldemort didn’t find it puerile to roll his eyes he would have.

“Well the offer still stands. My...skills are beyond what anyone knows.” Harry wasn’t sure how much he wanted to reveal but if Voldie asked he would tell. And really the reaction he’d get would be worth it.

Voldemort raised an eyebrow at Harry and looked skeptical at him.

“Your skills, you say? Do tell me more, Harry.” Voldemort said with a low, husky voice that sent shivers down Harry’s spine. He wondered if Voldemort was intentionally trying to seduce him or if it was just his imagination.

Harry leaned forward, his eyes locking onto Voldemort’s. “Let’s just say that I’ve had some...unusual experiences in my life that have given me unique abilities. Abilities that could be of great use to someone like you.”

Voldemort leaned back in his chair, his expression unreadable. “And what kind of abilities are we talking about here? I hope you’re not suggesting that you can teach me anything about the Dark Arts. I am the greatest Dark wizard of all time, after all.”

Harry chuckled. “I think I could teach you a thing or two but no, not the Dark Arts. I’m talking about something...else. Something that could help you gain an advantage over your enemies. It’s not something that can be shown here however.”

Voldemort narrowed his eyes, studying Harry intently. “Very well. We’ll discuss this further at a later time. But I must warn you, Harry, that I am not easily impressed. If you cannot deliver on your promises, there will be consequences.”

Harry grinned, feeling a rush of adrenaline at the challenge. “Oh, I can deliver. And when I do, you’ll be begging me for more.”

Voldemort’s lips twisted into a wicked smile. “We shall see, Harry. We shall see.”

“If you don’t believe me you’re free to try me out.” He said with a smirk. Was that a hint? Was he flirting with Voldemort? Yes apparently.

The other’s eyebrow rose as Harry spoke, making Voldemort look surprised but somehow also intrigued. He got a glint in his eyes that told Harry he was planning something, nothing good for Harry he was sure.

“Alright, a duel next time we meet.” Voldemort promised.

Harry’s smile became malicious and savage at the thought of dueling Voldemort. He was certain Voldemort wouldn’t stand a chance if he gave it his all but still, it could be fun.

“That’s a promise.” Harry confirmed.

They sat in silence for a while, Harry summoned some tea that he was now enjoying. Voldemort even grabbed a cup for himself. Could you really eat or drink in your dream? Well not really but it sure felt like it, as long as your mind knows how something feels, tastes, smells, it will make your senses recreate the sensation.

Alright this isn’t what matters now.

Harry was not planning to take a side in the war, but that did not mean he did not have a preference. Even though Voldemort was reluctant to accept Harry’s generous offer of help, Harry felt he could freely give advice. Harry’s mind drifted to a question that had always puzzled him.

"You know, I always wondered why you never claimed your lordships or seats?" It was not a question he intended to ask, but it came out anyway.

Voldemort snapped back to focus, and his intense red eyes locked onto Harry. Harry couldn't help but notice Voldemort's physical attractiveness, which was quite distracting.

"By the time I could claim them, I had no need for them." Voldemort answered in an indifferent tone as he leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs.

"Still, lordships grant more than seats in the wizarding world, they grant access and respect. Besides, you have been keeping a low profile and, as far as I can tell, have made no moves as the Dark Lord." Harry ran his fingers through his hair, unintentionally messing it up even more. Voldemort tracked the movement with his eyes.

"No, I have not." Voldemort replied.

"You don't do anything without a reason, so I'm assuming you're biding your time. Either in preparation or out of necessity, considering coming back from the dead can be quite an ordeal for the body, mind, and magic." Harry pondered.

Voldemort's eyes narrowed in anger. "Do not assume to know me." He hissed, bordering on Parseltongue.

Oh. Right, that would be fun.

"Don't I know you though? I was your horcrux for almost 15 years." Harry answered back in parseltongue with a teasing smirk.

While Voldemort's eyes didn't waver, the anger was replaced with something else. It was hard to make out, but by the way Voldemort's pupils dilated, Harry was pretty sure it was arousal. No doubt, Voldemort would deny it until the end of time.

"You may have housed a part of my soul but that doesn't make you privy to my mind." Voldemort retorted.

Wow, hearing Voldie speak parseltongue was something else. It just flowed differently from his lips than Harry's own. It sounded so sensual and intimidating Harry couldn't prevent the shiver that traveled up his spine.

"Of course not. But do tell me, am I wrong? You did, after all, avoid answering the question. Classic evasion tactics, answering a question with another question." Harry continued the conversation in Parseltongue. It was much more fun than in English, and he'd have to do it more often.

Voldemort certainly didn't like being called out and Harry was questioning him more than he thought would be possible. The anger was back in Voldemort's eyes, and he remained silent, which Harry took as an affirmative.

"Fine, I'll drop it. Now back to what I was saying, your lordships. You should claim them." Harry huffed out.

Voldemort's eyes softened but in no way became soft. "Why would I claim them? It gives me nothing, and the ministry would be informed that someone has taken up the lordships, and I'm the only one of Slytherin blood left." Voldemort wasn't dismissing Harry's idea yet but if Harry didn't come up with a good answer he was sure it would be game over soon.

"No, not really. You could claim them in another name. You could pretend to be your own son or grandchild or second cousin or something. And by the way, you're not the last one with Slytherin blood in you. I have some too." Harry grinned at Voldemort whilst he glowered back.

"How?" Was hissed at Harry.

"It's a really long story but the short version is the Potter line is a direct descendent from the Peverell line and the Peverells apparently had a thing for Slytherins seeing as a few actually married them." Harry's hold on this reality was slipping which meant it wasn't long before they had to wake.

Time to bring up the request.

“Morning is approaching out there so before we depart I would like to make a request.” Harry's voice was even and confident.

With a raised eyebrow Voldemort waved his hand in a “get on with it” gesture.

“I want Wormtail.” His voice had dropped an octave, despite how much time had passed Harry still held a general loathing for traitors and cowards.

“Oh? And why would I do that? Wormtail has been rather useful lately.” Voldemort's voice was light and mocking.

Harry rolled his eyes. “I know you despise the sniveling rat as well, do not pretend otherwise. Now as to what I can offer you, why don't you tell me and hurry it along. We have little time left.”

“I want you to meet me in person.” Voldemort spoke, still in the same light, airy tone.

What was he planning?

“I will meet with you and you will give me the rat? Alright deal.” Harry didn't really think there was anything Voldie could do to affect him so what did he have to lose.

Voldemort's lips stretched and teeth followed, a grin was plastered on his face. Looking way too unnatural with so many teeth and far too wide.

“Deal.”

"Oh and by the way, do not, under any circumstance, summon Snape. Bye!"

As Harry slowly opened his eyes to the warmth of his soft and comfortable bed, a sense of longing swept over him, and he couldn't help but yearn for the night to come again. Meanwhile, in a similarly plush bed, Voldemort startled awake and found himself feeling surprisingly content.

Throughout the day, both individuals were plagued by a constant churning in their stomachs, and despite their best efforts, the allure of daydreaming continued to take hold of them.

While Harry leaned into these feelings, Voldemort despised them with every fiber of his being.

They both knew that what they were experiencing was irrational, but that didn't make the sensations go away. For Harry, he chose to focus on their upcoming meeting, both physical and in their dreams. He considered sneaking away from Hogwarts to meet Voldemort in person but was apprehensive about whether he was ready for it.

The anxiety that bubbled up inside him, coupled with the tingling in his limbs, made it clear that it was too early.

Perhaps a few more meetings in their dreams before that, Harry thought. Maybe they could finally meet during Yule, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to stay at Hogwarts for the holiday. Ultimately, he decided against it and opted to go horcrux hunting instead, possibly even giving them back to Tom and convincing him to absorb them.

As Harry pondered his decision, he realized that he had just referred to Voldemort as "Tom" in his mind. He couldn't recall ever doing that before, and his mind went blank for a moment as he considered the implications of this slip-up. Maybe he should start calling Voldemort by his name regularly. It could be a fun experiment and a good way to determine the Dark Lord's mental stability.

With his mind made up, Harry resolved to stick to his decisions, but first, he had to survive two more months at Hogwarts until he got a break.

Condemning Confessions of a Corrupted man

Chapter Summary

An outing with Draco, a few emotional confessions and a break in.

Chapter Notes

Soooo I'm kinda drunk as I'm posting this, I edited it a few hours ago when I was sober so hopefully it alright but I have stuck to posting on Saturdays so I wanted to get this up.

Sorry to all those who were excited for another Tom and Harry meeting you're gonna have to wait sorry!!!

This is a bit of a filler chapter but I do really like it I just feel like I've forgotten something. Something about Draco, I'll probably remember some other time but whatever

Enjoy!!!! ♥♥♥♥

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

Muggle London looked pretty much the same as it did thirty years ago, which surprised Harry. Muggles were creatures of development and improvement, always trying to solve problems and make their lives easier by inventing and developing things to advance their communities.

If Harry had to describe muggles, he would say they were inventive.

It was Hogsmeade weekend, and Harry had convinced a reluctant Draco to join him in London in search of information, mainly books. Harry hadn't interacted with muggles in a long time and didn't miss it. However, knowledge was power, and Harry needed to understand the muggle world more, not only for his own sake but also for argument's sake.

Harry was sure Voldemort would bring up muggles more often, and he didn't want to seem ignorant, considering he should be living with them and should have been doing so for the past fifteen years.

Harry's decision to bring Draco was selfish on his part. He wanted Draco to see that muggles could pose a potential threat and were not Stone Age barbarians, as many purebloods believed. He wanted to show that they were not harmless and primitive.

Draco had never been to Muggle London either, so it would be interesting to see his reaction. The only muggle city he'd visited was Paris, and although he didn't believe they were barbarians, he still thought what he saw in Paris was an anomaly.

They were currently at Piccadilly Circus, the only place Harry could slightly remember. He hadn't spent a lot of time in Muggle London before.

As a child, he hadn't been allowed to come when the Dursleys took their trips into the city, and as an adult, he tended to avoid overcrowded places. He'd been too paranoid to be around so many people. Showing Draco how many muggles there were compared to wixen was also an interesting experience.

Draco wasn't too surprised to see so many muggles. He'd been told by his father that they breed like bunnies. Still, what surprised him was what they were doing, what they were wearing, and how they were conducting themselves.

Harry had dressed Draco in simple slacks and a button-down shirt to not stand out from the muggles. Draco had despised the simplicity of the outfit, but as he regarded the muggles, he liked his own outfit more.

Most of them were dressed in jeans, oversized shirts, and baggy coats. Harry called the sport jackets. Women were dressed similarly, and Draco even saw a woman in what he could only describe as undergarments. Harry called them biker shorts. Draco really despised their fashion so far.

The architecture he did like, but out of principle, he wouldn't admit it.

As they walked down a street Draco didn't know the name of, he regarded Harry. Despite his apparent casualness about being around muggles, the underlying tension in his shoulders and tightness in his jaw gave him away.

Not for the first or last time, Draco wondered what had happened to him during the summer.

Draco had never really thought of Harry Potter after meeting him for the first time and being sorely disappointed with what he saw.

Harry had been a small, quiet child with hardened eyes. He'd never taken up much space, never stood out, and never tried to either. Young Harry had blended into the background, which Draco found ridiculous, considering he was the boy who lived. But most people had seemed to forget that as they met the boy.

Harry had been forgettable, unimpressive, and unimportant.

This Harry, though - this Harry was everything the other wasn't.

He was vociferous, captivating, powerful, charming and a genius.

This Harry forced you to notice him; his magic made it impossible to forget him. He demanded attention from the room as soon as he stepped in and knew he was powerful.

Manipulative, cunning, sadistic, and cruel, this Harry was honestly the perfect Slytherin, the perfect lord.

This Harry could bend the world to his will, and it would let him.

During his slip into his mind, they had apparently arrived at a bookstore. Harry had his hand on Draco's arm and was leading him into the store, through the bookshelves and people, when he stopped them in front of the history section.

They spent about 45 minutes there before Harry was satisfied with his gathering of books.

“Harry, I’m rather hungry. Could we stop for lunch somewhere?” Draco asked as he stepped out of the store.

“Sure, Draco. Any preferences?” Harry grabbed his arm once more, leading him further into the alley.

“Not really, anywhere that is not too crowded.” Draco had made up his mind to once more ask Harry about his summer once they settled down at a restaurant, and Harry couldn’t easily disappear or steer the conversation in another direction.

They ended up at a small Asian place. Draco wasn’t too sure what kind of Asian place it was. He mostly ate French or other European food growing up.

“A ramen shop.” Harry informed him. They sat down at one of the unoccupied booths in the corner of the restaurant. Harry was very adamant that they needed this precise booth so he could see all the exits.

After letting Harry order for him, Draco thought on how to best broach the subject. He didn’t want to come off as crass or pushy.

His thoughts must have shown on his face, though.

“What's the matter, Draco?” Harry asked, slightly concerned.

Draco let out a breath and decided it was best to just be direct, no games.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you about this summer how - how things changed. How you changed...” Draco must be more nervous than he thought, seeing as he was stammering like a fool.

Harry took a moment to react, then he breathed out deeply, coming to a decision.

“I suppose I should start at the beginning. My childhood isn’t what everyone thinks it was. It wasn’t happy, not at all...”

As Harry told him more and more, Draco’s expression became one of horror. Beaten, starved, locked away. How could they treat a child like that? If Draco disliked Muggles before, he truly hates them now.

A magical child, a precious magical child, treated worse than most house elves. The savior of their world thrown away to abusive relatives.

Draco burned with rage. For the Muggles, for the unjust treatment, but also for Dumbledore's actions leading to this.

But Harry wasn’t finished. They hadn’t even gotten to Hogwarts age yet.

“When I turned 11, and the letter came, they tried to hide it from me. They even ran away when the letters kept coming and coming. At one point, the whole house was flooded with them. Then Hagrid came and found me. I thought he saved me. He told me all about the wizarding world, how my parents were murdered, how I was the boy who lived...”

Harry took a breath and collected himself.

“I hated it. More expectations, more pressure, more, more, more. As if I wanted to be famous, as if I wanted everyone to look at me.”

Harry sneered and spoke in a low rumbling voice.

“Be quiet, you freak. You deserved it, you freak. Don’t tell anyone about this! Don’t be stupid Harry. Don’t be an idiot Harry. You’re overreacting Harry. Your family loves you Harry! You need to do this Harry. You need to die for the greater good Harry! Don’t be selfish Harry! You’re our savior Harry! Don’t you dare do that Harry! You’re a freak Harry! You’re a dark lord Harry! You should just die Harry.”

The booth was shaking; in fact, the whole restaurant was shaking. Harry's magic was leaking out, and Draco was frozen in place by it.

“Harry...” He whimpered. It was so quiet, but he couldn't speak louder over the dread spreading through him, the dread Harry's magic was causing.

He didn't seem to be heard. That's when he saw Harry's eyes glazing over for a moment, and then, in a second, he was calm and collected, like nothing ever happened.

“Sorry, Draco, I got lost in some bad memories there... should I continue?” Harry still seemed distracted, exhausted, and overwhelmed, but Draco needed to know.

“If you're alright to continue.” Draco whispered.

“Yes, I'm alright. Where was I... oh yes, Hagrid. He told me all about the houses as well, how Gryffindors were brave and kind, whilst Slytherins were evil and dark. Being the abused, naive child I was, I took that to heart, and when the hat wanted me in Slytherin, I begged it not to.” Harry was watching him, like he finally remembered Draco was the one listening.

“And, well, you know how the coming years went at Hogwarts. Confronting the Dark Lord in first year and second year. Being almost kissed by Dementors in third and forced to compete in the tournament in fourth. You also know what happened at the end of the tournament, Voldemort was resurrected.” Draco was stunned; he didn't know that!

He just guessed by his father's behavior that the Dark side was rising once more. Sure, he'd thought about how the Dark Lord could have left something behind to help them or made plans that were now being used or something! He didn't think the Dark Lord was actually back from the dead!

Harry disregarded his shock and continued, most likely wanting to get it over with.

“During the summer, the waves opened.”

Harry looked at Draco like that should mean something to him. He had no idea what Harry was getting at. Harry must have noticed that.

“The waves are the different versions of the same timeline. The different realities of the same world.”

Draco still didn't understand. Harry seemed uncomfortable and hesitant.

“I saw them. I saw what could be. Versions of the future. I didn't like what I saw.” Harry spoke gravely. Thank the gods Harry put up a privacy ward around them, or the Muggles would have thought them barmy.

“Luna... you talked to Luna about that... you asked her if she saw them.” Draco whispered, his mind trying to understand what he was hearing.

“Yes. She also saw, she saw it. The future, the future that was most likely for us should we have continued going as we were, would have not been bright.”

Draco was conflicted. He did believe Harry saw something, but could it really be the future or a version of it? It seemed mad. Harry wasn't a seer, it didn't exist in his bloodline, so how? And why?

Could Draco put his faith in Harry, trust him?

Draco closed his eyes and let his magic interlace with Harry's. He heard a startled breath but paid it no mind. His magic would know.

Harry's magic was like no other, but he already knew that. It was cold, so cold it felt like being burned, but it was also peaceful and comforting. He knew it was powerful and deadly, but it was gathering around him like it wanted to protect him, like it cared. Harry wouldn't hurt him.

“Alright, I believe you. Please tell me what happened in the future.” Draco said, his eyes alight with determination as he looked into Harry’s glowing green eyes.

Harry swallowed and clenched his hands. “I defeated the Dark Lord in the Battle of Hogwarts when I was 17. Afterwards, I discovered the betrayal of my friends and mentors and hid away in my house. A few years later, I tried to make things right by joining the Wizengamot, but the Ministry was already beyond repair, so I left. I spent the next 10 years traveling, learning, and improving myself. Back in Britain, you got married and had a child, Scorpius.”

Draco’s breath hitched. He had never told anyone that he wanted to name his son that.

“When I returned to England, I tried once more to help, but you can’t help people who don’t want help. Your wife, Astoria, died shortly after Scorpius turned eight, and you were raising him with the help of her parents. But before I’d even returned home, suspicion of the Dark had once more become an issue. I won’t go into too much detail about it right now, so please hold your questions.”

Draco nodded silently.

“We met again through Luna when we were 36. For me, it was perfect. He was perfect. The more we met after that, the more I wanted you, him. We fell in love.” Harry said, his eyes far away as he held onto Draco's hand tightly.

Draco's mouth was slightly parted, and he wasn't sure how to feel, so he chose to remain silent.

“We married. It was the happiest time of my life. We had five years together. But those five years were the only ones that mattered to me. You were the most important person in my life, and when...” Harry was shaking, his lips trembling lightly, and his eyes downcast, looking at their joined hands.

Draco was scared, knowing that something awful had happened. Harry composed himself enough to continue. “As I said before, the suspension and tension in the community were growing. I had even been accused of being the next Dark Lord. They, the Ministry, had started conducting raids again after an attack by a new group of Dark Wizards. They raided our manor many times but came up empty. They had banned all Dark Magic, all old traditions and celebrations. Those with Dark cores were forced to disregard their own natures and study only Light Magic. The laws were changed, the punishments became more severe. They had become what they feared the Dark would be, supremacists. Only not Dark, but Light supremacists.”

Harry's sadness had changed into wrath. “One of the main men in their new rule was none other than my former best friend, Ronald Weasley, who had somehow risen to the top of the law enforcement department.”

Draco couldn't help the sneer that was forming on his face. That Weasel in charge of the law was preposterous.

“On Samhain 2024, they came to our manor. I wasn't home, only you were there. He - he killed you. You were murdered. I came home, and there you were, lying dead at the tree where we married. I couldn't protect you. You were alone, and I couldn't protect you. I - I wasn't with you.” Harry said, his voice breaking.

Draco felt the tears fall on his hand before he saw them. Harry was crying, his lips quivering, shoulders shaking, trying and failing to gather his control.

Draco quickly stood up and walked to the other side of the booth. Before Harry could feel even more devastated, he gathered him in his arms. Harry held on to him for dear life, clinging to his shirt, pressing his face into the nook of his neck and whispering frantically over and over again in a quiet, broken voice. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry Dragon. I couldn't protect you. I'm sorry."

Draco held him tighter, trying to keep his own heart intact as Harry's was breaking. Feeling the tears gather in his own eyes, Draco quickly shut them and breathed. He needed to be strong for Harry. He couldn't break down now that Harry needed him. He needed to hold on to him, comfort him, save him.

"It's okay, Harry. I'm here. I'm safe. I'm so sorry you had to go through that. It's not your fault. You did nothing wrong." Draco whispered frantically back. He wasn't sure Harry could hear him, but after what could have been minutes or hours, Harry's breathing evened out, and the wetness on Draco's neck dried.

Draco still kept him firmly in his arms, rocking him and petting him down his back. "Harry. Are you...alright?" But of course, he wouldn't be.

"I'm okay, Draco. I'm sorry for crying all over you." Despite saying he was okay, Harry didn't move a centimeter to detangle himself from Draco's arms.

"Honestly, all my life, I've just been surviving. I've never been living. And I think you might be the same. I think you understand." Harry's voice was hoarse and uneven as he spoke.

Draco wasn't sure he understood. The other Draco must have if Harry thought he would. He wondered what kind of childhood the other Draco had if he had never lived and only been surviving.

Sure, Draco, this Draco, kinda of understood just surviving. His father had been very strict as he grew up, but he'd never hurt Draco. Draco knew it was mostly his grandfather that was talking through his father whenever he'd get like *that*. It did hurt as a child. He didn't understand then why his father was so harsh, so demanding. He tried his hardest to please him. Things got better after grandfather died. It was like the cloud hovering over his father disappeared, and the sun could finally reach him.

So, to some extent, he understood surviving day to day, but he had experienced living as well. Should he tell Harry that? Would it make him feel better or worse? Perhaps it was best not to say anything.

Harry squeezed him before slowly letting go and leaning back. Their knees were still touching, which was rather grounding for Draco.

"After...after that, I hunted them down." Harry's voice was low and rumbling. The raw emotion from before was still present, but it was taking on a different edge.

"I spent months taking them all down. Ruthlessly, efficiently. I tore through their minds and tortured whatever I needed out of them."

Draco couldn't hold his tongue anymore. "Who?" He pressed out.

Harry looked up at him with wide, manic eyes still red from crying. "The ministry. The aurors. Anyone who was involved in your death. In the prosecution of the dark. I slaughtered them all like the animals they were. I hunted them down one by one. The others would know I was coming for them, and it only made it better. Their paranoia, the primal fear, the terror once I came for them. Mm, it was a worthy revenge."

Harry's eyes were glowing, taking on the shade of the killing curse - the same curse they had learned last year with Moody, the one that had made his skin crawl and his blood freeze. But Harry... he wore it so well.

"I saved *them* for last." Harry spat out the words. "They knew I was coming for them. They tried to hide, to run. They couldn't outrun me."

Draco's mouth was dry, and for a moment, he had forgotten to breathe as he watched Harry's mind be transported back to that time. He was... he was death. He was the devil. He was breathtaking.

"I killed his wife first, Hermione Granger. An eye for an eye and all that. It was only justified that I killed his beloved when he killed mine. Of course, I wasn't as quick as he was. I made her scream quite a bit before she died, but Ron... Ron I wanted him to die screaming. I cursed him - a nightmare curse, but my own variant of it. I slowly drove him insane. It took hours, but by the next morning, there was nothing left of the person he once was. He was nothing, and I made sure he knew he was becoming nothing. He knew what was happening to him, he felt as memories slipped away, as his personality crumbled. He screamed and he screamed. He begged, but why would I show him mercy when he showed you none? No, that wasn't justice. In the end, he was nothing, and as he died screaming that he was nothing." Harry was grinning now, and Draco would be scared for his life if that toothy grin were directed his way.

Harry's eyes glazed over again, and his smile slowly receded. Draco was just focusing on breathing at this point.

"Later I died again, a few times actually. I died violently, desperately and young like I always knew I would. I just didn't stay dead. And each time I came back I came back a little bit colder. I had less and less empathy for others."

Harry's eyes snapped back to him, and Draco startled. Harry's gaze softened and turned into one of concern.

"I know this is a lot to take in, so I would understand if you need some time away from me after all this." Harry frowned and looked away.

"No, I'm... I'm alright. Just... just overwhelmed and trying to sort out my thoughts, but I... I don't want to leave you, Harry. It doesn't matter what happened before - I mean, of course, it does, but it doesn't affect how I feel about you now. You're my friend, and I care for you. But umm, just so you know, I'm not... I'm... I can't... I'm not into umm..." Draco trailed off, but Harry must have understood him anyway, as he smiled - a small, amused smile that made Draco explicitly happy to see.

"I know, and despite how much I loved him for who he became as a person, I don't ever want you to have to go through the same things. What I had with him was special. And you are special to me, Draco, but in a different way." Harry spoke lightly, not disappointed at all.

Draco let out a sigh of relief and looked around. "Hey, what happened to our food?"

"Oh, I probably made them leave with my magic. They probably even forgot we existed. Let's reorder."

As they left the shop, Harry felt lighter. It felt nice to have someone know more about him. Of course, he hadn't told Draco the whole truth. He hadn't mentioned that it had actually been his life and not just memories of one. He also chose not to mention the whole "Master of Death" thing, but honestly, that was more Kali's input that prevented that.

Kali had spoken to Harry a few times during Draco's and his conversation. They had probably sensed his distress and tried to help him, which Kali did unsurprisingly. What was surprising was how well Draco seemed to be taking all this. Harry wasn't sure what was running through his mind, and he didn't want to look into Draco's mind while his own was so unstable.

He'd felt his emotions through Draco's magic, and none of it had been surprising, considering what Harry was telling him. The only thing that had made Draco truly uncomfortable seemed to be what Harry's expectations for their relationship could be. Harry had felt the sorrow and gloom that spread through Draco's magic as he tried to find a gentle way to tell Harry he wasn't romantically interested in him. He'd stayed calm in the face of Draco's sorrow, and it had been the truth. Harry had no intention of starting up a relationship with Draco. No, that wouldn't work.

The constant comparisons between the two, the fear, the paranoia. No, Harry couldn't put himself or Draco through that once more. He loved Draco, but it would stay a platonic love in this world. However much he craved more, it was not meant to be.

It took Harry only a few years as a child to realise not everyone gets their happy ending. That not everything in life is beautiful and happy. That some die as sadly as they lived. That happiness isn't a given and that most likely, he won't find it.

"I have one more stop before we head back to Hogwarts, if that's okay with you?" Harry turned to Draco as he walked down the street.

"Sure, where are we going?" Draco asked curiously.

Harry grinned and tilted his head to the side. "Grimmauld Place, to pick up something that is currently residing with my escaped convict godfather." Harry spoke in a light, overly happy voice.

Draco couldn't help himself as he bent over and groaned. "Really Harry. We're committing a crime today as well. This day is certainly endless."

"It'll be quick, I promise. I have no intention of talking to Siri today. I don't even want him or anyone else that we've been there." Harry patted Draco's back and continued walking.

"Besides, what we're about to steal is even more illegal than consorting with a known criminal." Harry said cheerily.

Draco groaned once more, and Harry started to giggle.

Harry resorted to using shadow walking with Draco into the house, seeing as it was the only way to bring Draco along. He wouldn't have been able to enter because of the wards, but thanks to shadow walking, they easily bypassed them.

As they stepped out of the shadows, Harry waved his hand, and an invisible barrier appeared and disappeared around them.

"What was that?" Draco whispered at him.

Harry didn't even bother whispering. "A ward to prevent anyone from seeing and hearing us. It also works against house elves, thank the gods. The one residing here is a very noisy elf, after all."

Harry could see Draco looking around at the terrible state of the once-proud and honored home of the prestigious Black family. With no time to think of the state of the place, Harry let his magic guide him to the locket hidden once more in Kreacher's cupboard. Before Draco could see it, he'd stuffed it into his pocket.

"What is that?" Draco asked with a slight tremble in his voice. He could most likely feel the dark magic transmitting from it.

As Harry stuffed the locket into his pocket, he felt it reaching out to the pendant with the other part of the soul. He allowed them to feel each other briefly, but before they could act, Harry closed the connection.

"This is something I need in my quest against my enemies. It's nothing you should know about, Draco. It will only put you in more danger." Harry spoke gravely.

"Alright, I trust you." Draco said, easily letting it go, which Harry was thankful for.

"Let's head back now. It's getting late, and I'm sure the others are wondering where we are." Harry said as he grabbed Draco's hand and pulled him into the shadows.

As they left, Harry couldn't help but think back to the conversation he had with Kali and felt the same shiver of trepidation travel down his spine.

"Your husband, he died, why?"

"Because of me. They were after me."

"No, he died because humans always do. They are not as strong as you. They never will be. They die. But you - you don't. You won't.... And it doesn't matter how much you wish you would."

Chapter End Notes

This is a more emotional chapter which I'm not really sure how to write. I tried my best but please let me know if somethings weird!!

I'm not the most emotional person and have a difficult time with empathy so I'm not sure if this is any good but I'm proud of myself, hopefully you like it as well!

Intimidating the Ignorant

Chapter Summary

A potions professor finally does his job and consequently causes trouble for his least favourite student and himself.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to the person who suggested that The rise of a dark lord by LittleMissXanda was the fic I was looking for!

I wasn't sure where I read the scene this chapter was inspired by but it is from that fic, specifically ch 8! I read it years ago and couldn't find it but now that I've read it over after releasing this chapter it might have turned out too similar. I could only remember the vibe and a few lines from the chapter but my chapter is inspired by it and if you've read the other fic you can definitely tell!

So the scene in which Harry is taunting Ron and Draco is playing along is inspired by chapter 8 of The rise of a dark lord by LittleMissXanda!

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

Over the past few days, Harry had noticed something peculiar - someone was messing with him and his belongings.

It was of no consequence, of course. Nothing of importance could be touched by others, and if his homework disappeared or got ruined, he just looked for the written homework in his mind and transferred it back onto the parchment. No biggie, but it was getting slightly annoying.

This morning, while sitting at the Slytherin table, eating his breakfast and trying to catch up on some reading, Harry noticed that his copy of "Magical Hieroglyphs and Logograms" had vanished from the table. He frowned, looking around in confusion.

"Where'd my book go?" he asked Draco and Pansy, who were sitting across from him.

They both looked up from their breakfast, equally puzzled. "What book?" Pansy asked.

"Magical Hieroglyphs and Logograms. I had it right here." Harry said, gesturing to the empty space on the table.

Draco looked around and frowned. "Maybe someone took it? Or maybe it fell on the floor?"

Harry shook his head, his mind was already going over the last few minutes, trying to recall when it disappeared. "No, I don't think so. I had it right here a minute ago."

As he spoke, his eyes flicked over to the Gryffindor table, where he saw Ron glancing in his direction. Harry had a hunch that he and Granger might be behind the strange occurrences happening to him over the past few days. He made a mental note to keep an eye on them.

During potions class, his suspicions were confirmed when Ronald tried to throw what Harry guessed was an Ashwinder egg into his potion, which would have caused an explosion. Thankfully, he had a protective barrier around the cauldron, and the extra ingredient just bounced off.

Another fortunate coincidence was Snape's placement as this all happened. He was standing behind Weasley and Granger and had clearly seen Ron throw something towards Harry and Draco's potion.

"What are you doing, you imbecilic dunderhead? Are you trying to kill us all, or are you just so utterly clueless you don't even know what would have happened had an Ashwinder egg landed in their potion?!" Snape's words were sharp and cutting, and Harry could feel the anger radiating off of him in waves. He was surprised that Snape had even acknowledged what had happened, seeing as Harry was the victim, but most likely, he was doing it for Draco.

Snape demanded to know what Ron's thought process had been. Ron had no answer and had only stuttered out a half-hearted "It-it was just a-just a-a joke."

“Detention both of you, two weeks with me preparing ingredients and learning of the importance of not mixing incompatible ingredients!” Snape's fury was obvious with the way he was glaring at them. Hermione was shocked - how had she landed herself in detention - was what Harry saw as he skimmed her mind.

Ron's mind was only filled with anger, bitterness, and resentment. Half-formed plans of revenge occupied his mind. His mind was predictably unguarded, and Harry shouldn't be surprised, really, but he honestly expected more from Dumbledore's soldiers.

And really, how did they think that messing with him was a good way to rekindle their friendship? Harry certainly wasn't sure how they planned to spin this to their advantage.

As Snape finished berating them and Hermione looked close to tears, he turned to Draco and Harry's table. The hatred in his glare was still clear as he looked at Harry, but he said nothing.

Was Harry supposed to thank Snape for doing his job for the first time in a decade? No way, he thought to himself.

As Harry remained silent and looked straight back at Snape, the professor narrowed his eyes and turned away.

"Get back to work, you idiotic brats!" Snape hissed as he headed for his table.

Harry shook off the feeling of frustration and turned his attention back to the potion they were working on. Draco was carefully measuring out ingredients, his movements precise and practiced. Harry watched him for a moment, admiring the ease with which he worked. It was clear that Draco had been raised in a household where potions were an important part of life.

As the class wore on, Harry found himself stealing glances at Ron and Hermione. Ron was still fuming, muttering under his breath and shooting dark looks at Harry and Draco whenever he thought they weren't looking. Hermione, on the other hand, looked torn between anger and concern. Harry could see the worry etched on her face, and he wondered if she was

more upset about Ron's behavior or the fact that she had been dragged into detention along with him.

Snape was still watching them all like a hawk, his gaze sweeping across the room every few minutes. Harry tried to ignore him as best he could, but it was getting a bit distracting.

Finally, the bell rang, signaling the end of class. Harry quickly gathered his things, eager to escape the stifling atmosphere of the dungeon. As he headed for the door, he heard Ron mutter something under his breath.

When Harry was young, he remembers how adults praised him for being quiet and well-behaved. They would say things like "Doesn't make a sound" and "Such a calm and silent child," as if being unnoticed was a virtue to aspire to. But Harry despised this kind of praise, he was not choosing to be quiet, he was forced into it.

As a child, he quickly learned that staying silent was the best way to avoid being hit. Every time he was forced to be in his abusers' presence in the presence of others, they would hiss at him, "Be quiet or you'll regret it when we get home!"

How he longed to scream, to shout out, "I'm here! I exist! I matter!" But he never did. At least, not as a child.

Now, Harry had the power to choose how loud he wanted to be, how much his presence and his voice mattered. He vowed never to remain silent for the sake of others again. So when Ron and Hermione came yelling at him after dinner, blaming him for getting them in trouble, Harry refused to hold his tongue.

"What the hell is your problem!? We're supposed to be best friends, and you can't treat us like this!" Ron shouted as he left the Great Hall with Draco.

Harry couldn't help but let out a deep, annoyed sigh. Hadn't they been over this before?

"As I have previously told you, we were never really friends, and I certainly don't have friends who drug me, rob me, and betray me. You, Weasley, are nothing to me." Harry spoke in a calm voice, infuriating Ron further.

Ron raised his wand at Harry, his eyes filled with determination, but still Harry found him lacking. Harry thought his attempt to force a duel was idiotic and rolled his eyes. With a wave of his hand, Harry sent Ron's wand flying.

"Did you see that, Draco? The fool wants to attack me, hurt me, make me *scream*." Harry said in a cold, honeyed voice. Draco sneered at Weasley and prepared himself with his wand by his side.

"I'll make you come back to the light, Harry! And if I have to hurt you to do so, I will!" The fool obviously wasn't able to understand the situation he was in.

Even with Hermione standing by his side, Ron was not a threat. No one was. A cold, dark chuckle escaped Harry's lips as he regarded Ron.

"Did you hear that, Draco? He's going to hurt me. Let's see how he does it without his wand." Harry had previously been maintaining his facade, but he dropped it, revealing a malicious, sadistic smile on his face.

Draco had never been one for physical violence, but he wanted to see Weasley put in his place. A smaller, but still malicious smile pulled at his lips.

Ron was still angry, but he had seemed to come to the conclusion that without his wand, this fight wouldn't last long.

"No? Not even gonna try?" Harry asked, still grinning, but his tone now light and curious. You would almost believe he was joking if not for the oppressive magic in the air.

In a second, his smile disappeared, and his expression turned cold, precise, and ruthless. His eyes glowed an eerie green, and his lips twitched as if he were trying to contain a sneer that was forcing its way to the surface.

“You are nothing. Will anyone miss you if you were gone? No? How sad. Isn’t it sad Draco when someone is worth nothing?”

“So sad.” Draco replied with no hesitation.

“Hmm yes, so very sad. It’s so tragic when a person is just *nothing*.” Harry looked Ron dead in the eyes and let his magic surround Ron, making him shiver with unease.

“You know right? You know that's what you are right? *Nothing*. You are *nothing*...you will live as *nothing*. You have no worth, no importance. And after living as nothing you will die as *nothing*.” At the last words Harry’s magic expanded beyond reach. The air became so cold their breaths could be seen, the floor sparkled as ice crystals formed along the whole corridor. The feeling of death cold touch travelled up their spines and grabbed them by their necks.

Harry stalked towards Weasley and slowly walked around his immobilised form, stopping in front of him. Harry put a hand on Ron’s shoulder and whatever strength the redhead had left him. He fell to his knees with a weak whine.

As he used whatever will he had left to lift his head and look into Harry’s eyes he regretted it immediately. This was not Harry. This was a monster, a demon. This wasn’t a human.

Draco didn’t think the terror in Weasley's eyes could increase but as Harry laughed, cold and high, it did. If not for Harry’s hand on his shoulder the boy would have fallen backwards and crawled away from whatever sight he saw as he looked upon Harry.

“You wanted to hurt me. You proved you can’t. And I, oh I want to hear you beg. Shouldn’t one of us get what we want at least, hmm?” The light, unbothered voice was back and it made them all flinch in response.

Harry must be focusing his magic on Weasley. He was trembling like a leaf and gone pale making his freckles stand out like blood in snow. Draco could feel the biting cold of Harry's magic but not to the same extent Weasley did apparently.

Harry's former friend's mouth opened and closed a few times before Ron seemed to realised no one was coming to his rescue.

He didn't know what Harry would do to him should he refuse, a few minutes ago he wouldn't have hesitated to spit in his face for even saying something like that but that was before the monster became known.

He was certain Harry would hurt him, maybe even kill him if he didn't get what he wanted so Ron forced the words from his throat.

"I beg you, please let me go." The words could barely be heard and Harry wasn't satisfied.

"Let you go? What about your darling know-it-all over there? No plea for her? How selfish." Harry tilted his head in curiosity.

Hermione had forgotten she was even there before that moment. She had looked upon the scene as if it were a play and not real life, a grave mistake on her part.

"You can't do that. It's illegal to threaten someone. We will go to the Ministry!" Hermione spoke up.

Harry turned his glowing green eyes to her and dropped the hand on Ron's shoulder. She really wished he wouldn't look at her with murder clear as day in his eyes.

"Threatened? I haven't threatened anyone here. Draco, have I spoken a word of a threat to anyone here?" Harry shook his head in mock confusion.

Draco couldn't see Harry's expression, but he knew what part he was to play without seeing Harry.

"No, Harry, you haven't threatened anyone. Weasley over there, however, has. He was quite clear in his threat. What was it? Oh yes, he would bring you back to the light even if he had to use violence. Now that's a threat if I've ever heard one." Draco spoke as if he were talking about the weather.

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but Ron was faster.

"Please let us go! We are sorry! Please have mercy." Ron spoke hastily, finally having used his brain.

"Mercy?" Harry said the word as if he'd never heard of it before. "Let you go? Who is holding you hostage here? Not me, nor Draco. If you wish to leave, I'm not forcing you to stay." The mock confusion was back at full force.

"Just a word of advice, remember what happened here today. Wouldn't want to repeat the same mistakes for a third time, would we?" Harry smiled mockingly at them as he walked up beside Draco and crossed his arms, as if scolding them.

Quickly scrambling to his feet, Ron grabbed Hermione's hand and sprinted away. As he ran, the feeling of death followed him as he heard the mocking, high laughter echo all around him.

During the late evening, a disappointed old man and a seething potions master were found in the headmaster's office.

"Severus, my boy, we are only as strong as we are united and as weak as we are divided. Alienating Miss Granger and Mr Weasley is not in our best interest. They have an important task ahead of them, and they need to be able to do it freely, without interference." Dumbledore spoke with a disappointed sigh to finish the statement.

Snape was seething with annoyance and anger. Did the headmaster not understand what would have happened had the fools succeeded in sabotaging the potion?

"Whatever their task may be, it is of no importance to me. My priority is to the students, and should they have succeeded, many students would have been hurt. I will not stand back and watch. You know my oath will not allow it. Their punishment was too lenient. However, I knew you would have protested should I have punished them accordingly." Snape responded through gritted teeth, not looking away from the headmaster's grave stare.

The headmaster let out a long-suffering breath and leaned back. "I am aware of your predicament and the children's poor judgment in choosing the appropriate time, but I have to ask you to let them go without punishment."

"No. I will not, and that's the end of it. If there is nothing more, I'll be on my way." His glare was hardened, and Dumbledore could see this was a lost fight.

"Very well, then, my boy. I hope that when I ask something of you in the future, you'll be more willing, knowing that everything I do is in our best interest." The old man looked lost in thought as he spoke, but a moment later, the clarity returned to those glimmering eyes of his.

"You may be on your way now, Severus. Please do try to keep your distance from those children. Goodnight." Dumbledore turned away, already dismissing Snape's presence.

Severus quickly rose and headed for the door. But before he reached it, he shot a quick glance towards the bookshelf. Something felt off about it, but he saw nothing out of place.

As he turned back towards the door, he spotted movement from the corner of his eye but pretended not to notice.

With a quick pace, Severus headed for his office, soon reaching it. As he closed the door behind him, he could still feel eyes on him. A second later, that became irrelevant due to the burning pain he felt coming from his dark mark.

Alongside the pain came panic, disbelief, and anger. The Dark Lord was back, and Dumbledore was right. Why was he being summoned now of all times, though? Did the Dark Lord know he was a traitor? That he worked for Dumbledore? Did he know of the oath?

As his thoughts spiraled, the pain became almost unbearable. He needed to go. There was no other option.

With his impending doom on the horizon, Severus' thoughts drifted to Lily. He hoped he had done enough for her to forgive him.

The Dark Lord had summoned him to the Malfoy manor. He recognized it as he landed on its front steps.

A house elf came into existence before him and led the way. Severus' mind was blank as he prepared to face the most powerful Dark Lord once more. His shields were as immaculate as ever, and the Dark Lord had never been able to see past them. He hoped that was still true.

The elf had stopped in front of a double door, most likely holding Voldemort behind them. He raised his fist and knocked once-twice before the door softly opened, leading into an office.

Sitting behind a large, dark wood desk was a man – just a normal man, until he looked up from the papers on his desk, and his blood-red, inhuman eyes met Severus's. Severus couldn't contain the shiver down his back, nor the cold sweat that broke out across his forehead.

The Dark Lord was in human form – a form that was strikingly beautiful and, disregarding the eyes, would make anyone trust this despicable man.

"Severus, how wonderful of you to join me on such short notice." The man spoke. Even his voice was beautiful. The only thing that brought Severus out of his shocked state was the sinister thoughts lurking behind those eyes as he stared into his.

Finally, Severus returned to himself, and so quickly his knees hurt as they hit the ground – he was kneeling.

"My Lord, please forgive my mistake of not kneeling before you sooner. I was rejoicing at your unexpected return." Severus spoke in a low and surprisingly steady voice.

"Unexpected? Do you think I am incapable, a mere mortal wizard?" Voldemort's voice was cold as he spoke, his eyes narrowing at the sight of his kneeling follower.

Severus's hands shook at the poorly worded excuse. "No, of course not, my Lord. You are the most powerful wizard that ever existed. Of course, you wouldn't be bound to the same rules as us mere mortals. I – I only meant that I hadn't noticed any indications of your return. Please forgive my slight and have mercy upon me, my Lord." This time his voice wasn't as steady. Instead, it was shaky.

With his head lowered as a sign of respect and subordination, he wasn't able to see how Voldemort reacted.

He heard the rustling of papers as he waited for a response. The most likely outcome would be a Crucio to the chest, but that hadn't happened yet. Maybe, just maybe, this Voldemort was different.

"You wouldn't have." The Dark Lord responded without emotion. No hidden anger – that was a good sign for Severus.

It took a second for Severus to understand what he'd responded to. "*You wouldn't have.*" Severus wouldn't have noticed his return because he'd done nothing to attract attention, or he had gotten better at hiding his presence?

Before he got a chance to think it over, Voldemort interrupted.

"Come, have a seat, Severus." Voldemort wasn't looking at him; instead, he was sorting through the papers on his desk. It made Severus relax for a moment to be disregarded, dismissed as someone of no threat.

The peace didn't last long.

Voldemort's eyes snapped back to him with anger clear as day in his eyes.

"It has come to my attention that you have betrayed me, Severus." He spoke calmly, too calmly. Severus's breath hitched.

"My Lord, I would never-" but he was cut off before he could explain.

"Stop. I know what you have done, but I want to hear it from you. You are bound to Harry Potter. You have sworn an oath to protect him. Tell me how that came to be."

He was already doomed – what was the point of turning back now?

"I-I loved Lily. I love Lily. When I heard of your plans to hunt her down after the prophecy was told, I-I had to protect her." Severus swallowed but continued on.

"I begged Dumbledore to protect her, to save her. He asked me what I would give in return. I gave him myself. I sold myself to the Order of the Phoenix in the hopes that it would save her. I spied on you so he would protect her, hide her."

"But he didn't, did he?"

"No." In that simple word, so many emotions could be heard: regret, grief, anger, frustration, hatred.

Death had been creeping in for a long time; Severus would accept what was to happen. In death, at least, there was a chance he'd get to see her again.

But death didn't come.

A knock was heard as Severus was frozen in his seat.

"Lucius, perfect timing for once." Voldemort said as Lucius slowly stepped inside and knelt.

"My lord, how may I be of assistance?" Lucius hadn't noticed Severus yet or perhaps didn't dare to look at who was seated across from his lord.

"Lucius, you've come to witness an oath between Severus and myself." At the response, Lucius glanced up and made eye contact with a startled Severus.

"Of course, my lord." Lucius said quietly.

Severus' mind was still blank, and he had a hard time understanding what was happening. Why wasn't he dead after admitting his guilt? Why wasn't he twitching uncontrollably on the floor? Why was he breathing?

As Voldemort stood, so did he. The dark lord rounded the table and grabbed ahold of Severus' arm quickly, before he could protest. Lucius put his wand to their connected arms and released his magic.

Usually, with a two-way unbreakable vow, the witness posed the question, but this wasn't two ways. This was Severus' vow, a vow binding him to Voldemort as it did to Dumbledore, tying him to the dark lord with no means of escape.

"Do you, Severus Tobias Snape, swear to never betray my trust, my cause, or the way of the dark ever again?"

"I do." What choice did he have if he wanted to live? And despite everything, he wanted to live.

"Do you swear to never personally or through someone else, willingly hurt the Dark Side or anyone associated with the Dark Side from this moment forward?"

"I do."

"Do you swear to always follow my orders and execute the order to the best of your ability?"

"I do."

"Do you swear to die, should I command you to?"

Severus swallowed. "I do."

Severus had been waiting for a specific question, but it didn't come. The question to kill Potter or to kill Dumbledore. If the Dark Lord asked it, Snape wouldn't be able to do so and he would be breaking his vow to protect Harry Potter. But it didn't come.

"If you break any of these bonds, know that your death will not come quickly nor painlessly."

"I understand." Severus' voice was grave but accepting.

With that, the magic snapped into place, invisible chains gathering around Severus' core, keeping him bound and restricted. But it didn't matter; what mattered now was Potter.

"My lord, what about Potter?" Severus questioned without hesitation.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes in irritation as Lucius flinched at the question. Voldemort disregarded Lucius.

"The boy does not matter. He shall be left alone. He shall no longer be of concern." Voldemort's voice was tight and strained as he spoke, as if he didn't want to accept what he just said.

"Now, leave both of you. I will summon you when the time is right." Voldemort looked at Severus during his last statement. Severus couldn't keep his tongue still.

"What am I supposed to do, my lord?"

Voldemort's nostrils flared at the question, and this time the Cruciatus curse did come. Severus fell to the floor but refused to scream. It was, however, as painful as he remembered. Voldemort only held it for a few seconds, though.

"Stand, Severus." Severus rose on unsteady legs.

"Continue on as if nothing has changed. Gather information and wait for my summons. Do not question me again. Leave."

And Severus left on even shakier legs than when he arrived.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo I'm sorry I can't really help myself, I just am a sucker for a powerful and in control Harry who puts fools in their place. Ron and Hermione won't be as annoying in the future chapters, Harry has bigger things to concentrate on.

And sorry that they didn't have a meeting this chapter! Next chapter there will be a meeting between Voldie and Harry and I really like how the next chapter turned out, hope you follow along!

Endearing and Enrapturing Experiences

Chapter Summary

Another article gets published, Harry does some breaking and entering, gets pulled into an unexpected dream and flirts with Dark Lords who are too rattled to think clearly.

Chapter Notes

I know I have a tendency to switch perspectives in the middle of an interaction, I just really want to show both perspectives sometimes but if it gets confusing or annoying please let me know.

I'm not feeling great and spent most of the day editing this but I'm not entirely happy with how the first half of this chapter turned out but I really like the second half, hopefully you all enjoy their meeting as well 😊🍕

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

Harry plopped down at the breakfast table with a stretch and a yawn. Draco, who was sitting next to him, couldn't resist yawning himself. Harry had been up late the night before, honing his powers, and he was thrilled with the progress he had made.

He had now almost perfected the ability to manipulate the physical development of living beings down to the year. He had been experimenting on rats, but he was eager to move on to humans. However, finding a muggle subject to practice on was a difficult task, and he wasn't sure where to start. He wasn't sure how painful of an experience it was to be changed on a molecular level, most likely very painful, so using someone who actually deserves some pain would be best to ease Harry's discomfort. Maybe he could break into a muggle prison and grab a couple of the worst criminals and then, when he was done, he'd just kill them and drop them back there? In that case he could also practice separating the soul from the body...

As Harry pondered his next steps, he heard a commotion outside the windows. The sound of owls filled the air, and he could hear a growing murmur of voices. He paid it no attention at first, but then he noticed Draco reading the Daily Prophet with a look of consternation.

"What's going on?" Harry asked.

Draco looked hesitant but eventually handed Harry the newspaper. "You should read this, Harry. It's about Dumbledore." He said, fearful of how Harry would react.

As Harry read through the article, his amusement grew. He couldn't help but snicker quietly.

THE SCANDALOUS PAST OF ALBUS DUMBLEDORE: lover of a Dark Lord

By Rita Skeeter

My dear readers, I have uncovered a shocking revelation about our beloved headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. It turns out that he is not the virtuous defender of the light that he presents himself as. No, in fact, he was once the lover of the Dark Lord Grindelwald.

Dumbledore and Grindelwald first met when they were young men and quickly became involved in a romantic relationship. Their love was anything but innocent, and their relationship was quite scandalous. (More about how they met on page 3.)

It is a well-known fact that Dumbledore and Grindelwald were acquainted and had met previously to their famous duel. However, until now, the true nature of their relationship has been hidden from the public eye...

Now that the truth has been revealed, it is up to us to decide whether Dumbledore is truly the hero he claims to be. Can we trust a man who was once involved with the very embodiment of darkness?

I leave that decision up to you, my dear readers. But I urge you to consider carefully the implications of this revelation.

Harry couldn't help but roll his eyes, Rita was so dramatic. He had sent her information and evidence, but he had forgotten that she had already been gathering her own information on Dumbledore for her book. He had assumed she would release it in due time, but she had acted quickly.

Death is too easy a punishment for Albus Dumbledore. His reputation was what he valued the most, and once it was gone, he would never be able to restore it. Losing a good reputation was much worse than never having one at all.

Harry already knew what the article contained as he skimmed through it. He glanced over the paper and watched the others' reactions to the shocking revelation. The Gryffindors were outraged and believed Rita to be a liar. The Hufflepuffs were split, with some trusting the evidence presented, such as the photo, the witnesses, and the letters between the star-crossed lovers. But some of them still chose to trust in their headmaster. The Ravenclaws were undecided and needed more evidence before coming to a reasonable conclusion. As for the Slytherins, most were able to hide their contempt and disgust, but Harry could see through their masks. He himself was fighting a smirk.

Unfortunately, Dumbledore was not present at the head table, so Harry couldn't witness his reaction firsthand. However, the horrified looks on the other professors' faces were quite a sight.

Yule break was approaching, and Harry still had horcruxes to find. He had in his possession the locket, ring, diadem, and the piece currently around his neck, leaving only one remaining: the cup.

Although Harry was certain the cup was a horcrux, he wasn't sure about Nagini. In his world, Nagini had become a horcrux before the Triwizard Tournament when Voldemort was still a wraith. But, even if Nagini was a horcrux in this world, he couldn't kidnap her without Voldemort noticing. So, for now, he would focus on finding the cup and retrieving it.

Breaking into Gringotts would be a challenge for an ordinary wizard, but Harry was anything but ordinary. Although he had the ability to shadow walk directly into the vault, he wanted to try doing it without that ability first, and if he failed, he would admit defeat and use it.

Harry didn't want to wait for Hogsmeade weekend, which was still two weeks away, especially since he needed that weekend to shop for Yule gifts. So, on a Saturday evening, after his dorm mates had gone to sleep early due to a little something in their food, Harry

gathered what he deemed necessary and headed out. For old time's sake, he decided to sneak around using his cloak, which he had willed to take the shape of a winter robe and become invisible.

Walking through the corridors, Harry couldn't help but reminisce about the past. This had once been his home and safe place, the only place he could be himself, or so he thought. While this place held dear memories, it also held some of the worst, such as the tainted friendship with Granger and Weasley, the manipulations of the old goat, and the death of so many innocent children.

This was the place where his dreams had come true, and the place where they had been crushed. Just over in the Forbidden Forest was where he lost an important part of himself, his soul. The fact that Harry had no soul didn't bother him, but that might be because he couldn't miss what he didn't remember having.

All of these memories had taken place so long ago that being back here felt like looking at a long-forgotten memory. It didn't feel real, but then again, he never really felt real either.

As Harry reached the statue of the humpback witch and opened the secret passage, he willed his mind to focus on the present, forcing all memories of Hogwarts behind his occlumency shields. As he walked through the endlessly long tunnel, he called Death to keep him company.

"Hey Kali." Harry spoke in his mind, pushing his magic towards the connection between them to alert Death of his want for their presence.

"Yes, my dear master?" Death's voice was still inhuman and grating, but it brought with it a sense of peace.

"Do you happen to know if Voldemort made Nagini into a horcrux in this world?" Harry asked curiously. He was pretty sure Death wouldn't know, seeing as they had little interest in human lives. Kali only valued their beloved souls.

"No, I don't know. What I do know, however, is that the woman he killed to be able to do the ritual in your world still lives in this one."

"So he didn't kill her. That must mean he didn't make one. Well, I guess he could have made another one later on, but still, this is interesting." Harry mumbled, lost in thought.

"What are you planning to do once you've collected all his *shards*?" Death emphasized "shards." He really disliked what Voldemort had done to his soul.

Harry continued walking quietly for a few steps before answering. "I am not sure. I needed to collect them to keep them out of the old man's hands, but what I plan to do with them depends on Tom. Either using them as blackmail or forcing them back together into his soul. But I'm undecided."

He had given it some thought after speaking with Death about it the first time, but honestly, it was difficult to determine what the consequences of his actions would be. His initial thought had been to gather them and hold them hostage as a way to control Voldemort. He wanted him to act a certain way, and if he had to blackmail him into being that way, Harry would. But that was before he met him. The Voldemort he met wasn't what he had expected. He was still a murdering psychopath, but who wasn't? But this Voldemort, Tom, was sane, or well, sane-ish. He could hold a conversation without threatening or trying to kill Harry, so that was an improvement.

Harry wasn't deluding himself into believing he was fundamentally different from Voldemort. He knew he wasn't. Just because Tom was saner didn't mean he wasn't still the embodiment of rage and pain. The man would sooner kill the whole ministry than confirm their law. But again, so would Harry.

This was why he was so hesitant to make any concrete plans regarding Voldemort. Was he so blinded by their similarities that he could not see past them? Was he a captive to the man who reminded him too much of himself, the same but in a different font?

It was odd how some people who had experienced abuse or neglect as children tended to develop a protective instinct for the frail and weak. How they were eager to stand up for insignificant things like plants or favoured things that no one else did, like misunderstood creatures. Neville and Luna appeared in Harry's head as he was thinking this. How, like him,

people grew attached to worn-out clothing or broken toys. After believing in their own worthlessness for their entire lives, they hid that aspect of themselves by saving other worthless things.

Yet, Harry and Tom had chosen to destroy those things instead. They chose to destroy that part of themselves by destroying those around them that reminded them of that. It was funny how instead of protecting themselves, their minds found the best way to move forward was to obliterate those parts of themselves that they didn't believe deserved to be here.

They both despised and envied the weak. While Harry had protected the weak as an abused child, it wasn't entirely his choice. He had been controlled, but now that he was free, he enjoyed causing destruction and chaos. Although he had more self-control than Voldemort, he still desired to crush the weak and eliminate any weaknesses he once had.

However, the problem with Voldemort was that he wasn't weak. He was one of the most powerful men in the world, and Harry admired his strength and ability to protect himself. The horcruxes made him almost invincible, but Harry couldn't decide whether it was a good thing or not.

As his thoughts spiraled, Harry was interrupted by Kali's gentle voice. "Do you not enjoy his company and look forward to the meetings?" Death asked curiously.

Harry sighed deeply. "I do. I like this new version of him, and I enjoy spending time with him...and looking at him. But I can't be too sure of his motives. I don't really care what he does to the muggles, but I don't want to see the same thing happen to the wixen of this world as in mine, where children were slaughtered for nothing."

Harry struggled to understand his own feelings. Most of the time, he cared for no one and was willing to sacrifice them if it benefited him. But, occasionally he felt guilty and responsible, which he hated because he had been brainwashed into saving others at his own expense.

"Wouldn't talking to him be the best course of action?" Kali suggested.

Harry raised an eyebrow and got a skeptical look on his face. "Are you serious? I know Voldemort is saner now, but that doesn't mean he can make a sane decision about the horcruxes. You know what he fears the most. He would never give up his lifelines in favor of a healthier psyche."

Harry knew it was time to end the conversation. "No, telling him will do no good. I'll come to a decision later. I've got to go, but I'll talk to you tonight, Kali?"

"See you then, master."

Gaining entry to the vault had been effortlessly easy for Harry. A little Confundus charm here, a bit of Imperius there, and he was in. As he stood in front of the vault, he could sense the dark magic emanating from the cup even with the ancient wards of the Goblin community guarding it. His fingers involuntarily reached for the pendant containing the other part of the same soul. He could feel it calling out to its lost counterpart. With shaky fingers, Harry pushed his magic combined with the pendants, into the door. This wouldn't have worked for an ordinary wizard, but Harry had become adept at mimicking the magical signatures of others. It was a skill that he had honed over time. He realised that it was not as difficult as it seemed. All one needed was an object with their magical signature, magical sight, experience, and a high level of control over their own magic. Easy-peasy.

The door slid open with a loud grinding sound. Harry winced as his ears were assaulted by the noise, but it didn't last long. Once he was inside the vault, Harry went straight for the spot where he remembered the cup to be. And thanks to the magic of the cup, it was easy to locate.

The gold of the cup sparkled in the dim light, and for most wizards, the temptation to reach out and grab it would be irresistible. Harry felt the warmth of the cup spread through him, as if searching for sanctuary within his magic. On the verge of accepting its request, Harry's magic burned and seared, forcing him back to reality.

The fact that he, a being like him, was not immune to the cup's seductive magic was disheartening. Those with darker cores would not have the willpower to resist, and those with lighter cores would be repulsed by its dark aura.

Frowning, Harry levitated the cup and dropped it into his Mokeskin pouch, shivering as it almost touched his skin. After that experience, Harry didn't feel like lingering any longer than he needed to. He was still slightly unnerved by the cup's magic. After erasing his magical signature and obliterating the goblins, he used the shadows to travel back to Hogwarts, leaving a replica of the cup in the real cup's place.

It's dark and cold. Harry doesn't know where he was. How did he end up here?

He looked around and saw sloping walls, but he could barely make them out. There was only one tiny window so his eyes took some time to adjust but soon he realised he was in what appeared to be an attic. A very old, very dirty and creepy attic. As he looked further back, everything became hazier, almost like an illusion, a dream.

But this wasn't his dream.

Suddenly, the door he hadn't previously noticed was slammed open, and an older woman dressed in a long, outdated dress barged in, dragging a child behind her.

"You will stay here, you freak! And think of what you did or I'll be forced to call back the priest for your devilish behaviour!" The woman yelled as she threw the young child onto the dusty, dirty floor.

Harry was appalled. Who was this woman? Why was she treating a child in such a cruel manner? He needed to help the boy.

As the boy lay crumpled on the floor, the woman retreated and slammed the door shut with a frustrated grunt. Harry knelt in front of the child, uncertain if touching him would frighten him further. Instead, he spoke in a slow, gentle voice, hoping not to startle the child.

"Hey kid, are you alright?" The child tensed at the sound of Harry's voice but remained still. Harry slowly reached out and grazed his fingers on the child's shoulders with a featherlight touch, letting his magic spread through the child.

Harry watched as the boy slowly started moving his limbs, almost like a puppet being pulled by strings. As the boy turned onto his side, Harry noticed blood running down his face. Panic surged in him. No, he had to calm down; this was just a dream.

He couldn't heal the child if he didn't believe he was being healed. He had to do it the muggle way; the child was clearly a muggle-born.

The boy slowly rose to a sitting position, pushing himself up with one arm, his head hanging down in defeat.

"Little one, what happened? You're bleeding." Harry said, noticing the child couldn't be more than five years old. He hoped the child could understand him.

As Harry reached out to help, a hand quickly stopped him by grabbing his wrist. "You're real?" The child whispered in a low hoarse tone, staring at Harry's hand like he'd never seen one before. He gripped Harry's wrist so tight that Harry was sure it would leave bruises if this were real.

"I am real. My name is Harry. May I have your name?" Harry spoke gently to avoid aggravating the child.

After examining Harry's hand, the child looked up, and Harry gasped. This child, he knew this child.

Gods, are you daft or what Harry? He felt like hitting himself in the face. Of course this was his dream, who else's? This child was Tom Riddle.

Their eyes connected, and Harry's eyes remained wide and surprised while Tom regarded him with suspicion and fear. Seeming to come to a conclusion, the child spoke.

"My name is Tom Morvolo Riddle. How did you get here?" Tom spoke louder now, more confident, but was still gripping Harry's wrist to make sure he was real or to keep him from leaving.

Harry twisted his hand in Tom's grip to grip Tom's wrist back. "Hello Tom, we've met before actually. Do you remember?" Harry was curious about how much this Tom recalled. Had he reverted back to his child self, or was the adult still in there?

Tom tilted his head and frowned. "You look familiar, I think, but I can't remember meeting you." Tom spoke very clearly for such a young child but he'd always been gifted. The blood was still dripping down his head, and Harry wanted to heal him up.

"Tom, you're bleeding. I would very much like to heal you and stop the bleeding. Is that okay?" Harry tried to show he was genuine in his words, still looking into his eyes.

Tom slowly loosened his grip on Harry's wrist and nodded his head. Harry conjured up a first aid kit since he wasn't sure if this Tom knew of magic and how healing worked. Slowly he cleaned off the blood and found the wound located in Tom's hairline. Harry cleaned him up and bandaged him to the best of his abilities. "There, all done. Are you hurt anywhere else?"

Tom hadn't moved his eyes away from him for a second. "No." He answered simply.

The urge to hug the child was overwhelming, but Tom was hugging his knees tightly. "How about I take us somewhere nicer? Would you like that?" Harry asked, copying Tom's sitting position.

Tom narrowed his eyes at Harry as if he believed him to be lying. "How?" he asked with a hint of bitterness in his tone.

Harry smiled lightly and reached out slowly to grab Tom's hand. He thankfully didn't flinch away. "Close your eyes, and when I tell you to open them, you'll be in a new place, alright?" Harry squeezed Tom's hand gently. Tom hesitated but reluctantly did as he was told.

Harry wasn't sure where to bring Tom, but he focused on the image of an endless field of flowers with the ocean in the background. "Open them, Tom." Harry whispered. With a gasp, Tom quickly rose to his feet, looking around in wonder and awe.

"How did you do this? We were just at the orphanage!" Tom exclaimed, his hand running over the flowers. Harry walked towards him, grinning.

"Do you like it?" Harry asked, choosing not to answer Tom's other question.

"Yes! It's beautiful!" Tom replied, flushing with excitement. With a spin, he faced Harry again. "Thank you." He said softly, avoiding eye contact.

Unable to contain his emotions any longer, Harry fell to his knees and pulled Tom into a hug. "You don't need to thank me, Tom. You deserve beautiful things. You deserve better than what you were given, little one. You are precious and special, and you should be treated with love and kindness." As Harry spoke, Tom relaxed and leaned onto him.

Reluctantly, Harry loosened his hold and leaned back so he could look Tom in the eye. "Tom, I know this will sound weird, but this is a dream. You are dreaming right now. I can guide you out into my mindscape, but you've got to let me lead. Do you understand, sweetheart?"

Tilting his head in confusion, Tom didn't seem to understand, but he gave the request some thought. "Alright, I will follow you." He said, nodding.

Harry smiled gently at this adorable version of the Dark Lord. He was having a hard time understanding that this child grew up to be the most feared man in Britain.

"Close your eyes and focus on my magic spreading through your body." Harry instructed. Tom gasped as the warmth spread through him, the unfamiliar magic latching onto his own. "This is going to feel scary, Tom, but only for a moment, the world will go dark, okay? It will be over very quickly, and then you'll remember who you are."

Tom nodded slowly, keeping his eyes closed. Harry grabbed onto Tom's consciousness and pulled, an unpleasant and disorienting experience. There should be no pain, at least. As Tom's body fell slack, and he lost consciousness for a moment, Harry brought them back to their normal meeting room.

In the blink of an eye, the child was transformed into an adult. It made Harry a bit sad to see the sweet child go, but this version of Tom wasn't too bad either. Slowly, the Dark Lord regained his consciousness. His eyes fluttered, and his fingers clenched. With a gasp, he flew upright, a look of panic on his face as he scanned the room.

Spotting Harry by the window, the clear blue light leaking in through the glass, Tom looked at him with a mixture of wonder and fear. Harry looked ethereal, like the angels he had never believed in.

He had no control over his reaction. His mouth fell open, and his eyebrows raised to make room for his widened eyes. What happened? How did he get here?

Whilst contemplating what had happened, he was startled by a low, light giggle coming from the person he was staring at. As he gazed at those enchanting green eyes, his mind filled with images of a dream, a dream with Harry, where he was a child. A child back in the orphanage, thrown into the attic and greeted by a strange boy, Harry, his mind supplied. Harry had comforted him and helped him out of his nightmare...

"Tom, you okay?" Harry asked softly, once more startling him by being able to talk. He didn't even react at being called by his muggle name.

For the first time in his adult life, Tom chose to run instead of fight. Avoiding his feelings wasn't something he'd have to do for a long time, probably not since he was the same age as in that dream. Tom hated that he was running from the same feeling once more, acceptance. Once he dreamt of belonging somewhere, of being part of something, having people care and understand him, but he was no longer that child, and he would not submit to such feelings now.

His love for being alone stemmed from control. Having no one around meant not hiding, not compromising, not having to alter his feelings to suit them better. Not having to force himself into being someone he's not. Tom felt most comfortable when he was by himself and failed to see how that would ever change. But still - still, the gripping, painful longing for a connection still haunted him, despite knowing it would rip him to shreds. Some say there's peace in chaos, Tom only thinks that authority over chaos brings peace.

He'd remained quiet for some time now, averting his eyes from Harry.

Harry must have taken pity on him.

"So, have you thought anything more about taking on another identity?" Harry's calm, cool voice was a nice distraction from the bubbling uncomfortable feelings rising up in him. It was best to focus on the present.

"I have. It would be a considerable risk, however, and my magic, while extremely powerful, is not invincible. If I built myself a new persona, there would be ways to expose me. The reward is too little for such high risks." He spoke as if nothing was out of the ordinary, as if Harry wasn't the one to pull him out of a nightmare. He felt he was doing a good job of remaining calm.

Harry hummed in thought, his eyes looking up to the right. Tom wasn't sure if Harry was aware of his habit to look right when thinking of something in the past and looking to the left when making something up and trying to formulate himself.

Tom had always prided himself on being very observant, and whilst he did occasionally pick up on some habits others may have, he tended to pay them no mind, but it was different with Harry Potter.

He knew which side he looked to when he was thinking, he knew he fiddled with his necklace when he was considering something or was deep in thought, he knew he clenched his fist when he got annoyed, he knew he drummed with his fingers when he was uncomfortable, he knew he bit his bottom lip when thinking of something he didn't like. Tom knew these things. Were they important, valuable for him in any way? No, not really. But still, he couldn't help but look for them.

“I may have another alternative... it would be almost impossible to be detected by anyone, and there would be no magical signature to expose that you were hiding something. It’s pretty much foolproof, but it won’t be pleasant for you.” Harry was still looking over to the side, his eyes glazed over slightly.

Tom raised an eyebrow at the thought of the brat knowing something he didn’t. “Go on.”

Harry breathed out deeply, he didn’t really want to disclose this information but Kali had promised the Dark Lord could not copy the marks and do them himself. The magic of death was needed and it was something Tom didn’t have.

“I think it’s easier if I show you.” And with that Harry started to unbutton his shirt carefully. Tom watched on in interest and surprise as more of Harry’s toned chest was exposed.

As the shirt was unbuttoned Tom noticed the dark shapes on Harry’s chest and rib cage. He’d never seen anything like it before, the tattoos were the darkest of black, twisted into rough lines forming what he would describe as something similar to hieroglyphs. As his eyes tried to see the details of the tattoos they watered and his vision blurred. Was it a variant of the notice-me-not charm that made his eye unable to distinguish any details?

A warm tingling in his fingers made him come back to the present. Somehow he had gotten up and walked over to Harry and was now touching the marks with his fingertips. For a moment he froze, his gentle touch pausing before continuing investigating as if him touching Harry Potter’s chest was a normal occurrence, nothing about this meeting was normal. He dared not lift his eyes and come face to face with him, he would not show weakness in the face of a potential danger.

But had he not done so already. Was he not letting his guard down, letting his thoughts wander in the presence of his prophesied downfall? Hadn’t the same downfall also been nothing but polite and friendly in his presence? This was a dangerous game he was playing. In his effort to disarm the boy he had disarmed himself and evidently grown comfortable in his company.

Such notions were unprecedented. Since the moment he was born, he had been forced to remain on edge. How did such a cheeky brat pull him away from the ledge?

He could not allow it. Something had to change if he was to continue these meetings. A vow, maybe? More consideration would have to be done.

For now, he would continue as if nothing was amiss.

“I cannot distinguish them.” However much he hated admitting to not knowing something, these marks were something special. Just the magic traveling through his fingers proved as much.

Internally, he grimaced. He was still touching him, tracing his finger along the edges and trying to memorize the patterns. He had failed to notice the goosebumps forming along Harry’s arms, but the shiver as he traced the one along the rib cage made his eyes move up to Harry’s face before he could stop himself.

Harry’s breath was shallow, and his mouth was slightly parted, his lips red from biting, making him look edible. His pupils were blown wide, the green of the irises almost unseen. And how Tom yearned. For what, he was unsure.

“You wouldn’t. No human has seen these runes in centuries.” However much he knew he should remove his fingers and stop this rising tension from continuing, he could not stop the movement. He was not a man who denied himself. Still, where was his self-restraint, his self-control? To fall trap to the human desire for intimacy was a failure. He craved no such thing.

Stop derailing and focus. You are still in his presence, he reminded himself.

“No human, so a creature created this language or has been using it?” Tom asked, no indication of a troubled mind.

Harry tilted his head and looked to the left. "In a way, they would be deeply offended to be referred to as a creature. However, I cannot tell you who made them and what language they are in, but I can tell you what they do if you're interested?" Harry smirked teasingly, perhaps to soften the blow for him of not knowing something. The half-smirk on his face was devilishly attractive, and Tom wanted to ruin it.

Tom waved his other hand in a "get on with it" gesture and looked blankly at Harry. His nonchalant exterior must not be as persuasive as it once was, seeing as Harry's lips twitched in amusement. Despite it being at his expense, the expression upon Harry's face had him granting forgiveness before it was even asked of him. Somehow, he doubted Harry would ask for it anyway.

"Well, this one—" Harry grabbed his hand gently by the wrist and guided it to the mark on the left side of his chest. Tom let himself be held and led. "—is for protection." Harry was still holding his hand and looking at the physical connection between them with an unreadable expression. Tom himself was forcing himself to remain relaxed. However much his muscles wanted to tense in anticipation. Once more he was unsure for what. He was barely able to focus on Harry's words being this close to him and his magnificent magic.

"And this one is for magic sight enhancement." Harry said as he tangled his finger over his and pulled them towards his ribs. As his fingers glided over the mark, he felt the intrusive thought to grab and squeeze Harry's slender waist and push him against the nearest surface. He stopped himself from indulging, but as he looked up at Harry's eyes, he saw that desire reflected back at him in them.

A dare.

Harry was daring him.

Harry stepped forward and gently grabbed Tom's wrist, running his thumb over the veins, sending shivers down his back. Giving Harry so much access to him that Harry could make him bleed should make him uncomfortable at least. But no, right now it only made him excited.

Harry watched his thumb move while Tom watched him. Looking up through his fringe, with eyes wide and open, Harry whispered a simple "Tom."

If he had been a weaker man, his breath would have stuttered, but he showed no signs of the utterance of his name having any effect on him. However, Tom felt it, a fluttering in his stomach and a creeping feeling of desire up his spine. He wanted Harry. But this was a game they were playing, and he knew it. He had played this game before, but he had never felt such a pull to give in, to lose. Harry was daring him to surrender. *"I dare you."* He could practically hear Harry's thoughts taunting him.

Which one would bend first? Which one would give in? Tom was almost certain that he would be the one to bend first, to give in to Harry's alluring gaze. Harry looked like an angel begging to be ruined, taken.

"Harry." He hadn't meant to speak. The name slipped out of his mouth without a thought, a breathless whisper coated with wonder and worship. This man would be the death of him, one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

Child Tom is so cute, I've started to love stories where he gets turned into a child or where Harry travels to the past and raises him. I never saw the appeal before but after reading *Growing pains* by Naomi_riddle and *Paved with the best intentions* by Ailora I really wanted to include a little scene with young Tom. I don't think I did anywhere near as good as them but it was fun to write and I just wanted to hug Tom and hold him close, he's so precious

Next chapter will be a continuation of the meeting!! I probably won't post during the week so sorry in advance, the chapter will be up next Saturday

Dares, Disarrays and Declarations

Chapter Summary

Continuation of the dream in which Harry confuses Tom further, an order meeting where a certain article comes up and the ramblings of an old man

Chapter Notes

Wow it's so strange that so many people have actually read this, I can't wrap my mind around the fact that you are all like real people. It's so weird, I didn't think anyone would actually read my attempt at a fic so just thank you! Thank you to everyone who reads and comments and bookmarks and sends kudos! It's so amazing. I really appreciate all your interaction with this fic! Love you all, have a great day and hope you enjoy the chapter!!! ♥♥♥

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

"Harry."

Harry hummed and leaned forward on his toes, millimetres away from Tom's lips. He spoke in a surprised whisper, "I spoke your name yet I still remain uncursed."

"Do you wish for me to curse you?" He replied just as quietly as Harry had spoken. His fingers twitched, unconsciously wanting to grab his wand as a way to ground himself from these feelings making him feel afloat.

"I wish for many things, I'm unsure if you'll be able to handle them." Harry swayed back and forth on his toes, and with every forward sway, Tom felt that their lips would collide.

"If I could kill you, I would." Tom growled at Harry. Whether it was from anger or arousal was unclear to both of them.

Harry lowered his eyelids and bit his bottom lip, making Voldemort's attention snap to the soft, full lips becoming red from the blood rushing to them.

"How would you kill me?" Harry spoke softly in a honeyed voice, looking up at him through his lashes, giving him the appearance of someone young and innocent, so unlike who Harry actually was.

Voldemort felt like growling again at the display. He knew Harry was putting up an act to get on his nerves. The annoying thing was that it was working. "How would you want me to kill you?" He asked through gritted teeth.

"Firmly, with your hands."

He didn't have an answer to that. Tom's control was wavering, and he was quickly forgetting all his reservations about giving in. He needed breathing room; they were too close to be considered appropriate for mere acquaintances.

"I dare you." He could still hear Harry's voice saying in his mind. *"I dare you."*

So very tempting. Harry was so very tempting. A strange mix of innocence and taint forcing Tom to focus fully on him and only him. Tom didn't like being forced into anything, even by his own hand.

Retreating was his only option. It would be a strategic move, not a loss. Yes, that's right, a strategically smart move to gather his thoughts and feelings and come to an educated conclusion.

With his decision made, Tom casually took a step back and slowly walked over to the sofa. He didn't sit down but looked into the empty fireplace opposite it.

He refused to look Harry's way; no good would come of it. Soon, he heard quiet footsteps closing in and a groan as Harry threw himself onto the sofa. He wondered how he'd sound groaning in pleasure.

Standing rigidly by the fireplace was not ideal, and Tom was quickly wishing to be back in Harry's private sphere. No harm in sitting down, he'd just sit as far away as possible, and besides, the armchairs were gone, so this was the only option. Tom sat down carefully, Harry looking at him as he did.

"You are sitting next to me." Harry acknowledged the change in behavior.

"Isn't it weird that just a few months ago, you tried to kill me, and now you willingly sit by my side?" Harry's voice was filled with hidden amusement with just a hint of something bitter.

"If you simply wished for me to move, all you had to do was ask." Tom spoke with irritation, already rising to his feet. But before he could take a step away, Harry grabbed onto his arm, forcing him to stay.

"No, that was not my intention. Your presence by my side is pleasant, and I honestly only find the situation we find ourselves in humor-ing. I certainly couldn't have seen this coming a few months ago."

Apparently, at some point, they had decided that ignoring the tension and the previous moment was an unspoken rule. Or perhaps Harry had gotten the hint that Tom no longer wished for such closeness.

"No, I suppose neither could I." Tom replied in a neutral tone.

"Do you wish to speak of it? The dream, I mean." Harry questioned after the silence had hung over them for a few minutes.

Tom looked at him and found no malice or mocking look on his face, only light curiosity tangled with something softer that he couldn't identify.

"No, what is there to say? You saw what happened. There is no more to be said." There was a sharp edge to Tom's voice now, promising cuts if one dared to step closer.

"If that is what you wish." Harry replied evenly as he shifted ever so slightly on the sofa, making Tom very aware once more of their proximity.

"Thank you for bringing me out of there. Of course, I could have done so myself given enough time." Tom spoke to distract Harry from any lingering thoughts on his past. He knew the boy would find his gratitude surprising, which was exactly why he chose to voice it.

A half-smile formed on Harry's lips in amusement, so unlike the surprise he'd suspected would force Harry's eyes wide open and part his mouth. "Of course. You are the mighty Dark Lord, after all." Harry teased.

Tom simply rolled his eyes, an action he wouldn't have felt comfortable doing in Harry's presence even a week ago. Harry refrained from pointing it out.

"I wish I could go back in time and kill them all." Tom admitted quietly after a few more silent minutes.

"You are experienced in time magic, could you do it?" Tom asked in a joking way, obviously not for Harry to take seriously, but he did. Harry now wore a slightly surprised expression. Yes, he supposed that the use of the time-turner was not common knowledge, but he'd seen enough evidence of it in Harry's classmates' memories gathered by Barty.

Harry looked into his eyes, his gaze unfocused for a few moments. If Tom didn't know better, he'd guess Harry was performing legilimency, but it was impossible. The child had no experience in the complicated magic of the mind arts, and he would have felt if an intrusion was occurring.

"Maybe I could." Harry answered but he startled as he spoke. Tom was unsure of why. Harry twisted his head away from the adamant stare being sent his way.

"*Maybe you could?* If I asked, would you try?" Tom asked curiously.

"Time magic is fickle. It would not end well for either of us." Harry spoke, deliberately avoiding the question.

"You did not answer the question. Would you?" His voice was even despite how wrong-footed he had felt this whole meeting.

"Yes." Harry replied quietly, avoiding his eyes.

The rest of the meeting was spent talking about Harry's marks and how they could be applied to Tom's situation. Harry was adamant it would help him secure an advantageous position if the war was to continue. Something Harry had spoken of as well in conflicted terms. As for a lot of this meeting, Tom was unsure why Harry was hesitant and conflicted toward starting up the war for their rights again. Bad memories perhaps, or simple dislike for war and battle? Tom had asked Harry what his issue with the war was, and he'd received a long rant because of it.

Harry had made it clear plenty of times he would not take part in the war efforts. He would help if asked, but he would not play a big part. Tom understood, surprisingly. Before Harry could never really understand why Tom chose to attack Muggles when it clearly wasn't an attack on the Wixen and the government. Now he understands that it was to spread fear. Fear that will later lead to inaction. To keep Tom's reign safe from attempted coups or such. That it's a strategic move. A very Machiavellian approach.

"One can say this in general of men: they are ungrateful, disloyal, insincere, and deceitful, timid of danger, and avid for profit.... Love is a bond of obligation which these miserable creatures break whenever it suits them to do so; but fear holds them fast by a dread of punishment that never passes." The quote popped into Harry's mind without his consent.

"If I join you, it will not be a war. It will be a genocide. I have powers beyond their imagination. I am too advanced. I am too deadly." Harry spoke with utmost conviction. Tom could not understand why he was so arrogant to believe himself to be the bringer of death, the destroyer of worlds.

"You are but a mere boy in a mask. Why pretend to be more than that?" He was being condescending he knew, but the statement had startled something within him. The same childhood conviction that he was all-powerful, unbeatable, godly. So similar to his own arrogance that it made his chest constrict uncomfortably.

Harry did not acknowledge the tone in which he spoke as he replied. "I'm not. For the beginning of my life, I tried my absolute best to be just a mere child, a normal boy, just Harry. And every time my powers were forcing me to go forward, to evolve, to advance. I am powerful. There is no denying that, and however much you wish it wasn't true, my powers overwhelm yours. You can feel it." The child was speaking as if it was simply facts he was stating, undermining everything Voldemort had spent decades priding himself in: power.

He wished to reach over towards Harry, who was situated at the other end of the same couch, and force him to gain some perspective, some common sense. But the little brat was too stubborn to accept reality, delusions such as his would be hard to overcome and would only bring him down.

"How about when we meet in the physical realm, we duel, and I can show you exactly how delusional I am?" Harry smirked at him, confidence and arrogance clear.

Tom was curious as to how that would play out, so he readily agreed.

As the time approached for them to awaken, they had a rough plan of meeting up during Yule break for Harry's retrieval of the irksome rat of his and the display of Harry's superior powers.

As they started to wake, and the room around them blurred, Harry reached out and grabbed his hand, softly lifting it up to his lips and tenderly kissing the back of his hand. Tom was frozen in place, never had anyone dared to pull such a move on him and get away with it. But somehow Harry, as always, was the exception to every rule.

"I'll see you later, oh mighty Dark Lord."

"Goodbye, little nuisance."

"Hello, my darlings. What have you been up to lately?" Harry hissed in Parseltongue as his beloved little snakes slid up the armchair on which he was currently sitting.

As they settled on his neck, they took in the looks that the other humans were sending their way. *"The old man has left the nest once more heading to something called the Burrow with the rest of the birds."* Nyx told him.

"They are heading to the Burrow? Then they must be having a meeting. How long ago did he leave?" Harry asked as he thought of ways to spy on the meeting.

"As he left, we headed for you. So, however long it took us to get here from the old man's tower." Selene answered this time.

Harry hummed and contemplated what to do. Going himself would be risky. He could go through the shadows, but did he feel like hiding and listening in to their scuffles? Not really. Besides, he had better things to do. Sending someone to spy would be easier. Now the question was, who?

Harry snapped his fingers and spoke in a clear voice, "Opie." And an elf popped into existence before him.

He had chosen to summon Opie seeing as her magic wouldn't register with the Headmaster. She was already keyed into the wards thanks to her being born here. Her parents had been two of the elves that work in the kitchen, and upon her birth, she had automatically been added to the wards. When she left, she had never been removed from them. It was a

convenient little fact Harry had discovered this summer when he helped Opie clean up the garden.

"Master Hadrian summoned Opie?" Opie asked in confusion as she looked around the room and observed the other humans watching.

Harry didn't really care if they saw. He had added a secrecy ward around the Slytherin quarters the first night he got here. Anyone who entered Slytherin territory would be bound to not speak of what happens there outside of the ward to someone who wasn't in the know. So far, no one had dared to complain. Some probably hadn't even noticed the restriction upon them, too ignorant of their own core to feel it.

However, what they were about to speak of didn't need to be heard by others, so he put up a privacy ward.

"Opie, I need you to do something for me. Could you spy on a meeting? It's very important I know what they speak of. You would need to hide your presence and make sure no one knows you are there," Harry spoke in a gentle voice, not wishing to push Opie to do something she didn't want.

He was certain she would be fine. Elf magic worked differently for their magic, and it would go unnoticed by the usual ward and precautions. Dumbledore wouldn't notice unless he was consciously searching for elf magic.

"Opie will help Master Hadrian. Opie will stay out of sight." She answered, seeming unbothered by the request and mission.

"Thank you, Opie. It's at the Burrow in Devon. Here's the address." Harry handed her a piece of paper with the address on it that he had just conjured up. "If they do discover you, do you remember what we talked about during the summer? The Code Orange plan?"

During the summer, Harry had spent a few days coaching his elves on different plans in case of emergency. So, if he ever said the words for a plan, they would be ready.

With a nod of her head, Opie took off with a loud pop, startling Harry's precious snakes that were almost asleep on his shoulders.

The Order of the Phoenix had gathered in the kitchen of the Burrow, their faces tense with worry as they waited for their leader, Albus Dumbledore, to arrive. Molly Weasley fussed over a pot of stew on the stove, while Tonks and Shacklebolt exchanged quiet words by the window.

Finally, there was a soft pop, and Dumbledore materialized in their midst. His eyes twinkled behind his half-moon spectacles as he surveyed the group.

"Greetings, my dear friends." He said, his voice calm and reassuring. "I trust you have all been keeping well?"

There were murmurs of agreement and nods of heads. Dumbledore's eyes lingered on each member of the Order, as if assessing their state of mind.

"Very good." He said at last. "Now, let us get down to business—" Before he could continue, the man was cut off by an impatient voice.

"Headmaster, before we begin, could we address the article that was posted in the Daily Prophet?" Tonks hesitated, and her eyes flickered from side to side as if undecided on how to proceed.

"It's just... is it true?" she rushed out. "What they are saying. Is it true that you and—" She choked on the words, unable to bring herself to ask if they had been lovers.

There were murmurs of unease around the table, and Dumbledore raised a hand for silence.

Dumbledore sat down on the only empty chair at the table and sighed. All the exhaustion and regret he had been carrying around was now clear. He dared not raise his eyes as he spoke.

“Once, I was young and foolish and fell for the charms of a promising young man. He was clever and ambitious, and I believed he wanted to change the world for the better. I believed I could help him change the world.” He said, taking a deep breath and relaxing his back, leaning heavily on the backrest.

“But I was blinded, blinded by my love and my faith in him. Only after the death of my dear sister did I understand what kind of man he was, and I’ve spent every day since living with regret and guilt. I decided then and there to give my life for the greater good, to spend every day of my life making up for that mistake.” Dumbledore raised his tear-filled eyes and looked at his people who were looking back at him with various reactions.

“Okay, Headmaster, I’m sorry for bringing it up.” Tonks said, seeming to be one of the few who looked at him with sympathy and forgiveness.

Some looked at him with pity and disappointment, but thankfully no one looked at him with disgust or anger.

“Thank you, my dear. I am sorry to have kept this in the dark. To be truthful, it’s my most guarded and shameful secret. I hope that in time, you will all forgive me for not sharing this fact.” Dumbledore’s gentle and coaxing voice was back.

It was now Molly’s turn to take a deep breath. “Of course, we forgive you. Everyone makes mistakes, and while yours wasn’t a small one, you’ve done more than enough to make up for it.”

The others seemed to agree with her statement and nodded along.

The subject dropped, and as tea was served, the tense atmosphere eased back into normal.

Albus cleared his throat, and attention was quickly focused on him. "There is something we need to discuss. It's regarding young Harry."

The Order tensed, and Sirius was quick to get on the defensive.

"What about Harry? What is wrong?" Sirius hastily asked.

Dumbledore rose and stood at the window in the kitchen, staring out into the night sky. He was worried, deeply worried, about Harry Potter. Something was not right with the boy, he could feel it in his bones.

He had been watching Harry closely for weeks, monitoring his behavior and his emotions. There were times when Harry seemed indifferent to others, jaded and guarded in his actions, but mostly he was able to keep up the newly-formed pureblood mask. He disappeared at odd hours, and while he interacted with the Slytherins, he hadn't sought out Miss Granger or Mrs Weasley's company since before the summer.

Dumbledore knew that Voldemort was still out there, somewhere, plotting and planning his next move. He feared that the Dark Lord might be reaching out to Harry, trying to infiltrate his mind and corrupt his thoughts.

"I believe young Harry might be falling into the hands of the dark." Dumbledore said calmly.

Sirius's face twisted into something angry.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Albus?" Sirius demanded. "Accusing Harry of going dark? You know him better than anyone, you know he's not like that."

Dumbledore held up a hand, trying to calm his old friend. "Sirius, please. I do not accuse Harry of anything. I merely express concern for his well-being. Voldemort is still out there, despite how quiet he's being, and he has tried to manipulate Harry in the past. I fear that he may be trying to do so again."

Sirius snorted. "You think Harry would fall for that? After everything he's been through?"

Dumbledore sighed. "I do not know, Sirius. Voldemort is a master of manipulation, and Harry is still young and vulnerable. We must be vigilant, we must watch over him and protect him at all costs."

Sirius glared at him. "You're damn right we will. But don't you dare accuse Harry of anything. He's been through enough without having to deal with that kind of suspicion."

Dumbledore nodded, acknowledging Sirius's anger. "I understand, my boy. And I apologize if my concerns have caused any distress. But we cannot afford to let our guard down. Voldemort is still out there, and he will stop at nothing to achieve his goals."

Sirius's anger had subsided slightly, but the burning in his magic was still quite clear. "Harry is strong, much stronger than any of us. He will not fall into the hands of the dark. He will follow his path, and whatever that may be, I will be with him."

Most of the order had remained silent, simply watching the exchange between Dumbledore and Sirius. Shacklebolt had heard enough. "Of course, Harry's safety is important, and we should help the boy in his endeavors, but if what the headmaster says is true, then we cannot let Potter have free range."

"We must not give in to fear." Dumbledore said firmly. "We have faced dark times before, and we will face them again. But we must be vigilant, and we must be prepared."

Nods were exchanged around the table among the members, but only Remus remained still as Sirius quietly fumed.

Albus turned to Lupin, who was sitting at the table with his arms folded.

"Remus, I understand you have been keeping an eye on Fenrir Greyback and his followers. What can you tell us?"

Lupin grimaced. "It's not good news, I'm afraid. Greyback's been recruiting heavily, and they've been targeting vulnerable families in isolated areas. They're using some kind of dark magic to track their victims, so it's almost impossible to catch them off guard."

Dumbledore nodded in understanding but Remus wasn't finished yet.

"There is, however, nothing to indicate that Voldemort is behind these attacks or the recruitment efforts. From what I've gathered, Greyback is simply trying to expand his territory and take over a few of the larger packs still remaining in Britain. I believe he wants full control of the whole country's werewolves."

Dumbledore nodded gravely. "Thank you, Remus. We will need to increase our patrols in those areas and send more teams to investigate further. Tom is staying hidden so far. I do wonder if that is out of necessity or a tactical move..."

There was a flurry of activity as the Order members began to discuss the best course of action. Some suggested a more aggressive approach, while others urged caution and secrecy.

Dumbledore listened to them all, his expression thoughtful. Finally, he raised a hand for silence once more.

"Thank you, my friends. Your input is invaluable. However, I must remind you that we must always act with caution and restraint. We cannot risk exposing ourselves or putting innocent lives in danger."

He rose from his chair, his robes billowing around him.

"Let us leave this meeting with a clear purpose: to defend our world from those who would do it harm. We may not always know the right course of action, but we must always strive to

do what is right."

With those words, he swept out of the room, leaving the Order members to ponder his words and their next move.

A second later a quiet pop could be heard.

As Dumbledore sat alone in his office, his mind was consumed with thoughts of the past, present, and future. He couldn't help but reflect on the decisions he had made and the actions he had taken in the name of the greater good.

His mind wandered back to a time long ago when he had been young and foolish and had made a grave mistake.

He had once believed that he and Grindelwald could work together to create a new world order, one in which wizards would rule over Muggles. He had been blinded by the promise of power and the allure of Grindelwald's charisma and intellect.

But as the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months, Dumbledore began to see the darkness that lay beneath Grindelwald's charm. He saw the destruction and devastation that he wrought in his quest for power and domination.

And then, one fateful day, Dumbledore's younger sister, Ariana, died in a duel between himself, Grindelwald, and Aberforth. The tragedy shook him to his core and made him realize the terrible mistake he had made by aligning himself with Grindelwald.

For years, Dumbledore had carried the weight of that mistake with him, haunted by the memory of his sister's death and the knowledge that he had once been party to such terrible ideas. He had spent the rest of his life trying to make amends, to atone for his past sins.

But the regret lingered, a constant reminder of his own fallibility and the cost of his ambition. And now, with the rise of dark forces once more threatening the wizarding world, Dumbledore felt the weight of his past decisions more acutely than ever.

He knew that he could not change the past, but he could use the lessons he had learned to fight for a better future. He could use his influence and his knowledge to stand up to those who sought to dominate and oppress, to ensure that no one else would have to suffer the way his sister had.

As he sat in his office, Dumbledore once more made a silent vow to himself: to never forget the mistakes of his past and to do everything in his power to make sure that they were never repeated. It was a small gesture, perhaps, but it was a start. And for Dumbledore, that was enough.

He thought back to the day he first met Harry Potter, a young boy who had just survived an attack from the most powerful dark wizard of all time. It was then that he knew that Harry was the key to defeating Voldemort, and that he would have to be prepared to do whatever it took to ensure that victory.

Over the years, Dumbledore had put Harry through countless trials and tests, knowing that each one was necessary for his growth and development as a wizard. He had even allowed Harry to suffer abuse at the hands of his relatives, knowing that it would only make him stronger in the end.

And yet, as he sat there now, Dumbledore couldn't help but feel a sense of regret for all that Harry had been through. He knew that it was necessary, but that didn't make it any easier to bear.

But Dumbledore also knew that there was no other way. If they were to defeat Voldemort and bring about a new era of peace and prosperity, sacrifices would have to be made. And if that meant Harry's death, then so be it.

It was a harsh reality, but Dumbledore knew that it was the only way forward. He would do everything in his power to protect Harry and ensure his safety, but ultimately, the greater good must prevail.

As he sat there lost in thought, Dumbledore couldn't help but wonder what the future held. He knew that the road ahead would be fraught with danger and uncertainty, but he also knew that they had a fighting chance.

For as long as there was hope, Dumbledore would continue to fight for the greater good, no matter the cost. It was his duty as a wizard, and as a human being, to do what was necessary to make the world a better place.

And so, with a heavy heart, Dumbledore rose from his chair and prepared himself for the battles to come. He knew that the road ahead would be long and difficult, but he was ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead in the name of the greater good. The first one might be the hardest one, to help guide Harry back into the light. And if worse came to worse perhaps it would be simplest to start dosing him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm currently writing chapter 23 and I'm stuck. It's gonna be another emotional chapter and I find emotions so hard to write. So I need some advice, is Harry the type to go over the edge, morally, and hurt a lot of people if he's pushed to the edge?

I know he won't hesitate to hurt those that hurt him but is he someone who could hurt "innocent people"? I think that if he feels justified he would and if he thinks it's for the best. But what are your thoughts? I don't want to give too many details away so it might be a difficult question to answer but I would really like your input. I know this is a dark Harry fic but how dark should I go?

Fantasies of a Fickle Fool

Chapter Summary

A meeting about the upcoming holiday doesn't go as planned for Dumbledore, Harry is angry but thankfully Luna is there and a day with Sirius Black.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all your opinions and advice on what I should do for chapter 23! I've written it, not my best work so gonna have to edit it a few times but your comments helped me get a different view on things so I really appreciate all the help! Thank you, love you all!!

Sorry no Tom in this chapter, he'll be back soon!

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

Dumbledore sat behind his desk, his half-moon spectacles perched on his long nose as he scrutinized the parchment before him. Harry stood before him, his arms crossed, a neutral expression on his face, wondering why he had been summoned to the headmaster's office.

"Good evening, Harry," Dumbledore said, looking up from his work. "I hope you're doing well."

"I'm doing quite well." Harry replied evenly as he sat down. He was growing impatient. The headmaster had better make his point soon.

"I've called you here because I have some important news." Dumbledore said, folding his hands on his desk. "As you know, the Christmas holidays are approaching, and I have received some troubling information about your safety."

"Oh?" Harry raised his eyebrow. "And what kind of trouble could I possibly be in?"

"It has come to my attention that you may be in danger if you remain at Hogwarts for the holiday," Dumbledore explained. "Therefore, I'm instructing you to spend Christmas with your relatives."

"My relatives?" Harry repeated, a smirk growing across his face. "And why, exactly, should I do that?" Harry asked in mock confusion.

"I understand your concerns, Harry," Dumbledore said. "But it's important for your safety that you spend this time with your family. It will also be good for you to get some distance from the wizarding world for a few weeks. I'm sure it will be fruitful."

Harry chuckled. "That's funny," he said. "Last time I checked, my relatives didn't exactly have my best interests at heart."

"As your headmaster, I still have a say in your welfare," Dumbledore said. "And I've decided that it's in your best interests to go to your relatives' home for Christmas."

Your relatives' home, Dumbledore said, not *his* home. Even Dumbledore knows that house could never be his home.

Harry's smirk turned into a grin. "You know, Albus, I think you're forgetting something. I'm not a minor anymore in the eyes of the law and magic. I don't have to do what you say, and there's nothing you can do to make me go."

Dumbledore's expression hardened. "I'm afraid you're mistaken, Harry." He said. "I still hold a great deal of influence in the wizarding world, and I have ways of ensuring that you comply with my wishes."

Harry's grin turned into a smirk again. "Oh, I'm sure you do," Harry drawled. "But you know what they say, Albus. It's not what you know, it's who you know."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow. "And what, pray tell, do you mean by that?"

Harry leaned forward, his eyes glinting with mischief. "I mean that I know people, Albus," he said. "People who would love to hear about all the things you've put me through over the years. People who would love to hear about how you used me like a pawn in your game. People who would love to hear about the horrific abuse and neglect I suffered at the hands of my relatives, abuse you let happen. People who would love to see you fall from grace."

Was it smart of Harry to practically admit to what he was already doing? No. But he was feeling particularly bloodthirsty this morning. He couldn't help himself.

Dumbledore's face paled slightly, realizing that Harry was not just bluffing. "You wouldn't do that, Harry." He said quietly. Harry leaned back in his chair, a smug expression on his face.

"Oh, wouldn't I?" He asked. "You see, Albus, I've learned a few things during the summer. I've learned how to be devious. I've learned how to be cunning. And most importantly, I've learned how to get what I want."

"You are not so cruel as to do that to an old man. You are not ruthless."

Harry's lips stretched into a playful smile, and his eyes crinkled at the corners. He tilted his head up, and now they were on equal ground, looking each other in the eye. Before he spoke, his smile twitched on the left side, almost making it look devilish. "Oh yes, I am."

For minutes they sat in silence. Dumbledore, perhaps waiting for Harry to back down or ask for forgiveness, who knew what went on in that head. Harry was waiting for the inevitable outcome, his victory.

Dumbledore hesitated for a moment longer, then spoke with a slightly uneven voice. "Harry, I understand your concerns, but you must understand that your safety is of the utmost importance. If you refuse to go to your relatives, I may have to take action to ensure that you are protected."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "What kind of action?" He asked.

"I don't want to threaten you, but if I have to, I will, for the greater good. If you don't listen, Sirius will find himself in trouble with the Ministry once more, and I will not be there to help. You know what that will mean for Sirius's fate." Dumbledore sighed heavily.

"I understand your frustration, Harry. But please try to see things from our perspective. You are not just any ordinary wizard. You are the Chosen One, and the fate of the wizarding world rests on your shoulders. We cannot risk your safety." His tone was sober and laced with false regret.

The anger burned, consumed. He wanted to burn this whole place to the ground if it meant this old bastard and all the memories of this place had a chance of burning along with it. But Death was currently warning him about not taking such actions, and despite his blinding anger, Harry knew it was best to listen to them.

Harry stood before Dumbledore, his chest heaving with anger and frustration. The old wizard gazed at him with a mix of sadness and understanding, but it did nothing to quell Harry's emotions.

"I won't do this anymore, old man." Harry spat out. "I won't fight for you or this supposed greater good. I'm just a child, for Merlin's sake, and there is no bloody war, you delusional old fool! Whatever you believe will happen won't. So leave me out of it!"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled, but the jovial expression was gone from his face. "I understand your reluctance, Harry. But we're fighting for more than just ourselves. We're fighting for a better future for all wizards and muggles alike."

Dumbledore purposefully ignored Harry's words, and the calm tone in which he spoke grated on Harry's already thin control.

Harry shook his head fiercely. "I don't care about any of that. All I care about is staying alive and protecting the people I care about. I won't let you or anyone else dictate my life and my choices anymore, and it'll be in your best interest to stay the hell away from me!"

Dumbledore's gaze softened, and he reached out a hand to place it on Harry's shoulder. But Harry hit his arm away before he could reach. Harry's magic would have burned Dumbledore's hand if he had touched him now, and however much he wanted the man to feel all the pain he'd inflicted on Harry, now was not the time.

"I never meant to make you feel like a pawn in this war, Harry. But the truth is, we need you. Your bravery and determination have been an inspiration to us all." Dumbledore confessed.

"I'm sick of being used as a tool for your agenda. You say you care about me, but you've put me in danger time and time again. I won't do it anymore. I won't fight for you or this greater good you speak of. Do you understand me, old man?!" Harry was practically screaming in his face now.

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "I understand your anger, Harry. But you must understand that we are at war. And in war, sacrifices must be made for the greater good."

"I don't believe in the greater good as I told you before." Harry spat out. "And there is no war. Voldemort is dead, you senile old fool. Stop pretending you can relive your glory days. And you can find someone else to fight your battles for you." Harry wasn't sure why he was even bothering talking to this imbecile. There was no getting through to him, but still, Harry wanted to relieve some of the anger he'd felt towards the man for years. It wasn't working.

Dumbledore regarded Harry with a hard expression. "I am sorry to hear that, Harry. But know that the path you choose to take will have consequences. You can't ignore this war and the danger it poses to us all."

"We'll see who's right in the end, old man." Harry said, his voice shaking with emotion.

"But I won't be a part of your imaginary war anymore. I'm done with it. I'm as dead to you as Voldemort is to me." With that, Harry turned on his heel and strode out of Dumbledore's office, his mind filled with conflicting emotions. But before he reached the door, he waved his hand minimally, letting his magic do as he intended without the old man's knowledge.

As Harry neared the ROR, he saw Luna leaning against the wall, looking as angelic as always. It eased some of the tension in his stomach.

As he neared her, her eyes snapped to his, looking as though she knew all the secrets of the universe.

“Harry, do not fret. Death doesn't hold you, but it'll become him. Peace will not find him.” Luna's voice was harder than he'd ever heard before in this life; she must have seen the meeting then.

Harry's jaw loosened, and a small smile twitched at his lips. “Is that so, dear moon? I look forward to it.” The smile quickly slipped away once he remembered what had happened.

Harry paced back and forth in front of the door, his frustration growing with each step. He wanted a dueling room with a sitting area. As the door appeared he turned to Luna smiling at her. The smile was not pleasant, this smile was twisted and crazed. “Come Luna, help me blow off some steam.”

As he entered the room Harry's eyes fell on a group of training dummies in the corner. Without thinking, he stormed over to them and began to unleash his anger on them.

Luna, who had been sitting quietly on the sofa out of the way of Harry's spells, watching Harry with a look of concern, got up and approached him cautiously. "Harry, are you okay?" She asked softly.

Harry didn't even acknowledge her presence. He was too busy conjuring spell after spell, blasting the dummies to bits with each one. His magic felt raw and powerful, tinged with the dark energy of death magic.

Luna watched in awe as Harry continued to unleash his anger on the dummies. She had never seen him like this before, so full of rage and despair. She knew that he needed to let it out, to release the pent-up emotions that had been building inside him for so long.

As Harry cast another spell, Luna could feel the magic crackling around him, almost like an electric storm. She stepped closer to him, laying a gentle hand on his arm. "Harry, it's okay." She said, her voice soothing. "I will always be here for you, I won't leave you like last time."

Harry turned to her, his eyes still blazing with anger. But as he looked into her gentle gaze, he felt something shift inside him. He let out a deep breath and his body began to relax.

"Thank you, Luna." He said softly, his voice barely above a whisper. "You are one of the few who understand me."

Luna smiled at him, her eyes filled with compassion. "I know, Harry. And I'm always here for you, no matter what."

Harry took a deep breath, his eyes still lingering on the shattered remains of the training dummies.

"Perhaps some meditation would do you some good." Luna suggested lightly.

Harry nodded and settled down on the floor, trying to relax his body and mind.

His thoughts enviably turned to Sirius.

Sirius had been pulled in so many directions that he couldn't remember which one was his. Harry had seen it in him, the struggle between light and dark, between the person he used to be and the person he had become. It was a battle that Harry himself was all too familiar with, having been torn between his desire to do what was right and his thirst for power and control.

Harry had seen the signs of the toll that the constant tug of war had taken on him. The lines on his face had been deeper, his eyes more sunken, his movements slower and more deliberate. He was a shadow of the vibrant, carefree man Harry had seen in photos and memories, and it pained him that Sirius was now so diminished.

But at the same time, Harry felt a sense of resentment and betrayal towards Sirius. He had put so much faith in him, had looked up to him as a father figure and mentor, only to discover that Sirius was not the person he had imagined him to be. The moments when Sirius called him James or looked at him longingly were like a knife to his heart, a reminder that he could never truly be the son or protégé that Sirius had wanted him to be.

In some ways, Harry knew that his idealized version of Sirius had been a coping mechanism, a way to fill the void left by the absence of his own parents. But now that he was once more facing the reality of who Sirius truly was, he couldn't help but feel disillusioned and betrayed.

And yet, even as he grappled with these conflicting emotions, Harry knew that he could never completely turn his back on Sirius. There was still a part of him that longed for the connection they had once shared, for the sense of belonging and acceptance that had come with it. Despite the bitterness and disappointment, Harry still cared for Sirius.

If Harry just grabbed a thread and pulled, Sirius would come apart. Sirius was already a shell of what he should be, a yarn doll becoming unraveled, and Harry was unsure of what he wanted to do about it. So he held back, keeping his anger and frustration in check, knowing that any sudden outburst could have dire consequences. He tried to find a way to reconcile his conflicting feelings towards Sirius, to see him not as the idealized father figure he had once imagined, nor as the flawed and damaged man he now knew him to be, but simply as a person, with both good and bad qualities.

This shouldn't upset him, the man he'd known as his godfather had died long ago and he'd come to terms with the distorted memories and lingering feelings about the man. Harry wasn't even a child anymore, he was an old man. He was older than Sirius ever got to be, and it left Harry with a bitter taste in his mouth.

Despite all this, Harry felt a duty to protect Sirius, even if it was only to fulfill his childhood fantasies and for the Harry whose body he'd stolen. He couldn't abandon the man who had once meant so much to both of them.

Sirius Black woke up with the first rays of sunlight piercing through the curtains of his room

at Grimmauld Place, the ancestral home of his infamous family. Even after a year of mostly living in this house, he still couldn't shake off the feeling of unease that came with it. Memories of the past, both good and bad, were embedded in every corner, every piece of furniture. But today, he had a purpose, a goal that made him forget about his uneasiness.

As he made his way down to the kitchen, Sirius couldn't help but feel a gnawing anger at Dumbledore's accusations against Harry, his beloved godson. Harry had always been a beacon of light in his life, a young wizard full of hope and kindness. The mere thought of Harry being accused of turning to the dark side was like a punch in the gut.

Kreacher, the old house elf, was already in the kitchen, grumbling and muttering insults under his breath. But Sirius paid him no mind and sat down at the table, lost in thought. Dumbledore's accusations had stirred up some dark memories Sirius had buried long ago. Memories of his own dark magical core. As a member of the infamous Black family, dark magic had been a part of his upbringing. And although he had never embraced it fully, he couldn't deny that it was a part of who he was.

But Harry was different. Harry had never been exposed to the darkness in the same way that Sirius had, and he was determined to keep it that way.

As he spent the day poring over old tomes and scrolls in the Black family library, Sirius felt a sense of purpose that he hadn't felt in a long time. He was determined to understand his own magical core and how to control it. It was a task that required focus and dedication, but Sirius was up for it.

Later that evening, as he sat in the drawing room, Hedwig brought him a letter from Harry. It was short and to the point, but it made Sirius smile. Harry had always been a source of light in his life, and he was determined to protect him, no matter what. He knew that Dumbledore's accusations were unfounded, and he would do whatever it took to clear Harry's name.

As the day drew to a close, Sirius retired to his bedroom, feeling content. It had been a good day, no slips into the past, no regression into a state of numbness, no painful memories rising to the surface. He'd been productive and able to focus for more than a few moments, his mind felt clearer.

Sirius was just about to drift off to sleep when he was suddenly startled by the sound of a house elf popping into existence beside his bed. Startled out of his calm state, he flew up into a sitting position, his wand in his hand, pointed at the intruder. The elf was holding a vial with a swirling liquid inside it, and Sirius recognised it immediately as a memory.

"Master Sirius, sir! This is urgent! Harry Potter sent me with this memory, you must watch it right now!" The elf's voice was panicked and frightened.

Sirius lowered his wand, feeling a sense of dread wash over him. He knew that when Harry was involved, things were never simple. He took the vial from the elf's outstretched hand and nodded. "Thank you, I'll watch it right away."

The elf disappeared with a loud pop, leaving Sirius alone in his room. He sat for a moment, staring at the vial, wondering what Harry could have sent him. Without further delay, he got out of bed and made his way to the room where his father kept the pensieve, thankfully it hadn't been moved.

Pouring the contents of the vial into the pensieve, he leaned in to examine the swirling liquid. The memory came into focus, and Sirius found himself watching as Harry was seated in the headmaster's office.

What followed was a conversation between the two that Sirius never thought would take place.

Sirius's heart sank as he learned the truth about Harry's past. The young wizard had been subjected to abuse at the hands of his own relatives. Sirius had never known the full extent of Harry's suffering until now. He only knew Harry disliked his relatives, but Dumbledore always assured him that nothing was wrong. Why had he believed him?

But what made his blood boil was the realisation that Dumbledore had known about Harry's situation all along and had done nothing to help him. Sirius had always thought of Dumbledore as a wise and compassionate man, someone who cared deeply for the welfare of all wizards, especially the young ones. But now, he couldn't help but see the old wizard in a different light.

Sirius had always held Dumbledore in high esteem. He had admired the man's intelligence, his wisdom, and his unwavering commitment to fighting the dark forces that threatened the wizarding world. But now, as he watched Albus try to force Harry to participate in the war when he clearly didn't want to, Sirius couldn't believe what he was seeing.

It was a side of Dumbledore that he had never seen before, and it made him question everything he had ever believed about the man. The old wizard's eyes glinted with a dangerous light as he spoke to Harry, his tone firm and unwavering. He made it clear that he expected Harry to take on far too much for someone so young, a mission to save the wizarding community from dark forces, one that could very well cost him his life.

Sirius couldn't help but feel a surge of anger and frustration as he watched Dumbledore's behavior. This was not the kind, gentle man that he had come to know over the years. This was someone who was willing to sacrifice the lives of others for the sake of a greater cause, someone who was willing to make tough decisions without regard for the consequences. Without regard for Harry's life.

As he watched Dumbledore continue to pressure Harry, Sirius felt a coldness settle over him. This was not the man he had thought he knew. He had always believed that Dumbledore was a great leader, someone who could be trusted to make the right decisions for the greater good. But now, as he watched him in action, Sirius couldn't help but wonder if he had been wrong.

Sirius couldn't even comprehend that the man used his life as a bargaining chip, willing to throw him to the wolves to control Harry. He was so bloody angry.

He thought back to all the times he had followed Dumbledore's lead, all the battles they had fought together, and he wondered if he had been blind to the man's true nature. Had Dumbledore always been willing to make sacrifices, to put others in harm's way for the sake of his cause?

Sirius didn't know the answer to that question, but he knew one thing for certain. He could not stand by and watch as Dumbledore threatened Harry. He had to do something, anything, to protect the young wizard.

As the conversation ended and Harry left the office, Sirius thought that would be the end of it, but no. As Harry left the office and headed down the corridor, he spoke.

“Sirius.” Harry spoke quietly, looking straight ahead. He couldn’t know Sirius was here right now, could he? You can’t speak to someone in a memory, you can’t interact.

“Sirius, I plan to show you this memory as soon as possible, and if you’re hearing this, I must have succeeded in bringing it to you. You need to run; you are not safe at Grimmauld Place. The old man could get to you if you stay there.”

Sirius was looking at Harry's frustrated expression as he walked on.

“The vial I’ll put this memory in will be spelled into a portkey. It’ll take you to one of my estates. It will only take you; if you try to bring someone else or someone else grabs on, they will get hurt. The command to activate it is Dumbledork.” Harry's lips twitched, and Sirius couldn’t help the amused smirk that grew on his face despite his growing anxiety.

Harry’s expression a moment later was serious. “Take the portkey, Sirius. Please. When you get there, more will be explained. Please Sirius, do as I ask.”

And with that, Sirius was forced out of the memory, almost falling on his ass as he emerged.

Sirius took a deep breath and got to packing.

Harry was heading to breakfast with a half-asleep Draco when he felt the recognisable tingle in the back of his mind. Someone had entered the wards.

With an abrupt stop, Harry turned, almost making Draco walk right into him, and grabbed Draco's hand, pulling them into the closest empty classroom.

Draco was rather used to Harry's odd behavior and had noticed the expression on Harry's face, one he was familiar with and meant that Harry wouldn't answer any of his questions before he'd done whatever it was he needed to do, so he held his tongue.

With closed eyes and a scrunched-up nose, Harry looked for the thread in his mind, looking for the connecting property.

Ah, it was the Black summer villa, and the magical signature that had arrived was one Harry had spent plenty of time with: Sirius.

Sirius was safe for now, he was most likely being greeted by his elves who had clear instructions on how to proceed.

Harry opened his eyes and the tension, he hadn't even realised was clinging to his shoulders, eased.

At least he could do this for the boy whose body he'd stolen.

At least he could offer him some form of compensation.

Chapter End Notes

So I saw a TikTok with a girl who let chatgpt read her story and rank it from 1-10 in different areas and I did that and got surprisingly good scores. But when I asked how I could improve it, it said I used a passive voice too much and needed to use an active voice more when writing. Honestly, I hadn't really heard those terms before (English isn't my first language as I've said before) and had to look them up. I tried to use an active voice more in this chapter but I'm not sure if I succeeded.

Anyways back to the actual chapter, I'm not really sure how I feel about this chapter, I changed Harry's thoughts on Sirius like 5 times. It's really hard to describe how Harry feels towards Sirius and most of the time he isn't even sure. Sirius is, however, devoted to Harry. He'd do anything for him, especially now that he feels like he failed him which

was kinda the outcome Harry was hoping for. Well let me know what you think and if I captured their feelings correctly!

Deceit of the Distraught and the Depraved

Chapter Summary

A defence class involving dueling and a meeting between two fated equals that ends in tears.

Chapter Notes

First off, I've been editing the first 12 chapters of this story so while the storyline is the same, I've edited the writing a bit so if you feel like it please re-read the first chapters and let me know if you think it's better. But you don't have to! I haven't added any new details, just fixed it up a bit.

Anyways the second part of this chapter is written from Voldemort's pov so you won't get any insight as to what's going through Harry's head. Voldemort only sees his physical reactions so if you're wondering why Harry reacted in the way he did you're gonna have to guess what was going through his head at that moment. And I just want to point out that the use of the different names, Potter and Harry and Voldemort and Tom, are intentional. It's a bit of an insight into how Voldemort thinks and feels at that particular moment.

It's come to my attention that this chapter may piss you off a bit so just a warning that you might feel like this is out of character for them. Sorry. I don't think it is but everyone has different opinions and if you want answers I'll be happy to answer your questions in the comments.

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

Draco and Harry strolled into their Defence Against the Dark Arts class, exchanging jokes and laughs like old friends. They settled into their seats at the front of the classroom, eager to see what the day's lesson had in store. Today's lesson would be about using the spells and shields they had learned in previous classes by participating in duels, and Harry was excited to show off his skills, especially against the Gryffindors with whom they shared the class.

Turning to Draco, Harry grinned mischievously. "Let's hope we get to duel each other today. It'll be fun seeing you fall on your ass," Harry joked. Draco shot Harry a mock-sowl. "Don't get too ahead of yourself, Potter," he retorted.

As class began, the pair noticed Lucius giving them an uneasy look. Harry couldn't help but smirk as he caught Lucius's eye, knowing that the man was intimidated by him.

“Good morning, class. Today we’ll put your skills to the test and see who amongst you has what it takes to be a good dueler,” The professor's words hushed the students. “One pair will duel at a time, and the others will observe. Once the duel is over, we’ll discuss what they did right and what they failed to do. Remember to use the spells we practiced in previous lessons so I can see you are actually capable of using them in high-pressure situations.”

The classroom had been expanded to fit a dueling platform in the middle, surrounded by a protective ward to keep the spells cast inside contained. The class scoreboard was kept on the side, and the students eagerly watched as their classmates went head-to-head.

Harry enjoyed dueling, but he knew these were children. He wouldn't hurt them too much, just enough to put them in their place. The duels were entertaining enough, but most of the students fell short of expectations.

First up was Goyle and Dean. It was interesting enough, quite evenly matched. Goyle, while slow and limited in his spell repertoire, was able to keep a pretty strong protego up for the duel. But in the end, Dean was faster and more aggressive, so the win was his.

The atmosphere in the classroom was electric as the students waited for their turn to duel. As they watched their classmates face off against each other, they couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement mixed with nervous anticipation. They eagerly pointed out their classmates' mistakes, hoping to learn from them and avoid making the same errors themselves.

When it was finally Harry's turn to duel, the room went silent as he stepped forward. His wand was held loosely in his hand, and he exuded calm confidence. Before Lucius could announce an opponent, Ron loudly volunteered, stepping forward to face Harry. The tension was palpable, and the students could feel it hanging in the air like a heavy blanket. They knew that this duel would be different from the others they had seen so far, that there was a deep-seated animosity between the two boys that would make this fight all the more intense.

Ron, unable to resist the urge to taunt his former friend, began to whisper insults so only Harry could hear. "Finally have the nerve to face me now, Harry? Scared are you? You should be. You're nothing special, a second-rate wizard who lucked out in everything he's gotten into."

Harry didn't respond, simply narrowing his eyes in determination. This fool was going to end up in the hospital wing if he kept talking.

"Alright, are you both ready?" Lucius asked. Lucius eyed Ron with barely disguised condescension and regarded Harry with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. Harry's lips twitched in amusement, his eyes gleaming with a hint of mischief as he prepared for the duel.

Both Harry and Ron nodded in agreement and as they got into starting position, Harry's movements were fluid and relaxed, his stance betraying a confidence that Ron seemed to lack. Ron, in contrast, was visibly tense, his muscles coiled like a spring, ready to be unleashed. His facial expression was contorted with effort, his brow furrowed and jaw clenched.

As the duel began, it quickly became apparent that Ron had vastly underestimated Harry's abilities. Harry was lightning fast, his movements precise and calculated. Ron struggled to keep up, his spells flying wildly off target.

At first, Harry didn't even bother to try, simply dodging Ron's spells with ease. He seemed to be enjoying himself, a sly smile playing at the corners of his lips. It wasn't like he needed to use magic, and the more Ron flailed, the more Harry seemed to delight in it.

Ron was starting to lose his cool, his face red with exertion and sweat dripping down his forehead. "Fight back, you bastard!" he growled, his frustration and anger palpable.

But Harry's smile only grew wider, more vicious and bloodthirsty. It sent a chill down the spines of everyone watching. They had never seen him looking like that, and it was a little unsettling. "If that's what you want," Harry replied, his voice laced with amusement and sadistic pleasure. There was something in his eyes that conveyed a sense of cruelty and malice that made Ron shrink back a little.

And then Harry unleashed a barrage of spells that left Ron reeling. The other students watched in awe as Harry demonstrated his mastery of defense. It was like he was toying with Ron, each spell more powerful than the last. Ron was completely outmatched, and it was clear that Harry was enjoying every moment of it.

"You fight to escape, Ronald," Harry spoke quietly but somehow his voice was heard by them all, his voice dripping with venom. "I fight to win. Or I just fight to see the other guy lose."

It had been a long time since Harry had let all his anger and rage out. Burning the Ministry to the ground had been the most satisfying experience he had ever had, but the memory was also tarnished by the grief interwoven into its seams, leaving a bitter taste in his mouth as the breathlessness of satisfaction evened out. As he looked upon Ron's face, filled with anger and fear, the current boy blended into the image of the older one he had faced before. Killing him once had felt like enough at the time, but rage crawls back when you least expect it. Harry couldn't help but think that ripping this person's throat out with his teeth would leave him satisfied without the interwoven grief.

However, now was not the time for revenge. It would come at a later date, but Harry could feel the resolve for it settle into his bones as it had once settled into his heart. The difference now was that the revenge would be entirely self-serving and not born out of love and loss.

Ron was pushed into a tight corner, his wand arm quivering with fatigue. Despite his earlier bluster, Ron now realised that he was no match for Harry. The realization humbled him, and he attempted to yield the duel. But Harry wasn't having any of it. He relentlessly advanced, determined to put an end to the contest.

Lucius hesitated at first, but he couldn't help but watch in awe as Harry displayed his incredible magical prowess. His spells were razor-sharp and potent, and it was crystal clear that he had honed his skills to perfection.

In a final surge of pure magic, Harry unleashed a forceful spell that sent Ron tumbling to the ground. The room erupted in cheers as Harry was declared the victor. Ron stood up, looking bewildered and ashamed, realising that the duel had been a one-sided show of Harry's power.

As Harry returned to his seat, he overheard Ron muttering insults under his breath. Harry paid no attention to him, having already proven his superiority. He hoped that Ron would

finally get the message and stop bothering him.

The rest of the class passed uneventfully. Harry was unimpressed by the following duels, which were all slow and feeble. He recalled a time when he had been just as weak and was disgusted by the thought. He focused on the present, pushing aside the unpleasant feeling.

When class was dismissed, Harry sensed Lucius's eyes lingering on him, so he took his time packing up. Draco, his loyal companion, followed suit without questioning. Once all the other students had left, Harry walked up to Lucius with a smile on his face.

"Is there something you need, Lucius?" Harry asked.

Internally, Lucius cringed, but on the outside, he remained stoic. "I was asked to deliver this to you, Potter," Lucius said as he handed Harry an envelope.

Harry turned it over and ran his thumb over the beautiful writing on the front of the envelope. "Thank you, Lucius. Have a nice day now. Bye-bye."

On the walk back to the common room, Harry couldn't contain his smirk. While Draco looked at him curiously, he didn't ask any questions. Draco was quite good at holding his tongue when need be. He wouldn't ask questions that he didn't need the answers to.

Later that evening, as Harry laid down in bed, his heart started rising in anticipation. He was excited, however much he wished he wasn't.

Voldemort had endured an excruciatingly long day, and his patience was wearing thin. His research had led him down a dead end, and he was no closer to retrieving his horcruxes from Potter or understanding how he'd been able to summon him through dreams. To make matters worse, he was completely in the dark about what Potter had been up to all summer. It was maddening, and he'd felt the need to take out his anger on some unsuspecting followers.

As he prepared for the night, his thoughts kept drifting to Potter. Had he received the letter? Will they finally meet tonight? A peculiar sensation rippled through his fingers and his heart raced at the thought. He scowled at the sensation, unsure of its meaning or origin.

Just as he was beginning to drift off to sleep, he was jolted back to reality by finding himself in the familiar room, alone. He settled into an armchair, knowing there was no point in standing around waiting.

Their last meeting had been anything but productive, but this time, he was determined to make the meeting work to his advantage. Something had to change in their dynamic.

As he looked up, he was startled to find Harry sitting across from him. Despite the suddenness of Potter's arrival, Voldemort managed to hide any indication of surprise.

Harry smiled at him, and their eyes locked in a tense exchange. "I got your letter," he said.

"You've been avoiding me," Voldemort responded, his voice flat.

Harry's eye twitched, revealing his discomfort, but he tried to play it cool. "No, I haven't. I've just been busy. Honestly, it's got nothing to do with you, I haven't been avoiding you."

Voldemort wasn't fooled. Using the word "honestly" and repeating his denial were signs of deception, and Potter had been avoiding him. After their last meeting, he had also needed some time away from Potter, but there was no way he'd tell him that. He kept his thoughts to himself and moved on to more pressing matters.

"Is that so?" Voldemort asked, his voice even despite his unease. "No matter now. Before we continue these meetings, there is something I wish to ask of you."

Harry's eyebrows raised slightly. "Oh, and what might that be?" Voldemort could tell he was curious and intrigued, but also tense from the way his shoulders were pulled back.

He remained quiet for a moment, considering the best way to approach this. Harry was resistant to manipulation, so he needed to present this as a mutually beneficial opportunity without sounding superficial. He needed to be somewhat truthful as well. Harry's biggest weakness had always been his emotions. If Voldemort showed some genuine feelings, perhaps it would endear him to Harry. But diving in headfirst would get him nowhere. He had to go slow, so Harry came to the same conclusion without him directly telling Harry.

"Our last meeting... it was rather startling. Don't you agree?" Voldemort allowed a small smile to creep across his face.

Harry's smile faltered, and a look of confusion took over his features. "To some extent, I suppose," he said hesitantly.

Voldemort seized the opportunity to press on. "What is it you wish to gain from these meetings, Harry?" he asked, intentionally using Potter's name for the first time.

Harry tilted his head in contemplation, and Voldemort watched as he considered the question. Though Harry may have noticed the sudden use of his name, he chose not to acknowledge it.

"I wish to understand you," he said, his gaze locked on Voldemort. Voldemort did his best to mask the anger that boiled within him at the statement. To understand him? No one could possibly understand him. He didn't want to be understood - no one deserved to know him that intimately.

But Potter seemed to pick up on something, and his eyes grew dull and sad, the bright green fading as he stared down at his lap. And Voldemort couldn't help but ask himself, was this all an act?

"I see," Voldemort replied, his tone cool and collected.

Potter twirled his fingers nervously before looking back up. "I know you don't want that. It scares you that I might get too close."

Irritation flared within Voldemort, but he kept his expression neutral. "It doesn't scare me. Nothing scares me."

Potter looked away, gazing off to his left as if lost in thought. After a moment, he changed the subject. "Who is your enemy here? It's not me anymore, right?"

Voldemort studied him for a moment before responding carefully. "My one true enemy has always been the same." He chose to be intentionally vague.

But Potter didn't let up. His eyes held a knowing look that set Voldemort on edge. "Oh, I see. *Them*, huh?" Voldemort knew they were talking about the same thing, and it made his eyes harden.

"Death is the only one worthy of being called *my* enemy," he growled.

Potter simply nodded, as if he understood what was going through Voldemort's mind. It was infuriating. "It's too bad, really."

"What?" Voldemort forced out through gritted teeth.

"That your one true enemy will always - that they will always win. *Memento mori*." Potter fidgeted with his necklace, not looking at Voldemort as he spoke. It was as if what he said was insignificant, but it burned within Voldemort nonetheless.

Remember you must die.

"No. I have won," Voldemort declared, his voice rough and unyielding.

But Potter just looked back at him, eyes full of pity. It was enough to make Voldemort want to lash out, to unleash the Cruciatus Curse upon him. This conversation was not going as he had planned.

"*Death* has no end. It will come for all men. *They* will always win, sooner or later," Potter spoke with conviction, and Voldemort could feel the truth of his words resonate within him. But what does a child like Harry Potter know about the true power of death? Voldemort thought.

"Do not patronize me, child! You have no idea what you speak of," Voldemort spat with venomous rage. "You have no idea what it's like to face death, to feel its icy grip on your soul, to know that every breath could be your last. You don't know the terror that grips you, the sheer terror of knowing that at any moment, death could snatch you away."

Voldemort could see Potter shrinking back in his chair, hugging himself tightly, as if trying to protect himself from Voldemort's words. "You understand nothing! You are nothing but an ignorant, naive boy who knows nothing of the grip death can have." For a moment, he felt a flicker of something akin to pity. But then the anger flared up again, stronger than ever before.

"I wish death had come for you sooner. At least then I wouldn't be forced to remain in your presence!" Voldemort sneered, his eyes blazing with fury. He could see the hurt and despair etched on Harry's face, and it filled him with a sense of twisted satisfaction.

"You're weak, Harry. Too weak to even face the inevitability of your own demise. You'll never be a match for me, never!" Voldemort's words were like daggers, piercing Harry's heart and shredding his soul. He couldn't look at the sight in front of him anymore and turned around, trying to get his ragged breath under control.

A hitched breath startled him and made Voldemort look back at Potter.

Harry was crying.

And it felt like cold water washed over him leaving him breathless and shocked. Voldemort's anger dissipated as he watched Harry cry. He had never seen him cry before. Harry was looking away, tears streaming down his cheeks. His chest was rising and falling unevenly, as he tried to stay quiet. His eyebrows were drawn together, and his lips pressed in a tight line. The only indication Voldemort's words had hurt him was the steady flow of tears dripping from his eyes.

Voldemort was surprised by his own reaction. He felt something new, something uncomfortable that made his stomach clench. He clenched his fists to stop them from shaking.

Harry was so beautiful.

He couldn't move. He just stood there watching. His anger had flown out the window and been replaced by something else. Something he wasn't familiar with.

"Harry," he breathed out, once more unintentionally.

Hearing Voldemort speak his name was apparently the last straw.

"Shut up. Shut up. Shut up," Harry whispered frantically, trying to stop the tears from spilling. But they kept falling down his cheeks, wetting his eyelashes.

Furiously Harry rubbed his eyes trying to stop the weakness from showing.

Voldemort could practically hear his thoughts. *Don't show weakness in front of others, it is unacceptable.*

As Harry tries and fails to stop the onslaught of tears Voldemort felt a sudden urge to comfort him, to wipe away his tears and tell him everything was going to be okay. But he didn't know how to do that. He had never comforted anyone before, let alone Harry.

Without thought he'd stood, he took a step forward and hesitated, unsure of what to do. He didn't want to scare Harry or make things worse. He just wanted to help for some reason.

Harry didn't respond to his closeness, he just kept crying. Voldemort's heart ached for him. He didn't understand why he felt this way, but he knew he couldn't let Harry suffer anymore.

He took another step forward and reached out his hand, tentatively. He hesitated for a moment before gently wiping away a tear from Harry's cheek.

Harry flinched at his touch but didn't pull away. Tom took that as a sign to continue. He wiped away another tear and then another, his movements becoming more confident with each touch.

With a gentle hand, he touched Harry's neck and guided him forward. Harry was too preoccupied with his own emotions to resist. He didn't dare look up, and Voldemort was grateful. He didn't want Harry to see the confusion and discomfort on his face. He pulled Harry closer to his chest and slowly, awkwardly reached his arms around him, holding him gently.

At first, Harry didn't make a sound, trying to keep a small amount of dignity. But then, he let out a quiet sob and clutched onto Tom's shirt with all his might. And Voldemort held on tighter.

He was hugging Harry, but he didn't care. And Harry was too upset to think rationally. Why was he comforting Harry when he was the one who upset him? When he wanted to upset him? He'd moved forward on instinct, but he'd never instinctively comforted someone before. Whenever someone had cried in his presence, he'd been quick to flee the situation and berate them for their weakness. Why wasn't he doing the same now?

Harry pressed closer, shaking and trembling, trying to regulate his breathing without success. The contact was foreign to Tom, and he stiffened slightly as Harry buried his face in his shoulder and cried harder. But then something inside him shifted. He focused on the boy in his arms, and everything else faded away. Harry was not tiny by any means, he was about

average in height and fit, but right now, trembling in his arms, Harry felt so small. So vulnerable. So fragile.

As Tom's arms around Harry squeezed, his sobs echoed in the quiet room. Tom couldn't really concentrate himself, he was too confused by his own actions. But he couldn't let go just yet.

"Why are you crying?" Tom whispered, his voice barely audible above Harry's sobs.

Harry didn't respond. He simply clung to Tom, seeking solace in his embrace. Tom remained still, unsure of what to say or do, but he continued to hold Harry, hoping that his presence would bring some comfort.

After what felt like an eternity, Harry's sobs began to subside. He pulled away from Tom, wiping his eyes and taking a deep breath. Tom watched him, his eyes filled with apprehension. Something inside him had shifted, and he wasn't quite sure what to do with it.

He hadn't had this much physical contact in decades. The last time he was this close to someone for so long was probably when he was around 25 and trying to seduce an older woman into giving him a rare book. He'd never had to resort to such methods later in life, which he was glad for. He didn't enjoy physical intimacy.

But somehow he was still holding Harry. Somehow he didn't mind. It might even feel... pleasant.

Slowly, uncertainly, Harry looked up at him. With tear-streaked cheeks, red puffy eyes, and a runny red nose and Tom felt something he hadn't experienced ever, guilt.

For a moment, they sat in silence, Harry lost in his thoughts and Tom in his own uncertainty. Despite their confusion and pain, they both understood that they needed to rely on each other in that moment.

Harry looked tired, he was sniffing lightly and Tom felt the urge to reach out again. Somehow during the hug they'd ended up on the floor, leaning back against the armchair Harry had sat in before.

"Why did you start crying?" Tom whispered quietly, not wanting to startle Harry.

"Why did you comfort me?" Was the question thrown back at him. Harry was looking away now and rubbing his hands all over his face, only succeeding in making it redder.

Both questions went unanswered and silence settled between them.

Tom's piercing gaze settled on Harry's tear-streaked face, and for a moment, he felt the unexpected pang of guilt again. It was a feeling he couldn't quite explain, but it was there, gnawing at him like a persistent ache.

He had made countless people cry in his lifetime, but he had never reacted as he did now. Maybe, just maybe, this was a good thing.

The meeting had been a disaster, and Harry would have been closed off and distant if Tom had gloated in his agony. But something had changed. Harry had let him comfort him, had let him hold him. Perhaps, deep down, Harry's feelings towards Tom were more than lukewarm.

The idea sent a thrill through Tom's body. He had always been a master manipulator, but he had never felt this way before. It was a growing feeling, one that he couldn't quite put his finger on, but it was there nonetheless.

As he sat there, lost in his own contemplation, he couldn't help but wonder how he could use these newfound emotions to his advantage. If he could use them to gain access to Harry, he could finally get his hands on the horcruxes that Harry was holding onto.

Voldemort's heart quickened as he considered the possibilities. This could be the breakthrough he had been waiting for. With Harry's vulnerability laid bare before him, he

knew that he had the upper hand. And he wasn't going to let this opportunity slip away. *I dare you*, Harry's voice echoed through his head.

Seduction. Giving in.

Voldemort's eyes flickered with a mix of disgust and desire as he considered his plan. Could he really stoop so low as to use his own feelings to manipulate Harry Potter? It seemed beneath him, a tactic reserved for lesser beings.

But the temptation was too great to resist. If he could seduce Potter, he would have access to the most elusive of all horcruxes. And he couldn't deny the thrill of the challenge.

Potter was too stubborn to fall for his usual tricks, so Voldemort would have to play a more subtle game. He would have to convince himself that his intentions were genuine, so that Potter couldn't question his motives.

As he looked down at Harry, his body relaxed and vulnerable beside him, Tom felt a surge of desire. The idea of seducing Harry, of bending him to his will, was intoxicating.

He imagined his beautiful form beneath him wiggling and squirming with pleasure. He imagined the expressions on Harry's face, the fully blown pupils in his eyes, his lips parted and breath stuttered. It wasn't hard to convince himself. He imagined Harry always having to remember what his lips taste like, what it felt like to go down on him and moaning like a slut every time they met. It was a fitting punishment for all the grief the brat had caused him. He wants Harry to always blush as he looks upon him, squirming and smiling in his presence. Forced to relive their passionate nights together and think of what Tom could do to him.

He imagined the thrill of the chase, the thrill of the conquest. He imagined Potter submitting to him, helpless in the face of his power.

Yes, Voldemort thought to himself. This was a game worth playing. And he was going to win.

Voldemort turned his head slightly, his burning eyes meeting Harry's.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and interacting with this story! I love reading and replying to all your comments and I check at least once a day on this story.

Hope everyone had a lovely day! ❤️❤️❤️

The Abyss of Adoration

Chapter Summary

Harry wakes up in a bad mood after the last meeting, he goes to a quidditch game, gets drunk and embarrasses himself in front of Tom.

Chapter Notes

I'm on vacation and I didn't wanna keep you waiting but I haven't had as much time to edit this chapter as I usually do. I hope it turned out alright, I did some last minute changes so let me know if something is weird!

FYI the memoirs and some thoughts are written in italics, there are two memories.

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

As they lay in the midst of the flowing grass, staring at the endless stars above, Harry couldn't help but feel a sense of longing in his heart. He hadn't been able to sleep, as was often the case, and Luna had sensed his unease. She had invited him over, and now they lay there together, bathed in the moonlight, enjoying each other's company in the tranquil silence. Luna's hair seemed to shimmer like silver in the moonlight, and her long, flowing white nightdress danced gracefully in the gentle breeze. Harry couldn't help but think that she looked like a fairy, the kind that he had always read about in stories, with flowers in her hair, dancing barefoot in a circle.

But Luna was here with him, and she was asking him about things he had tried to forget. He answered her questions with a heavy heart, recounting the years of neglect, starvation, and abuse he had suffered as a child. "Others had it worse than me," he said with a sigh. "Why does it even matter?"

Luna turned to him, her eyes gleaming like the stars above. "Harry," she said, "it doesn't matter if others had it worse. What matters is that it hurt you, and it was painful for you. You're allowed to feel hurt, and you're allowed to acknowledge that it was real. Your struggle was real, and you matter. No matter how your pain compares to someone else's, it doesn't make it any less valid or true."

Harry's eyes filled with tears, and he looked away, ashamed of his emotions. But Luna gently lifted his chin, and their eyes met once more. "You matter, Harry," she whispered. "Your struggle matters. It's okay to feel anger, and it's okay to be hurt and in pain. No one can take away the truth of your struggle, and no one can take away your worth."

Some days feel like a relentless onslaught, a never-ending barrage of misery that you just can't seem to shake. When happiness seems like an unattainable dream and sadness is your only companion, it can feel like you're drowning in a sea of emotions. Today is one of those days for Harry.

As Harry groggily opened his eyes, he realised that he was alone in his bed. His mind instantly flooded with emotions that weighed heavily on him like a ton of bricks. He was furious, hurt, and betrayed all at once. The memory of how Tom had taken advantage of his trust flashed in his mind, making him feel even worse.

Despite his best efforts, he couldn't shake off the memories of his past life. They haunted him, stirring up a whirlwind of painful emotions that made him feel powerless. He knew that he couldn't let Tom hurt him like this, but he just couldn't help it.

Lying there, lost in thought, Harry realised that he should have known better than to let his guard down around Tom. It was his nature to strike back when cornered, but Harry had hoped that Tom would be different this time. He had been foolish to think that way.

In that moment, Harry felt like he was staring into the darkness of the abyss. He was angry at himself for being so naive and foolish, but he refused to give up. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, steeling himself against the onslaught of negative emotions.

Harry knew that he had to be strong, to keep his guard up, no matter what. He could never let his guard down again, not in this strange, new world. From this day forward, he would be vigilant, always on the lookout for danger, and never trust anyone too quickly. He would be ruthless, bloodied and bruised, but he would feel alive.

And with that fierce determination, Harry vowed to take back control of his life. He wouldn't let his past or his fears hold him back any longer, but as always it was easier said than done.

He tried to shake off the frustrating feelings and get ready for the day, but they clung to him like a dark cloud. As he made his way to the Great Hall for breakfast, he saw Draco already seated at the Slytherin table. Draco studied Harry's face for a moment and undoubtedly took notice of Harry's somber expression.

"Hey, Harry, what's got you down? Did someone mess with your things again?" Draco asked, attempting to lighten the mood. The mystery of Harry's missing or ruined possessions had become an inside joke with the Slytherins at this point.

Harry couldn't help but let out a small chuckle at the comment, but it quickly faded. "No, it's nothing like that. I just woke up feeling...off, I suppose."

Draco nodded in empathy. "I understand. Sometimes it seems like something's missing, you know? But hey, speaking of missing things, have I told you about the time Parkinson's got robbed over the summer?" Draco's sudden topic change was probably meant as a distraction, and Harry appreciated the effort.

Harry found it amusing that Draco had chosen that specific topic when he was the one who had robbed the Parkinsons. It hadn't come up before, so Harry was interested to see what Draco would say. He decided to play dumb.

Harry shook his head, curious about the sudden subject. Draco launched into the story, recounting how the entire pureblood community had been in an uproar over the theft of the Parkinsons' family crystal collection. How everyone had panicked about how someone could bypass the wards so effortlessly and without triggering them. How the news had spread overnight and how everyone had scrambled to get a ward master to inspect their wards. Harry's mood had lifted after Draco described the summer of the manor wards' frenzy.

As Draco spoke, Harry couldn't help but ponder how information seemed to spread like wildfire among the purebloods. It gave him an idea. What if he could plant a thought or rumor in one of the pureblood ladies' minds and watch as it spread like wildfire through the community? Hmm, something to keep in mind.

The day progressed, and Harry found himself at the Slytherin vs. Gryffindor Quidditch match.

When Blaise and Theo came to his room to drag him to the Quidditch match, Harry was hesitant to go. He didn't feel like being around people, and he didn't want to feign happiness when he wasn't genuinely happy.

But Blaise and Theo were persistent, insisting that they had to support Draco, their friend and fellow Slytherin.

They promised to make it a fun distraction and take Harry's mind off whatever was bothering him.

So Harry gave in and followed them to the Quidditch pitch, feeling sour as they made their way to their seats. The crowd was already abuzz with excitement, and Harry felt out of place, like he didn't belong. He wasn't a child, so what was he doing here? Pretending? But for what, he didn't know anymore.

As the game began, Harry found himself getting caught up in the action despite his earlier reluctance. It was familiar, and a sense of peace washed over him as he took in the long-forgotten scenery. He cheered alongside his friends as Slytherin scored the first goal, and he felt a surge of pride in his house. Harry's eyes were fixed on Draco, following his movements as he searched for the snitch.

The game was intense, with both teams playing hard, and the score tied for most of the match. Harry found himself yelling at the players, urging his housemates to score, and jumping up and down with excitement when they did. Their game tactic was pretty much the same as it used to be: be ruthless but don't get caught.

As the game drew to a close, Harry's heart was pounding in his chest. It was anyone's game, and he could feel the tension in the air.

And then it happened. Draco caught the snitch after a daunting race against Ginny, winning the game for Slytherin. The stands erupted into cheers, and Harry found himself jumping up and down, caught up in the excitement.

Draco flew over to where Harry and the guys were sitting, waving the snitch at them and grinning from ear to ear. Harry couldn't help but feel happy for him, despite his earlier reluctance to attend the game. It had been fun. He hadn't attended an actual game since his husband had dragged him along to one of Scorpius's games. It was nice doing it again, even if things had changed since then.

That night, there was a party in the Slytherin common room to celebrate their victory. As they entered the common room, the sound of music and laughter greeted them, and Harry felt his spirits lift. He had no idea how they'd managed to arrange such an elaborate party in no time. The game had literally ended less than half an hour ago.

The atmosphere was electric, and Harry found himself caught up in the excitement of the night. He drank and danced with his friends, laughing and joking as they moved to the rhythm of the music. He hadn't been to a party in ages, but Draco used to drag him along to different ministry parties and pureblood gatherings. *No, stop it, Harry.*

Feeling a bit out of place, Harry had a few too many drinks, which wasn't a great idea. He began to feel the weight of his past bearing down on him. This wouldn't end well.

Memories of Voldemort, the war, the hatred that followed, all flooded his mind, and he struggled to separate the past from the present.

As he stumbled across the dance floor, he caught sight of Draco and felt a surge of longing in his chest. He couldn't help but be drawn to the familiar face and the memories it evoked. Draco, his lovely Draco, he always made him feel better...

Draco was lying face down in front of their tree. Harry couldn't see his face, he needed to see his face. As he turned him over Harry noticed blood on his cheek - he must have scratched his face on something as he fell - Harry couldn't think, couldn't feel. For minutes he just sat there, staring at Draco's empty eyes - his eyes were always so lively, he couldn't hide the emotions in his eyes. As a beetle climbed up Draco's back the walls in his mind rumbled and

came crashing down. Heartbreak, sorrow, guilt and anger mixed together into something ugly in his heart.

Why - why had Draco turned his back on a threat?

Why didn't he fight back? There were no indications that a fight had taken place here. The ground around them looked undisturbed - peaceful even. Draco looked as perfect as ever - only the gash on his cheek was out of place. But - but his hair looked ruffled, his shirt was dirty, some of his nails looked broken. He wasn't as perfect as normal, he - he wasn't breathing, he wasn't trying to suppress a smile and a blush as Harry stared at him, he wasn't - he wasn't looking back at him. He was gone. He was dead. Why - why had he - why isn't he - why, why, why?

Harry was alone. There was no other soul here, there was just a cold body beside him.

Draco was dead.

Why when he's supposed to be dead, is he here across the room, eyes shifting from the girls in front of him to Harry.

Why - how is he alive?

This isn't real. Is it?

Draco looked up and caught Harry's eye, and a slow smile spread across his face, Harry tried to focus. And god, that smile was so teasing and so fucking attractive, and so fucking familiar .

The blonde was dancing with a group of girls, his silver eyes shining with amusement. Harry approached him, feeling bold and reckless.

"Hey, Malfoy," He slurred, grinning crookedly. "Wanna dance with me?"

Draco raised an eyebrow but didn't hesitate to take Harry's hand and pull him closer.

They moved together, Harry's body pressed up against Draco's. Harry couldn't help but notice how good it felt, how right it felt to be back here with Draco in his arms.

They danced and laughed, their bodies intertwined. Harry felt like he was in a dream, a wonderful dream where he could forget about everything else and just be with Draco.

In his drunken state, Harry couldn't help but flirt with Draco, his words slurred and his thoughts muddled. He felt a sense of comfort in the familiar presence of his old husband, and he longed to relive the moments they had shared in the past.

As the night wore on, Harry's memories faded into a blur of drunkenness and dancing. He laughed and joked and flirted, but Draco wasn't reacting as he should.

Something was wrong, something was different. Then reality came crashing back, and Harry was hit with a wave of guilt and shame. He couldn't be doing this, not with this Draco. This wasn't *his* Draco, what was he thinking? He wasn't and that was the problem.

This wasn't fair to either of them.

He stumbled back, breaking the connection between them.

"I'm sorry." He said, his voice thick with emotion. "I shouldn't be doing this. I'm a mess. This isn't fair to you. You're not-" He choked on the words. "You're Draco, young and innocent Draco. Not-not *him*."

Draco didn't look angry or offended, only concerned and confused. "Harry, what's wrong?" He asked, his hand reaching out to touch Harry's arm.

Harry pulled away, feeling like he was going to break. "I can't do this, Draco."

Harry breathed in deeply, tears gathering in his eyes. "I'm sorry Draco, I've gotta go." He rushed out, turning on his heels to flee to the dorms.

But before he could Draco had grabbed a hold of his sleeve tightly. “Harry, what happened, did I do something?” His voice was slightly slurred and Harry chose to believe that the tremor in his voice was caused by his drunken state. But he couldn’t turn back and face him. Harry would break.

Still he needed to reassure Draco, his precious *friend*. “No you didn’t do anything wrong Dragon, I’m just - just tired and stressed and I didn’t mean to flirt with you and insinuate anything.” Harry exhaled shakily and turned around to face Draco.

He tried to relax his body but it was pulled tightly. “I care about you Draco and I don’t want to ruin what we have now. You’re my friend and our friendship is important to me.”

Dracos fearful and concerned eyes softened into something of understanding and his tight hold on Harry’s sleeve loosened. “It’s alright Harry, I care about you too. Right now I’m happy with how things are between us. I don’t mind the flirting cause I know it doesn’t really mean anything to you-“

“Of course you mean something, Draco I just-“

“Wait, Harry. Let me finish. I just meant that flirting is just your way of coping and I know you just do it out of habit and I don’t mind. It’s kinda nice to be appreciated actually.” Draco was smiling at Harry and Harry, who was too drunk to think, pulled Draco into a hug.

“Thank you, Draco.” Harry squeezed him tightly while lifting him off the ground and Draco giggled - he really must be drunk - at Harry’s antics.

The next thing Harry knew was a voice calling out his name. “Potter. Potter. Potter!”

Harry groaned and rolled over, trying to get rid of the annoying sound. “What - what, Draco?” Was his muffled reply which was apparently not the right answer seeing as he was hit in the head with a pillow.

“Ow, what the hell?” Harry rolled onto his back and rubbed his eyes, trying to remember how he got here. It couldn’t be the next morning, he still felt pretty drunk. “Dracooo what?”

“I’m not the Malfoy boy, you insolent child.” Was hissed at him. And *oh* , that was most definitely not Draco.

Voldemort was in a foul mood. He had been dragged here against his will, and what did he find? A passed-out Harry Potter in an armchair. As he approached the boy, he couldn't help but take in his disheveled appearance - ruffled hair, flushed cheeks, parted lips, and a half-unbuttoned shirt. Hmm, Harry didn't look half bad when he wasn't talking.

But the quietness of the room was bothering Tom. He couldn't stand to look at the peacefully sleeping form of Harry Potter anymore.

Tom wanted to reach out and touch Harry, but he was afraid of crossing a line. He hissed at Harry, but the boy didn't even stir until Tom practically screamed in his ear. And to make matters worse, Harry mistook him for the Malfoy child, giving Tom an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of his stomach.

It was then that he realised he was jealous. Jealous of the fact that Harry had called out to Malfoy first, not him. *Why was he acting so irrationally around Harry all the time?*

He hissed at Harry again for mistaking him for Malfoy, but when the boy simply looked at him with wide eyes, his anger deflected a little, and he felt drawn to the feeling of Harry's eyes on him.

He huffed out a breath and walked back to his armchair, not wanting to linger too close and increase the risk of acting uncouth. "Why am I here, Potter?" he asked calmly, not showing his internal struggle to remain in control.

Potter finally looked away from him, twisted his head around to see the room, and struggled to sit up. "I'm not sure," he muttered and ran his fingers over his face in a haze. Tom tracked

the movement with half-lidded eyes before he caught himself and frowned.

"What do you mean you're not sure? You brought me here," he said calmly, reminding himself to remain calm. He wouldn't be a slave to his desires; he had overcome such proclamations a long time ago.

Harry looked tired as he managed to sit upright, leaning heavily on the backrest, and his limbs seemed out of his control. "I can't really remember what happened. I don't think I brought you here."

As he spoke, he shut his eyes tightly, trying to recall what happened. "Well, I didn't bring you here on purpose if I did bring you here."

Harry's words were slurred, and his voice was raspy. Tom recognized the signs. "You're drunk," he stated in a slightly hard tone.

Harry hummed noncommittally at his statement, perhaps he didn't hear Tom. His gaze was unfocused, and Tom wanted to yell at him to focus, to keep his eyes on him, but he didn't, he wouldn't.

Tom had a plan after all; he was going to seduce Potter, and he could use Potter's drunken state to his advantage. As he mulled over ways to take advantage of Harry's lowered inhibitions, an unpleasant sensation - a tightening - forced his throat to close up, and his muscles to stiffen. He didn't like it.

"Hmm, yes I am," Harry giggled, finally replying. He leaned over and nearly fell out of his chair, interrupting Tom's thoughts.

Tom narrowed his eyes at Harry's undignified and overtly drunk behavior. He had seen Harry act vulgar and crass before, but it had never been in addition to a loss of control. He didn't like it either. It should have made him feel satisfied, but it didn't.

For a minute or two, Harry continued to giggle, and every time he looked at Tom, he broke into fits of laughter again.

Despite Tom's growing irritation at being laughed at, he couldn't help but notice Harry's crinkling eyes and the soft music of his laughter. Every time Tom looked at Harry and saw his radiant eyes dance with mirth, the energy to be upset left him abruptly, and he was overcome with something softer. The tightness in his throat and the stiffness in his muscles dissipated, replaced by a warmth that spread through him, leaving him feeling relaxed.

But he couldn't stand not knowing what it was that Harry found so amusing. Despite not wanting to interrupt Harry's laughter, Tom needed to know.

"What's so funny?" he asked, and the moment Harry stopped laughing, Tom regretted interrupting the lovely sound.

Harry raised his head, and for a moment, Tom thought he would start laughing again. Instead, he received a small, tender smile that made his insides flutter. Tom might be hooked on Harry, but the same could be said about Harry in return.

"Nothing," Harry teased. "You're just so...Tom." His giggles were soft as he looked at Tom in a way Tom didn't understand - as if he were the sun, and despite Harry wanting to look away, he was still watching at the risk of ruining his eyes.

With a raised eyebrow, Tom spoke. "I am Tom. What exactly does that mean?"

Harry was still smiling at him as he answered in a soft voice. "Hmm, I don't know. You're just so you that it makes me happy." Harry's eyes betrayed his sincerity, even behind the hazy tint of his drunkenness. The tips of his ears had gone pink.

Tom felt struck by lightning, and it made him want to squirm. "Should I take that as a compliment?" he asked, shifting his weight a little to ease the weight he felt crushed under.

"Yes," Harry replied, with no hesitation.

Tom looked towards the fireplace, unable to bear the intensity of Harry's drunken gaze. "Hey, now that you're here, why don't we talk?" Harry slurred as he smiled lazily at Tom. "What should we talk about?" Harry trailed off in thought, leaving Tom to his own rumble of thoughts.

Tom sat silent for a moment, taking in the sight of Harry baring his soul, inhibitions discarded. The boy looked almost angelic, with his flushed cheeks and relaxed posture. Tom couldn't help but admire him. He looked rather lovely.

As Harry waited for a response, his impatience grew evident, and he let out a frustrated breath before standing on wobbly legs.

"You're not gonna say anything, Tommy boy?" Harry teased, grinning mischievously at his own joke.

Tom knew better than to argue with a drunk. There was no point; their judgment and decision-making skills were too impaired. Instead, he just rolled his eyes at Harry, who was too drunk to notice.

"Come on, talk to me," Harry slurred, his eyes fixed on Tom's arms, then slowly traveling up to his gaze. "I'm bored. Play with me?" He took a few unsteady steps closer to Tom's chair.

Harry's sultry tone sent a shiver down Tom's spine. He couldn't help but imagine all the ways he could play with him, explore every inch of his body. But he knew better than to give in to temptation - Harry was too drunk to make any meaningful decisions. He rolled his eyes at Harry's request, but inside he was fighting a losing battle to keep his composure.

As Harry waited for Tom's response, Tom took a moment to drink in the sight of him. His shirt was hanging open, revealing just a hint of toned chest, and his tight trousers clung to his legs in a way that Tom couldn't help but find flattering. *Was this what young people wore these days?* Despite himself, he felt a surge of desire.

As Tom dragged his gaze from Harry's legs up to his face, he found himself lost in those dilated pupils and parted lips. Harry looked edible, a thought that had haunted him too often nowadays.

"Perhaps you should sober up before we continue this conversation," Tom suggested.

"Nooo, I don't want to. If I'm sober, we'll fight, and I don't want that." Harry pouted, and Tom couldn't help but wonder what they would fight about. Uncertainty gnawed at him.

Thankfully, he didn't need to say anything just yet. Harry leaned forward, dropping the pout and flashing a charming smile. "Besides, I can think of much more fun things I want to do with you," Harry purred.

Tom felt Harry's gaze on him, those vibrant green eyes looking up at him through thick lashes. It was a dare, plain and simple: *I dare you*.

Come on, I dare you.

Taunting him, tempting him.

The tension between them was palpable, a live wire buzzing with electricity. Tom knew he should pull away, but he couldn't tear his eyes from Harry's. They were like pools of green fire, daring him to take the plunge. Tom's voice was thick with desire as he responded: "Look at me with those eyes again, and I'll pluck them from their sockets and keep them in a jar on my desk so I'll never have to see them look away from me."

It may have been a bit of an overreaction on his part, but he was holding onto his control fiercely at the moment, and provoking him would only end badly for both of them.

Harry exhaled a shaky breath, and Tom couldn't help but glance at his soft, full lips. "Promise?" Harry asked in a silky tone, swaying forward as if he wanted to come closer.

A strange feeling he couldn't quite place surged through him, leaving him feeling giddy and high-strung. He tried to maintain his composure, not wanting to show any signs that Harry was affecting him, but it was no use. Harry was getting to him, and it irked him to no end.

Still, he remained silent as Harry grew impatient with his lack of response and settled on the floor like a child. He talked about his day to fill the silence, telling Tom about a Quidditch game and an after-party. Harry complained about his easy and boring classes and how stupid his peers were.

"...and then these stupid Gryffindor boys thought they could hurt me. Make me cry. As if." Harry scoffed, clearly annoyed at their stupidity. But then his expression morphed into one of confusion, and Tom felt a sense of trepidation for what Harry was about to say.

"Hey, before, last time we met, I mean yesterday...why did you comfort me? When I cried, I mean. I'm not really sure why I even cried. I just got upset, I think. But why did you...hug me?" Harry rambled and mumbled, looking embarrassed as he stared at the ground.

Tom would have found Harry's embarrassment amusing if he hadn't been so uncomfortable with the line of questioning. He hesitated before answering, unsure of how to explain himself. He'd thought about it himself and hadn't come to any reasonable conclusion. What was there to say when there was nothing that could explain his actions?

Should he be honest and tell Harry that he didn't know, that he acted on instinct? Harry was drunk; there was no guarantee that he would remember any part of this meeting. Perhaps it would ease the guilt he felt over causing Harry to cry if he talked about it.

"I'm not certain," he spoke quietly, avoiding Harry's eyes. "You were crying, and I felt compelled to help ease your troubles, to comfort you. It was instinct. Would you have preferred I did nothing?"

"No! No, I didn't mind. Well, you were the reason I started crying, so it kinda was your responsibility to fix it anyway," Harry replied with a confused expression.

Tom snorted, surprising both Harry and himself. He couldn't help but smile at Harry's awed expression. Something had changed between them during the last meeting. Their relationship didn't feel as strained or forced, and the wall that had kept them apart had started to crumble. Something softer had started to settle between them, which was strange, considering that neither of them was the softest of people.

"You really do look beautiful when you smile," Harry whispered, gazing at Tom. He quickly looked away, his cheeks flushing. He probably hadn't meant to say that out loud.

Tom said nothing, unsure of how to respond when his supposed enemy said he looked beautiful as he smiled. What do you say to that?

The silence settled between them, and for a while, it felt peaceful. So peaceful, in fact, that Harry was starting to nod off. As his head fell forward, he jerked awake and looked around, confused. Tom snorted again, and Harry's eyes fell on him.

Harry looked up at him, and Tom looked back down. It didn't feel as he had expected to have Harry Potter on the ground in front of him, but it didn't disappoint either.

Harry's eyes slid over his body and settled on the ring on his finger, the Slytherin lord ring. A rather large and gaudy ring in the shape of an ouroboros whose scales were bejeweled with small rubies. His eyes remained focused on the ring as his face opened up with realisation.

"*Tom,*" Harry hissed as his eyes flickered from the ring up to Tom's frozen face.

Parseltongue. Harry was a parselmouth; how could he forget?

"*Toooooom, why are you looking at me like that?*" Harry hissed at him with a playful smile.

How? How was he looking at him? His face was impassive, was it not?

"Tom, you're looking at me like you want to eat me," Harry's smile was teasing, and his eyes bright as he looked at Tom.

Is that an offer? He wants to ask. He wants to accept, he wants to show Harry exactly what he's giving up now. His eyes stray to the infuriatingly inviting lips, and he wonders if Harry would deny him if he were to take what he wants now. He doesn't think he would, and it's so unfortunate that now isn't the time.

"I'm not looking at you in any particular way," Tom replied in English, outright denying the clear truth of Harry's statement. Tom wants to consume him.

"Ssssure," Harry hissed back at him as his lips twitched in amusement. Will he go defensive if Tom were to point out his flirtatious behavior? Would Harry deny his attraction and attempt to distract him from the truth of his actions? It's so tempting.

"Come on, Tom, aren't you bored? Talk to me." Harry's voice is wobbly as he tries to rile Tom up, trying to force the wanted reaction out of him.

"You're drunk, Harry," he breathed out. Stupid drunk child, attempting to force his control to slip. "Perhaps it's time to be quiet, or you'll regret even more things come morning."

Harry pouted, and Tom wasn't sure if he wanted to hit him or do something more sinister to make Harry stop. His murderous mood must shine through as Harry's eyes go lidded, and he sways where he sits.

Harry starts to fidget and shuffle around before looking towards Tom with wide eyes. It must be uncomfortable on the floor seeing as Harry couldn't, for the life of him, sit still.

His eyes lit up, and with slow, deliberate movements, Harry crawled towards him on all fours. It was a weak attempt at seduction, and Tom didn't like his partners to be growling and submissive. The fire that usually consumed Harry was much more entertaining than watching him play into someone else's fantasy.

Tom hoped that Harry would remember this encounter come morning. He was sure it would linger in his mind and haunt his ego at nighttime.

As Harry neared, Tom didn't move. He turned around on the floor and leaned his back on the chair beside Tom's legs. Tom did his best not to move a muscle.

Harry let out a small sound of contentment as their bodies touched, and Tom wondered at the sounds Harry would make were their limbs entwined and bare.

"If you're not in the mood to talk, the least you can do is distract me," Harry said, leaning his head against Tom's knee. He acted as though this were normal behavior.

Tom wasn't certain what Harry meant by "distract me" or why his mind automatically thought up ways to comply with the request.

Harry rubbed his face against Tom's knee, and Tom felt himself tense under the movement. He didn't like physical contact; he wasn't used to it, and after their last meeting, it put him on edge. It made him feel uncomfortable. But he would not let such weakness control him, not when so many other things about Harry already had him in their grip.

Slowly and hesitantly, he moved his hand forward and touched Harry's rowdy hair with the tips of his fingers. It was softer than he expected, and the short locks on top were not as tangled as they appeared. Gently, he tugged on them and ran his fingers through.

Harry let out a contented sigh and leaned more fully against Tom's leg, wrapping an arm around his knee. It was an innocent gesture, but it felt like so much more. Tom couldn't understand why he cared so much about Harry, why he was letting him get so close when he had never let anyone else in before.

As he sat there lost in thought, Tom realised that Harry had wormed his way into his life in a way that he couldn't explain. He wanted to resist, to take back control of his horcruxes and forget about Harry. But there was a part of him that didn't want to let go, that craved the intoxicating feeling of being close to someone who could challenge him in ways that no one else could.

In their last meeting, he had made up his mind to seduce the little nuisance, but his resolve had crumbled in the face of Harry's charming demeanor. He had decided that winning Harry's trust and reclaiming control of his horcruxes was the quickest path to his goal. He still didn't have the horcruxes, which should have been his main focus with Harry, but he didn't need to go to such extreme lengths to achieve his objective.

Tom had always pushed people away, using them for his own gain and discarding them once they were no longer useful. But Harry was different. He had managed to insinuate himself into Tom's life, and now Tom couldn't imagine how dull his existence would be without these meetings to anticipate and ponder over.

Tom didn't know what it was about Harry that drew him in. Was it his carefree nature, his easy smiles, or the fact that he didn't seem to have a fearful bone in his body? Harry was like a ray of sunshine and the clouds that blocked it. His whole personality was a conundrum, and for some reason, it made Tom want to solve him, to understand him – just as Harry had said he wanted to understand Tom.

Whatever it was that made Harry special, Tom found himself wanting to be closer to him. But at the same time, Tom was scared. Scared of what it meant to care about someone so deeply, scared of what Harry would think if he knew how Tom truly felt. He was so used to hiding behind a mask of indifference, and the thought of taking it off was terrifying.

As Tom gently, almost too gently, ran his fingers through Harry's hair, he wondered if it was supposed to take such violence to be gentle. No one could ever understand how violently Tom had to hold himself back from being too rough. And no one would know that for Harry, he did it with ease.

Tom knew he had to figure out what he wanted and what he was willing to risk. He couldn't keep going on like this, unsure of his own feelings and constantly questioning his behavior.

After a lifetime of being alone, forgotten, ignored, ridiculed, and feared, he wanted Harry. He wanted someone to understand him, a soulmate. He wanted to be someone's priority, someone's first and last thought of the day. He wanted to be chosen, to be wanted. How badly, how terrifyingly he wanted someone to choose him. Not just anyone, but Harry.

Tom's mind was a whirlwind of confusion, but as he looked down at Harry, he knew one thing for certain: he wanted to explore this new, uncharted territory with him. But could he?

As Harry's eyes fluttered and shut, he spoke in a quiet voice, clearly drowsy with sleep. Tom looked down at his peaceful face and felt his heart clench uncomfortably.

"Tom?"

"Hmm?" he hummed back, unwilling to startle Harry awake.

Harry didn't say anything right away, and for a moment, Tom thought he had fallen asleep. But then, Harry mumbled in a slurred voice, "You're important to me."

And Tom couldn't breathe.

Harry must be his salvation and his damnation.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure if I'm happy with how their interaction turned out. Writing about someone who's drunk is actually really difficult, I thought it would be easier. It feels a bit choppy but I didn't want to keep you waiting.

So some might be wondering how can Tom not know why Harry would be upset with him? Tom is an idiot sometimes, that's why. He doesn't understand emotions like others, he believes it was solved when Harry let him comfort him cause he would never let anyone he's upset with, comfort him like that. He thinks Harry let it go and he got upset because of something else. He's not the best at understanding emotions even if he's very

good at reading people, he has cognitive empathy but not emotional and compassionate empathy. (This is kinda how I experience it so I based it on myself.)

Oh and I know Tom is a bit too soft but Harry's an exception, he isn't that soft in general. And I think I could drag all the pre relationship stuff out but I honestly can't do it. This is already a pretty long story and we haven't even gotten to their relationship yet so in the coming like 10 chapters their relationship is gonna develop, I want them together before chapter 35 but not sure how it will go.

If you have any more questions about it let me know!

And by the way is anyone watching Eurovision tonight? I really like Czechia's song but I'm partial to Sweden seeing as that's my country.

The Ruin of Reality

Chapter Summary

Tom thinks about Harry, Harry thinks about Tom, and Harry is faced with the truth of his past and can't handle it

Chapter Notes

So this is the chapter I struggled with and asked you all for help with. I hope you like how it turned out! I kinda kept it safe but I personally really like how it turned out. Oh and it might be a little confusing towards the end but it's a confusing time for Harry as well. The last two chapters have been more focused on Tom and Harry so I wanted this chapter to be different.

So warnings: angst and a panic attack

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

He isn't ready to face Harry just yet.

After their last shared dream - a moment when an inebriated Harry had revealed his innermost feelings, resting his head against Tom's legs before falling asleep - Tom had found himself in an unsettled state.

Uncertainty had crept into Tom's once-confident and poised demeanor. It was an unfamiliar feeling, one that made him hesitate, questioning the depths of his own emotions before laying them bare.

As he weighed the risks and rewards of pursuing a relationship with Harry, Tom grappled with the essence of personal sacrifice, questioning whether Harry was deserving of such devotion. Despite their short time together, Tom saw something special in Harry. His heart and soul whispered in agreement, urging him to take the leap.

What was he willing to wager to secure Harry's presence by his side?

The answer was resolute - a great deal.

But would it all prove worthwhile? Was Harry truly deserving of the sacrifices entailed?

Without a doubt.

Yet, was he prepared to relinquish the carefully outlined future he had meticulously crafted for himself in favor of a passion as human as desire?

Here, he hesitated, caught between the yearnings of his heart and the logic of his mind.

Never before had he succumbed to such raw emotions. In the past, he had claimed what he desired, heedless of consequence. However, Harry, with his presence, promised a myriad of complexities.

Amidst this internal struggle, he pondered whether the challenges outweighed the rewards and if embracing a relationship with Harry would ultimately pave the path to personal... contentment.

The conflicting waves of thoughts and emotions left Tom adrift, trapped within a ceaseless circle of introspection. Acknowledging the need for more time to unravel the intricacies of his own feelings and to fathom the potential impact that Harry's involvement might have on his life, he resolved to create distance.

For now, Tom believed that seeking solitude and engaging in profound self-reflection would help him find the clarity required to make a resolute decision about the fate of their relationship.

If there was ever to be one.

Betrayal. To Harry, it represented the ultimate breach of trust. He considered it to be one of the most serious offenses a person could commit. From his perspective, betrayal shattered bonds and caused irreparable damage to any relationship. Its pain ran deeper than any curse or hex, leaving wounds that might never fully heal. Scars that remained, blending in with his others.

For Harry, trust was a scarce and precious commodity. It possessed the power to bring people together amidst chaos, binding hearts and souls. When that trust was broken, it felt as though witnessing a masterpiece crumble, leaving behind only fragmented remains.

Harry had encountered betrayal in various forms. Friends revealing secrets, allies turning against him, and loved ones stabbing him in the back leaving him in a pit of darkness. Each instance felt like a barrage of a thousand knives piercing his heart.

The scars left by betrayal endured, eroding the foundation of love, friendship, and trust. It led him to question every interaction, word, and gesture. Trust became a cautious dance, filled with hesitancy on a battlefield of doubt.

What made betrayal so devastating was its inherent unfairness. Trust was an investment, a belief that it would be reciprocated. When that trust faltered, it felt like a betrayal of one's very essence. Harry wondered if his faith had been misplaced, if loyalty and honesty were mere illusions. An impossible commodity in a world ruled by avarice.

Despite the pain, Harry found solace in the revelation that betrayal brought. It exposed the true nature of those around him, revealing their cracks and flaws. Betrayal served as a poignant reminder to Harry of human vulnerability, an inherent imperfection. It urged caution in a world where trust could be shattered in an instant.

But, forgiveness did not come easily. Betrayal left enduring wounds on the soul. It became a struggle between seeking justice and finding inner peace.

For some unfathomable reason, he had come to trust Tom. In Tom's disposition to remain unmoved and unbothered in the face of Harry's irksome presence and childish conduct, meant

to push him beyond his limits. The belief that Tom would remain stoic and impassive shattered the day Harry confronted him with his worst fear: death.

The betrayal stung as if the wound was fresh, but Tom's kindness when faced with Harry's drunken state prevented the wound from becoming infected.

The self-inflicted irritation gnawed at him relentlessly, a stinging reminder of his own betrayal. Barely a day after he vowed to remain vigilant he had succumbed to his own weakness. The itch of regret taunted him, mocking his lack of self-control.

It had been days since he had last seen Tom, and their last shared dream was a blur of incoherent words and actions that Harry had a hard time deciphering. He had used a pensive to look through the memory, hoping to gain understanding, but it only left him in a flood of confusion and suspicion.

He remembered provoking Tom and trying to elicit a response. The memory of questioning Tom about the embrace and the comfort he had offered lingered, but frustratingly, the response slipped from his grasp. Speaking in Parseltongue was a blur, leaving him wondering what exactly he had uttered. And oh, the embarrassment of crawling on the floor and desperately clinging to Tom's legs—it still made him cringe and shake his head to shake off the rising memory.

How incredibly undignified.

But despite the embarrassment, he couldn't deny that it had felt strangely wonderful when Tom ran his fingers through his hair. He was surprised that Tom entertained his request for a distraction. He had expected Tom to be annoyed with his improper behavior, but to his surprise, Tom was patient and, dare he say, kind. For a couple of days, Harry pondered the reason behind this peculiar behavior. Was Tom being nice as a form of manipulation? Was he attempting to rebuild the trust he had shattered, or was he simply not in the mood for a conflict with a drunk?

His questions remained unanswered. However, one thing Harry was certain of was that Tom never did anything out of the goodness of his heart. Kindness wasn't exactly his strong suit. There must be an ulterior motive, and the most logical explanation was that Tom hoped to lower Harry's guard and break him down further. Harry refused to speculate any more on

Tom's intentions until he observed how he would now act around him. After their two tumultuous encounters, one resulting in tears and the other in gentle caresses, Tom was bound to change his approach in dealing with Harry.

But now, it had been days, and Harry hadn't been able to reach Tom at all. It was as if Tom's mind was just beyond his grasp, tantalizingly close yet out of reach. It left a bitter taste in Harry's mouth and an uncomfortable tightening in his gut.

He missed Tom. And what a surprising realisation that was. Harry had made a promise to himself not to deny his feelings any longer, and after thoughtful consideration, he came to the conclusion that he did miss Tom and enjoyed his presence during their initial meetings.

He was almost certain that Tom also enjoyed his company, so why was the wayward dark lord avoiding him? Had he done something terrible during their last encounter that he couldn't remember?

Had his drunken behavior offended Tom to such an extent that he needed time away from him?

It was upsetting not to know, which was why he had planned to meet with Kali after class and ask them what they knew. They must have been watching during the meeting, but when Harry had asked them, they had gone oddly quiet and avoided the question. Kali had promised to never lie to him, so if he could just have a physical - spiritual? - meeting, he was certain he'd be able to get it out of them.

A light tapping on his legs brought him back to the world of the living, and he noticed all attention was focused on him.

"So, Mr. Potter, what is the answer?" Snape drew near him, hoping Harry had been too out of it to know the correct answer and that he would be able to punish him for it.

With a quick dive into Snape's mind, he found the question and answer at the forefront of his thoughts.

"You'd need moonstone powder to counteract the effects, sir," Harry answered calmly, looking at Snape's forehead so Snape had no chance of delving into his mind.

Snape's eyes narrowed, and with a dramatic turn, he went back to 'teaching' them. Harry found it all so boring.

As class neared its end, Harry prepared to leave quickly. But as Draco looked questioningly at him, he slowed down enough for Draco to follow his lead. With a snarky comment towards Gryffindors, Snape dismissed the class, and Harry grabbed his things along with Draco's and headed for the door, Draco quick on his heels.

"Why are you running off, Harry?" Draco questioned as they sped down the corridor towards the stairs.

"Sorry, Dragon. I'm in a hurry. I'm meeting someone, so unfortunately, you can't join me," Harry said with genuine regret as he handed Draco his bag.

Draco didn't look upset, and Harry thanked the fates for having such a great and understanding friend. "It's alright, Harry. I'll see you at dinner?" He tilted his head in question, looking at Harry with far too much innocence for the Draco he used to know.

"Hmm, yes, I believe so. See you later, Dragon," Harry said as he ruffled Draco's hair and received an annoyed look in return, making him smirk.

As Harry entered the Room of Requirement, he quickly settled on the ground and immersed himself in his mind. He retraced the familiar path leading to his connection with Death, and at a much quicker pace than the first time he attempted it, he arrived at limbo.

Kali was waiting for him, but this wasn't his limbo. This wasn't the place that left him rendered gutted and despondent. This wasn't the place that holds the best and worst of his memories. This place was unfamiliar.

"This place has color and life," Harry remarked, surprised by the vibrant surroundings. "Kali, where are we?" Harry asked, curious about their location.

"We're in my limbo," Kali answered.

Limbo was a place of waiting, where lost souls drifted in a hazy state of uncertainty, not quite belonging to the world they had left behind and not quite ready for the next one. Kali had made this place their home, patiently waiting for the lost souls to find their way to them so that they could guide them on to the next life.

As they waited, Kali couldn't help but overhear the echoes of the worst memories of the lost souls they encountered. Memories of pain, sorrow, and regret that had left their mark on these souls as they journeyed through life. Kali had grown accustomed to these echoes, as they were an inevitable part of Death's duty as the god of death.

One day, a lost soul arrived, but this soul was different from the others. It shone brighter than any other soul that Kali had ever encountered, and they were intrigued. Kali decided to look through the soul's memories to try and understand what made it so special.

As they watched the soul's memories, Kali was overcome with emotion he'd never felt before. The memory he saw was one of pure joy, so much so that they could feel the happiness emanating from the soul. For the first time in his long existence, Kali felt what it was like to be truly happy. He got to experience the feeling through someone else.

The memory was of a simple moment of happiness shared between two people. Kali felt like crying tears for the lost souls that had never experienced such a moment. The happy memory that Kali saw was that of a young couple sitting together in a beautiful garden, surrounded by blooming flowers and lush greenery. They were laughing and joking, holding hands, and enjoying each other's company.

As Kali watched, they felt the warmth of the sun on their face and the breeze rustling through the leaves. They could smell the sweet fragrance of the flowers and hear the birds singing in the distance. It was a moment of pure contentment, a moment that had stayed with the lost soul even after they had left the mortal world behind. Over all the pain and regret that most

lost souls kept closest to their heart this person chose to hold their happiest memories closest and let go of all the pain that burden them. Who remembers kisses when wounds leave scars.

And then something changed. Kali's version of Limbo, which had always been a hazy, indistinct place, began to shift and change. It transformed into the place from the happy memory, and it would remain that way for centuries. The sky was a bright blue, and the sun shone down casting a warm glow over everything. The air was filled with the scent of blooming flowers and the sound of trickling water could be heard in the distance. Even if it was an illusion it was a welcome one.

Now, as lost souls find their way to Kali in Limbo, they are greeted by a place of joy and peace, a place where they can experience the simple pleasures of life once more before moving on to their next existence. Kali continues to guide lost souls to their next life, but now he does so with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing that he can give them one last taste of happiness before they move on.

Silence hung in the air, and Harry's concern grew as Death's usual air of composure seemed to waver. This was uncharted territory for him, and Harry couldn't help but feel a flicker of uncertainty creep into his voice. "Kali, are you alright?" he asked, his words laced with genuine worry. Tentatively, he considered reaching out to offer comfort, but he hesitated, knowing that physical touch was a new concept to Death.

Kali's gaze softened, their eyes meeting Harry's with a depth of emotion. "Yes, I'm alright, Master," they replied, their voice carrying a faint tremor of vulnerability.

Harry couldn't help but let out a weary sigh, his head falling back in a gesture of fatigue. "Haven't I told you to call me Harry?" he murmured, a trace of exasperation in his tone.

A half-smile tugged at Kali's lips, a beautiful transformation from their previously unnerving countenance. "You did, Harry, but I prefer 'Master.' It's a term of respect," they explained, their words gentle yet unwavering.

Harry huffed in response, a mixture of amusement and affection playing across his features. "Fine, if it means that much to you, then I'll allow it. But I'd still prefer Harry," he conceded, his gaze momentarily drifting to the tranquil garden that surrounded them. Curiosity danced in his eyes as he wondered why Kali had chosen this location instead of whisking them away

to Harry's personal realm, his Limbo. "Why have you brought us here?" he inquired, his voice filled with genuine curiosity.

Kali shifted uneasily, and Harry's gaze locked onto the subtle movement. "I thought you'd be more comfortable here," Kali remarked, his voice tinged with unease.

A flicker of suspicion danced in Harry's eyes. "Comfortable? Is there something unsettling you're about to reveal?" Harry's words carried a mix of playful banter and underlying seriousness.

A barely perceptible tension coursed through Kali's body, not escaping Harry's keen observation. It struck Harry as odd how Death, of all beings, exhibited human-like mannerisms. With a hint of apprehension in his gaze, Kali remained silent, leaving Harry on edge, his muscles coiled in anticipation.

Finally, Kali broke the silence, his words laden with a sense of foreboding. "There is something I haven't told you. I know it will be difficult for you to hear."

A sudden pang gripped Harry's chest. This departure from Kali's usual demeanor sent a shiver down his spine, and he realized he wasn't prepared for the weight of what Kali was about to disclose.

"Tell me," Harry managed to utter, his voice barely audible.

"Before I reveal this, Master - Harry, please listen," Kali implored, a hint of desperation in his voice. "Everything that has transpired, it has happened for a reason. There is a purpose behind it all. Please don't forget that and don't rush to judgment too hastily."

Harry nodded weakly, his mind swirling with a mix of fear and curiosity. He braced himself for what was to come.

After a moment's hesitation, Kali locked eyes with Harry, his gaze laden with reluctance. "This isn't your first venture into the past, Harry. You've treaded this path three times before. And this, now, is your fourth."

Harry felt as if the ground had given way beneath him. His breath hitched in his throat, and a dizzying whirlpool of thoughts consumed his mind. He struggled to comprehend the weight of Kali's revelation.

"What do you mean?" Harry managed to stammer, his voice trembling.

Each word seemed to inflict pain upon Kali as he spoke, slowly and hesitantly. "The previous three attempts didn't end well. You had to restart your life, over and over again. But each time, you wouldn't retain any memories of the past. It's the price you pay for another chance at life."

A profound sense of emptiness settled in Harry's core. He felt as if he'd been sucker-punched, robbed of his breath and thoughts. How could Kali have kept this from him for so long? Was this the reason he had always felt an inexplicable connection to death, an eerie familiarity?

The pieces started to fall into place, and Harry's realization struck him with the force of a thousand crashing waves.

Betrayal.

"How could you do this to me, Kali?" Harry's voice cracked with raw emotion, his eyes burning with a mixture of anguish and anger.

The weight of guilt settled upon Kali, and he couldn't meet Harry's gaze. "I couldn't have done it without your request, Harry. You begged me, pleaded with me to send you back."

Harry's fists clenched, his fury rising. "Why? Why would I ever ask to be subjected to such pain and suffering, to be trapped in an endless cycle of torment?"

With a heavy sigh, Kali's voice carried a tinge of resignation. "Because what you had experienced before was even worse. You asked me to send you back, time and time again."

Harry stared at Kali, his mind spinning with disbelief. How could he have forgotten everything from his past lives? And why would he willingly choose to endure heartbreak again?

His voice barely a whisper, Harry asked, "Why would I ask to be sent back? What could have been worse than what I've already faced?"

Kali hesitated, his words weighed down by the gravity of truth. "You were in unimaginable agony, Harry. So, you pleaded for another chance. And I granted your wish." As if to offer solace, Kali took a step forward, but Harry recoiled, stepping back.

"You were returned to your original world, but I could only bring you back to the moment of your first brush with death or the moment you became my master. You asked me to bring you back to the point when you became my master. Though you changed after the first return, your circumstances remained the same. History repeated itself. Yet, those memories lingered in the depths of your mind, shaping you into someone darker, more jaded. The pain and paranoia followed you, consuming you..." Kali's voice trailed off, his words filled with regret.

"That's enough," Harry interrupted sharply, silencing Kali's rambling.

Harry's mind whirled, grappling to comprehend the enormity of it all. He couldn't recall his past lives, yet their weight bore down upon him, a constant shadow in his consciousness. The ache, the loss, the heartbreak—they remained etched within him, unspoken but ever-present.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Harry's voice quivered, a mixture of hurt and confusion.

"I promised never to lie to you, Harry," Kali replied, his voice tinged with remorse. "But I also wanted you to have a fresh start each time, free from the burden of your past. I wanted you to forge your own path without the weight of previous lives anchoring you down."

He shook his head in disbelief, his body consumed by a mixture of anger and grief. "How could you do this to me?" He asked again, his voice trembled with raw emotion, a plea for answers. "How could you send me back again and again knowing what I had to go through, are you that cruel?"

Kali's voice was barely a whisper, filled with regret. "I only fulfilled your wishes, Harry. I couldn't have acted without your consent."

Unable to contain the overwhelming surge of emotions, Harry shot up from his leaned over position, his entire being quaking with a storm of rage and agony. "I can't... I can't deal with this right now. I need some time to think," he said, his voice choked with unshed tears.

Kali's gaze was laden with sorrow as they pleaded with Harry, their voice laced with urgency. "Please, Harry, stay and listen. Allow me to explain. There's more to this, a grander scheme at play. It's all interconnected, tied to the very fabric of fate. The gods wouldn't have intervened so many times if it didn't hold immense significance, if it wasn't crucial for—"

"For the greater good," Harry interjected bitterly, the words dripping with bitter irony.

Was this all his existence amounted to? A pawn in some cosmic game, a mere instrument for the greater good?

Kali—no, they did not deserve that name, they were Death, only Death—attempted to justify their actions, to convince Harry that it was all part of a greater plan. But Harry felt his sanity unraveling. How could they expect him to accept it? How could they expect him to bear the weight of countless lifetimes, trapped in a hellish cycle of suffering, all in the name of some plan? The sheer absurdity of it all threatened to consume him.

His mind collapsed in on itself, and Harry fell to his knees. For the greater good? The greater good?!

OH, THE FUCKING IRONY!

Harry felt the giggles slip past his lips. Soon, the laughter turned hysterical as his life's bitter irony washed over him. His existence, his purpose—it had all been a cruel joke. His every breath, his every decision, had been dictated by the grand notion of the greater good. Oh, how preposterous it all seemed! The very thing he had tried to escape, to defy, had held him captive all along. He was a puppet, pulled by the strings of others - Dumbledore, Voldemort, Death, and now Fate! Fate, the puppeteer of his life, controlling his every move.

He was always something, never allowed to be just Harry. The Chosen One, the Boy Who Lived, the Master of Death—labels that suffocated his identity. And now, he was Fate's plaything, tossed about in their grand design. The weight of his own significance crushed him. He was just too fucking *special*.

Darkness closed in, stealing his vision, but Harry's laughter persisted, mingling with his ragged breaths. The lack of air was inconsequential compared to the suffocation he felt in his heart. The realization that he couldn't escape, couldn't even choose his own fate, pierced through his being. He couldn't die! However much he wanted to... Oh no, that's not allowed. All for the sake of the greater good. He was just too fucking *special*! The fog was entering his mind, spreading. His vision was gone, but the laughter, the wheezing laughter, was still there, but... but the air was gone.

Harry couldn't stay. Summoning his last shreds of strength, Harry staggered to his feet, his mind a tumultuous whirlwind of memories and emotions too overwhelming to process. Leaving Kali behind, burdened by their own remorse, he ascended to the surface. Death had done what they thought was best for Harry, but now they realized that they had only caused him more pain.

A conversation that had taken minutes had irreparably unraveled Harry's very being, crumbling the foundation of his entire existence.

Hermione's voice pierced through the air, filled with anguish and betrayal. "You're a monster!"

"Why are you saying that, Hermione? I don't understand."

Petunia's blow landed on him, her words dripping with venom. "You're a freak!"

"Shut up, you old hag."

Ron's voice erupted with raw emotion. "I will kill you, you traitor!"

"Kill me?! What are you saying?!"

"Harry, I love you." Draco's whispered confession tugged at Harry's heart.

"I love you too, my dragon."

Snape's accusation pierced through the air like a knife. "You raised him like a pig for slaughter,"

"More like a sacrificial lamb."

"You've been so brave," His mother's loving words washed over him.

"I haven't. I'm scared."

"Don't let the past haunt you, Harry," Luna's gentle voice offered solace.

"It won't stop haunting me, Luna. It won't let me go."

"It's quicker and easier than falling asleep," Sirius' comforting words carried a weight of longing.

"I wish it was that easy."

An unknown man's accusation lashed out from the stands. "You're the next Dark Lord! We should throw you in Azkaban!"

"If I wanted to be a Dark Lord, you'd all be dead already."

Xenophilius' voice quivered with grief. "Luna is gone, Harry. There was an accident,"

"What? No, it can't... No, I just saw her, she's fine. Nothing has happened to her!"

"Life isn't easy, Harry, but neither is death," Draco's tender touch brought comfort as he cried.

"Death sounds much easier than life. I want to join you."

Ron screamed in his face. "He was DARK, he'd turned you Dark. He deserved it!"

"He didn't do ANYTHING! I've always been DARK, you fucking idiot! He did nothing to deserve it. I did nothing!"

The auror's cruel laughter pierced his soul. "He died screaming for you, you know. He was calling for you! Hahah."

"Shut up, shut up, or I will fucking kill you again!"

Hermione's furious accusation resounded in the air. "You should have died with him!"

"I wish I'd never left our garden. I wanted to go with him!"

"They were animals! I slaughtered them like the beasts they were!" His own voice echoed through the darkness, filled with torment.

"Harry, you can't hang onto the past like this. Let it go. Let it go, it's not healthy," Luna's pleading voice reached his ears.

"I can't, I can't. It holds me tight. It comforts me in the dark. I can't let you go, I can't let him go."

"They were innocent," Dumbledore's portrait lied.

"No, they weren't innocent!" The voice in his mind and his own echoed in unison, denying the claim.

"No one in this life is innocent either. They shouldn't have a chance to hurt us again," His own voice reverberated through his tormented mind, echoing with bitterness and anguish.

"No, that's not true. It can't be true," he vehemently shouted back, his words laced with desperation.

"They hurt us! They don't deserve to be here anymore!" the voice retorted, its tone dripping with venom.

"They didn't hurt us! They have done nothing. You twisted the Dark into an excuse for a life of violence. All those innocent people... in this life, they have done us no harm," Harry

desperately pleaded, his words filled with a mix of sorrow and frustration.

"There is no such thing. They have committed their own sins, I can assure you. They are spreading their lies throughout the community, seeking to control and suppress, their beliefs resting on the backs of the oppressed. None of their hands were clean. They were not innocent. They are not innocent!" the voice hissed, its words seething with malice.

Control, control, stay in control, he repeated in his mind, a mantra to ward off the darkness threatening to consume him.

"These people, they are innocent, they have never hurt us!" Harry cried out, his voice cracking with vulnerability.

"They hurt us by simply existing!" the voice countered, its accusation piercing through his thoughts.

"You need to get rid of them. Take them out before the taint spreads," the voice whispered, its words insidious and tempting.

Anger. For a long time, anger had been his constant companion, fueling his actions. It was a twisted solace, better than facing the overwhelming grief, heartache, and guilt that lurked beneath the surface. But feeding the anger was exhausting, like trying to satiate an insatiable monster. The monster protected him, but at what cost?

His resolve crumbled like fragile sandcastles. Why was he protecting them? They never protected him. He owed them nothing.

Maybe they were better off dead.

Death is a mercy. The thought whispered in his mind, a chilling melody that threatened to consume his sanity.

He strode forward, his purpose propelling him through the world without conscious awareness of his surroundings. His steps were quick, determined, driven by an urgent need to reach a destination he couldn't clearly define.

Now was the time.

Now he had to find them all.

Eliminate them.

Erase their existence.

The sound of his own footsteps reverberated loudly in his ears, amplified by the chaos that seemed to crackle in the air around him. Shattering noises echoed, but he paid them no mind.

A gasp reached his ears, a voice calling out his name from a distance.

"Harry!"

"Harry, wait!" The voice grew closer, filled with desperation and breathlessness.

"Harry, you foolish idiot, stop right there!"

Some invisible force compelled his body to halt, but his mind screamed that he must continue.

Now.

A hand landed on his shoulder, attempting to anchor him, but he resisted. He tried to shake it off, but it clung stubbornly, and he reached up to grip it tightly in return.

Something held him back, restrained him from moving forward again.

"Harry, what's wrong? Where are you going?" The voice now sounded distant, fading away.

His feet resumed their motion, but a lingering resistance persisted. The hand still grasped his shoulder, its touch a tether to the present.

"Harry, please look at me. What happened?" Concern laced the voice.

His lips moved, but the words, if there were any, were lost in the void.

He needed to...

"Harry, you can't... you have to stay. Stay here with me."

Stay.

Stay?

Why should he stay? He had a purpose to fulfill.

"Harry, please, look at me." The voice pleaded, filled with a mix of desperation and love.

His head turned, guided by an unseen force, yet his eyes remained vacant.

A gentle hand caressed his cheek, jolting him from his current state.

What was happening?

Where was he?

"Harry?"

He blinked. *Draco?*

"I'm sorry, Harry."

And in an instant, the world descended into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

So Draco saves the day by stopping Harry from going on a killing spree. Would Harry actually have killed anyone? I'll leave it up to you but I think that in the mindset he was in, he would have.

I guess it might have been a bit confusing with all the different thoughts and memories and voices but I kinda meant it to be. All the different people that talk to Harry at the end are just memories he can't ignore so he answers them. A lot of what happens at the end is just in Harry's mind. I wanted to convey Harry's state of mind but if you have any questions I'll be happy to answer.

I realised it might be difficult to understand what death meant so I'll try to explain it more (it will come up more in future chapters as well). Harry has experienced 3 lifetimes and is experiencing his 4th right now. He has started over 3 times from the

same point in time, the moment he became master of death. All lifetimes have the same childhood because Harry never wanted to go back to being a baby and experiencing his childhood again despite being able to choose to start over from the moment he had his first brush with death (the first time Voldie tried to kill him as a baby). He always chose to go back to the moment he became MOD. All the lifetimes went through pretty much the same thing in the original universe (the universe he was born into.) Life went pretty much like this: awful childhood, life at hogwarts, defeating Voldie, Harry traveling, falling in love with Draco, Draco dying, Harry trying to die, Harry thinking he succeeded in dying but accidentally ending up in the past in a different dimension. All lifetimes he's lived played out the same when it came to the original dimension but not the new dimension, that's where things change between the lifetimes. But every time he came to a new universe it ended badly and he wanted to die but couldn't so he asked death to help. Death offered to send him back every time but told Harry he'd lose all the memories he had formed after the moment he became MOD. So all memories of a different life would be gone. Harry accepted that fact every time.

What a lifetime looked like for Harry

1. born (in original dimension)
2. Awful childhood
3. Traumatic Hogwarts years
4. Defeats Voldemort
5. Becomes MOD
6. Finds out about the betrayal
7. Goes traveling around the world (meets master)
8. Comes back to Britain meets Draco again
9. Falls in love with Draco
10. Marries Draco, is happy
11. Draco is murdered
12. Harry goes on a rampage, kills all involved parties
13. Avoids all people and tries to commit suicide a lot, can't
14. Lives to old age (over 100)
15. Thinks he succeeded in dying, ends up in new dimension in his younger body
16. Lives in a new dimension (but things always change here between the different lifetimes)
17. Something terrible tragic event happens
18. Begs Death for help, Death offers an alternative, to start over at the moment he became MOD.
19. Harry goes back to the moment he became MOD, doesn't remember anything that happened after he became MOD. He's reset
20. Cycle repeats itself from point 5

Hope that made it clearer!

Love you all! Thanks for all the support! ♥♥♥♥

Delusion's Demise

Chapter Summary

The truth stirs up a storm in Harry's mind, from which his friends try to offer solace and Harry's plans for Yule are interrupted

Chapter Notes

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

That morning, Harry woke up feeling as if he were teetering on the brink of life and death, enveloped in utter wretchedness. Any fleeting hope of relief was instantly shattered as his bleary eyes landed on the figure standing beside his bed - Draco.

Draco's bloodshot eyes brimmed with unspoken agony, and the downturned corners of his mouth mirrored the weight of unbearable pain he carried. And inexplicably, Harry found himself transported back to that fateful night in the astronomy tower, where Draco's fear and despair had intertwined with his own inability to act. It was as if the present moment fused with haunting echoes of the past, rendering Harry immobile, a captive observer to a horrifying spectacle. In his mind, he screamed, commanding himself to move, to escape the suffocating stillness. But his limbs remained unyielding, shackled by an invisible force, while unspeakable torment unfolded before his eyes. Time stood still, ensnaring him in a harrowing reminiscence - a time of helplessness, powerlessness, and paralyzing fear. Desperation had consumed him then, the yearning to fulfill the role of the revered Boy Who Lived, to be their savior. The bitter surge of bile rose in his throat, threatening to spill forth, but he swallowed it down, refusing to succumb to weakness.

No longer confined by the shackles of past helplessness, Harry recognised the immensity of his own power. He was the harbinger of unparalleled strength, no longer paralysed or frozen. He could move, and move he did. With a deliberate gesture, he raised his arms, silently asking Draco for solace, for a shared embrace that transcended words. And without a hint of hesitation, Draco threw himself into the waiting sanctuary of Harry's arms, their impact stealing their breath away. In that fierce embrace, Harry clung to him with a fervor that grounded them amidst the tempest of their internal turmoil. In Draco's trembling form, he felt the profound depth of fear, a fear he himself had unknowingly instilled. A sigh, laden with poignant admission, escaped Harry's lips. He wasn't the savior, nor the celebrated Boy Who Lived. But he could still be a protector - a guardian for those whose presence breathed purpose into his existence.

Draco had apparently stunned him, panicked and fearful that Harry was about to embark on a murderous rampage based on something he had said - a memory Harry couldn't recall. Fortunately, his body hadn't reacted as violently as it usually did when faced with a wand. He had simply allowed Draco's stunner to hit him, knowing deep down that resorting to violence was not the answer. After their heartfelt embrace Draco had yelled at him, shook him and demanded that he promise never to scare him like that again. Draco hadn't pressed for an explanation, but Harry could sense his burning curiosity. Yet, Harry still hadn't found the words to share what had caused his previous state, and days had slipped by in silence.

In the following days, a delicate dance of unspoken understanding and shared vulnerability began to unfold between Harry and Draco. Their interactions became a tapestry of unspoken truths, of gentle gestures and lingering glances that held the weight of unspoken conversations. They navigated the uncharted territories of their own emotions, offering solace and strength in equal measure.

Harry found solace in Draco's presence, a refuge from the storm that raged within him. Draco's unwavering support and the tenderness of his touch provided a respite from the consuming darkness that threatened to engulf Harry's mind. But as the weeks wore on, it became apparent that even the comfort of Draco's company was not enough to ward off the relentless truth that Kali had unveiled.

He hadn't spoken to Kali or Tom since the day Kali had unveiled the truth about his past lives. Consumed by a relentless stream of thoughts, the revelation lingered in his mind, haunting every waking moment. Why hadn't Kali told him before? And why was he condemned to relive his life repeatedly? What could possibly be the grand plan of fate?

As he pondered the meaning of his existence, Harry's thoughts swirled like a storm, searching for answers in the depths of his consciousness. The revelation had shattered the fragile foundation of his understanding, leaving him adrift in a sea of confusion. He grappled with the weight of Kali's previous silence, questioning their motives and the consequences of their actions.

Why didn't Kali tell me the truth earlier? Harry's voice echoed in the solitude of his thoughts, his brow furrowed in frustration. What purpose does it serve to keep me in the dark, subjected to this endless cycle?

A profound emptiness settled in Harry's chest as he wrestled with the magnitude of his existence. Memories of his past lives eluded him, yet their weight bore down upon him like an unseen burden. The ache of loss, heartbreak, and the relentless cycle of suffering had shaped him into someone unrecognizable.

"What purpose does it all serve?" Harry's voice trembled, his words a desperate plea to an indifferent universe. "Why am I condemned to this existence, forever caught in the web of fate? What have I done to deserve this?"

His mind spun with fragments of the past, memories that refused to surface. The unknown haunted him, an unsolved riddle that tugged at his thoughts. Did the threads of his lives intertwine with a greater tapestry? Or was he merely a pawn, a vessel to fulfill an inscrutable purpose?

In the depths of introspection, Harry yearned for clarity, for a glimpse into the intricate machinations of destiny. He longed to understand the reasons behind his suffering, to find solace in the notion of purpose. But as he delved deeper, doubts gnawed at the edges of his thoughts, threatening to unravel the fragile thread of hope.

"What is the plan, fate?" Harry's voice resonated with a mix of defiance and resignation. "What greater purpose could justify these endless cycles of pain and torment?"

Was he destined to be a mere puppet, manipulated by unseen forces? Or did he possess the power to forge his own path, to break free from the shackles of predetermined fate? Who was he to fight against the gods?

The weight of his questions bore down upon him, pressing against his weary spirit. His days had blended into a haze of purposelessness and self-pity. He felt adrift, lacking any sense of direction. Yet, in the depths of his turmoil, a flicker of determination ignited within Harry. He would not be defined by the circumstances imposed upon him. He would seek his own truths, forge his own destiny, and confront the mysteries that plagued his being. Besides, if his life was ultimately meaningless, bound to be restarted and redefined, then nothing he did here would matter. He was free to do as he pleased without consequence. Currently, what pleased him was the prospect of encountering a certain Dark Lord.

He had attempted to reach out to Tom, but Tom had been avoiding him, and Harry couldn't blame him. He had been too pushy, too demanding. While Harry hadn't forgiven Tom for his past behavior, he still longed for his presence. He missed their conversations, their discussions, even their bickering. Without them, he felt an overwhelming sense of loneliness, realizing how much he had come to cherish his time with Tom.

Harry spent most of his time locked in his room, lost in contemplation. The nagging feeling persisted that everything he had done, everything he had endured, had amounted to nothing. He felt like a mere pawn in a grand scheme he couldn't begin to grasp.

The days had melded together, and though he wasn't certain of the exact date, he knew that the Yule break was approaching. Kali - *Death* had been trying to reach him incessantly, but they had given him space during the first week, perhaps hoping that Harry would eventually come around. Yet, he hadn't. It was all too overwhelming.

He didn't want to talk to Kali, but he yearned to see Tom again. However, Tom remained elusive, somehow out of his reach. Every night, Harry tried to grasp Tom's consciousness, but it slipped through his fingers. Tom was intentionally avoiding him. The pain of it was unbearable.

Harry missed him. He felt utterly alone. Abandoned.

But you couldn't think your way out of loneliness.

He had Draco, but it wasn't *his* Draco.

One evening, it might have been Friday, as Harry lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, he heard a knock on his door. He groaned and rolled over, hoping that whoever it was would go away. But the knocking continued.

He had put up wards around the dorm room, which perhaps was rude since none of his roommates would be able to enter.

With a lazy wave of his hand, the wards dropped, and his roommates stepped in. He watched as Draco, Blaise, and Theo walked in.

"Hey, Harry," Draco said, taking a seat on Harry's bed. Blaise sat down beside him, while Theo took the desk chair. "How's it going?"

Harry shrugged. He didn't really feel like talking, but he knew he should probably say something to help ease his friends' concern, and it might even help him if he shared some of his worries.

"Not great, to be honest," he admitted, feeling a lump form in his throat. "I just feel like... like everything I do is pointless."

Draco looked at him with concern. "What do you mean?" he asked gently.

"I don't know," Harry said, shrugging again. "I just... I feel like I'm not making any progress. Like no matter how hard I try, I'm always going to fall short."

Blaise rolled his eyes. "That's ridiculous," he said, his tone light. "You're Harry Potter, for Merlin's sake. You've defeated Voldemort, like, twice. You're a bloody legend."

Harry couldn't help but smile at Blaise's words. It was true; they just didn't know that he had killed him once as well. Not that he wanted to anymore.

Theo spoke up, trying to distract Harry from his thoughts. "Hey, did you finish that essay for Professor Snape?" he asked.

Harry shook his head. "No, I've been too... busy," he said, trailing off. He didn't want to talk about his problems anymore.

"Hey, did you hear about the new prank Fred and George pulled on Professor Malfoy?" Blaise asked, a mischievous gleam in his eye.

Draco groaned loudly and let the back of his head hit the wall. "What did they do now? My father is very easily irritated, you know. He might take it out on the class if they continue."

Blaise only laughed at Draco's misery and proceeded to tell the story of how Fred and George charmed all the objects in Lucius' office to fly away from him whenever he reached for them.

Harry shook his head, feeling a surge of relief with the change in topic. As his friends bantered and laughed, he felt a warm sense of normalcy wash over him. For a brief moment, he could set aside his burdens and simply embrace the carefree spirit of being a teenager.

Amidst their animated conversation, Harry realised how fortunate he was to have friends like them. Imperfect but fiercely loyal, their kind hearts never failed to support him, even when he struggled to ask for help.

As the night wore on, a newfound lightness filled Harry's chest. His problems hadn't vanished, but the presence of these caring individuals reminded him that he wasn't alone in his journey.

"Hey Harry, are you coming to Hogsmeade tomorrow? It's your last chance before the Yule holiday," Theo asked, while the others nodded along.

Hogsmeade had slipped from Harry's mind, but the thought of finding gifts brought a heavy sigh and a reluctant groan. Despite his reservations, Harry resolved to join them.

After a while, Draco stood up. "We should probably get going," he said, looking at his watch. "It's almost time for dinner."

Blaise and Theo stood up as well, glancing at Harry, but he shook his head, not really feeling up to being around so many people.

"We will bring back some food for you," Theo told Harry.

As their departing figures disappeared from sight, they cast one final smile towards Harry, leaving him with a profound sense of gratitude for their unwavering presence in his life.

As he sank back onto his bed, a wave of relief washed over Harry, enveloping him in a comforting embrace. Though uncertainties loomed ahead, the knowledge that he was surrounded by people who genuinely cared provided solace in that moment. Their support served as a pillar of strength, reminding him that he was never alone.

Yet, within the growing stillness, his thoughts began to stir, clamoring for attention. His heart yearned for a meeting with Tom, a long-awaited rendezvous they had discussed in anticipation of the upcoming Yule break. If a face-to-face encounter seemed unlikely, Harry contemplated alternative means of reaching out, perhaps through a letter.

Alright, he'd try that. At least then he'd be doing something to ease his anxiety. Now the question was, what to write in the letter?

Perhaps it was time to seek out Luna. Oh, now he felt terrible for not speaking to her for a while. He had been too stuck in his own mind to think of anyone else, but Luna was... Luna. His Luna. His darling Luna who was always kind and understanding, who was always there for him. He wanted to curse himself; he had been an awful friend lately.

It was dinner time, so Luna was most likely in the Great Hall, and he didn't feel like going there, so he'd head over to the Thestrals with whom Luna spends most of her evenings. Harry hadn't really sought out the reason for her obsession with them, but he knew they were important to her. She'd visit them every day, feeding them, petting them, keeping them company. Was it because they didn't expect anything from her or didn't hold any preformed prejudice against her? Maybe they just made her feel safe.

As he got dressed in something more appropriate than pajamas, Harry let his thoughts focus on his precious friend Luna. Oh, he should definitely invite her over during Yule break; he was sure it would be fun having both her and Draco around. Their personalities were complete opposites, but somehow they never seemed to clash. And Draco wouldn't mind if he

took some liberties in inviting her over to his manor, and Lucius would be too scared to argue.

Shopping was an exhausting task, especially when someone kept bothering him through their connection for hours. Not the best way to win him over, by being annoying. He responded by sending bursts of magic to push Death away from the connection, but they seemed oblivious to the hint.

The persistent disturbance gave him a headache, but he managed to finish his shopping and now had a letter in his pocket as he made his way to Lucius' office. He hoped Tom would read it and not just burn it upon receiving it.

Luckily, he had agreed to meet Theo in the library for a study session before school let out for Yule. It would be a welcome distraction from worrying about trivial matters. Theo was bound to have questions about the homework, leading to a lengthy discussion of theory and probably a debate that would leave them both utterly puzzled.

Tom,

Hey, how are you doing? Listen, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that I'm staying with Draco at Malfoy Manor during the Yule break. The bad news is that I won't be able to see your annoying face unless you come to visit me.

But let's be real, you were already planning on coming to see me, right? I mean, we both know that we can't get rid of each other. Our last meeting was a bit of a blur, I was too drunk to remember most of it. I hope I didn't embarrass myself or say anything too strange. Did I? Well I'm sure you've heard weirder things, you are pretty old aren't you?

Anyway, I was hoping we could meet up again soon. I miss your murderous tendencies and your sharp wit. And I believe we have some business to conduct.

Harry

It was difficult to discern whether Tom was scolding or grinning due to his peculiar facial expression. The little brat was something else.

Harry and Draco walked out of Hogwarts together, surrounded by a crowd of other students. It was a crisp winter day, with a light dusting of snow on the ground. Harry had his cloak pulled tightly around him, and Draco had his hands buried in his pockets.

"So, you're really coming to my house for Yule?" Draco asked, looking at Harry with a mixture of excitement and scepticism.

"Yeah, I can't wait," Harry replied, grinning. "It'll be nice to have a break from Hogwarts and all the drama."

Draco nodded, a small smile on his face. "It'll be good to have you there," he said before looking away.

As they approached the carriages that would take them to the Hogwarts Express, a figure stepped out from the crowd and blocked their path. It was Dumbledore because, of course, it was him, his long white hair and beard blowing in the wind.

"Ah, Harry," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling. "I was hoping to catch you before you left."

Harry felt a sense of annoyance wash over him, knowing Dumbledore's tendency to meddle in his affairs and his current interest in where he spends his Yule break. He hadn't brought it up again after their last meeting, and Harry had hoped that the old man had let it go. Hope is for fools. "What is it, Headmaster?" Harry asked, trying to keep his tone neutral, aware of the students around them.

Dumbledore's expression grew serious. "I'm afraid I must ask you to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas, Harry. I don't think it's a good idea for you to spend your time with the Malfoys. Your safety is still not guaranteed, and there have been new threats against you."

Harry felt a flash of anger at Dumbledore's words. He didn't appreciate being told what to do, but he knew that arguing with Dumbledore wouldn't get him anywhere. Last time had certainly proved that. For now, it was easier to just play along. "Alright, Professor," Harry said, forcing a smile. "I understand your concern."

If Dumbledore noticed his sudden change in attitude, he didn't acknowledge it.

Draco looked at Harry with concern etched on his face. "What's going on, Harry? Are you coming with me or not?"

Harry turned to Draco and put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Go on without me, Draco," he said. The old man was waving goodbye to some Gryffindors and wasn't looking at them, so Harry whispered his next words in Draco's ear as they hugged goodbye. "I'll meet you at the manor later. It's no big deal."

Draco hesitated for a moment, then nodded and climbed onto one of the carriages. Harry watched him go, feeling a sense of sadness wash over him. He wanted to spend his time with his dragon, not a senile goat. The headmaster was getting in his way and delaying his peaceful break from annoying professors and obnoxious teenagers.

As Dumbledore continued to lecture Harry, the young wizard could feel his irritation growing. He was tired of being told what to do and how to live his life, especially by someone who only pretended to have all the answers.

"Listen, Albus," Harry said, cutting off Dumbledore's speech. "I don't need you to tell me who to be friends with or how to live my life. I'm perfectly capable of making my own decisions."

Dumbledore looked at Harry, his eyes twinkling with a mixture of amusement and pity.

"Of course, Harry," he said. "I apologize if I've given you that impression. I only want what's best for you."

Harry snorted. "Sure you do."

Dumbledore's expression didn't change, but Harry could tell that he was offended by his bluntness. What exactly did he expect Harry to do? Just go along with whatever the man said? Was he delusional or just plain stupid? Didn't he recall how their last meeting went, or any of their meetings this year? Gods, this man—how he gained so much respect and admiration was a mystery to Harry.

"Harry, I understand that you have some reservations about me, but I hope that you know I have always been on your side," Dumbledore said.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, sure. That's why you kept so many secrets from me and put me in danger all those times."

Dumbledore sighed. "I realize that my actions may have caused you pain, Harry, but I assure you that everything I did was to protect you and defeat Voldemort."

Beware that when you fight monsters, you do not become a monster yourself, Harry thought as he looked at Dumbledore. Only a true idealist could willingly commit so many atrocities. Only a true idealist would willingly sacrifice a child for his cause. It's all for an ideal of freedom that Dumbledore believes to be absolute. When faced with monsters of your own creation, how could one not become a monster themselves if they wish to overcome them?

Harry didn't want to argue with Dumbledore anymore. He knew that the headmaster had his own agenda, and it didn't align with his own. He just wanted to get away from him and join Draco at the manor. Without another word, Harry called for his invisibility cloak and slipped away from Dumbledore's sight, his mind already planning out the next steps.

As Dumbledore continued to walk back to the castle, he noticed that Harry was no longer responding to him. He turned around, expecting to see Harry trailing behind him, but to his surprise, the young wizard was nowhere to be found.

Dumbledore stormed back to his office, his face flushed with anger and frustration. How could that boy slip away from me again? He thought to himself. It was as if Harry had no respect for him or his authority.

Once in his office, he sat down heavily in his chair and took a deep breath to calm himself. He knew he couldn't let his emotions get the better of him. He had to think logically and come up with a plan to get Harry back.

Dumbledore grabbed his wand and cast a spell to activate the fireplace. He threw in a handful of Floo powder and called out, "The Burrow!"

The flames turned green, and he saw Molly Weasley's face in the flames. "Dumbledore, what is it?" Molly asked, looking concerned.

"We need to hold an emergency Order meeting tonight," Dumbledore said, his voice grave.

"What's happened?" Molly asked, her eyes widening.

"Harry has gone to spend Christmas with the Malfoys, and I fear for his safety," Dumbledore said. "We must act quickly to bring him back to Hogwarts."

Molly's face darkened. "Those Death Eaters," she muttered under her breath. "I'll send out the owls right away."

"Thank you, Molly," Dumbledore said. "We cannot let Harry be swayed by their beliefs. We must show him the right path, even if it means taking drastic measures."

Molly nodded, looking determined. "We'll do whatever it takes," she said. Dumbledore nodded in agreement before ending the call.

After the call ended, Dumbledore sat back in his chair and rubbed his temples. He knew that breaking into Malfoy Manor and kidnapping Harry was a risky plan, but he felt like he had no other choice. Harry needed to see the right way, and he couldn't do that if he was spending time with the Malfoys.

Dumbledore thought about how he had failed Harry in so many ways. He had allowed the boy to be raised by abusive relatives, he had put him in danger year after year, and now he was letting him spend time with Death Eaters. He knew he had to keep the boy alive, even if it meant using force.

As he sat in his office, lost in thought, he was unaware of the chaos and fear he was causing in the hearts of those who loved Harry. The Order members were worried and anxious about the urgent meeting, and Draco was wondering why he had suddenly disappeared. Harry himself was on his way to Malfoy Manor, oblivious to the danger that was brewing.

Dumbledore's determination to get Harry back was unwavering, and he knew that he would do whatever it took to make sure the boy was on the right path.

That evening, the Order of the Phoenix gathered in a dimly-lit kitchen of the Burrow. They sat around the large kitchen table, while Dumbledore stood at the head of the table.

"Thank you for coming," Dumbledore began, but before he could continue, he was interrupted.

Remus Lupin spoke up, looking around the room searchingly. "Albus, where is Sirius? Why isn't he here?"

Dumbledore's eyes flickered to Remus, and for a moment, there was a flicker of something in his expression. "Sirius is away on a mission," he said smoothly. "He is keeping an eye on a potential Death Eater recruit. It's important work."

Remus could hear Albus's heartbeat, thanks to it being near the full moon, and he was surprised to notice it speeding up, indicating that Albus was lying. He knew Dumbledore was lying, but he didn't want to call him out on it in front of everyone. Instead, he nodded, hoping his expression conveyed his doubts.

"We have a situation," Dumbledore continued, looking around the room at the gathered members. "Harry has gone to the Malfoy Manor for the Christmas holidays."

The room erupted in confusion and concern. "Why would he do that?" Asked Kingsley.

"I have reasons to believe that he is not safe there," Dumbledore replied, his voice calm and measured. "He needs our help to get him out of there."

"But why would he go to the Malfoys of all places?" questioned Remus Lupin, his brow furrowed in concern. "What if they've coerced him into staying there?"

Dumbledore waved his hand dismissively. "I assure you that he went there of his own free will. As they were leaving, I tried to stop him, but somehow Harry slipped away. I had talked to him previously about how his safety was being threatened, but Harry didn't seem to realize the potential danger of the situation."

The members looked skeptical, but Dumbledore continued to speak with conviction. "We need to act quickly to bring him back to Hogwarts. I propose we break into the Malfoy Manor and retrieve Harry, using whatever means necessary."

Molly spoke up, her voice laced with worry. "But Albus, isn't that a bit extreme? We can't just barge into someone's home like that. What if we get caught?"

"We will not get caught," Dumbledore replied firmly. "We have the element of surprise on our side, and we are doing this for Harry's own good."

Arthur, who had been quiet until now, spoke up. "But Albus, why did Harry go to the Malfoys in the first place? It doesn't make any sense."

Dumbledore hesitated for a moment before replying. "Harry has his reasons, reasons that I cannot divulge at this moment. All I can say is that he needs our help now more than ever, and it is up to us to provide it."

There were murmurs of agreement, but the doubt and worry still lingered in the air. Shacklebolt spoke up once more. "But if Harry is truly in danger, shouldn't we contact the Ministry?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "No, we cannot involve the Ministry. It will only cause more trouble for Harry in the long run. We must handle this matter within the Order."

The meeting continued, with Dumbledore trying to quell any objections or worries that the members had. Remus was still bothered by Dumbledore's explanation about Sirius, but he knew better than to press the matter for now. As the meeting came to a close, Dumbledore reminded everyone of the urgency of the situation and that they must act quickly to bring Harry back to safety.

They needed time to prepare, but in a few days, Harry would be back safely.

Meanwhile, Harry had just arrived at the Malfoy Manor, having used the shadows to walk directly into the dining room where the three Malfoys were currently having dinner. Well, "enjoying" might be too strong a word. Draco looked pissed, while Narcissa and Lucius appeared to be troubled. Harry could only assume his absence was what was causing the downturned mood.

Harry made his invisibility cloak turn into a normal cloak while still remaining hidden in the shadows.

"Did someone die while I was away, Draco?" He couldn't keep the amusement out of his voice if he tried.

The three startled and looked around the room, searching for the person the voice belonged to.

Harry decided this was the right moment to make himself known and stepped out of the shadows with a mean smirk on his face, very much channeling his inner Tom Riddle stepping out of the shadows in the Chamber of Secrets (the dramatic prat). “Or did you just miss me?” He asked as Draco's eyes snapped to his form.

Abruptly, Draco stood, the chair he had been sitting in scraping on the floor as it was pushed back. “Harry, what the hell happened?!” Draco frantically asked as he neared.

“There was no need to worry, dear. Nothing happened, only an old man who didn’t know his place,” Harry replied as he glanced past Draco and observed the older Malfoys.

They were looking at him with suspicion and something akin to fear. Harry felt his smirk grow wider as he met Lucius' obviously nervous gaze. Before he could go full-on insane killer smile, he turned back to Draco.

Who was standing in front of him with crossed arms and a frown marring his pretty face. “Why did you go with him?”

Harry tilted his head in consideration. “It was the most efficient way to get rid of him, to play along. Giving him the slip was child’s play, he didn’t even notice when I disappeared. And now he knows he can’t stop me from disappearing when I want to.” Harry smiled as Draco uncrossed his arms. “Besides, it is fun humiliating him.”

Draco huffed out a breath, but Harry could see his lips twitch.

“Now then, how about a proper introduction, hmm, Draco?”

soooo it's finally Yule break and things are gonna happen. I have a lot to fit into the three weeks of yule break so about 10ish chapters are gonna be over the span of three weeks. Just a little warning, these are gonna be the most eventful chapters, I think, in regards to Harry's and Tom's relationship.

But wow, 100k words, I have no idea how I've written so much. God I planned for this to be a slow burn but it's really really slow and really long but I don't want to make it quicker paced. So sorry it'll be a little while longer before the relationship starts. I have no idea how long this fic will be, I've planned out about 40 chapters but it might be longer or shorter than that. I'm guessing this fic will be around 200k words so we are about halfway through.

Oh and if there is too much internal monologue please let me know. I know it can be a bit boring but I think it's important to understand Harry thoughts and his struggle. I get that it's not the most fun part but if it gets annoying please tell me and I'll dial down a bit.

Thank you all for coming along for the ride and reading so far, all the support and love have been amazing and I'm so grateful!

Affirmations on the Absurdity of Affection

Chapter Summary

Luna joins Harry and Draco for the holidays, conversations that leave the participants pensive take place and lastly, a letter arrives

Chapter Notes

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

The first days passed quickly at Malfoy Manor. If he wasn't following Draco around as the boy showed him the secrets of Malfoy Manor, or they weren't playing impromptu games of Quidditch and Seeker games, he was hidden away in the corner of their vast library, trying to absorb as much information as possible. Most of the books he was currently enjoying had been confiscated by the ministry, banned, or lost during the war. Harry planned to take full advantage of having access to such knowledge.

He had been here for two days, and still, there was no sight of Tom. He had been certain Tom had been residing here, but now there was no trace of his presence. Had he fled once he received Harry's letter disclosing that he'd be spending the holidays here? Or had he never resided here as he did in the last world? Perhaps this was just his headquarters for meetings and such; maybe he didn't want anyone to know where he actually lived.

Harry scoffed at his own thoughts. There was no point in grumbling over it. Tom was avoiding him still, and he needed to give the man time to...process? Why was he avoiding Harry again?

Never mind. He had better things to do, like collect Luna and bring her here. As he arrived at Luna's lovely home, he could see the smoke coming out of the chimney at the Burrows. They must be home for the holidays as well.

With a knock on the door, Harry waited. A few minutes passed, while Harry could sense magical signatures inside the house, it appeared they wouldn't acknowledge his presence at the door. He was surprised when the door was thrown open and a man with a bewildered expression looked around. It was Luna's father, but right now, he was mostly unrecognizable. His hair was standing straight up, and his cheeks were covered in soot.

"Good morning, Mr. Lovegood. I'm Harry Potter, a friend of Luna's. Might she be at home?" Harry politely inquired but was met with a blank stare.

For a moment, all Mr. Lovegood did was blink repeatedly. Harry was becoming a little concerned. Finally, with a whole-body shake, Mr. Lovegood seemed to gather himself. "Oh, hello, young man. My apologies, you caught me at a bad time. My darling Luna, you ask? Yes, she is around here somewhere, I believe. Do come in," Luna's father replied, with a still slightly out-of-it look on his face.

Harry hesitated for a moment before stepping inside as Mr. Lovegood waved him in. The creaking door opened to reveal a mysterious interior. What dangerous secrets could be lurking within these walls?

"Tea?" Mr. Lovegood called from the kitchen, his voice trailing off.

"No, thank you, sir. I'm quite alright," Harry replied politely wanting to show respect, despite his reservations.

Luna had confided in him about her father's neglect after her mother's death. It had stirred a mix of emotions within Harry. Luna's father had been loving and caring when he was around, but as the years went by, the time he spent with her had decreased significantly, and he spent most of his time away doing research or searching for elusive creatures. He would leave Luna alone for weeks. She had been left to fend for herself, barely managing.

It was neglect. Harry didn't think Luna nor her father realised anything was wrong with their relationship, but Harry saw it. After having worked on his own childhood trauma, it had become easy to spot it with others.

However, he refrained from bringing it up, knowing how much Luna cherished her relationship with her father. Luna had never expressed any negative thoughts towards her father so why upset her unnecessarily. They used to have quite deep conversations about both of their messed up childhoods when they'd both been in their 30s. But currently, Luna was a child and he wouldn't leave a child alone in such a situation. He'd take her with him, even if he had to use less than ideal tactics to do so.

As Harry stood lost in his thoughts, the sound of light footsteps on the stairs snapped him back to reality. He turned, and there she was - Luna descending the stairs like a vision. Her blue summer dress adorned with fuzzy rainbow patches danced with every step, and a matching rainbow headband added a whimsical touch. Harry couldn't help but admire her beauty.

"Oh, Harry, you're early! I thought you'd come later to pick me up," Luna's ethereal voice greeted him.

Harry walked towards her, engulfing her in a warm embrace. "You knew I was coming?" He wasn't surprised, per se, but she'd been getting a lot more specific in her visions lately.

"Of course, the sparkling moon frogs whispered it to me. They said you'd arrive to take me with you. I've already informed Daddy that I'll be spending Yule with you. It's nice having friends to spend time with during the holidays." Luna replied with a soft look in her eyes.

A mixture of relief and affection washed over Harry. He leaned his head forward so their foreheads were against each other. "Of course, my darling moon, you'll always be my friend, and you'll always be welcome to spend time with me. I care for you deeply, Luna." Harry quietly said.

Luna's gentle smile radiated warmth. "And I care about you too, Harry. Shall we embark on our adventure? A certain dragon eagerly awaits our arrival." She giggled with excitement.

Harry's smile grew wider, his heart lightened. "Will your father be alright alone?" he inquired.

Luna hummed, her eyes filled with reassurance. "He had plans to search for Blibbering Humdingers during Yule. They thrive when the magic is at its strongest. So, he'll be fine. No need to worry."

Harry took a step back, his gaze lingering on Luna's face. He searched for any signs of sadness or resignation, but instead, he found amusement and fondness. Taking a deep breath, he resolved, "Alright, let's embark on our journey."

As Luna disappeared into the kitchen, Harry summoned her packed bags and skillfully shrunk them to fit into his pocket.

Luna reappeared a minute later, and to Harry's surprise, two snakes were elegantly wrapped around her neck - his snakes. Selene's piercing hiss filled the room as she locked eyes with him.

"You stupid human master, you forgot ussss!" Selene's anger laced her words.

Nyx joined in, venom dripping from her words. *"You left us at the big nest with the rotten goat! Mean human!"*

Guilt flooding his veins. He rushed forward, longing to embrace his slithering companions, but they recoiled, hissing menacingly. His shoulders slumped in remorse. *"I'm so sorry, my darlings. The old man delayed my departure, and when I finally escaped, I couldn't find you. I used a tracking spell, but you must have left the grounds by then,"* he pleaded, his voice laced with desperation. *"Please forgive me, my darlings."*

The snakes exchanged a glance, their beady eyes filled with calculated judgment. Finally, they nodded their heads in unison. *"Fine, but we demand 10 mice as compensation,"* Nyx hissed.

"Each," Selene added, her tone firm.

Relief washed over Harry like a cool breeze. Thank Merlin his snakes were easily appeased. *"Of course, it's the least I can do,"* he agreed, eager to make amends.

During their hissing conversation, Luna had observed silently, unable to comprehend their words but sensing the resolution in the air. With a beaming smile, she chimed in, "Alright, off to Malfoy Manor we go! It's sure to be a joyous Yule." A distant look crossed her eyes, signaling another one of her enchanting visions.

Harry could only hope that whatever Luna saw wasn't too dire. With a mix of trepidation and excitement, he clasped Luna's hand.

Draco and Luna were hitting it off splendidly, discovering their shared passion for potions and spell creation. It seemed that Draco had picked up his skill from Severus, while Luna had found inspiration in her mother's journals. As they delved into a lively conversation about the substitution of pixie blood (a forbidden ingredient but oh-so-valuable in complex potions) with Ptolemy and Silverweed, Harry found himself reclining in a plush armchair, enjoying the exchange.

Upon their return, Narcissa greeted Luna with a warm smile, luckily avoiding any encounter with Lucius, who was out attending to business. They quickly located Draco, who had been fiddling with a snitch in the family gathering room. Now settled comfortably with a steaming cup of tea, Harry savored a rare moment of relaxation, his tensions melting away.

Suddenly, Luna's voice jolted Harry out of his blissful reverie. "Harry, do you plan on meeting *him*?" she asked out of the blue, catching him off guard.

Draco's curiosity gleamed in his eyes as he turned to Harry. "Who?"

You-know-who, Harry silently thought, but he bit his tongue to spare Draco from unnecessary fear. "Just someone I recently reconnected with, Tom. He's been avoiding me," Harry replied, his words careful and measured.

Draco remained unaware of the true identity behind the name 'Tom,' oblivious to the connection between Tom and Voldemort. Harry didn't intend to reveal the truth until he was certain that Tom posed no threat to Draco.

Harry let out a deep breath, his sigh echoing the weight on his mind. "I do plan on meeting him. I have some gifts to give him, after all."

Draco arched an eyebrow, clearly intrigued by Harry's response. Luna, on the other hand, maintained her serene composure, unwavering in her demeanor. Harry admired her for that, her ability to stay composed in any situation.

"Is it safe?" Luna finally broke the silence, her voice gentle yet filled with concern.

Harry shrugged, uncertain. "I'm not entirely sure. But I'll be taking precautions."

Leaning forward in his chair, Draco couldn't contain his curiosity. "Precautions? What kind?"

Harry pondered for a moment, glancing at Luna, seeking guidance in her wise eyes. But she simply smiled and shook her head, as if advising him to figure it out on his own.

Just as Harry was on the verge of responding, a faint touch against his occlumency shield disrupted his thoughts. Death. With a determined push, he forcefully expelled the intrusive presence, unwilling to engage with it. No, he didn't want to entertain conversations with Death.

Shaking off the lingering unease, Harry refocused his attention on the ongoing discussion, determined to keep his mind in the present.

"The last encounter was a bit awkward, but no need to worry. I'll have my wand with me," Harry reassured, a flicker of mischief dancing in his eyes. "And I might have some handy blackmail, just in case."

Draco nodded. "Well, if you need any backup, count me in. I'm happy to lend a hand."

Luna chimed in with a warm smile, echoing Draco's sentiment. "And so am I."

A wave of gratitude washed over Harry, appreciating their unwavering support. Despite their complicated history, he was grateful to have Draco and Luna standing by his side. It brought him solace knowing that he didn't have to face challenges alone, that Draco was willing to help without fully understanding the situation.

"Thank you," Harry murmured, his voice barely audible. He avoided their gaze, his heart pounding in his chest. His attention shifted to the window, but Luna seemed to sense his unease.

"The weather is simply delightful, don't you think? Let's take a leisurely stroll in the garden. Who knows, we might stumble upon a Crumple-Horned Snorkack. They do have a fondness for the fragrance of roses," Luna suggested, her voice a gentle invitation.

As they wandered through the enchanting garden, Harry couldn't help but find his thoughts drifting back to Tom, despite his reservations about allowing him to dominate his mind during this precious time with his friends. Tom was undeniably captivating, how could Harry not be consumed by thoughts of him?

It started innocently enough, a passing curiosity about the enigmatic dark wizard who had wrought so much pain and suffering. But now, it was growing within him, a relentless obsession with Tom Riddle, better known as Voldemort.

Harry couldn't escape thoughts of him - the raw power he possessed, his magnetic charisma, and his unwavering determination. Despite knowing the depths of his monstrosity, the cold-blooded murders he had committed, Harry found himself drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

The more Harry delved into the depths of Voldemort's complexities, the more he realized the darkness that lay within him. He was a monster, a ruthless killer who would stop at nothing to achieve his ambitions. And yet, Harry couldn't shake the pull he felt towards him, an irresistible force that defied reason.

Haunted by the memory of past wounds, Harry trembled at the thought of getting too close to Tom again, recalling the scorching pain he endured when he pushed the boundaries. He feared the speed at which his subconscious had embraced Tom, how a mere flicker of interest had transformed into an all-consuming obsession. This felt entirely different from his journey of falling in love with Draco... Wait, did he just - no, he couldn't have - what the hell? Did he genuinely compare his feelings for Tom to those he experienced when falling in love?

No. Absolutely not. He forcefully banished that thought to the depths of his mind, vowing never to entertain it again. He couldn't afford to entertain such dangerous notions. Was he out of his mind? It was sheer madness. No, there was no way...

Desperate for a distraction, Harry contemplated diverting his attention to honing his metamorphosis skills. Perhaps it was finally time to focus on mastering that ability.

Weeks had passed since Tom last saw Harry. Initially, it had been bearable for a day or two, but then an odd, gnawing sensation took root in his chest, compelling him to unconsciously rub at it. He couldn't pinpoint what was wrong, only that something felt amiss, and it was undeniably connected to Harry.

Days turned into an obsessive search through countless books on curses and illnesses, as if desperately seeking a magical explanation for his condition. Deep down, he knew it wasn't anything magical; it was simply him. However, he needed to be certain. Perhaps someone had cursed him, an improbable but not impossible scenario. It seemed more plausible than the other laughable theory he entertained. Laughable indeed.

The notion that he could be affected by something as trivial as longing felt inconceivable. Why would he ever experience such a sensation?

Yet, after another torturous week, he couldn't deny it any longer. The unpleasant sensation had only intensified with each passing day, devouring him from the inside out until there was nothing left but Harry. He reluctantly reached the worst possible conclusion - it was true. The realisation crashed upon him like an unstoppable wave, leaving him helpless in its wake.

Harry, the infuriating, ridiculous, arrogant, and yet utterly captivating boy. His eyes shone so brightly that it felt like staring directly into the sun. His laughter, soft and melodic, left an echo in your ears, a lingering enchantment even when you closed your eyes. His heart, so breathtaking and radiant, could leave you breathless in its absence. It matched his own ruthless nature, a perfect complement. It was all about Harry.

Tom found himself with an empty heart, yearning for Harry's touch and affection. How he missed him. Merlin, he missed him dearly. The longing parched his throat and sent shivers through his body. Something was undeniably wrong with him, no other explanation sufficed for the torrent of thoughts and sensations that consumed him. Yet, weeks had passed, and Tom reluctantly acknowledged that he had no idea how to resolve this on his own. With great hesitation and reluctance, he summoned the only one among his followers who possessed a semblance of sanity and empathy - Narcissa.

A gentle knock broke the silence, making Tom's neck hairs stand on end. "Come in, Narcissa."

The door creaked open, and Narcissa entered, her graceful demeanor intact. "My Lord," she greeted him with a small bow of her head.

Tom gestured to the chair in front of him. "Sit."

Narcissa gracefully took a seat, her piercing blue eyes curiously scanning Tom's face. "You summoned me, my Lord. How can I be of service?"

"Before we delve into anything, I require an oath from you - an oath of silence," Tom stated firmly, though both of them knew it was more of a demand.

"Of course, my Lord," Narcissa replied, bowing her head in a gentle nod.

Once the oath was sworn, Tom took a deep breath, attempting to steel himself for what he was about to do. He detested feeling vulnerable, loathed the idea of admitting to anyone, especially one of his followers, that he harbored emotions for someone. It felt like a

weakness, and Lord Voldemort did not tolerate weaknesses. However, Tom Riddle knew he had his own vulnerabilities.

But as the seconds ticked by, he realised he could no longer keep his feelings bottled up. He needed to confide in someone, anyone, about what was transpiring within him. And he had a sneaking suspicion that Narcissa, with her composed demeanor and clear thinking, was the best person for the task.

"Narcissa," Tom began, his voice low and steady. "I need your... advice about something." Narcissa raised an eyebrow but remained silent.

"I have been...occupied with a matter that troubles me," Tom admitted, his tone laced with disdain for his own vulnerability.

Narcissa's expression remained impassive as she inclined her head, silently encouraging him to continue.

"There is an individual who has somehow managed to captivate my attention," Tom confessed, his voice dripping with disdain at his own weakness.

Narcissa's eyes widened in surprise, but she maintained her stoic composure.

"And I don't know what to do about it." Tom confessed, the words feeling foreign and uncomfortable on his tongue.

Narcissa's eyes narrowed slightly, observing his guarded demeanor. "And what is it that you wish to discuss regarding this individual?"

Tom paused, his gaze hardened with determination. He couldn't afford to show any cracks in his façade. "I need advice on how to rid myself of these unwanted...affections."

Narcissa hesitated, her gaze softening slightly. "May I speak freely, my Lord?"

Tom nodded, realising that silence only exposed his vulnerability, swiftly correcting his behavior. "You may."

Narcissa's expression softened even further. "What do you mean by 'affections'?"

Tom hesitated, unsure of how to articulate it. He couldn't simply say that he had developed feelings for Harry, that thoughts of Harry consumed his every waking moment and that he yearned for his presence. He couldn't admit to feeling... happy, whenever they were together. It was too much to reveal all at once.

"I mean...we've been talking and it's become a pleasant pastime," Tom finally managed to say, his voice unusually soft. "And I... I haven't felt this way before. It's confusing." He scolded himself internally for stuttering like a fool.

Narcissa nodded in understanding. "I see. And am I allowed to ask questions about this... person?"

"Yes," Tom affirmed.

Narcissa nodded slowly, her gaze thoughtful. "Thank you, my lord. How does this person make you feel?"

Tom's throat constricted, and he swallowed with a profound effort. "Contentment envelops me when they are near. Their presence infuses life with a renewed sense of fascination and intrigue. I yearn to be in their company constantly, to immerse myself in their presence. But this... this is not proper. Such emotions should not consume me in this manner."

Narcissa pressed her lips together, contemplating his words. "My Lord, what I have to say may upset you..."

"Go ahead," Tom replied, annoyed at the whole situation.

Narcissa regarded him with a patient smile. "My Lord, love and affection are not sentiments that come naturally to you. It seems this individual has awakened something within you that you find unsettling."

Tom snorted involuntarily, unsettled by his own reaction, feeling defensive. "That's impossible. I don't have such feelings."

Narcissa maintained her calm composure. "My Lord, even the strongest of us can feel vulnerable at times. It's perfectly normal to have emotions, even if you don't yet understand them."

Scowling, Tom felt irritation rising within him. "I don't need your psychoanalysis, Narcissa. I just need a solution."

Leaning forward in her seat, Narcissa's tone remained gentle yet firm. "My Lord, denying or suppressing these feelings may only serve to strengthen them. Perhaps it is time to confront this individual and gain clarity on the matter. You may find that the resolution lies in facing your vulnerability head-on."

Tom considered her words, feeling a surprising willingness to listen. Why was he allowing her to speak so freely?

"What if they feel the same? Would you not want to know?" she continued.

The thought of Harry reciprocating his feelings caused Tom's heart to skip a beat. It felt ludicrous, impossible. Yet, he couldn't deny the warmth that spread through his chest at the mere notion.

Scoffing, Tom mustered up a bit of bravado. "I am incapable of such weakness. These feelings will pass, and I will regain my focus."

Narcissa held his gaze for a moment. "My Lord, there is always a risk when it comes to matters of the heart. But if you don't take that risk, you'll never know what might have been. If you lack the courage to find out, the uncertainty will eat away at you."

Tom looked up at her, his mind racing with all the potential outcomes. Could he really do this?

Narcissa's gaze remained unwavering, her voice calm and firm. "My Lord, denying the existence of your emotions will not make them disappear. It takes strength to acknowledge and understand the complexities of one's own heart."

Tom's nostrils flared in frustration. How had he allowed himself to become entangled in this absurdity? "Enough, Narcissa. I will deal with this on my own terms. Your counsel is no longer required."

Narcissa bowed her head respectfully, retreating from the room as Tom turned his attention back to the desk before him.

As he stood there, the weight of uncertainty crushed him. His grand plan of seduction had evaporated like smoke, leaving him at a loss for what to do next. He recognized his own limitations, and the mere idea of maintaining the facade churned his stomach and made his palms sweat with anxiety. It was frustrating - his emotions had never interfered with his schemes before. If only he could rid himself of them or manipulate them at will.

But why did he even want to? Why was it so important to suppress his desires?

Despite the risks, despite the pain it might bring, Tom couldn't deny that the possibility of being with Harry was worth it. The mere thought of giving up on him, of letting go completely, was unbearable. The connection he felt with Harry was something he had never experienced before, something he couldn't easily dismiss.

But he also knew that it wouldn't be easy. There were barriers between them, walls that seemed insurmountable. The past they shared, the darkness that Tom carried within him, all stood as formidable obstacles. And there was no guarantee that Harry would even reciprocate his feelings. The uncertainty gnawed at him, stirring up a whirlwind of emotions.

In the midst of his turmoil, a voice of reason echoed in his mind - Narcissa's words of encouragement. Taking a leap of faith was the only way to know for sure. If he didn't gather the courage to confront his feelings, he would forever be left wondering "what if."

Tom clenched his fists, determination flickering in his eyes. He couldn't let fear dictate his actions. It was time to face his desires head-on, to confront Harry and find out if there was a chance for them, no matter how small. It was a dangerous game, but it was a game he was willing to play. He stood up from his desk, the weight of his decision heavy on his shoulders.

Dear Harry,

I hope this letter finds you well, though I must say, I am concerned for your safety. I understand that you are currently residing in Malfoy Manor, and I cannot stress enough how dangerous that is for you.

As you know, the Malfoys have been involved with the Dark Arts for years, and with Voldemort's return, they have become even more dangerous. I fear that you may be in grave danger if you remain there much longer.

Therefore, I implore you to leave the manor at once. If you refuse to leave willingly, I must warn you that the Order will have no choice but to take action. I understand that this may sound drastic, but your safety must come first. We cannot risk your life by allowing you to remain in the clutches of the Death Eaters.

If we believe you to be in imminent danger we will not hesitate to inform the ministry of what kind of activities you are engaged in and we will be forced to provide them with memories partaking to Sirius location.

Please, Harry, do not make us resort to such extreme measures. Leave the manor and come to safety. We are here for you and will do everything in our power to protect you.

Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore

Harry couldn't suppress a chuckle at the audacity of the letter before him. Did they truly think they could breach the ancient wards encircling Malfoy Manor? It seemed utterly preposterous.

His mind drifted to the conversations he had with the master, contemplating the absurdity of mankind. How strange it was that despite our intellect, creativity, and countless achievements, we often find ourselves engaged in actions that defy logic and reason. We build elaborate societies and marvel at our own technological advancements, yet simultaneously succumb to self-destructive behaviors that harm not only ourselves but also those around us. We tirelessly seek happiness and fulfillment, yet a lingering sense of emptiness persists. In our relentless pursuit of knowledge and understanding, we are plagued by the ever-present fog of uncertainty.

Perhaps the pinnacle of our absurdity lies in our penchant for self-sabotage. Fully aware of the risks, we persist in consuming unhealthy foods, lighting cigarettes, and embracing recklessness. We cling steadfastly to outdated beliefs and biased notions, willfully disregarding the overwhelming evidence that beckons for our attention. We wage wars and perpetrate acts of violence, despite knowing deep down that peace and compassion are the true foundations of contentment.

But Harry shook off his musings, he had his own missive to send.

Chapter End Notes

So a bit of a shorter chapter but I hoped you like it, a bit of calm before the storm. Tom might have acted a bit out of character but it was out of desperation, normally he wouldn't confess his feelings to anyone but he's stuck on what to do.

Next chapter, the long awaited reunion!

Thank you for all your continued support, have a great week everyone! ❤️

Unveiling the Untruths

Chapter Summary

Afternoon tea with an unexpected person, an unexpected meeting in a forest and a dream with an unexpected revelation

Chapter Notes

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

Albus Dumbledore: The Dark Secrets of a Manipulative Mentor

By Rita Skeeter

Dear readers, brace yourselves for yet another exposé brought to you by the intrepid and relentless Rita Skeeter. Today, I uncover the sordid truth about our esteemed headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. Behind his façade of wisdom and righteousness lies a sinister secret that will leave you stunned.

Multiple sources have revealed a shocking revelation: Dumbledore, the self-proclaimed champion of the light, has spent over two decades grooming young students to join him in his pursuit of what he deems "the greater good." And do you know where this term comes from, my dear readers? None other than Dumbledore's former lover, the infamous dark wizard Grindelwald. Talk about a shady connection! (More about Dumbledore and Grindelwald's love life on page 16.)

But that's not all. It appears that Dumbledore has a penchant for favoritism, handpicking a select few to receive special treatment. How is it fair for a headmaster to play favorites, you ask? Well, my dear readers, it seems Dumbledore's prejudice extends even to innocent children. Just three years ago, when the Chamber of Secrets was thought to be reopened, the headmaster shamelessly allowed blame to fall on innocent students solely because they were sorted into Slytherin.

Can you believe it? Not only did Dumbledore withhold crucial information about the danger lurking within the school from parents, but he also silenced any discussion about the chamber. Innocent children were condemned to detention if they so much as breathed a word

about it. Frightened and defenseless, these children faced imminent peril, while the headmaster turned a blind eye. It breaks my heart to think of the suffering they endured. (More about the Chamber of Secrets incident on page 4.)

And let's not forget, dear readers, that even after the truth about the chamber was revealed, Dumbledore did nothing to ensure the safety of the students. Instead, he left it up to the children themselves to take matters into their own hands and rescue a girl who had been abducted and dragged into the depths of Slytherin's chamber.

The incidents surrounding Albus Dumbledore and his reign at Hogwarts are but glimpses into the dark underbelly of his leadership. It's high time we question his motives and hold him accountable for the appalling acts that have occurred under his watch. The students of Hogwarts deserve better than a headmaster who manipulates, favors, and abandons them in their times of need.

As Harry emerged from the library, clutching the weighty tome beneath his arm, he couldn't help but feel a mix of curiosity and excitement. The night had been long, but it was worth every minute he had spent delving into the pages of the book. The differences between this world and his original one were striking and had the potential to reshape his understanding of the wizarding community.

One of the most significant discrepancies he noticed was Voldemort's approach during the last wizarding war. In his world, Voldemort had unleashed a reign of terror, resorting to brutal violence and manipulation to achieve his goals. The casualties were numerous, and the scars of the war ran deep. However, in this world, Voldemort had taken a surprisingly peaceful and political route. In 1980, just a year before his disappearance, Voldemort's approach had drastically changed.

The books he'd read detailed how Voldemort had utilised diplomacy and negotiation, focusing on political manoeuvring rather than outright violence. He had formed alliances, gained support from influential figures, and cunningly worked his way through the Ministry of Magic. This approach resulted in fewer casualties compared to Harry's original world. While there were still conflicts and clashes, they were not as widespread or devastating.

The aftermath of the war also differed greatly. In the original world, dark magic had become synonymous with evil, and there was a deep-rooted fear and hatred toward it. The Ministry of Magic had banned numerous books, twisted information, and covered up any references to dark magic that didn't fit their narrative. But, in this world, the perception of dark magic was different. It was not as condemned or vilified by society. The books on the subject were not as heavily restricted, and there was a broader understanding of its complexities and potential uses.

People in this world didn't seem to dwell on the war as much. They didn't hold grudges or constantly worry about its resurgence. The wounds of the past were still there, but they seemed to have healed differently. The wizarding community had moved forward, focusing more on rebuilding and unity rather than perpetuating a cycle of fear and animosity.

Harry had spent the past nights catching up on the details of the last wizarding war, but he hadn't found the time yet to delve into the more recent events and how it differed from his own world. Nevertheless, the relief of having something to occupy his mind washed over him as he turned the corner, his thoughts still swirling with the stark differences he had discovered.

His momentary peace was abruptly shattered when he came face to face with Narcissa Malfoy. Startled, Harry quickly halted his steps, narrowly avoiding a collision with her. His emerald eyes locked with her steely gaze, and he couldn't help but notice a subtle shift in her demeanor.

"Hello, Mr Potter," she said, her voice slightly hesitant.

"Hello, Mrs. Malfoy," Harry replied in a neutral tone.

Narcissa smiled faintly. "How are you finding the library?" she asked, making small talk.

"Ah, it's quite ample," Harry replied.

"I hope it's proving useful for you," she said, Narcissa seemed preoccupied, her eyes momentarily darting away from Harry's. It was clear that something troubled her. Sensing her

unease, Harry decided to address the matter directly.

"Mrs. Malfoy, is everything all right?" he asked, feeling a sense of concern, she was important to his dragon after all.

Caught off guard, Narcissa hesitated for a moment before offering a feeble reassurance. "Yes, everything is fine," she replied, though her words lacked conviction.

He didn't want to push further, Harry respected her desire for privacy. "Well, if there's anything I can do to help, please don't hesitate to ask," Harry offered sincerely, his kind eyes meeting hers.

Narcissa nodded, a flicker of gratitude igniting within her gaze. "Thank you, Mr. Potter. I appreciate it," she said, a trace of vulnerability seeping into her words. "How about we take a break in the sunroom? I believe a cup of tea is in order."

Harry found himself pleasantly surprised by her suggestion, he realising that perhaps Narcissa had something else on her mind. Eager to accompany her, he extended his arm, an unspoken acceptance.

They strolled together in comfortable silence until they arrived at the sunroom. Sunlight poured through the expansive windows, casting a radiant glow upon the room. A magnificent crystal chandelier sparkled above them, enhancing the elegant ambiance. Surrounding them, lush green plants created a serene atmosphere.

Settling at a small table tucked away in a cozy corner, they were soon attended to by a diligent house elf, who graciously served their tea.

As they sipped their tea and talked about unimportant things such as school, Harry noticed a shift in the air. The tension radiated from Narcissa seemed to dissipate gradually and her body slowly relaxed. Their discussion revolved around trivial matters, yet the genuine connection they forged made the conversation meaningful and having shown his genuine emotions seemed to put her at ease.

With their tea cups emptied and the conversation winding down, Harry realised this was the perfect opportunity to try out the plan he'd impulsively come up with some time ago.

"Oh, there is something I've been meaning to tell you," Harry began, subtly allowing his magic to surface. He knew the power of a well-placed rumour, especially when it contained part of the truth and the potential for supporting evidence. Leaning in slightly, he continued, his voice carrying a hint of mischief. "I heard the most interesting rumor that Dumbledore lost his wand, and for months now he's refused to use magic in public. Rumor has it he lost it in a duel and is pretending to still have it. Quite dishonorable, don't you think?"

Wands held a sacred place in the world of wizardry, particularly among purebloods. The loss of a wand was not merely an inconvenience - it was a source of deep embarrassment and humiliation among the esteemed purebloods. Harry knew the significance that a wand held to someone like Narcissa, and he employed his magic to enhance his words, ensuring she wouldn't easily forget them.

As the words left Harry's lips, he observed Narcissa closely, her eyes widening slightly at the revelation. He had her full attention now, his carefully crafted gossip taking hold. He knew that she would be unable to resist spreading the rumor, ensuring its swift dissemination throughout the wizarding community.

Narcissa, though surprised, quickly regained her composure. A mixture of intrigue and curiosity danced in her eyes. "Is that so, Mr. Potter?" she inquired, her voice tinged with a newfound interest. "Losing a wand in a duel would indeed be quite an embarrassment, especially for someone who proclaims to be one of our most magically powerful."

Harry nodded, maintaining a composed demeanour. "Yes, I haven't seen him use his wand since before summer and neither has Draco. I thought you might find it... enlightening," he replied, his words trailing off.

A sense of understanding washed over Narcissa as she looked at Harry, a glimmer of appreciation in her eyes. "Thank you for sharing that with me, Mr. Potter. It's always interesting to keep up with the latest news," she said, her voice laced with a mix of intrigue and amusement.

As she rose from her seat, Harry couldn't help but wonder what truly lay behind Narcissa's enigmatic demeanor. He knew there was something significant she was keeping from him, and he resolved to keep a closer eye on her. Determined to uncover the truth and offer his help if needed, he watched her depart, her elegant figure disappearing through the sunlit room.

A thin sheet of snow had settled on the grounds leaving the people hiding away inside the warm manor left tranquil and peaceful. But Harry wasn't feeling particularly peaceful currently. Two days from now the prestigious Malfoy Yule Ball would take place and Harry wasn't looking forward to it. He hadn't prepared an outfit so he'd have to go shopping and he still hadn't met with Tom. Tom who'd he most likely run into at the ball.

With a huff Harry rose to his feet and sent the books in front of him away with a flick of his hand. He hadn't seen Draco and Luna since breakfast and it was now nearing lunch. While Harry preferred to spend his free time reading and pondering, Draco and Luna needed to do something more active to remain stimulated so they were currently in the forest connected to the estate, harvesting some mushrooms for a potion they were developing.

Harry planned to join them but as he left the building he felt *it*. Him.

He was here.

Tom was here.

Harry's breath stuttered and he almost tripped as he felt his magic. He was near and Harry needed to find him. He felt compelled to hunt him down and force him to talk.

With determined steps Harry follows the trail of Tom's magic. With every step closer he felt nerves travel through his arms and his stomach flutter in anticipation.

As Harry ventured deeper into the grounds, the familiar scent of the forest mingled with the faint trace of Tom's magic, guiding him forward. His heart raced with a mix of apprehension and longing. He couldn't deny that he missed Tom, but pride and past wounds made it difficult for him to openly admit it.

The anticipation built within Harry, he couldn't shake the realisation that this would be their first meeting in person, free from the ethereal realm of dreams that had woven their minds together in the past. This potential meeting felt more real, more vulnerable, and held the potential for a depth of connection beyond what their shared dreams had allowed.

As he turned a corner, there, in a small clearing, stood Tom, his tall figure bathed in dappled sunlight. Tom's expression remained carefully composed, his eyes revealing nothing of the emotions that might lie beneath the surface. A mask of indifference adorned his face, mirroring the one Harry wore.

But he was so beautiful.

Their eyes met, and for a moment, time seemed to stand still. The air crackled with unspoken words and unresolved emotions. Neither of them knew how to act now that their feelings had evolved, tangled and complex. The silence stretched between them, heavy with unspoken apologies and untold desires.

Breaking the stillness, Harry cleared his throat, the sound almost overbearingly loud in the quiet clearing. "Tom," he said, his voice steady, though his heart hammered within his chest. "It's been a while." Why was Tom hiding away in a clearing on the Malfoy estate anyway?

Tom's lips twitched imperceptibly, a hint of something soft flashing across his eyes before he masked it once more. "Indeed," he replied coolly, his tone betraying no hint of his own inner turmoil. "You've been keeping yourself occupied, I assume?"

Harry's breath caught in his throat, the voice he'd so often heard in his dreams sounded even more attractive in reality. Harry tried to contain his shiver. "Yes, I've been...busy," he replied, having to stop his mouth from blurting out how he had missed Tom.

Tom inclined his head slightly, his gaze lingering on Harry for a moment before shifting away. "I've heard you've been doing well," he admitted, his voice low and guarded.

Harry's grip on his emotions tightened. This was not the reunion he had imagined, but it was a start. "And what about you, Tom? What have you been up to?"

Tom's mask slipped momentarily, a flicker of vulnerability passing over his features before he composed himself. "I've been...occupied as well," he replied cryptically, his voice tinged with an unfamiliar softness.

Their conversation hung in the air, a web of unspoken words and unfinished sentiments. The tension between them felt palpable, a delicate dance of emotions that neither of them dared to fully acknowledge. They were uncertain of how to navigate this uncharted territory, their past still haunting them while a glimmer of hope lingered within their hearts.

In that moment, as they stood there, surrounded by the quiet whispers of nature, Harry noticed how his own desires were reflected back at him in Tom's eyes and it made his heart flutter.

And as the sunlight danced upon their faces, Harry took a tentative step toward Tom, both of their internal walls slowly crumbled as Harry neared. Harry wanted to be closer, so much closer but Tom's guarded expression halted him in his path. Tom didn't move away from him however, so Harry mustered the courage to break the silence once more.

He took a deep breath, his voice betraying a mixture of vulnerability and determination. "You know, Tom," Harry began, his words careful and deliberate, "I happened to stumble upon something during the summer. Something I think you might find intriguing." He paused, allowing the weight of his words to settle in.

Tom's curiosity flickered behind his impassive facade, a flicker that did not escape Harry's notice. "What is it?" Tom asked, his voice laced with a controlled curiosity.

Harry's lips curled into a small smile, his eyes shining with a glimmer of hope. "It's a Yule gift, for you. I'd like to give it to you," he replied, purposefully leaving the details vague, a

playful edge creeping into his voice.

A moment of uncertainty passed between them, as if Tom were contemplating the hidden meaning behind Harry's words. Finally, he spoke, his voice tinged with a hint of intrigue. "I suppose we should meet up again then? I'm afraid I have somewhere I'm needed now." A question spoke like a demand, it made Harry's fingers twitch in familiarity.

Harry's small smile widened, relief mingling with anticipation. "Yes, I'd like that. How about tomorrow? Meet me here again and I shall indulge your curiosity and show you where I spent part of my summer."

Tom's eyes flickered with a mixture of hesitation and curiosity, his resolve momentarily wavering. "Very well," he acquiesced, his voice low but tinged with a newfound warmth. "Tomorrow evening."

The weight of their unspoken feelings hung in the air, the promise of a future encounter shimmering like a distant star. With that agreement, a glimmer of hope ignited within Harry, fueling his determination to bridge the gap that had formed between them.

Harry wanted to step closer, the few meters that separated them felt like an endless field and Harry wanted to run across it and fly into the awaiting arms at the end. But Harry held himself back from making such bold gestures. As they prepared to part ways, Harry couldn't help but add, "And Tom, don't forget to bring a gift of your own. It's only fair, isn't it?"

Tom's lips quirked, a flicker of amusement dancing in his eyes. "Indeed, Harry," he replied, a rare hint of playfulness gracing his tone. "I shall come prepared." He turned on the spot, ready to leave before he froze in thought. "Oh, I was promised a duel, and I will collect." And with that Tom disappeared.

For the remainder of the day Harry's thoughts were clouded by anticipation and excitement.

His mind lingered on the upcoming meeting with Tom, their second encounter in person rather than in the realm of dreams. The thought filled him with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. In their shared dreams, they had explored a realm of possibilities, free from the

constraints of reality. But after facing each other in the physical world, their connection felt more vulnerable and profoundly meaningful.

The dreams had been ethereal, a dance of emotions in a realm where consequences held no weight. Yet, standing in that clearing, Harry couldn't help but realise that their meeting had been different. It carried with it a weight of reality and authenticity that their dream encounters had lacked.

In those dreams, they had been swept away by the currents of their shared desires, hidden behind the safety of fantasy. But in their physical meeting the vulnerability in Tom's eyes mirrored his own. There had been a tenderness that could not be replicated within the confines of their dreamscape. It was as if their beings had yearned for this genuine connection, one that transcended the boundaries of their dreamscape.

The anticipation of their second physical meeting heightened the emotions swirling within Harry's chest. The touch of Tom's skin, the sound of his voice, the way their eyes locked in a silent understanding - these were experiences he had longed for, yet never dared to hope would become a reality.

As Harry reflected on their past dream encounters, he understood that their future meeting held the potential to weave a tapestry of emotions that far surpassed their dream interactions. It was a chance to explore a tangible connection, to navigate the complexities of their evolving feelings in the tangible world they shared.

The vulnerability of their forthcoming meeting filled Harry with a mix of excitement and a touch of nervousness. It was as if they were shedding the protective layers of their dream personas, exposing their raw selves to the other's scrutiny. And in that rawness, Harry sensed the possibility of something beautiful - a genuine bond.

The day had passed slowly, but finally, night had come. Since Harry lost his soul, he didn't need to sleep as much as a regular person. His body didn't require it, but his mind craved the silence that sleep provided. So, once in a while, he would give in to the call and allow himself to rest. Sometimes, he was granted a peaceful, dreamless sleep, but not always. He had experienced far too many traumatic moments for his mind not to bring them up when he was vulnerable. Unfortunately, tonight was shaping up to be a difficult night for him.

In the depths of the night, Harry found himself drifting into a dream, a haunting echo from his past. He stood alone in the desolate landscape of King's Cross Station, the air heavy with a sense of foreboding. The memory of his encounter with Dumbledore in limbo materialised before him, as vivid and painful as the day it had occurred. It was difficult telling that this was a dream, a memory playing out, his body moved on its own as the memory continued.

As Harry surveyed the emptiness around him, he spotted a figure standing a short distance away. It was Dumbledore, his long silver hair flowing in an ethereal manner, his eyes twinkling with a mixture of wisdom and regret. The memories flooded back, raw and unyielding, reminding Harry of the anguish he had felt upon realising that he had died.

Anger surged within Harry's chest, mingling with a profound sense of betrayal. He clenched his fists, his voice trembling with a mix of resentment and pain. "You knew, didn't you?" he accused, his tone laced with bitterness. "You knew what I was getting into, what I had to face. And yet, you let me die!"

Dumbledore's gaze met Harry's, his expression somber and burdened. "Harry, my dear boy," he began, his voice filled with sorrow, "I did not wish for this outcome. But there were lessons you needed to learn, sacrifices that had to be made. It was a path you chose willingly."

Harry's anger flared, his voice rising with a bitter edge. "Chose? I never asked for this! I never asked to die and be trapped in this place, feeling nothing, alone and abandoned!" His words rang out in the empty station, filled with anguish and confusion.

Dumbledore's gaze softened, a flicker of remorse crossing his features. "I understand your anger, Harry. But you must realise that it was never my intention to betray or abandon you. I believed in your resilience and your ability to face the darkness."

A surge of numbness washed over Harry, mingling with the lingering anger. The weight of his sacrifice, the burden he had carried, felt crushing. "Resilience?" he scoffed, his voice hollow. "How can you speak of resilience when I was left with nothing but emptiness and confusion? I lost so much, Dumbledore, and for what?"

Dumbledore's voice quivered with remorse as he replied but Harry wasn't listening anymore. He had to remember that this was a dream, a memory. It had no bearing on him, no

consequence to him. Harry tried to pay little attention to the man's rambling, he'd heard it all before after all.

The memory played out as it had happened. Dumbledore trying to justify his actions, telling Harry about the horcrux and how he'd hoped Harry would survive and ultimately, how Harry had a choice in returning.

Harry remembers the bitterness, the anger, the rage he'd felt as Dumbledore told him he had to go back. But he was too overwhelmed and numb to let his emotions shine though. He was done, he didn't want to go back but he'd said nothing. Not like he would listen to Dumbledore anymore. He wouldn't go back.

Then why did I, in the end, go back? Harry thought to himself, he couldn't recall why he'd decided to go back.

As he walked towards the unmoving trains after Dumbledore had faded and disappeared, Harry's body froze as the familiar feeling of death crept up his back.

"Master."

He turned slowly, unsurely, and there stood Death. The knowledge that this being was Death had settled in his mind without his input. He knew instinctively that he was facing Death.

"Master." The being uttered again, voice echoing around them in the empty station.

"Death?" The question slipped out.

"Yes." The being answered leaving Harry crushed under the weight of that single word.

"Master? The master of death? I'm the master of death?" Slowly the rage that had faded to background noise came back. "I can't die?" The question was a whispered plea to be wrong.

“Yes, you are and no, you can’t.” Death answered emotionlessly, irritating Harry further for some reason.

He clenched his hands and breathed through his mouth. “Of course I fucking am. Of course I can’t just die like a normal person. Of course I have another title, another power. Of course I am just that *special*.” He spit out with a breathless quiver in his voice.

He spun on the spot, arms held up in disbelief. But should he really be? He always got more than he fucking asked for.

“Master, are you leaving?” They asked, Harry startled and reprimanded himself for turning his back on a god of all things.

Harry wasn’t sure he wanted to go back but he definitely couldn’t deal with this either. At least he had Hermione and Ron waiting for him in the world of the living.

“Yes.” He decided.

“Then don’t forget yours, master.” Harry couldn’t tell what the being was thinking, their voice held no emotion in it and their face was obscured.

“Mine, what?” He was uncertain as to what Death was referring to.

The being tilted its head in confusion before replying in the same emotionless tone. “Your soul of course, master.”

Harry frowned in confusion, his soul? The one under the bench, that wasn’t his? “You mean Voldemorts soul? Yea, I’m not taking that back with me.” He replied, could this god even understand snark?

If Harry could see their face he was certain they would look at him as if he was an idiot. It was just the feeling he was getting from the being as it only stared at him quietly for a minute. As they replied, Death lifted his hand and above it hovered a ball of light. "Your soul, master."

My soul? What is happening? Is this not a memory?

Memory Harry must have agreed with him. "My soul? Why isn't my soul in my body?" For some reason he wasn't really freaked out over the fact, he felt nothing as he looked at what was apparently his soul.

"It leaves your body as you enter Limbo, as all humans do. You however, may have it back, master."

The frown hadn't left his face and only deepened at the revelation. His gaze lingered in the light floating about Death's hand and Harry didn't feel a pull to take it back or an instinct that it was needed. No he only felt relief. Relief that he didn't need to carry the heavy burden a soul brings. Relief that he didn't feel as heavy and tired as he usually did. The thought of taking it back made his stomach drop and dread grip him.

"No. I don't want it. You keep it." His response slipped out with more bravado than he truly possessed.

What!? He had left his very soul?

Time stood still as Death froze, the flickering soul held in its grasp. Minutes or hours passed in an eerie silence, both parties locked in an unspoken standoff. Just as Harry began to believe Death wouldn't accept his soul, a reply finally escaped its lips. "If that's what you want, master. I'll keep it safe." The words carried an unusual weight, a somber tone that sent a shiver down Harry's spine. Ignoring the subtle change, he clung to the relief that Death hadn't rejected him. After all, he was *special*, right? The Master of Death, the boy who defied demise.

"I guess I shall take my leave then," Harry mused, his mood too restless to engage in further conversation. The enigma of his newfound title could wait; he had no desire to dig deeper into the mysteries just yet. With a flicker of hope tainting his words, he added, "I'll see you around?"

"You will, master," Death responded evenly.

As Harry turned to depart, a strange sensation washed over him, burrowing into his mind and seizing control. The world dissolved into darkness, and in a sudden jolt, Harry found himself jolting upright in his bed within the guest bedroom at Malfoy Manor.

What the fuck just happened?

Was it a dream? A memory? It certainly didn't match Harry's recollection of events. The beginning, the meeting with Dumbledore in limbo aligned with the dream, but he had no memory of encountering Death there. And what was that mind-boggling finale? Did Death obliviate him?

Why in the name of Merlin's beard would Death do such a thing? Denying him that crucial memory would have explained so much. His lost emotions, wonky magic, the overall sense of everything being different. Harry's brain was tangled in a web of confusion. He couldn't make heads or tails of it.

Reluctance crept over him like a pesky Blast-Ended Skrewt. The idea of facing Death, of seeking answers from Kali, felt like venturing into the Forbidden Forest without a wand. But as the unanswered questions gnawed at him, Harry knew there was no other choice. He had to gather the courage, push aside the fear, and confront the enigmatic entity once again.

Chapter End Notes

Made some last minute changes to this chapter and I've been in an awful mood the whole day but hopefully that didn't come across in the chapter. The meeting between Tom and Harry was a bit short, sorry, but it didn't feel right to make it longer. I wanted it to be kinda stiff and for them to be unsure of how they should act and when Tom doesn't

know how to act he retreats. And I hope the last part with the dream made sense but if you have any questions or there is something that doesn't make sense please point it out and I'll fix it!

Oh and next chapter the interaction between Tom and Harry will be longer and more interesting!

Hope you liked it and hopefully you all had a better day than me!

Bound Beneath Boundaries

Chapter Summary

It doesn't go as planned when Harry seeks Death out but thankfully he'll soon be too distracted by someone else to even think about it

Chapter Notes

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

The day after the weird dream/memory passed in a blur, much like many of Harry's days since Kali revealed the truth. He spent the day in the library, holding a book but unable to read it, preferring solitude to sort through his thoughts and prepare for his meeting with Kali. However, his solitude was short-lived as Luna unexpectedly appeared, finding him in a hidden corner of the vast library.

Upon seeing him, she sighed quietly. "Harry, there's no point in stewing in your own thoughts. Let us help you, let me help you," she pleaded.

"Forgive me, my dear Luna, but I'm not exactly in a chatty mood today," he replied, more sarcastic than intended. He had no doubt she somehow knew what he planned to do.

"My mother used to say, it's when you least want to talk that you need to the most," Luna settled beside him on the floor. "What are you afraid of, Harry?"

Harry swallowed heavily. "The truth," he replied simply. What more was there to say?

Luna gazed at Harry with unwavering compassion, her silver eyes filled with understanding. She knew better than anyone the weight of hidden truths and the fear they could invoke. Slowly, she reached out and placed a gentle hand on his arm.

"I understand, Harry. The truth can be terrifying, especially when it shakes the very foundation of everything you thought you knew," Luna's voice was soft, soothing, like a

comforting melody. "But sometimes, facing the truth is the only way to find peace within ourselves."

Harry's gaze shifted from the book in his hands to Luna's face, searching for answers. He saw the genuine concern etched across her features, and he knew she was right. He had been avoiding the truth for far too long, and it was consuming him.

"I'm afraid of what it means for me," Harry admitted, his voice tinged with vulnerability. "If everything I thought was true turns out to be a lie, who am I? What am I?"

Luna's hand tightened slightly, a silent reassurance. "You are still the same fierce and strong person you've always been, Harry. The truth doesn't define you; it simply shapes your path forward. And I believe that whatever you discover, you have the strength to face it."

Harry's shoulders sagged as the weight of his fears began to lift. The library's silence seemed less suffocating, and a glimmer of hope flickered within him. Luna's unwavering faith in him was a balm to his troubled heart.

"You're right, Luna," Harry whispered, his voice barely audible. "I can't keep running from the truth. It's time to face it, no matter how difficult or painful it may be."

A small smile graced Luna's lips, and she squeezed his arm gently. "You're not alone, Harry. We're in this together. Remember, even in the darkest of times, there's always a flicker of light waiting to guide us." Her lips twitched in amusement at her choice of words.

Harry snorted at the saying but with Luna's support Harry felt a renewed sense of determination. The path ahead was uncertain, but he knew he had allies by his side who would help him unravel the mysteries that lay before him.

Taking a deep breath, Harry closed the book he had been holding all day. It was time to leave the safety of the library's hidden corner and step into the unknown.

“You know, there is something else my mother said,” Luna trailed off with a contemplative look on her face, so unlike her normal carefree one.

“Oh?” Harry asked, always curious to learn more about the mother Luna rarely spoke of.

“A few hours before she died she told me I was going to change this world. I didn’t believe her but I think I might be meant to help you do it. I know you can.”

As Harry walked away, his mind didn’t linger on Kali however, but on the upcoming meeting with Tom, their second encounter in person rather than in the realm of dreams.

“Master - Harry.” Death looked smaller than usual, less regal, less godly.

Harry refused to meet their eyes and kept his eyes fixed past the beings shoulder. “Death.” Harry greeted. “I need answers.” He forced the words out, leaving a bitter taste in his mouth. “I had a dream of a memory, a memory I don’t remember. You took it.” Harry accused.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Death's voice remained calm and detached, devoid of any hint of remorse or explanation. "You were not ready to know. The memory had the potential to alter your path, to burden you with the weight of your destiny before you had the chance to grow into it."

Harry's frustration bubbled to the surface, his voice tinged with anger. "So you decided to play puppeteer with my life? Decided what I should and shouldn't remember? Who gave you that right!?"

Death's form shifted, emanating a sense of regret. "I understand your frustration, Harry. But sometimes, ignorance can be a shield too. To bear the weight of being the Master of Death requires immense strength, both physical and emotional. You were not yet equipped to comprehend it fully. I sought to spare you from the immense burden until the time was right."

You sound like Dumbledore, Harry thought to himself. "The time wasn't right when Voldemort killed me?" Harry's voice trembled with bitterness.

"Sometimes, the path to enlightenment is paved with suffering," Death replied, the echoes of empathy lacing their words. "You had to face your greatest fear, confront the darkness within yourself, and choose to return. Only through that crucible could you begin to fathom the magnitude of your role."

"Your destiny as the Master of Death is not an easy burden to bear," Death continued, their voice echoing with an otherworldly resonance.

Harry remained silent.

"There are forces at play that even I must obey," Death explained cryptically. "Circumstances dictated that the memory could not remain within your conscious mind. But rest assured, Harry, the truth remains within you, locked deep within the recesses of your mind. When the time is right, they will resurface, and you will understand." Death observed him but when Harry didn't reply they continued talking. "I have walked alongside you throughout your journey, guiding and shaping events to lead you to this point." Death admitted.

Harry clenched his fists, his anger rising and he couldn't keep up his calm exterior anymore. "Guiding me? Shaping events? You call that guidance? It feels more like manipulation! Like you've been toying with me this entire time!"

"Manipulation implies malicious intent," Death stated unnaturally calmly, unmoved by Harry's outburst. "I am bound by a higher purpose, beyond the comprehension of mortals. I do what is necessary for the balance of life and death."

Harry scoffed bitterly. "Balance? What balance is there in my life? I lost my parents, my godfather, my friends, my husband! I had to face the darkest evil this world has ever known! And you call that balance!?"

"Master, it hurt me greatly to separate you from them, but the timing of their deaths was beyond my control," Death responded evenly but as he opened his mouth to continue a look of resignation passed over his face. "Every entity in this universe opposed the union between Draco and you. It was inevitable."

"YOU took him away from me!" Harry's voice radiated with fury. "I will never see past that! YOU took him, and I was left behind! And then you took her, you've taken everything from me! You didn't even let me see them after they were gone, you corrupted the stone!"

Death's form flickered, they were no longer able to keep up the nonchalant mask and their lips pressed together in a thin line. "Master, please understand. I didn't choose the timing of their deaths. I am but an observer, collecting souls. The pain you feel is a result of circumstances beyond my control."

"Shut up!" Harry quaked with anger, the room falling into an oppressive silence.

After a long pause, Death spoke again, its voice tinged with solemnity. "Balance is not always achieved through comfort and happiness. Sometimes, it demands sacrifice and suffering. You have endured great pain, and I understand your anger. But you have emerged stronger, ready to embrace your role as the Master of Death."

Harry's anger wavered and interlaced with fear and confusion. "And what is this role? Why me? Why must I bear this burden?"

Death's gaze softened, and a trace of empathy flickered in its eyes. "The Master of Death is both a symbol and a guardian. You possess the power to manipulate the forces of life and death, to bring balance and restore order when necessary. Your journey has been a preparation, a forging of your character. You needed to experience the depth of darkness and rise above them, to fully comprehend the responsibility that lies upon you. In your past lives you fell to the darkness and stayed there but I feel hopeful for this lifetime."

Harry's mind swirled with conflicting emotions. He wanted to reject it all, to deny the weight of the title placed upon him. Yet, deep down, he knew there was truth in Death's words. He had faced immense pain and triumphed over unimaginable challenges.

"I don't want to be *special*," Harry muttered, his voice tinged with exhaustion.

"I know you don't," Death replied softly. "But destiny rarely grants us what we desire. Embrace the power within you, Harry. Embrace the responsibility that comes with it. You have the strength to shape the world and bring about change."

A heavy silence settled between them, and Harry felt a sliver of acceptance seeping into his heart. He couldn't change the past, but he could choose how to move forward.

"Fine," Harry finally conceded, his voice filled with angry resignation. "If this is my path, then I will walk it. But know this, Death: I will not be your pawn. I will not be fate's pawn. I will find my own way, make my own choices. And when the time comes, I will confront you again, demanding the truth and the answers I seek."

Death nodded solemnly. "So be it, Harry. The path ahead is arduous, but you are not alone. The power you possess is both a gift and a responsibility."

The evening approached too quickly for Harry, and his heart raced with a mix of anticipation and nerves. The weight of the day's events threatened to overwhelm him - his conversation with Kali after weeks of silence, and now this meeting with Tom. It felt like everything was happening at once, an emotional whirlwind that both excited and terrified him.

Harry made his way through the estate, the gift nestled securely in his pocket after having been shrunk. He had planned to gift Tom with his horcruxes, but those gifts came with demands, demands he didn't want to ruin the evening with. So instead he'd chosen to give those to Tom as a birthday gift in a couple of days. For the Yule gift he had carefully chosen it, wanting it to convey his intentions and the depth of his feelings. It had been difficult but in the end he'd chosen something traditional.

Each step brought him closer to the clearing in the forest, where Tom stood, a captivating figure against the backdrop of shimmering ice-coated trees. As Harry approached, he could see the flicker of curiosity and anticipation in Tom's eyes, a hidden flame waiting to be stoked.

"Tom," Harry greeted him, his voice tinged with a mix of nervousness and determination. "I'm glad you came."

Tom's composed expression wavered ever so slightly, a hint of a smile playing at the corner of his lips. "Of course I'm here, as promised," he replied, his voice laced with a touch of amusement.

Harry felt the weight of the moment as they regarded each other. Harry's eyes had no fixed point, skimming over Tom from bottom to top whilst Tom's eyes didn't so much as flicker away from Harry's face.

"Let's go then," he said, his voice low against his will, "and I shall show you a place no one else has had the pleasure of visiting, apart from myself, in the last hundred years."

Tom's curiosity piqued, his eyes narrowing with excitement and caution. The air crackled with a challenge unspoken, a dare that Harry silently extended. Would Tom dare to grasp his hand and venture into the unknown with him?

Harry held up his hand, his gaze locked with Tom's, conveying the unspoken invitation. A moment of tension hung in the air, a silent battle of wills. Then, ever so slowly, Tom reached out and placed his hand in Harry's, their fingers intertwining.

A surge of energy coursed through them both, the touch igniting a spark that traveled up their arms, making Harry shiver and Tom grip his hand tighter. The unspoken connection between them deepened, a promise and a reassurance wrapped in that simple touch.

Tom raised an eyebrow, his eyes searching Harry's, his current emotions expertly masked. "Well, shall we?" he asked, his voice carrying a hint of playfulness.

A grin spread across Harry's face, his own excitement bubbling to the surface. He tightened his grip on Tom's hand, conveying his readiness and trust. "Yes, of course," he replied, his voice filled with anticipation. "Hold on tight."

With a final squeeze, Harry apparated them away.

As Harry and Tom materialised in front of the grand entrance of Peverell Castle, they were greeted by a group of Harry's loyal house-elves, their eyes shining with joy and anticipation. The elves, who had spent a significant portion of the summer working alongside Harry to restore and rejuvenate the castle, had been sworn to secrecy about his whereabouts and been told to never expect guests to come so this was an unexpected occurrence.

Tom's tight grip on his hand loosened before reluctantly letting go fully. Instantly Harry missed the physical connection between them.

"Welcome back, Master Hadrian!" Opie, one of the elves, exclaimed with a bow, her voice filled with genuine delight. "We've missed you."

Harry smiled warmly at the elves, his happiness clear as day in his eyes. "Thank you, Opie. It's good to be home. And I've brought a guest with me," he said, gesturing towards Tom and emphasising that he had willingly brought the guest with him, there was no threat.

The elves exchanged curious glances, but their impeccable manners prevented them from prying. With a nod from Harry, they scurried off to attend to their duties, leaving Harry and Tom to explore the castle in privacy.

As they made their way through the corridors, Harry guided Tom towards the library - the heart of the castle, a sanctuary of knowledge and forgotten secrets. The heavy wooden doors swung open to reveal a breathtaking sight. Tom's mask of indifference faltered, his eyes widening in awe at the sight of the vast collection of books, some faded with age, others whispering secrets from their shelves.

"It's... magnificent," Tom breathed, unable to hide his awe. The flickering candlelight cast a warm glow over the room, illuminating row after row of shelves, each one housing long-lost books and rare tomes.

Harry couldn't help but smile, his heart swelling with a mix of pride and satisfaction as his eyes never left Tom's form. Tom fit in so well with their surroundings, Harry wished he couldn't keep him here forever. "I've spent a week here during the summer, restoring and organising the library," he explained, his eyes meeting Tom's as he turned to look at Harry. "These books hold centuries of wisdom, and I thought you might appreciate their company."

As they settled in on a comfy sofa facing a black marble fireplace, surrounded by the silent whispers of parchment and ink, their conversation shifted to the events that had unfolded between them. Harry broached the topic with care, knowing that Tom had been avoiding him for reasons yet unknown or forgotten.

"Tom," Harry began, his voice tinged with a mix of curiosity and concern, "I couldn't help but notice that you've been keeping your distance. Have I done something to upset you?"

Tom's expression tightened for a moment before he regained his composure, his gaze fixated on the ornate bookshelf across the room. "No, Harry, it's not that," he replied, his tone guarded. "I've been... busy preparing for a takeover. My focus has been consumed by the intricacies of my plans."

Harry nodded, understanding the weight of Tom's ambitions. He decided to let the subject drop for now, sensing that Tom wasn't ready to reveal the depths of his thoughts. Instead, he shifted the conversation towards Tom's progress, a much safer option.

"How are your plans going, Tom?" Harry asked, his voice laced with genuine interest. "Are you getting closer to reentering wizarding society?"

Tom's gaze softened, a flicker of vulnerability shining through his eyes and something Harry might decipher as appreciating. "It's going slower than anticipated, but progress is being made," he admitted. "I'm almost ready to make my presence known once again."

Harry's curiosity piqued, and he leaned in closer, a conspiratorial smile playing on his lips. "You know, Tom, my offer to perform the markings to mask your identity still stands," he whispered, his voice laced with mischief. "We could have some fun fooling Dumbledore and his flaming chickens."

Tom's lips twitched, a rare spark of sadistic amusement dancing in his eyes. Harry hadn't noticed how long it had been since he saw the look but now that he thought about it Tom must have been keeping that part of himself hidden behind his mask. Harry didn't mind the look, quite the opposite actually.

"Indeed," Tom replied, a glimmer of excitement creeping into his voice. "Playing a game of deception with Dumbledore would certainly be entertaining. It's a tempting proposition, Harry."

Harry grinned, he really wanted to see Tom in his element and Harry was certain he would thrive in a more political game now that he was saner. "I knew you'd be intrigued," he replied, a touch of satisfaction in his tone. "We can create a web of intrigue and misdirection that will keep them guessing. It will be *our* secret, Tom."

Tom leaned back in his chair, his expression thoughtful yet filled with a newfound eagerness. "Yes," he agreed, his voice filled with anticipation. "Our secret, Harry. Together, we can manipulate the chess pieces Dumbledore is so fond of keeping in control and manipulate it to our advantage."

Harry's excitement mirrored Tom's, their shared enthusiasm fueling the flame of their alliance. The library seemed to come alive around them, the ancient texts almost vibrating with the weight of their whispered knowledge. It was as if the shelves themselves were eager to witness the unfolding of their grand scheme.

"We need to discuss the strategies we'll employ and the potential allies we can enlist," Harry stated.

Tom nodded along in thought. "Agreed, Harry. Let's start by identifying the vulnerabilities of our opponents. We need to exploit their weaknesses to weaken their hold on power."

“Precisely. We should gather intelligence, establish a network of informants, and strategically position ourselves to strike at their weakest points.” Harry added.

Harry’s eyes glinted at having to develop tactics and strategies, Tom's eyes studied him closely before answering. “Yes, gathering information will be crucial. We'll need spies who can infiltrate their ranks at the ministry and in the Order, gather sensitive data, and provide us with a tactical advantage.”

“And let's not forget about building alliances with influential figures who share our goals. They can offer support, resources, and credibility to our cause.” Harry had turned fully towards him now, his words coming out quicker than usual.

Tom could only find it endearing. “Absolutely. We should approach those who have a stake in challenging the existing power structures and persuade them to join our ranks.”

“Once we have a solid network in place, we can disrupt their operations and expose their corruption. We'll dismantle their power piece by piece.” Harry continued.

Harry was so consumed in his thoughts and words he didn’t even notice how he moved closer and how Tom froze when their knees touched before quickly covering it up by answering. “Indeed, our actions must be calculated and strategic. We need to anticipate their counterattacks and have contingency plans ready to mitigate any risks.”

“I agree. We must be prepared for resistance and take into account the potential consequences of our actions. But with careful execution, we can tip the scales in our favor.” Harry, consumed in his thoughts, finally noticed their proximity. But he, like Tom, didn’t mention or acknowledge it.

For a moment Tom's eyes left Harry’s and a frown marred Tom's lovely face. Harry was thankful when the eyes returned and met his. “Precisely, Harry. Our success lies in meticulous planning, exploiting their weaknesses, and leveraging our allies and resources to achieve our shared goals.”

As they delved deeper into their plans, ideas began to flow between them, each suggestion building upon the last. They discussed strategies, potential allies, and the vulnerabilities of their opponents. The once-impenetrable walls of secrecy that Tom had erected around himself began to crumble, replaced by a growing trust in Harry.

They discussed the possibilities that lay ahead once the plans came to fruition - how they would navigate the intricacies of power, challenge preconceived notions, and revel in the thrill of their hidden alliance. Their laughter echoed through the library, a mingling of mischief and affection. With every passing moment, Harry saw a glimmer of the person Tom could become - a powerful and charismatic leader and Harry craved to make it come true.

Amidst the grandeur of their ambitions, Harry's gaze occasionally wandered to Tom, his heart tugging with a mixture of longing and hope. He yearned for more than just a partnership based on shared goals and shared secrets. He craved the intimacy that came with baring their hearts to one another, letting go of the masks they wore and embracing the vulnerabilities that lay beneath.

Yet, for now, they reveled in the enchantment of their shared dreams, allowing the background tension to weave its spell without needing to explicitly acknowledge it. They were entangled in a dance of power and passion, of secrets and desires, each step bringing them closer to an uncertain future.

As they delved into their plans, the magnetic pull of Harry's presence grew stronger with each passing moment. Tom couldn't deny the thrill that coursed through his veins, a heady mixture of intrigue, attraction, and something deeper that he couldn't quite define.

Harry's words, laced with mischief and a touch of hope, tugged at the corners of Tom's tightly controlled mask. He had been avoiding Harry, but not because he wanted to. The truth was that Tom had missed him - missed the way Harry challenged him, the way his mere presence stirred something within Tom's heart.

But admitting such a thing was not in Tom's nature. He had always prided himself on his self-reliance, his ability to keep others at arm's length. He had built an empire on his independence, his resolve unyielding. To let someone in, to expose the depths of his desires, was a vulnerability he couldn't afford.

And yet, here he sat in the enchanting library of Peverell Castle, captivated by Harry's words and the gleam in his emerald eyes. The way Harry spoke of their future together, of manipulating the chessboard of power, ignited a fire within Tom - a fire that danced dangerously close to the realm of his less than pure desires.

Harry's presence soothed him, and he craved more than partnership and alliance. But fear gripped him tightly. Could he offer Harry what he deserved? His scars ran deep, and he doubted his ability to escape the darkness within. Though he yearned for Harry, he hesitated, afraid of causing more pain.

"So, Tom," Harry said, a playful glimmer in his eyes, "can you imagine the look on Dumbledore's face when he realises we've been pulling the strings all along. The dark lord and his favourite child soldier, if he doesn't die by my hand he'll die from shock."

Tom couldn't help but be drawn further into Harry's web of mischief. His lips curved into a smirk, mirroring the mischievousness in Harry's gaze. "Indeed," he replied, his voice low and laced with anticipation. "To watch him stumble in the face of our carefully orchestrated illusions would be nothing short of exhilarating."

Harry leaned closer, their faces mere inches apart, the air crackling with unspoken tension. "And imagine the power we'll wield, Tom," he whispered, his breath warm against Tom's skin. "Together, we can reshape the world in ways no one else can."

Tom's heart quickened, a flicker of something more vulnerable crossing his features before he masked it with his usual composure. "I've always admired your audacity, Harry," he admitted, his voice tinged with a mix of amusement and desire. "And with our minds and powers combined, we will be unstoppable."

Their conversation ebbed and flowed, weaving together dreams of conquest, secrets, and the intoxicating dance of power and passion. Each word, each shared vision, tightened the bond between them, drawing them closer to a precipice they both longed to cross.

But amidst the shared laughter and whispered plans, Tom couldn't resist the urge to ask the question that burned within him. "Harry," he began, his voice softer than he intended, "why did you seek me out? What drew you to my side? You say you won't participate in a war, that

you won't fight but still you offer your support and ideas." Harry's gaze softened, his emerald eyes holding a mix of earnestness and longing.

"Because, Tom," he replied, his voice barely a whisper, "I missed you. Not just the partner in potential crime, but the man beneath the mask. I missed the way you challenge me, the way you make me feel alive."

Tom's mask cracked, the walls he had built around his heart weakening in the face of Harry's vulnerability. "And what of now, Harry?" he asked, his voice betraying a hint of uncertainty. "What do you seek from me?"

A gentle smile played upon Harry's lips as he reached out, his fingers brushing against Tom's hand. "I seek a future, Tom. A future where we can be free and build this world into something extraordinary, together."

Together .

Tom's breath caught in his throat as he searched Harry's eyes, seeing a reflection of his own longing mirrored back at him. A battle raged within him - the fear of vulnerability clashing with the irresistible pull towards a future where he could embrace his desires without reservation.

For a moment, the world around them faded into insignificance as the weight of their unspoken connection hung heavy in the air. The library walls seemed to hold their collective breath, as if anticipating the pivotal moment that could redefine the course of their lives.

Tom's heart wrestled with conflicting emotions. He listened attentively to Harry's words, his mind calculating the intricate dance of power and desire they were poised to perform. Yet, the vulnerability that shimmered beneath Harry's surface unsettled him. He couldn't afford to be swayed by the pull of emotions. Not now, not when his own feelings were still a tempest he couldn't control.

Harry's voice trailed off, the confession hanging in the air like a fragile thread. Tom's gaze met his, his eyes shielding the turmoil within. He knew he couldn't admit the depth of his

feelings, the way Harry had already managed to worm his way beneath Tom's carefully constructed defenses.

"Harry," Tom began, his voice smooth and composed, "your proposal is indeed intriguing. The prospect of wielding power is something I've long desired."

He watched as disappointment flashed fleetingly in Harry's eyes, quickly replaced by a cautious understanding. Harry had always possessed a wisdom beyond his years, but that fact only served to remind Tom of the vast difference in their ages.

"But," Tom continued, his tone measured, "we must be cautious. Your youth and inexperience, as talented as you are, pose certain challenges."

Harry's jaw tightened, his youthful determination flaring in his gaze. "Tom, I may be young, but I've faced unimaginable challenges and triumphed over them," he asserted, his voice laced with defiance.

Tom's lips curved into a wry smile, a hint of amusement glinting in his eyes. "Of course, Harry," he replied, his tone carrying a touch of condescension he couldn't completely suppress. "You have indeed accomplished remarkable feats. But the world of power and manipulation requires a subtlety that comes with time and experience."

He watched as conflicting emotions warred within Harry - frustration, determination, and a flicker of hurt. It pained Tom to be the one to extinguish Harry's fiery spirit, but he believed it was for the best. They both had much to learn, and Tom couldn't let his own desires cloud their judgment.

Harry's jaw clenched, his voice tinged with a mix of frustration and hurt. "I may not have your years of experience, Tom, but I'm not a mere child to be dismissed so easily."

Tom's eyes softened momentarily, his heart aching at the hurt he had caused. But he couldn't relent, not now. "Harry, you possess an extraordinary potential, but there is still much you

have yet to learn," he explained, his voice gentle but firm. "I fear that joining forces prematurely may lead to unnecessary risks and complications."

Harry's gaze hardened, a wall of stubbornness rising within him. "I understand your concerns, Tom," he replied, his voice tinged with disappointment. "But don't mistake my youth for naivety. I am capable of more than you give me credit for."

A pang of regret shot through Tom's chest, but he knew he had to maintain his resolve. "Harry, I'm not questioning your abilities," he reassured, his voice softer now. "I simply believe that we should proceed with caution. Let us focus on our individual journeys for now and see where they lead us."

Harry's voice turned sharp, a glimmer of anticipation in his eyes. "Fine, if you believe our individual journeys are the most important aspect now, how about we proceed with me carving those markings into your chest?"

A flicker of surprise crossed Tom's face at Harry's unexpected suggestion. The abrupt shift in tone and the intensity behind Harry's words caught him off guard.

Tom's gaze narrowed, his mind working to decipher Harry's true intentions. He couldn't deny the allure of having his identity masked, of being able to move through the wizarding world undetected. It was a tempting offer - one that could potentially serve his own ambitions.

He leaned back, his voice measured and controlled. "Harry, I appreciate your willingness to assist me in masking my identity," he replied, his tone carefully neutral. "But let us not rush into decisions. I have no way of knowing what the marks will actually do to me. You can't tell me what kind of runes they are nor where you learned them. How am I to trust they will work as you say?"

Harry's eyes flashed with a mixture of determination and defiance. "It's about trust, Tom," he retorted, his voice tinged with a hint of hurt again. "I want to help you, to ensure your safety and success. It's a gesture of trust, of loyalty."

Tom studied Harry's face, the vulnerability etched across his features. Perhaps there was more to this than he initially perceived. Could Harry's offer be an olive branch, a gesture of connection, and a testament to the depth of his feelings? But could he really risk his well-being just to spare Harry's feelings? He had no information about the markings; he hadn't been able to find even a mention of such marks in any book he had read. But he supposed he did trust Harry.

A wave of conflicting emotions washed over Tom, his resolve waning ever so slightly. The allure of Harry's touch, the undeniable advantage of having such protections - it was a siren's call he struggled to resist. But caution whispered in his ear, warning him of the dangers of trusting too much too soon.

He reached out and gently took Harry's hand in his own, his touch a silent reassurance. "Harry, your offer is appreciated, and I do trust your intentions," he replied, his voice laced with a mix of gratitude and caution. "But there is no guarantee that they will work. I cannot risk it."

Harry's features softened, the hurt in his eyes giving way to a glimmer of understanding. "I understand, Tom," he responded, his voice softer now.

For a moment, Tom believed that would be the end of the conversation until Harry lifted his wand, and his determination shone through his eyes. "I, Hadrian James Potter, Lord of the Houses Potter, Peverell, and Black, swear that the markings I have mentioned to Tom Riddle, Lord Voldemort, the markings I wish to carve into his chest, will have no negative impact on his well-being and only help mask his true identity from those who wish him harm. My intentions are pure, and my words true. So mote it be."

Tom's eyes widened in surprise at Harry's sudden oath. The weight of the words hung in the air, their significance sinking in. It was a truth oath, a solemn declaration made by Harry himself.

He couldn't help but feel a mixture of awe and apprehension. The power and conviction behind Harry's proclamation were undeniable, leaving Tom with a sliver of hope that perhaps, just perhaps, this endeavor might not be as risky as he initially believed.

A pause lingered between them, the silence pregnant with unspoken thoughts and emotions. Tom broke the stillness, his voice quiet but tinged with a hint of vulnerability. "You're willing to bind yourself with such an oath?" he asked, his gaze fixed on Harry's face.

Harry nodded, his eyes locked with Tom's. "Yes, Tom," he replied, his voice steady and resolute. "I want to assure you of my intentions and alleviate any doubts or fears you may have."

Tom felt a stirring deep within him - a flicker of devotion that threatened to dismantle the walls he had so meticulously built. Harry's unwavering belief in their cause, in the potential for a future together, challenged the very core of his being.

He took a deep breath, his mind grappling with the possibilities. This was an important moment - a leap of faith that could alter the course of their relationship. Closing his eyes briefly, Tom made his decision.

"Very well, Harry," he said, his voice laced with a mixture of caution and acceptance. "I will trust in your oath and allow you to carve the markings on my chest."

A flicker of relief crossed Harry's face, quickly replaced by determination. Tom bared his chest, exposing the canvas upon which the runes would be etched. He watched as Harry's gaze roamed over his skin, his touch gentle yet purposeful as he traced the intricate symbols that would grant Tom the protection and anonymity he sought.

"This will hurt," Harry whispered as he conjured a blade from thin air. Tom shivered; he didn't enjoy pain, but when the promise of hurt was whispered to him by Harry's sinful lips, it sounded pleasant.

Slowly, oh so slowly, Harry lightly dragged the blade up his torso until he reached Tom's ribcage. As Harry began to carve the markings, Tom's mind quieted, focusing solely on the sensation of the blade against his flesh. Pain mingled with a strange exhilaration, a fusion of emotions that blurred the boundaries between pleasure and power. Harry's eyes stayed focused on his work, his hands steady and controlled. While Tom couldn't keep his eyes off Harry, leaning over him, far closer than they had ever been before.

In that moment, Tom realised that this act of vulnerability and trust was a significant step toward the intimacy he feared to embrace. The thought made his breath hitch, and he struggled to control the small twitch in his hands. Harry paused, noticing the movement, and his gaze shifted from Tom's hands to his torso, then up to his face.

"Everything alright?" Harry asked, a concerned look on his face.

They were so close that Tom could see the circle of Avada Kedavra green lining Harry's pupil. He wasn't certain if it had been there before or if it was a physical manifestation of Harry's emotions and magic. "I'm fine," Tom finally replied, his voice slightly strained.

Harry lifted an eyebrow, appearing skeptical of Tom's statement. His eyes flickered between Tom's, then returned to his chest as he resumed his work.

Once the final mark was etched, Harry stepped back, a mix of exhaustion and accomplishment etched across his face. Tom rose from his seat, the bloody markings on his chest pulsating with newfound energy.

"Thank you, Harry," Tom murmured, his voice filled with genuine appreciation. "This gift you have given me, I shall not forget it."

Harry met his gaze, a glimmer of something deeper shining in his eyes. "You're welcome, Tom," he replied, his voice soft and sincere. "May these runes serve you well in your future endeavors."

The night grew darker, enveloping them in its embrace, and their conversation became lighter, the weight of their initial purpose forgotten amidst their shared enjoyment. In the midst of their laughter and exchanged words, the exchange of Yule gifts, once a significant part of their meeting, faded into insignificance. Time slipped away, an unimportant construct, as their connection deepened and their hearts intertwined, oblivious to the outside world.

So last night, as I was falling asleep and thinking about this chapter, I had a realisation. Unfortunately, I was too tired to grab my phone and write it down, so despite thinking I'd remember, I didn't. It feels like there's something important or overlooked in this chapter, particularly regarding Harry and Tom's interaction that doesn't quite fit with their characters. Ahh I'm so frustrated at myself for not remembering. Well, whatever. I can always change it later if I remember.

They're also something else I've been thinking about and am I crazy for thinking I might be going too fast with their relationship? I know this story is rather long already and I can't wait to get to the more fluffy parts (which will be in just two chapters!) but I'm hesitating. I want to include fluff soon but what do you guys think? Would it feel off if I did or feel wrong? I do want to pick up the pace but will I disappoint you guys?

Anyways... hope you enjoyed the chapter and please let me know what you think of the different interactions! Enjoy your weekend!

The Predictable Prejudice of Politics

Chapter Summary

Dumbledore has a bad day while Tom and Harry have a great time together

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for all the lovely and encouraging comments on the last chapter. I'm really grateful for all the love I've received for this story and I've started to become afraid I'll do something that will upset you. I never imagined this story would be as read and supported, I honestly don't understand why or how so many people have followed along with this fic and actually liked it. I know I'm not a bad writer but I don't feel particularly good either, there are so many good fics out there and I just don't feel like my fic deserves so much attention and now that it's gotten it I'm feeling slightly intimidated. I've never really received any bad comments on this fic and don't get me wrong, I don't want to receive hate or nasty comments but it's just so unexpected. I was certain I was gonna get some haters and I was prepared for that when I posted the first chapter but I've written 27 chapters now and haven't received any bad comments and now I'm scared that I inevitably will. I've grown comfortable in receiving love and support and feel wholly unprepared if it were to stop. I don't mind constructive criticism or politely worded dislike, I actually do like knowing if something I've written isn't up to standard. I'm not sure where I was going with this whole thing, I guess I just wanted to vent. No one I know in real life knows about this story and I can't really share my happiness and fear with anyone so I guess I wanted to share. Anyways, I'm so utterly grateful for all of you! All the support and love and encouragement it's just wow, I can't believe so many sweet and kind people have read my fic. I love you all!

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

The atmosphere in the grand chamber of the Wizengamot was thick with tension as Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic, called an urgent meeting. The purpose? To hold a vote of no confidence regarding Albus Dumbledore's position as Chief Warlock. Dumbledore, revered and respected by many, sat at the center of the room, his eyes scanning the faces of those gathered, searching for any signs of what was about to unfold.

Dumbledore had been preoccupied with the affairs of Hogwarts, Harry and the Order, unaware of the storm that was brewing against him. He had no inkling that Fudge had summoned this meeting with the intent of challenging his authority.

The Chief Warlock's mind raced as he tried to gather his wits, unsure of what accusations might be hurled his way.

Fudge stood, his voice laced with an unusual conviction. "Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot," he began, his tone dripping with a mix of faux concern and veiled animosity, "it is with a heavy heart that I bring forth this motion today. We are here to determine whether Albus Dumbledore should continue to hold the esteemed position of Chief Warlock."

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed, a flicker of realisation dawning upon him. He straightened in his seat, his expression a mixture of surprise and concern, trying to anticipate the case that would be presented against him.

Fudge turned to Amelia Bones, a stern and formidable presence among the members. "Amelia, please present the case against Albus Dumbledore."

Amelia rose from her seat, her gaze fixed on Dumbledore. She spoke with a measured and deliberate tone, her voice carrying a hint of disappointment. "Members of the Wizengamot, it has come to light that Albus Dumbledore, the esteemed Chief Warlock, has shown a concerning pattern of prejudice and partiality in his actions."

Dumbledore's breath caught in his throat as Bones began to lay out her case. She outlined incidents where Dumbledore had manipulated members of the light faction into unquestioning loyalty, instilling a sense of indebtedness towards him. She presented evidence, carefully compiled, revealing instances of Dumbledore's biased treatment and his tendency to favor certain individuals and groups over others.

"He has built a web of influence, control and corruption," Bones declared, her voice resonating with conviction. "It is time for Albus Dumbledore to step down from his position of power. Recent revelations and the countless secrets that have emerged have painted a picture of a man who is not only hypocritical but also a danger to the impartiality and fairness we expect from our Chief Warlock."

Dumbledore felt a wave of disbelief wash over him. The room seemed to spin as the weight of the accusations pressed upon his shoulders. How had it come to this? How had his noble

intentions been twisted and distorted?

In the midst of Bones' speech, Dumbledore found his voice. Standing tall, he looked directly at Fudge and the members of the wizengamot, his eyes blazing with a mixture of anger and hurt. "I am startled by these allegations," he began, his voice quivering with suppressed rage. "I have dedicated my life to the cause of justice, to protecting the innocent, and to maintaining the integrity of our magical community."

A stunned silence fell over the chamber as Dumbledore's anger filled the room. The members exchanged uncomfortable glances, taken aback by the forcefulness of his response.

"I admit that I have made mistakes, that I have let my judgments be clouded at times," Dumbledore continued, his voice rising with intensity. "But I assure you that my intentions have always been pure. I have fought tirelessly against the forces of darkness, and I have sought to create a better world."

Dumbledore's voice echoed with indignation as he faced the members of the wizengamot. "You will come to regret this decision. Mark my words," he warned, his voice carrying a sense of ominous conviction. "You have turned against a man who has dedicated his entire life to protecting the wizarding world. You may think you are acting in the best interest of our community, but you are gravely mistaken."

His words hung in the air, heavy with an unspoken challenge. Dumbledore's eyes swept across the room, his gaze piercing through the doubts and hesitations that clouded the hearts of those who had once respected him.

"You accuse me of prejudice and partiality?" he continued, his tone laced with a mixture of anger and sorrow. "I have stood against discrimination and fought for the rights of all magical beings, regardless of their blood status. I have worked tirelessly to promote unity and understanding in a world torn by division."

The members of the wizengamot shifted uncomfortably, their confidence waning in the face of Dumbledore's fierce determination. They had expected a defense, but not the fiery defiance that radiated from him.

"You may cast your votes, but remember this: true leadership cannot be determined solely by public opinion or manipulated narratives," Dumbledore declared, his voice resonating with unwavering resolve. "True leadership is forged through integrity, wisdom, and an unwavering commitment to what is right."

His words lingered in the air, leaving a profound impact on those who listened. The chamber was filled with a heavy silence, the weight of their decision pressing upon them. Some members exchanged hesitant glances, questioning the path they were about to take.

Fudge, his unusual air of authority faltering, glanced nervously at the divided room. He had expected a more subdued reaction from Dumbledore, not this defiant display of his unyielding spirit.

After a tense moment, Fudge finally spoke, his voice betraying a hint of uncertainty. "The votes have been cast, and the decision has been made. The majority stands in favor of removing Albus Dumbledore as Chief Warlock."

Dumbledore's face hardened, his disappointment etched deep into his features. He nodded solemnly, accepting the outcome with a mixture of resignation and defiance. It was a blow to his pride, a betrayal that would not soon be forgotten.

"Very well," Dumbledore replied, his voice heavy with disappointment. "You have made your choice. But mark my words, the consequences of this decision will be far-reaching. The day will come when you realise the true value of the principles you have cast aside today."

The members of the wizengamot remained seated in the chamber, the weight of their decision heavy upon them. The removal of Albus Dumbledore as Chief Warlock had sent shockwaves through the room, leaving a bitter taste of regret in the air. Yet, as the tension lingered, a new motion was proposed - a vote of confidence for Dumbledore as Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Fudge, his voice strained with uncertainty, addressed the assembly once more, his words hanging heavy in the air. "Now, we must address another matter of utmost importance," he announced, his gaze shifting towards Albus Dumbledore. "Shall Albus Dumbledore continue in his role as the revered Headmaster of Hogwarts?"

Dumbledore, his emotions still raw from the previous vote, braced himself for another round of scrutiny. Each breath felt like shards of glass cutting through his resolve. He understood the fragility of the situation, knowing that any misstep could plunge him into the abyss of failure. His eyes met Bones', the stern and unyielding figure who had led the charge against him just moments ago. Her unwavering gaze spoke volumes, a silent warning that she would not back down.

Amelia rose, her voice cutting through the chamber. "Members of the wizengamot, it is crucial that we hold our leaders to the highest standards of integrity," she stated, her tone measured and firm. "While Albus Dumbledore has removed from his position as Chief Warlock, we must make it abundantly clear that any deviation from the path of righteousness will not be tolerated."

Dumbledore listened attentively, his pride momentarily subdued. He had felt the sting of their betrayal, and the warning in Amelia's words served as a reminder that his position as Headmaster was precarious at best.

Amelia's unwavering gaze remained fixed firmly on Dumbledore, her words cutting through the tense air like a sharpened blade. "Time and time again, you have demonstrated a lack of impartiality, forsaking the well-being of individuals in favor of your interpretation of the greater good. We have witnessed your readiness to sacrifice innocents, believing it will pave the way for some twisted notion of progress. Over the years, you have jeopardized the safety of our children, cloaking us all in darkness, shrouding us in ignorance. Your actions may not have breached the realm of legality, but your morality, your very integrity, has been tarnished, corrupted beyond repair. We simply cannot stand idly by and accept it."

The chamber fell into a heavy silence as Amelia's words sank in. The members of the wizengamot exchanged cautious glances, their thoughts mired in the complexities of the situation. The recent revelations had shaken their faith in Dumbledore, but they also recognised the significance of his contributions and the potential consequences of his removal.

Fudge, sensing the weight of the moment, called for the vote. The members, their minds weighed with conflicting sentiments, began to cast their ballots. The future of Hogwarts hung in the balance, teetering on a precipice of uncertainty.

As the final votes were tallied, Fudge stood with a solemn expression. "The motion of confidence in Albus Dumbledore as Headmaster of Hogwarts has been decided. For now, the majority stands in favor of his continued tenure."

A mix of relief and trepidation washed over Dumbledore. The reprieve granted by this slim margin would not go unnoticed. He understood the conditions imposed upon him, the warning that he must tread carefully.

"I accept this decision with the utmost gratitude," Dumbledore spoke, his voice laced with determination. "I recognise the faith that has been placed in me and the weight of responsibility it carries. Rest assured, I shall not falter."

Amelia, her eyes still fixed upon Dumbledore, nodded once. "Make no mistake, Albus Dumbledore," she cautioned. "The eyes of the wizengamot will be upon you. Deviate from the path of justice, and your position will be swiftly revoked."

Dumbledore met her gaze, his eyes filled with a mix of concealed anger and determination. "I am acutely aware of the consequences of my actions," he replied, his voice steady. "I shall strive to uphold the principles of fairness, impartiality, and the protection of our students at all costs."

With those parting words, Dumbledore turned and strode out of the chamber, the members of the wizengamot were left with a sense of unease. They had crossed a formidable figure, a man of immense power and unwavering determination. Only time would tell whether their decision would be vindicated or if they would indeed come to regret the day they removed Albus Dumbledore from his position as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

The members of the wizengamot dispersed, their minds filled with a mixture of relief and apprehension. Dumbledore fled the room before anyone could corner him.

Rita Skeeter, in her bug animagus form, fluttered her wings as she followed Amelia Bones and Albus Dumbledore through the corridors of the Ministry of Magic. The two wizards seemed unaware of her presence, engrossed in their conversation. Rita couldn't believe her

luck. Not only was she getting an exclusive scoop, but it involved none other than the renowned Albus Dumbledore, whose reputation had taken a hit recently.

Amelia led Dumbledore to her office, and as the door swung open, Fudge was waiting inside. Rita's bug eyes gleamed with anticipation. This was going to be juicy.

Dumbledore, still on edge from losing his position as Chief Warlock the day before, entered the room with a wary expression. He had no idea what awaited him, but he sensed trouble brewing in the air. Amelia gestured for him to take a seat while Fudge stood in the corner, silent but nodding along to the conversation.

As the bugs buzzed around Rita, she listened intently, her tiny antennae twitching with excitement. Amelia wasted no time and presented Dumbledore with the evidence she had gathered. Rita strained her hearing to catch every word.

Amelia handed Dumbledore a letter, and Rita strained her wings to get a closer look. The letter spoke of Dumbledore's demands and threats towards Harry Potter, urging him to leave the Malfoy's for the Yule holidays. Dumbledore's eyes widened as he read the damning words.

But that was just the beginning. Amelia continued her assault, showing Dumbledore a memory. Rita watched as the memory unfolded before her eyes after Amelia spelled it to play out like a film for all to see. Dumbledore, in all his wisdom, stopping Harry from leaving Hogwarts and forcing him to stay, despite having no authority over the boy's holiday plans. It was a blatant abuse of power.

Amelia didn't stop there. She handed Dumbledore an official document from Gringotts, detailing how he had placed compulsions on Harry and stolen from his vault. Rita's wings buzzed with excitement as she absorbed the shocking revelation. Dumbledore, the great protector of the wizarding world, turned out to be a thief and a manipulator.

Amelia withheld some of the evidence, and Rita couldn't help but feel a tinge of frustration. She wanted every bit of information for her exposé. Still, what she had already witnessed was enough to make her ink buzz with anticipation.

Amelia's voice cut through Rita's thoughts. "If it were up to me, charges would be pressed for line theft and illegally spelling a child without their knowledge," she said sternly. "But Harry is more forgiving than most." Dumbledore's face showed disbelief, but Amelia pressed on. "He has ordered a restraining order against you, Dumbledore. You are not allowed to be in a room alone with him and cannot initiate conversation unless it pertains to school matters. Harry is an adult by law and magic, and you have no right to his person."

Dumbledore's anger boiled over. He launched into a passionate defense, revealing the prophecy and Harry's role in defeating Voldemort. Rita's bug eyes widened further, capturing every word. This was a revelation that could shake the wizarding world to its core.

But Amelia was unmoved. She listened, her face impassive, and when Dumbledore finished, she shook her head. "Your explanations fall on deaf ears, Dumbledore," she said firmly. "Your actions have crossed a line. Harry deserves better than to be manipulated and controlled under the guise of protection."

Rita, in her bug form, couldn't resist a satisfied chirp. She had stumbled upon a scandal that would rock the wizarding world. As she fluttered away, unnoticed by the occupants of the office, she couldn't wait to transform back into her human form and set her pen to paper.

The headline of Rita's upcoming article danced tantalisingly in her mind as she scurried away from the Ministry, careful to avoid detection. She knew that the explosive revelations she had witnessed in Amelia Bones' office would send shockwaves through the wizarding community.

In her cozy writing nook, Rita transformed back into her human form, her quick fingers itching to bring her story to life. She pulled out a fresh roll of parchment and dipped her quill into a pot of ink, her eyes shining with the thrill of exposing Dumbledore's dark secrets. With flourish and precision, Rita began to craft her article.

The truth of the boy-who-lived and Albus Dumbledore: the betrayal exposed

By Rita Skeeter

In a stunning turn of events, former Chief Warlock, Albus Dumbledore, finds himself at the center of another scandal that threatens to shatter his carefully constructed image. Through a fortuitous encounter, I, Rita Skeeter, have uncovered a series of shocking revelations that lay bare Dumbledore's manipulation, abuse of power, and disregard for the rights of a young hero.

In a clandestine meeting held at the Ministry of Magic, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones, presented irrefutable evidence that exposes Dumbledore's deplorable actions towards none other than the Boy Who Lived, Harry Potter. The evidence, which I have obtained exclusively, reveals a web of control and coercion that will leave readers astounded.

First and foremost, a letter was unveiled, penned by Dumbledore himself, in which he ruthlessly demanded that young Harry abandon the Malfoy household and spend the Yule holidays under his control. This audacious demand, backed by threats, serves as a chilling testament to Dumbledore's unwavering belief in his authority over the young hero's life.

But the letter is only the tip of the iceberg. A memory captured the very moment Dumbledore, without any legal jurisdiction, prevented Harry from leaving Hogwarts for the holidays. It is an outrageous abuse of power, a display of control that borders on tyranny.

Yet, the most damning evidence lies within an official document from Gringotts. This document, presented to Dumbledore in the presence of Amelia Bones and Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, reveals a shocking truth - Dumbledore had placed compulsions on Harry, invading the young wizard's autonomy and manipulating him to suit his own agenda. Additionally, the document asserts that Dumbledore brazenly pilfered from Harry's vault, an act of theft that cannot be overlooked.

Amelia Bones, with a steadfast commitment to justice, expressed her belief that charges should be pressed against Dumbledore for theft and illegally spelling a child without their knowledge. However, Harry Potter himself, in a display of forgiveness rarely seen, has instead opted for a restraining order against Dumbledore. From this point forward, the former Chief Warlock is forbidden from being alone with Harry and can only engage in conversation pertaining to school matters. It is a stark reminder that Harry, by law and magic, is considered an adult, and Dumbledore's claim to any authority over him is null and void.

Dumbledore, desperate to salvage his reputation, invoked the prophecy that foretells Harry as the chosen one destined to vanquish the dark lord, Voldemort. He argued that his actions were merely a means of protecting Harry...

Harry surveyed Tom's office, a playful smirk on his lips. "So, this is your office? I expected a bit more... darkness. Skulls on the walls, ominous artifacts adorning the shelves," he remarked, walking around the room, taking in the details.

They stood in Malfoy Manor, in a corner of the east wing where Tom had established his personal space. The office appeared rather ordinary to Harry's eyes, with a simple dark desk, a plush sofa facing the crackling fireplace, and bookshelves filled with seemingly average grey magic books. But Harry suspected there was more to it. Perhaps hidden compartments concealed the truly intriguing treasures.

Tom leaned casually against the desk, his gaze following Harry's every move. "I'm a Slytherin, Harry. I don't keep anything valuable in plain sight," he replied, a hint of amusement in his voice.

Harry chuckled, his eyes sparkling mischievously as he turned to face Tom. "Ah, so you're telling me all the fascinating things are tucked away, hidden from prying eyes? Well, now I'm even more intrigued," he teased, taking a step closer to Tom.

A sly smile curled Tom's lips, and he pushed himself away from the desk, standing tall. "Perhaps one day, Harry, you'll earn the privilege to witness what lies behind closed doors," he said, his voice tinged with a slight purr.

Harry's heart skipped a beat at the playful tone in Tom's voice. Leaning casually against a bookshelf, Harry crossed his arms and tried not to look too enthusiastic. "I look forward to that." They locked eyes for a moment before Harry remembered himself.

"Anyway, have you heard the news about Dumbledore? He's no longer the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. Quite a surprising twist, don't you think?" he remarked casually, a twinkle of satisfaction and knowing in his tone.

Tom's expression subtly shifted, a fleeting flicker of glee crossing his features. "Indeed, I'm well aware of that development. Unexpected turns of events often make for the most intriguing tales," he replied, stepping away from the desk and joining Harry by the bookshelves. "It seems our esteemed Dumbledore made some questionable decisions, which ultimately led to his own downfall. Such a pity for a man of his *stature*."

Harry's smile widened, a glint of mischief dancing in his eyes. "Indeed, Tom. They say every downfall opens the door to new opportunities. And sometimes, those opportunities can be quite... tempting."

Tom's head tilted, his gaze intensifying as it locked onto Harry's face. His voice grew huskier, laced with anticipation. "And what, pray tell, do you have in mind, Harry?" There was a hunger in his tone, a hunger for power and something more.

Harry's eyes sparkled with a mix of mischief and a hidden agenda. "Well, Tom, with Dumbledore out of the picture, it leaves a void, doesn't it? A position of immense influence, waiting for someone who truly understands the intricacies of both light and dark magic. Someone who can navigate the shadows and bring about a true transformation."

A faint smirk tugged at the corners of Tom's mouth. "You have a point, Harry. Who do you have in mind, my little nuisance?"

Harry couldn't resist the surge of satisfaction that swept over him at the endearment. For a moment he considered hiding his approval but why should he? Turning to face Tom, he reached out slowly, giving him the opportunity to retreat if he desired. His fingers traced a gentle path along Tom's cheek, their touch electrifying. For a fleeting moment, the desire to close the distance between them, to let their lips meet, surged within Harry. Yet, when he saw how wide Tom's eyes had gotten he held back.

A playful smile played upon Harry's lips as he leaned back slightly. "Oh, Tom, you should know by now that I always have something in motion," he murmured, his voice laced with anticipation.

...

Harry and Tom sat facing each other, their conversation veering toward the Yule Ball happening the following day. Excitement had filled the air at Malfoy Manor as the event loomed closer, but there was something else brewing beneath the surface. Harry, unable to resist the urge, asked Tom about his attendance.

"Tom," Harry began, his gaze meeting Tom's. "Will you be going to the Yule Ball tomorrow?"

Tom leaned back in his chair, his eyes lingering on Harry for a moment longer than necessary. A faint smile danced on his lips as he replied, "Guess you'll just have to wait and see."

Harry couldn't help but feel a flutter in his chest, a mixture of curiosity and a hint of disappointment. He had hoped that Tom would give a more definitive answer. Sensing the unspoken tension, Harry shifted the conversation to his own concerns about the upcoming event.

"I have to admit," Harry said, a touch of annoyance in his voice. "The Yule Ball doesn't exactly thrill me. All those forced conversations, superficial pleasantries, and pretending to care about things I have no interest in. Politics and idle chitchat—it's just not my cup of tea."

Tom's gaze never wavered as he watched Harry express his frustration. He seemed genuinely surprised by Harry's sentiment, his eyes filled with a mixture of admiration and confusion. Tom thought Harry would relish the opportunity to showcase his intelligence and cunning in such a setting.

"You're quite remarkable, Harry," Tom said, his voice laced with a subtle admiration. "I thought you would thrive in a place like this, given your intellect and wit."

Harry's cheeks tinged with a rosy hue, a combination of embarrassment and pleasure at Tom's compliment. He tried to brush it off, attempting to downplay his own abilities. "Oh, come on, Tom. You know me. I'm not as impressive as you make it sound. Politics and power games just don't interest me as much as they do you."

A soft chuckle escaped Tom's lips, his eyes never leaving Harry's face. He found himself captivated by every word that left Harry's pouty lips. There was something about the way Harry carried himself, a quiet strength that drew Tom in.

"You may not realise it, Harry," Tom replied, a slight intensity in his voice. "But you possess a magnetism that's hard to ignore. Your ability to see beyond the superficial is a rare gift." Harry's heart skipped a beat, a warm sensation spreading through his chest. He looked into Tom's eyes but quickly averted his eyes as he saw the hunger staring back at him.

"Thank you," Harry responded, his voice carrying a hint of bashfulness. They continued their conversation, but the encroaching night weighed heavily on Harry, his eyes burdened with exhaustion. Not a single wink of sleep had graced him since arriving at Malfoy Manor. Instead, he had devoted his nights to devouring books, but tonight he knew he couldn't resist the allure of rest any longer.

Tom, ever perceptive, noticed the weariness etched on Harry's face. With a tentative gesture, he reached out, his hand gliding through Harry's hair, causing a cascade of comfort to wash over him. The temptation to close his eyes became irresistible. "It's been a long day, Harry. Time for you to rest," Tom murmured as he rose from his seat and extended a hand, an unspoken invitation.

Harry, without a second thought, grasped Tom's hand, allowing himself to be guided. As they made their way towards his room, Harry couldn't help but voice his query amidst the weariness that enveloped him. "Are you planning to return home or stay here for the night?"

Tom hesitated momentarily, his gaze shifting as if contemplating the implications of his decision. "I will stay. I have a room just a few doors down, always available to me," he finally replied.

A yawn escaped Harry's lips, a testament to his profound fatigue, and he found himself blurting out the first thought that emerged, unfiltered and laden with unspoken desires. "Stay. I want you to stay," he whispered, the words floating in the hushed ambiance of the quiet hallway.

Tom's step faltered, his eyes fixated on Harry, who had already turned to face him, wide-eyed and vulnerable, as he unveiled his innermost longings. "I will," Tom responded, his voice mirroring the same breathless timbre.

"Good night, Tom," Harry offered, his voice imbued with a mix of fondness and vulnerability.

"Good night, Harry," Tom replied, his voice tender and filled with a promise that lingered in the air like a whispered secret.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm not totally happy with how this chapter turned out. I've been sick for a while now and haven't really had any energy so this chapter might not be up to standard.

On another note, I'll be going on vacation in a few days and I feel like I need a break from writing and editing for a week so next weekend I won't be updating. I'm really sorry to let you all down but I need a break. I will be back to updating the week after (on the 8th) I think.

On another, other note, I've written a one-shot for some reason and I'll be posting that sometime this week. It's not related to this fic at all, it's just a short simple one-shot. I really like it, I hope you give it a chance and that you'll like it as well!

Love you all, have a great week!

Cry for the Culpable

Chapter Summary

The consequences of a nightmare

Warnings: talk about self harm (at the end)

Chapter Notes

Oh god, I don't think I've ever spent as much time on a chapter. I don't know how many times I rewrote the first part, I just couldn't get it right. I'm not totally happy with it but I think it's pretty good..? I'm not sure anymore, let me know. Oh, and I know the nightmare thing is a bit cliché but I wanted to do it so I did. Okey... enjoy!

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

*“Harry... how could you? I forgave you for not being able to save me. I forgave you for the disaster you caused following my death but this, how am I meant to forgive this? You know what he did to me. How can HE still be alive, how can you let him live on? How can you so easily disregard all the unspeakable horrors he's committed? The graveyard filled with his victims, victims **HE** hunted, **HE** tortured, **HE** murdered in cold blood. How, after knowing what he did to me? To my family? How can you say you love me when you stay with him? How can you blindly forgive him? When he broke me down, when I wished for death, when I begged him for death, for release and he just laughed. When he wanted to hear me scream for fun, tortured me for relaxation, cut into me just to watch me cry? You know exactly what he did to me. What he did to us. If I were in your place, I would have struck him down immediately. I would have hunted him to the ends of the earth to ensure he could never hurt us again. But you - you didn't. You won't. And I can't forgive you for that.”*

Harry sat up in bed, sweat dripping from his forehead.

It had been dark, cold, and empty, and then Draco appeared – his Draco. He looked like his Draco, but he acted differently. He seemed disappointed, disgusted as he spoke, and Harry couldn't respond.

He thought he would always choose Draco, forever. But he couldn't. He just couldn't. And now, he felt like he had let Draco down, like he was breaking his promise to the Draco who was long gone. Everything he had told Draco, everything he had promised, felt like a lie. He promised Draco he would always love him, that he would always choose him. But he couldn't choose Draco now, not this Draco. This wasn't him. Even if he looked like him, talked like him, and was just as lovable, he simply wasn't him.

Harry felt consumed by guilt. He felt guilty for letting Draco go. Guilty for wanting to move on with the one who caused Draco so much pain, who caused Harry so much pain. But Harry wanted Tom. He wanted him. Was it so wrong to choose the person he desired? Was it so wrong to let go of the past and have hope for a future with Tom? Maybe. Maybe not. But Harry felt guilty nonetheless.

And now, here he stood in front of the door, leading to the one person he shouldn't be seeking out at this moment. He had tried, truly tried, to shake it off, to fall back asleep, to read, to take a walk in the garden, but it inevitably led him here.

Slowly, cautiously, Harry raised his fist to knock, but before his knuckles made contact with the door, it swung open. A wand was pointed directly at his face. The hand holding the wand belonged to a startled Tom, still drowsy with sleep. Harry momentarily forgot why he had come as Tom's eyes met his, softening in recognition. The wand remained raised, and Harry shot a pointed look at it. The sleepiness in Tom lessened, allowing him to notice the wand he still pointed at Harry.

Quickly, Tom lowered his wand, his eyes scanning over Harry's form clad in pajamas. Harry felt a jolt of embarrassment when he realised he was wearing his least favorite pair, covered in snowflakes. Heat rose to his cheeks, and he averted his eyes, collecting himself. He wasn't allowed to dwell in self-pity for long.

"Harry, what are you doing here?" Tom's raspy voice, coated heavily with the residue of sleep, was such a pleasant sound that Harry instantly turned toward its direction. Unfortunately, that meant he was met with Tom's raised eyebrow and slightly concerned eyes. Tom looked so utterly irresistible with his ruffled hair and the rare softness that lingered in his eyes.

"Can I stay with you tonight?" Harry asked quietly.

Tom's eyebrow shot even higher, a mixture of surprise and suspicion evident on his face. He hesitated for a moment, as if contemplating Harry's request and the unspoken implications behind it. Harry held his breath, fearing rejection and the disappointment that would accompany it.

After what felt like minutes, Tom's expression softened, and he stepped aside, gesturing for Harry to enter. Harry let out a relieved sigh and crossed the threshold into Tom's room. The familiar scent of aged books and a hint of magic enveloped him, making him feel strangely at ease.

Harry found himself at a crossroads, unsure of where he should go. He went and stood by the open balcony, letting the gentle breeze brush against his face, as if nature itself offered a comforting touch.

Tom appeared beside him, their arms unintentionally grazing against each other. The warmth emanating from Tom's presence served as a stark contrast to the lingering coldness that had taken residence in Harry's being since waking from the dream. Their eyes met briefly, a fleeting connection that made Harry's heart race within his chest. He quickly looked away, unable to hold Tom's gaze.

"Why did you come here, Harry?" Tom's voice carried a mix of curiosity and concern, its gentle tone inviting Harry to share his burden.

"I woke up from a dream... about Draco," Harry confessed, finally turning to face Tom directly.

Narrowing his eyes, Tom couldn't conceal his anger. "So you're here because you couldn't find him," he said, bitterness seeping into his words. "I'm just a replacement, then. Convenient." Harry was taken aback, wondering how Tom had arrived at such a conclusion.

Desperate to clarify, Harry began, "No, I... what? No, that's not what I meant - " But Tom's expression interrupted him.

Inadvertently, Harry had unleashed the dormant monster within Tom, and now he had to face the consequences. Harry's gaze remained locked with Tom's, watching as his eyes gradually transformed from their usual ruby red to a haunting shade of blood. The proximity was overwhelming, every breath Tom took resonating within Harry. Tom leaned forward, pushing Harry gently against the railing. Harry couldn't help but feel small, vulnerable. Despite knowing Tom couldn't harm him, his body couldn't forget the pain inflicted by Voldemort in the past.

Anxiety coursed through Harry's veins as Tom raised his hand, briefly instilling a fear that he might hit him. Instead, he placed his hand on the railing behind Harry, looming over him with an intense gaze. Harry felt cornered, his breathing growing rapid, a mix of fear and adrenaline flooding his system.

His eyes darted around, searching for an escape. Coming to Tom had been a mistake, a stark reminder that Tom's fractured soul rendered him unpredictable. He had underestimated the speed at which Tom's anger and aggression could surface.

Taking a deep breath, Harry gathered his courage, knowing he had to explain the turmoil that consumed him. "I... I had a nightmare," he began, his voice barely above a whisper. "Draco was there, but he wasn't truly himself. He was filled with anger and accused me of betraying him, of ignoring what you have done in the past."

Tom's expression softened, the flicker of understanding replacing the anger that had clouded his eyes. Slowly, his hand, poised near Harry, retreated, granting Harry some much-needed space. Stepping back, Tom allowed Harry room to breathe and collect himself.

"I'm sorry," Tom murmured, his voice tinged with a hint of remorse. "I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions."

Harry's nod conveyed his comprehension, though forgiveness still eluded him. His breathing gradually returned to normal. "It's alright," he managed to whisper, the tension within him easing.

Silence settled between them for a moment, Harry took the opportunity to gather his thoughts, trying to find the right words to express his feelings.

Tom's features softened further, regret and apprehension etching across his face. Inhaling deeply, he broke the silence. "It's not alright, Harry. I shouldn't have reacted that way. I am sorry, please forgive me."

Pausing, Harry studied Tom's face, finding no trace of deceit. In that moment, he decided to let go of Tom's outburst, at least for the time being. He did understand after all, Tom wasn't emotionally stable. Slowly, he nodded, "I forgive you."

Relief washed over Tom, evident in the sigh that escaped his lips. "Do you want to talk about the dream?" he asked gently, mindful of not upsetting Harry further.

Contemplating the question, Harry decided that addressing the dream might be the best course of action. "Okay... I made a promise to Draco, a promise to always stand by his side. But in the dream, he accused me of betrayal, claiming he would never do what I'm doing."

Tom remained silent for a moment, absorbing Harry's words. "You're troubled by the choices you've made and the repercussions they've had on Draco," he stated, his voice devoid of judgment.

Harry nodded, a profound sense of relief washing over him. It felt liberating to have his emotions acknowledged, to be heard without condemnation. "Yes, I am. I made so many promises to Draco, but now... now I find myself unable to fulfill them."

"Are you burdened by them because Draco still needs you? Are you clinging to those promises to save him, or is it because you love him? Perhaps it is you who needs him?" Tom inquired, his voice tinged with a trace of jealousy yet overshadowed by genuine concern.

Harry's brows furrowed, and after a moment of contemplation, he replied, his voice tinged with uncertainty, "I... I don't believe he needs me anymore. It's me who needs him. I need him to ground me, to provide me with a sense of security. Or... at least, that's how it used to be. Now, it feels like I'm holding on out of familiarity, seeking comfort in the known. I thought I

had grown stronger, but..." Frustration colored Harry's words as he ran a hand through his hair, struggling to articulate the complexity of his emotions.

Tom's expression shifted, a mix of concern and curiosity shimmering in his eyes. "What do you mean, Harry?" he asked, his voice gentle.

Harry took a deep breath, gathering his thoughts and trying to express the turmoil within him. "I mean... I thought I could move on, that I could leave the past behind and choose a different path. But the truth is, I'm still haunted by it. I can't seem to let go of the guilt, the feeling that I'm betraying him by even considering someone else. I know it may sound silly..."

Tom didn't understand fully, he didn't know what had transpired between Draco and Harry. Tom's fingers tightened slightly around Harry's hand, offering reassurance and support. He did his best to offer advice without knowing the whole story. "Harry, guilt is a natural part of letting go, especially when we've experienced loss and pain. But it doesn't mean we're forever bound to our past choices. You're allowed to grow, to discover what truly makes you happy."

Tears welled up in Harry's eyes, his emotions threatening to overflow. It was as if Tom's words had struck a chord deep within him, stirring a mixture of sadness, longing, and hope. The weight of his conflicted feelings became too much to bear, and a single tear escaped, tracing a path down his cheek.

Why was it *Voldemort*, after all this time, that would offer him an escape? That would speak the words Harry had longed to hear for so long. Why - why was it him? It felt unfair, unjust. Voldemort should not have the power to evoke such emotions within Harry.

He had promised himself not to let his guard down, it seems he never learns.

Tom's gaze softened as he noticed the tear, following its path down Harry's cheek. Without hesitation, he opened his arms, a silent invitation for Harry to seek solace in his embrace. Harry hesitated for a moment, unsure if he deserved such comfort, but the genuine warmth in Tom's eyes reassured him.

Unable to resist any longer, Harry leaned into Tom's waiting arms, his body trembling with fear, anger, hope, relief and exhaustion. Tom held him gently, providing him with a sense of comfort he'd long forgotten. Tom's presence enveloped him, grounding him and offering a sense of stability.

"Tom, do you ever feel guilt?" Harry asked quietly, his voice muffled against Tom's neck.

Tom's body stiffened momentarily, he had to consciously willed himself to relax. "I'm not certain, Harry. Sometimes, I feel... unsettled by the choices I have made in the past, but I am unsure if it truly constitutes guilt," Harry couldn't see Tom's face buried against his neck, but he sensed the hesitancy in Tom's voice. "I'm not sure if I am capable of experiencing emotions as profound as guilt."

Harry's heart sank at Tom's response. It saddened him to think that, despite the pain and suffering caused by Tom's actions, guilt might elude him. The realisation washed over him, and he felt a profound sense of loss. He remained silent, taking solace in the steady rise and fall of Tom's chest, focusing on his own breathing to find a momentary escape from his racing thoughts.

Harry's own perception of guilt fluctuated, shifting from intense turmoil on certain days, like today, to an overall emptiness that rendered those emotions irrelevant. He hadn't deeply pondered the reasons behind these wavering emotions and thoughts, but he suspected that his missing soul played a role. A soul acts as a tether, shaping a human's identity. However, Harry questioned whether he could still be considered human and whether a soul held any significance for him now...but currently, it didn't matter.

Tom held him close, his touch tender and gentle. He didn't try to offer empty words or quick solutions; instead, he allowed Harry the space to grieve, to release the pent-up emotions that had plagued him. It's as if he can sense the weight of Harry's burden and understands the depths of his inner turmoil.

Backing them up, step by step towards the bed, Harry felt a lightness washing over him. With each movement, the worries and anxieties melted away in the comforting warmth of Tom's presence.

They settle down on the soft expanse of the bed, their bodies intertwined in a comforting embrace. Harry nestles himself against Tom's strong chest, feeling the steady rhythm of Tom's heartbeat beneath his ear. The rise and fall of their breaths synchronised, creating a gentle cadence that lulled Harry into a state of tranquility. It felt natural, as if this was where they truly belonged.

Buried in the crook of Tom's neck, Harry inhaled his familiar scent. The room enveloped them in a soothing silence, accompanied only by the soft sounds of their intertwined breaths. Fatigue descended upon Harry, a bittersweet sensation finding solace and respite in the arms of the one he desired most, the one he should desire the least.

In the hushed stillness, Harry spoke, hesitant but genuine. "I need you," he whispered, his words a plea for understanding and acceptance.

Tom's hold tightened, silently promising to remain exactly where he was. The tender strokes of his fingers through Harry's hair relaxed him further.

As Harry's eyes fluttered shut, the unsettled energy that had kept him awake dissipated, leaving behind a sense of calm. Tom's gaze traced the gentle descent of Harry's eyelids, witnessing the surrender to sleep's embrace.

How had they arrived here? What had led them to this moment? These questions swirled within Tom's mind as he lay in bed, cradling a sleeping Harry. Harry, who welcomed his touch, now held onto him in slumber. His grip tightened on Tom's shirt, their legs entwined, Harry's hair tickling his chin. The synchronised rhythm of their heartbeats, the warmth of Harry's breath against Tom's skin held both comfort and a hint of unease. The heart many believed Tom didn't possess, ached at the tenderness of the moment.

The lines of tension that had etched themselves onto Harry's face were now smoothed away, leaving behind an expression of serenity. Tom couldn't deny the longing he felt, nor the profound impact Harry had on him. Despite the constant struggle within himself regarding Harry's youthfulness, Tom's perception had long transcended Harry's age. However, the discomfort of their age difference remained, serving as a reminder of the one moral boundary he had vowed never to transgress. He was resolute in his rejection of exploiting the innocent in such a manner, and the mere thought of crossing that line repulsed him. He still recalled the utter disgust he'd felt when he learned what his mother had done. How she'd forced

herself onto his father, and he had sworn there and then to never, no matter how far he fell, to cross that line.

Harry, though mature beyond his years, was still just fifteen - too young, too inexperienced. Tom recognised the need for restraint, to exercise patience until the time was right. The desire burned within him, but he would wait, maintaining the integrity of their relationship. It was a delicate balance between his longing and the principles he upheld, a test of his own self-control.

Gradually, Tom's body began to relax, mirroring the peaceful slumber of Harry. Unconsciously, his arms tightened around Harry, as if instinctively protecting and cherishing the fragile bond they shared.

Harry stirred in the softness of the sheets, embraced by a gentle warmth that enveloped him. His eyelids fluttered open, and as the morning light seeped through the curtains, he found himself lying in Tom's bed. It was a rare occurrence for him to wake up feeling so at peace and well-rested. The remnants of a smile played on his lips as he savored the serenity that washed over him.

However, reality soon settled in, and Harry's heart sank a little as he realised that Tom was nowhere to be seen. A twinge of sadness tugged at his chest, contrasting with the tranquility he had just experienced. Questions swirled in his mind as he wondered why Tom had departed silently, without even so much as a goodbye.

Lying there, Harry's thoughts wandered back to the events of the previous night. After a particularly distressing nightmare, he had sought solace in Tom's presence. Emotions had overwhelmed him, leading him to express himself with unguarded honesty. In retrospect, he cringed at his own impulsiveness, wishing he had maintained a more composed demeanor.

Nevertheless, he couldn't deny the comfort he had found in Tom's arms.

With a determined sigh, Harry resolved to find Tom and talk about the lingering questions and doubts that swirled in his mind. Understanding why Tom had departed without a word was essential for their relationship to progress.

Throwing off the covers, Harry swung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat up. He scanned the room, searching for any trace of Tom's presence. The absence only fueled his determination. Today, he would find Tom and have an honest discussion about their feelings, fears, and the complexities of their relationship.

Though the prospect of confronting Tom and delving into their emotions made him apprehensive, Harry also felt a glimmer of hope. He enjoyed the moments they had shared, however fleeting they may have been, and he longed to take their relationship further. Brimming with resolve, Harry left the room, ready to embark on a search for Tom.

The afternoon wore on, each passing minute adding to Harry's growing anxiety as he searched the expansive manor for any sign of Tom. The once-quiet halls now buzzed with activity, house-elves scurrying about, meticulously preparing for the grandeur of the upcoming Yule Ball. While the vivacity surrounding him was hard to ignore, Harry's thoughts remained consumed by his own concerns.

As twilight painted the sky with hues of orange and pink, Harry's heart sank a little deeper. Tom was still nowhere to be found, and the thought of attending the Yule Ball without him filled Harry with a strange mix of disappointment and unease. He had hoped to talk things through with Tom before the festivities began.

Lost in his own turmoil, Harry found himself standing in his room, seeking comfort within the familiar space. The door swung open, breaking the silence, and Draco stepped inside, with a determined expression.

"Harry!" Draco's voice carried a note of relief, his eyes lighting up as he caught sight of his friend. "There you are! I've been searching high and low for you. I thought you might need these."

In his hands, Draco held a set of meticulously tailored dress robes, their fabric shimmering with an ethereal silver sheen. Harry's eyebrows raised in surprise. He was grateful for Draco's thoughtfulness seeing as he had forgotten to acquire his own dress robes.

"Draco, I... Thank you," Harry's voice conveyed his heartfelt appreciation. "I hadn't even considered what to wear. You've truly come to my rescue."

Draco grinned, a playful spark lighting up his gaze. "Of course, I couldn't let you attend the Yule Ball looking like a lost soul. Besides, silver suits you quite splendidly. Though, I must admit, the Winter Palace theme this year might be a tad over the top... and a bit tacky."

A soft chuckle escaped Harry's lips. "Tacky or not, I'm sure it'll be... interesting."

As Harry started to change into the elegant dress robes, Draco approached him with a sudden seriousness that washed over his features. Concern etched in his eyes, he spoke softly, "Harry, are you okay? You seem a bit... off today. Is something wrong?"

Harry paused, his mind weighing the decision of whether to confide in Draco. "I had a restless night," Harry admitted, glancing at himself in the mirror as Draco adjusted his collar. "Nightmares and... well, some things were said to Tom. I fear I might have complicated things, Draco. I don't know where he is, and I'm not sure if he's coming tonight..."

Draco's expression softened, and he met Harry's gaze in the reflection of the mirror. "You'll find a way to resolve it, Harry. You always do. Tom cares about you, I'm certain he does. Give him time, and when you're both ready, talk."

Harry nodded, grateful for the comforting words. "You're right, Draco. I just need to find the right opportunity to talk, to explain myself."

Draco's encouraging smile radiated warmth. "Now, let's shift our focus to getting you ready for the ball. We'll ensure you're the most dashing bloke out there. And fear not, I'll even assist with your hair - though your look of horror suggests otherwise!"

The tension that had weighed heavily on Harry's shoulders began to ease as Draco's playful banter filled the room. A genuine smile curved Harry's lips, appreciating his friend's unwavering support.

With the dress robes expertly adjusted, Draco stepped back, appraising Harry with a nod of approval. "Looking sharp, Potter. Now, let's tame that unruly hair of yours. You'll need to make a lasting impression."

Harry chuckled, shaking his head as Draco fussed over his hair, experimenting with various styles. The simple act of sharing this moment with Draco brought a sense of normalcy and camaraderie back into Harry's world. Harry regarded himself in the mirror, he smiled slightly at what he saw.

Even though he had moved on from Draco, his influence on Harry would endure. As he glanced in the mirror, he noticed remnants of Draco's touch. The way he styled his hair, the carefully tailored robes he adorned, and even the confident posture he adopted, all bore the marks of Draco's impact. Of this Draco and his Draco. Regardless of any other changes, Draco would forever remain ingrained within him, an indelible part of his being.

Harry shook his head and focused on the moment. "So, Draco," Harry began. "Tell me, who should I keep an eye out for tonight? Any intriguing guests attending the ball?"

Draco leaned against the dresser, his eyes unfocused as he tried to recall. "Ah, yes, the *esteemed* guests. Well, you can expect Minister Fudge to grace us with his presence, as he always loves to be the center of attention. Keep your interactions with him polite but brief. The man can be quite... eccentric."

Harry nodded. "And what about the heads of the departments? Will they be attending?"

Draco's expression turned thoughtful as he counted off the names on his fingers. "Amelia Bones, the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, will be there. She's a strong and fair woman, someone worth getting to know. Just be cautious not to mention You-Know-Who around her; it tends to put her on edge."

"Got it," Harry replied, absorbing the information.

Draco continued, "Gareth Greengrass, the Head of the Department of Mysteries, will also be in attendance. He's Daphne's father, you know, and a staunch supporter of equal rights

between pure-bloods, half-bloods and muggleborns. Keep your conversations with him civil, but tread carefully when it comes to topics of blood purity, he's quite opinionated."

Harry raised an eyebrow, the intricate workings of pure-blood politics always feeling like a foreign language to him. "I'll do my best, Draco. Anything else I should be aware of?"

With a mischievous smirk, Draco leaned in closer. "Well, there's Ludo Bagman, the former Quidditch player turned head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, you've met him before I think. He's quite the character and loves a good wager. Get ready to be thoroughly questioned about the tournament if you run into him."

Harry chuckled, already coming up with ways to avoid him. "I'll do my best not to get too caught up in his betting schemes."

Draco's expression turned more serious as he mentioned the final name. "And then there's Barty Crouch Sr., the Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation. He's quite an enigmatic figure, always keeping to himself. You remember his son turned out to be a death eater? Don't bring it up unless you want a lecture on the importance of law and order."

Harry wasn't keen on talking to him, he never did like him.

As Draco finished his rundown of the influential ministry attendees, he stepped forward, placing a reassuring hand on Harry's shoulder. "Remember, Harry, tonight is your night too, your first debut into high society. Don't let the weight of their expectations overshadow your own enjoyment. Be true to yourself, and if things become overwhelming, I'll get you out of there."

A surge of gratitude washed over Harry as he locked eyes with Draco. "Thank you, Draco. I couldn't ask for a better friend."

Draco's mischievous smirk softened into a genuine smile. "Likewise, Potter. Now, let's make an entrance they won't soon forget."

Tom had long forgotten the reasons behind his hatred for his current form. Why he had made relentless efforts to shatter the reflection he saw in the mirror. Why he had forsaken beauty and chosen monstrosity. It was because of people. They had an uncanny ability to transform into demons when faced with something they desired, and his beauty was coveted by many. For him, beauty was a curse, a fleeting gift that people believed they were entitled to possess. They believed they had the right to look, stare, touch, and possess his beauty. He despised the consequences that came with it - violation, humiliation, assault, and pain. As a child, he yearned to rip his face to shreds, to be rid of the 'face of an angel' that stared back at him. Even with such beauty, he still felt like the son of the devil - the ultimate temptation that needed to be put in its place. People couldn't see beyond his looks, and when they eventually did, they were left disappointed and disgusted. But it was he who felt disgusted.

He often fantasised about taking a razor to his face, cutting away all the features that made him beautiful - his eyes, his lips, his skin, his bones. He never followed through with those dark thoughts because, despite everything, his beauty served as a useful mask, no matter how much it repulsed him to wear it.

When he arrived at Hogwarts, he became more adept at exploiting his looks. People still gawked, stared, and touched him, but not without consequences. Beauty became both an advantage and a disadvantage, yet his feelings of resentment remained unchanged. He continued to yearn for destruction - to slash, cut, and obliterate. And when he finally freed himself from people's gaze, he did just that. He hacked away all the features that had made him beautiful until he became monstrous, until he became ugly. It was liberating. He had forgotten why he despised his beauty until he was faced with the very reason again - people looking, staring, and touching - as he stepped through the doors to the Yule Ball.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully that wasn't awful. Does this count as fluff? I know they shared a bed and all but was it fluffy, I don't know. Maybe? I think I'm better at writing angst

Next chapter, the Yule ball and some drama! And then some angst and then some fluff. We are finally getting to all my favourite scenes!

Anyway, love you all, thanks for all the support, wouldn't be here without you guys!!♥



Oh and I posted a one-shot, check that out if you want to, it's not related to this story but I think it's a nice little fic

Absurdly Attached

Chapter Summary

The Yule ball and a smitten Tom

Chapter Notes

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

Original world, 2002

Harry stepped into the Minister's office, his gaze sweeping across the room. Minister Shacklebolt, the head Auror, and a few unfamiliar faces from the Wizengamot were waiting for him. Something felt off. Shacklebolt gestured to an empty chair, and Harry obliged, settling himself down as he observed the serious expressions around him.

"Harry," Shacklebolt began, his voice carrying a hint of concern. "Have you been following the news lately?"

Harry shook his head, his brow furrowing. "No, I haven't. What's going on?"

The Minister exchanged a glance with the others before continuing. "The Lestranges and a few other Death Eaters are still on the run, and we haven't been able to track them down. They've stayed hidden for years but recently started conducting raids and it's causing unrest among the public."

Realisation dawned on Harry. He already suspected where this meeting was heading. "You want me to help find them, don't you?"

Shacklebolt nodded, his gaze steady. "The public would feel safer if they knew you were assisting our Aurors in bringing them in. Your presence would give them confidence."

Harry sighed, feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders. "Look, I've done my part. I've fought, risked my life, and saved countless people. But that doesn't mean I'm obligated to continue putting myself in danger."

A voice from the corner chimed in, filled with anger. "Are you a coward, Potter? Are you scared to face them?"

"Maybe he wants them out there to gain more publicity for himself." Another chimed in.

Harry turned his attention to the unfamiliar faces, his voice tinged with frustration. "I am the savior. I saved you all. You're alive because of me. If it weren't for me, you'd be dead. So why, why are you demanding things of me? Why are you telling me what to do when you live now because I saved you? Because I let you live, I let you survive."

Angry murmurs filled the room, but Harry pressed on, his voice growing louder. "Why do you think I owe you anything when I have already laid down my life for yours once? I owe you nothing. I don't owe anyone anything! My life is my own to do with as I please. There is no room for you. For any of you. Be grateful you're still alive. Be grateful I'm letting you stay alive. Be grateful, and never presume to believe I owe you anything when it is you who owes their life to me!"

Silence enveloped the room as Harry's words echoed, his eyes blazing with fury. The atmosphere crackled with tension, as the truth of his words hung heavy in the air.

Minister Shacklebolt leaned forward, his voice soft but filled with understanding. "Harry, we appreciate everything you've done. We are grateful. But we need your help to ensure the safety of our people."

Harry's eyes met the Minister's, his voice resolute. "I understand, Minister. But I won't be manipulated or guilt-tripped into doing something I'm not comfortable with. I've already given enough." He turned his gaze towards the unfamiliar wizards in the room, a steely determination in his eyes. "And let's not forget, I've faced down dangerous predators before. To take down a predator, you can't just remain prey; you have to become one yourself."

Tom entered the room, his heart pounding with a mix of anticipation and nervousness. As he scanned the grand room, he immediately spotted Harry engrossed in conversation with the minister.

Narcissa's impeccable taste in decorating had transformed the ball room into a breathtaking sight. Twinkling lights gracefully adorned the walls, casting a warm glow that illuminated the room. Delicate snowflakes gently descended from the ceiling, melting into nothingness as they reached the enchanted gathering below. Yet, amidst this ethereal beauty, Tom's gaze was fixated on one person alone - Harry.

Harry had always possessed a certain charm, his youthful features transitioning into the striking visage of a remarkable young man. But now, in this moment, Harry seemed to radiate an otherworldly allure that left Tom utterly captivated. It was as if an enchanting spell had been cast upon him, rendering him unable to comprehend how those around him could remain oblivious to the extraordinary presence before them.

Tom couldn't fathom how the rest of the attendees, these mere mortals, failed to recognise the sheer magnificence that stood in their midst. His mind swirled with questions, bewildered as to why they hadn't dropped to their knees, overwhelmed by an undeniable surge of adoration for this extraordinary man.

As he walked across the floor he couldn't help but feel the weight of numerous eyes upon him, but they meant nothing to him in that moment. His entire being was captivated by Harry alone. With each step he took towards him, he could feel the intensity of Harry's magic growing stronger.

Harry's voice reached Tom's ears as he spoke about his plans for joining the Wizengamot. "Well, I want to join soon, but the idea of going through the OWLs and then NEWTs is a bit daunting," Harry confessed, a touch of uncertainty in his voice. "I've been considering taking the NEWTs early, but I don't want to take on too much..."

Tom couldn't resist the temptation any longer. He stealthily approached from behind, placing his hand gently on Harry's lower back. The touch sent a surge of warmth through his veins, and Harry turned to him, his smile transforming from forced to one filled with genuine fondness. "You'd have no trouble passing them with ease I'm sure, Harry."

"You came!" Harry's voice was filled with joy, causing Tom's heart to ache with a sweet pain. "I wouldn't miss it," Tom replied, his voice barely above a whisper. "You look lovely, darling." An adorable blush rose to Harry's cheeks but instead of averting his eyes as Tom assumed he would, their eyes locked, oblivious to the curious gazes fixed upon them.

"Oh, how terribly rude of me," Tom suddenly remembered, tearing his gaze away from Harry's captivating eyes. "I'm Marvolo Gaunt. Well met, Minister." He extended his hand politely, exchanging pleasantries with the minister as Harry's eyes lingered on him, filled with an unspoken desire.

As the conversation shifted to Tom's past, he couldn't help but steal glances at Harry.

"I haven't heard the name Gaunt in a while. May I inquire if you've been abroad, perhaps?" Fudge asked politely.

Tom made a conscious effort to maintain eye contact with the minister, knowing it would be unwise to offend him so early on.

"Ah, yes. I've been living in Poland for a few years now. Prior to that, I resided in France with my grandmother," he explained. He took a moment to gather his thoughts before continuing his story. "Since her recent passing, I've inherited the Gaunt estate and decided to embrace the long-neglected lordship and its associated seats."

The minister's expression shifted from polite interest to slight bewilderment. "Please accept my condolences for your loss. However, I wasn't aware that the Gaunts had any seats to their name..." Fudge trailed off.

"The Gaunt name itself doesn't hold any seats, but through the Gaunt bloodline, I've acquired the Slytherin Lordship, which happens to have four seats," Tom explained, a smugness creeping into his tone.

Fudge's face paled as Tom spoke. "The Slytherin Lordship? I believed the heirs had died out. And four seats? The regulations state that one can only own two seats per name."

Tom tilted his head slightly and shot a quick look at Harry, who observed the conversation with an amused glint in his eyes. "While it's true that the direct line of heirs has ceased, the Lordship deemed me worthy. The limitation on seat ownership is a relatively new rule, implemented in the 1880s. Houses that possessed more seats prior to this rule are allowed to retain them. Hence, I hold four seats," Tom explained, satisfaction evident in his voice.

"I believe Lord Potter-Black-Peverell also possesses more than two seats for his respective houses," Tom added, as the minister remained silent. He discreetly stroked Harry's back as a gesture of reassurance, transmitting a wave of encouraging magic.

Harry seized the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. "Indeed, that is correct. While the Potter house holds only one seat and the Black house holds two, the Peverell house also possesses four seats. Consequently, I have a total of seven seats in my possession," Harry stated with a neutral expression. "I believe no other individual currently holds as many seats. Isn't that right, Minister?"

The minister, startled by being directly addressed, began to look around anxiously, seeking an escape. It was apparent how easily intimidated he was. "Ah, yes, I do believe that's true. If you'll both excuse me," he stammered, quickly making his exit before either of them could respond.

Harry couldn't hold the mirth back anymore and snickered as he turned to Tom. Tom found himself longing to lose himself in those emerald eyes, to dance among the stars sparkling in his eyes and never return to reality. The ache inside him grew until he couldn't bear it any longer.

"Harry," Tom said, his voice laced with an urgent yearning. "Would you do me the honor of sharing this dance with me?" His heart thumped against his chest, anxiously awaiting Harry's response.

A mischievous glint sparked in Harry's eyes as he chuckled playfully. "Oh, I suppose I can make an exception for a Gaunt," he teased, the sound of his laughter like music to Tom's ears.

Tom let out a quiet sigh. In that moment, he knew without a shadow of a doubt that he wanted Harry, that they belonged together.

He had never truly seen a person as beautiful until he laid his eyes upon Harry. A mere smile and a glance in his direction, accompanied by the captivating depth of Harry's eyes, made him firmly believe that no one else could ever compare to Harry's beauty.

As they glided onto the dance floor, Tom leaned in and whispered in Harry's ear, his voice filled with sincerity. "I apologise for leaving you this morning. I was...overwhelmed, but I want you to know that the night meant a lot to me. It truly did." The words lingered in the air, their significance not lost on either of them. "You fit perfectly in my arms as you slept, and you fit perfectly in them now."

"I thought so too." Harry's gleeful and relieved laughter filled the room once more, and as they danced, their steps in perfect harmony, Tom knew that their connection was something truly extraordinary.

Mid-twirl on the dance floor, Harry brought up a question that caught Tom off guard. "What did you want to be when you were a child?"

Tom tilted his head, a mixture of curiosity and confusion. He wasn't sure where this topic came from. "Why do you ask?"

"I just... I don't really know much about your personal life. I know your goals, ambitions, and plans, but I don't know much about you as a person. So, I'm curious," Harry explained earnestly.

Tom glanced away briefly, reminiscing about his childhood dreams. "I yearned to explore the world. Before I knew of magic, I thought being an archaeologist would be fascinating, or delving into ancient history, like the Roman Empire or the Vikings. The idea was to see the world; the career was just a means to that end," Tom confessed. "What about you, Harry? What did you dream of?"

Harry was taken aback, evidently not expecting that answer. "I wanted to be an astronaut. I found the stars mystical, beautiful, and kind for granting wishes. They were so unlike people. It's funny, really," Harry's brows furrowed momentarily, indicating his contemplation, before smoothing out. "My muggle relatives, the Dursleys, would sometimes lock me out at night if I didn't finish the gardening on time. It was cold, dark, and terrifying for a small child. But I would lean back against a tree, squint my eyes, and gaze up at the night sky. Every now and then, I would spot a star and make a wish upon it."

Tom felt a surge of anger building up inside him, a desire to unleash his fury upon Harry's relatives. However, he realised that this wasn't the right moment for that. It wasn't what Harry needed right now. So, he swallowed down his anger and let out a deep breath. "What did you wish for?" he asked gently, pulling Harry a little closer.

For a brief moment, Harry's gaze dropped to Tom's chest, a soft smile forming on his lips. Then, he looked up, meeting Tom's eyes. "I wished to join them up there," Harry confessed. "I asked the stars to come and take me far, far away."

Tom's smile was tender, although he struggled to suppress the unfamiliar emotions welling up inside him - feelings that made his stomach knot and his throat tighten. He did his best to conceal them, but a slight quiver slipped into his voice. "It seems we shared a similar dream."

"Yeah... you eventually got to travel, didn't you? Did you get to visit Rome?" Harry inquired, curiosity lighting up his face.

"I did. The muggle attractions held little interest for me, but I did stumble upon some fascinating runes carved into the statue of Athena," Tom replied, a flicker of relief in his eyes. He went on to recount his experiences in Rome, sharing tales of the wizarding community he discovered there.

Their conversation meandered from Rome to travel, different cultures, and even their favorite foods. They talked and laughed as they danced, blissfully unaware of the world around them and the photographs being taken.

"I envy those who can be brave and reckless. They might not live forever, but those too fearful will not live at all," Harry responded, reflecting on Tom's tale of a daring adventure of a man who dove into a treacherous lake in search of a rumored creature unfamiliar to Harry.

Tom gazed at him, a look of confusion evident in his eyes. "Why do you harbor envy towards that foolish man? There was no tangible evidence to suggest the presence of a Luminara Lacustria there. It was a futile pursuit," he responded firmly.

Harry took a moment to ponder Tom's reply, his expression thoughtful. "I understand your skepticism, Tom," he said, his voice tinged with contemplation. "But sometimes, it's not about concrete proof or absolute certainty. It's about embarking on a quest for something greater, something extraordinary that exists beyond our comfort zones. In his daring endeavor, that man embraced the unknown and the potential to uncover something magical."

"Admittedly, he may not have discovered the Luminara Lacustria in that lake," Harry continued, his words flowing. "However, he possessed the audacity to believe in its existence, even if just for a fleeting moment. There's a certain beauty in taking risks and following our curiosity, even if it leads us astray. It's about embracing uncertainty and the potential rewards that may accompany it."

Harry's gaze lifted, capturing the sight of snowflakes gently descending upon them.

"We all have different thresholds for fear and caution," he mused. "Yet sometimes, it's worth pushing ourselves beyond our comfort zones to truly experience life. It is in those moments of bravery and recklessness that we uncover our true selves and unearth the wonders hidden within the world."

Tom's expression softened, his conviction faltering slightly. "Perhaps you're right," he conceded.

Had he truly experienced the vibrant essence of life? The haunting memories of his tormented childhood lingered, casting doubt upon his supposed escape from that inferno. Was he still trapped in an unyielding hell, or gradually wilting away in the vast expanse of this earth? Yet, amidst this existential questioning, Harry's presence transformed existence into a haven. It dawned on him that it might be time to be brave himself and step into the unknown.

"Harry?" Tom waited for Harry to meet his gaze, and as their eyes connected, the undeniable truth surfaced. "When I'm with you, Harry, I feel like my authentic self. I am only whole when I have you in my embrace, by my side."

Harry's eyes gradually widened, their once-dancing movement freezing in the face of a profound revelation. Uncertain of how to respond, Harry seemed at a loss for words, and Tom wanted to assure him that no immediate response was necessary.

"Harry, you don't have to push yourself to-" Tom began, but he was interrupted before he could finish.

"I am not," Harry replied firmly. "I'm simply taken aback." Harry's gaze shifted, dropping to his hand resting on Tom's shoulder. Slowly, he slid it up, his fingertips coming to rest gently against Tom's cheek. "I am happy," Harry confessed in a soft voice.

Tom's eyes darted between Harry's, searching for guidance on how to proceed. Before he could reach a conclusion, their moment was interrupted by a cheerful voice.

"Harry, Tom, how lovely to see you here," Luna chimed in, seemingly appearing out of nowhere beside them.

For a brief moment, their eyes remained locked, until Harry hesitantly withdrew his hands, and Tom followed suit. "Hello, Luna. What brings you here?" Harry asked, a hint of tension lacing his tone.

Luna seemed oblivious to the situation. "Oh, nothing really. It appeared that your dance had ended, so I thought I'd come over and introduce myself to the man Harry can't stop talking about," she said with a cheerful tone.

Harry spluttered in embarrassment, and Tom couldn't help but forgive Luna for interrupting them, when hearing that he occupied Harry's thoughts so frequently. A mischievous smirk formed on Tom's lips. "Oh, really, Harry? How often do thoughts of me cross your mind?" Harry pouted and turned away, attempting to regain control over his expression.

Tom chuckled softly. "Harry has shared so much about you, Miss Lovegood. Well met," he said, taking Luna's offered hand and gently kissing her knuckles.

Luna smiled kindly at him, but Tom wondered if she truly knew who he was. Harry had mentioned her gift as a seer, but he was uncertain about the nature of her abilities since every seer had a unique experience with visions. "Well met, Lord Gaunt-Slytherin. I'm glad you could join us, and I'm sure Harry is pleased to have you here."

A genuine smile graced Tom's lips. "I couldn't bear to leave dear Harry alone to face the crowds. That would be rather cruel."

Harry groaned and turned back to them. "I should have known the two of you would conspire against me."

Luna tilted her head curiously. "What do you mean, Harry? I think the wrackspurts might be coming back," she stated.

Tom had no idea what wrackspurts were, but Harry seemed familiar with the concept. "Being surrounded by these people might indeed attract them," Harry replied, discreetly glancing around.

Tom had momentarily forgotten about the presence of other people, a foolish oversight as he now noticed the close scrutiny they were under.

Luna's voice snapped him out of his thoughts. "Perhaps you should take a stroll in the garden. Cissa has adorned it with lovely lights and a path illuminated by sparkling flowers. It's quite enchanting; you must see it." Luna's enthusiasm caught Harry's interest.

"Sure, Luna, we'll do that. Would you care to join us?" Harry asked.

Luna shook her head, indicating a boy standing not too far away, looking insecure and awkward. "No, Neville could probably use some company. The wrackspurts are almost bursting out of his ears."

As Luna moved away, Harry turned to him. "Fancy a walk?" he asked, and Tom couldn't remember the last time he had denied Harry anything. As they made their way toward the open double door leading outside, Tom couldn't shake the feeling of eyes following them, but perhaps that was to be expected given their circumstances.

The garden emanated an ethereal beauty. Pearlescent white flowers adorned the path of white marble, while golden orbs of light floated overhead. The enchanting scenery, however, paled in comparison to the captivating presence of Harry. Tom couldn't help but be spellbound as Harry unleashed his untamed magic, causing Tom's hair to stand on end and goosebumps to ripple across his body. The overflow of magic intoxicated him, its chilling touch somehow warming, and its scent mingling with the freshness of blood and death left Tom breathless.

"So..." Harry began, his words trailing off. Boldly, he reached for Tom's hand, which had been lingering close to his own. Grateful for Harry's courage in that moment, Tom could do nothing but squeeze his hand tightly. "You want me by your side?"

Tom's grip tightened, his voice steady. "Of course. I thought I had always made that clear," he responded unwaveringly.

Harry let out a soft, amused huff. "I know you want me on your side during the war, but this feels different, doesn't it? I thought you believed it would be unwise, that I was too young and inexperienced for us to be partners," he inquired, turning to face Tom with a questioning gaze.

Tom swallowed, contemplating how to express his thoughts without upsetting Harry. "It is different, undoubtedly. Having you by my side would be invaluable, but this goes beyond the war. This is personal." Tom paused, momentarily averting his gaze as he caught sight of another couple sharing a tender kiss up ahead. "I do recognize your youth, and it genuinely concerns me, Harry. I don't abide by many moral codes, but there are lines I refuse to cross, even for this."

Harry squeezed his hand, sensing that Tom had more to say. Tom looked back at Harry, his eyes tracing over his face for a brief moment. "I want you, Harry. There's no denying that. Every fiber of my being screams that you are the one. There hasn't been a day since we first spoke in the mindscape that you haven't consumed my thoughts. You've become indispensable to me. Conversations with you have been the highlights of my days, and in your absence, I felt a profound emptiness and sense of loss. I want you by my side as my

partner, as my friend, as my other half," he confessed, exhaling heavily as he finished speaking - an unprecedented display of vulnerability.

Fear gripped his heart, searing through his insides, even reaching his fingertips. It crawled up his legs and settled heavily on his chest. Hadn't he accomplished what he desired? Yet, his body ached with unease, and the anticipated lightness accompanying his confession was overshadowed by a lingering dread. The fear, more tangible than any other emotion, confirmed that what he felt for Harry ran deep and enduring.

For a while, Tom had entertained the notion that Harry had somehow enchanted or bewitched him, but deep down, he knew it wasn't true. His feelings had blossomed rapidly and organically, independent of any external influence. When had Harry managed to breach his defenses and entwine himself within Tom's being? Was it when Harry expressed a genuine desire to understand him, to delve into the depths of his soul like no one else had bothered to do? Or was it when they shared their dreams for the future, and Tom saw how perfectly their paths aligned? Perhaps it was when Tom witnessed Harry's tears and felt an irresistible urge to provide solace and comfort. He couldn't pinpoint the exact moment; it had transpired subtly, without his conscious awareness. Was it always like this? Was it always akin to falling, a plunge into the unknown?

Harry exhaled heavily, a smile tugging at his lips. Observing Harry's happiness, Tom resolved never to witness anything other than that radiant joy on Harry's face. Harry was simply exquisite - bright, beautiful, and otherworldly. Tom would give anything to preserve that smile on Harry's lips for eternity. He acknowledged his own vulnerability, his unexpected softening, but in that moment, nothing else mattered except the man standing before him.

"Tom," Harry began, his voice slightly breathless. "I... I want that too. You're important to me as well." Their eyes locked, their faces mere centimeters apart, their hands still intertwined. A mischievous smile danced on Harry's lips. "You know, Tom, it almost sounded like you were proposing."

Suppressing the urge to succumb to a swoon, which was exactly how he felt, Tom responded in a playful tone, matching Harry's teasing. "If I were, how would you answer?" He couldn't help his curiosity. He recognised that Harry was one in a million, an irreplaceable presence in his life. Hadrian James Potter was everything.

Harry's teasing smile transformed into a bashful one. "Ask me some other time, and you might find out."

Their attention was momentarily diverted by the not so subtle glance of another couple. "Come, let's venture into the rose garden," Harry suggested, tugging Tom along.

Tom allowed himself to be guided by Harry, too stunned, too overwhelmed by the fact that Harry had accepted his feelings to resist. Despite yearning to wrap his arms around Harry's waist, whisking them away to a bedroom and spending the entire night exploring each other's bodies, Tom recognised that they hadn't reached that stage in their relationship yet. His mind, however, seemed to have a different agenda, conjuring vivid and explicit scenarios involving Harry.

Lost in impure thoughts, Tom and Harry arrived at the rose garden, as Harry referred to it. Surrounding them was a circular wall of rose bushes, with a gazebo situated at the center. Harry didn't guide him toward the gazebo; instead, he appeared to be searching for something on the ground, his eyes scanning the area around them. Finally, Harry found what he was looking for and, unfortunately, released Tom's hand to retrieve it.

Tom observed Harry as he bent down and picked up something small and delicate. Uncertain of Harry's intentions, Tom opted not to interrupt the comfortable silence that enveloped them. With an excited smile, Harry stood and returned to Tom, holding the object in his hands.

"I understand that you perceive me as a child, but I'm not. I haven't been for a long time. Unfortunately, I can't alter my physical age just yet," Harry's choice of words intrigued Tom. "However, I can at least demonstrate to you that magically, I am most certainly not a child."

Tom's gaze shifted to Harry's closed hands, pondering how Harry intended to prove himself. "What do you-" Tom began to inquire, but Harry opened his hands, revealing a small, lifeless gray bird nestled within.

Tom's curiosity deepened, and he felt the magic gathering in the air. He heard the soft whispers of words from Harry's lips, words he couldn't comprehend. A brilliant silver light emanated from Harry's palms, enveloping the bird's motionless form. Tom's eyes traveled from the luminous glow to meet Harry's gaze, and in that instant, his breath caught in his throat. Harry's eyes glowed with the green of a Killing Curse, an iridescent brilliance that

transformed him into an ethereal god. Power surged from him in waves, an intensity too immense for an ordinary body to contain and control. Harry was magnificent, perilously captivating, dangerous and a formidable force. However, such considerations faded in the face of his sheer splendor. Every fiber of Tom's being ignited, consumed by Harry's presence, and he never wanted that fire to be extinguished.

Tom's gaze flitted across Harry's face, illuminated by the radiance of his gathered power. It cast an ethereal glow, rendering Harry almost otherworldly. Harry's attention briefly shifted away from Tom, focusing on the bird that was obscured by the enveloping silver light. Harry's incantation persisted, growing louder and more intense, akin to the final surge before crossing a precipice. In a final flourish of Harry's magic, the light diminished, revealing the once-lifeless bird now pulsating with vitality.

Before Tom could register any other details, the sweet melody of bird song graced his ears. For what felt like the tenth time that night, his breath caught as he realised the previously deceased bird had been revived. "You're a necromancer," he whispered, his voice rendered helpless by the revelation.

Looking up, Tom met Harry's gaze. A half-amused smile danced on Harry's lips. "Hmm, I did mention that I could do more than you thought," Harry remarked, raising his hand and watching as the now living bird took flight into the starlit sky.

"Harry, you're-" Tom began, but their thoughts were abruptly cut short as both of them stiffened. An enclosing ward materialised around them.

Emerging from the shadows, figures closed in on them. Tom cursed himself inwardly, realising he had been too captivated by Harry to notice their approach.

They were surrounded.

Chapter End Notes

This was a bit different from my usual writing style, I think. I really liked how this chapter turned out though and hope you all liked it as well. I can't believe we're finally

at Yule, feels like forever ago that I started planning out this chapter.

Sorry to leave you with a cliffhanger I just couldn't resist. And the next chapter might be a bit delayed, I'm not sure if I'll be able to finish it by next Saturday. I've only just started it and this week is gonna be pretty packed. I'll try to get it up in time but no promises. If it's not up on next Saturday it will be up the week after. Sorry to leave you hanging. But I hope you like this chapter!

Monster and Men

Chapter Summary

The hours leading up to the ambush and the ambush itself

Chapter Notes

Sorry to keep you waiting and leaving you on a cliffhanger, hope you enjoy the continuation!

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

10 hours before the ambush

The Order of the Phoenix gathered around the long, oak table in the kitchen of the burrow, a sense of tension hanging in the air. The recent article written by Skeeter had sent shockwaves through the magical community, and now they were faced with the task of confronting their revered leader, Albus Dumbledore.

Molly sat at the head of the table, her eyes filled with unwavering loyalty to Dumbledore. She began the discussion, "I don't believe a word of this article. Albus has always been there for us and for Harry. He's done so much for the wizarding world; we cannot let these baseless accusations tarnish his reputation."

Tonks shifted uncomfortably in her chair, her skepticism evident. "Molly, I want to believe that too, but some of the evidence seems hard to ignore. We can't just dismiss it outright."

Shacklebolt, known for his level-headedness, chimed in, "I agree with Tonks. We must approach this with caution. The evidence seems compelling, and we owe it to Harry to ensure his safety and well-being."

At that moment, Hestia Jones, who hadn't contributed much to these meetings, spoke up. "I think we should hear from Albus himself. He deserves a chance to explain."

A hushed silence fell over the room as the door creaked open, and Dumbledore stepped in, his expression calm and composed. He took his seat at the table, and all eyes turned towards him, anticipation filling the room.

Shacklebolt leaned forward, his voice firm but respectful. "Albus, we need to address the accusations in this article. It claims that you forced Harry to stay at Hogwarts during the holidays and that you put compulsions on him. Is there any truth to these claims?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled with a mix of serenity and sorrow. "Ah, my dear Kingsley, I understand your concerns, but you must realise that these are nothing more than vile lies concocted by Voldemort to discredit me and divert attention from his true intentions."

Tonks, leaning back in her chair with crossed arms, interjected, "With all due respect, Headmaster, Rita Skeeter might be known for sensationalism, but we can't dismiss everything as pure fabrication."

Remus, who had been quietly observing, cleared his throat. "Albus, you've always been open with us. Can you explain the contents of the letter she mentioned? The one where you demanded Harry's presence during the Christmas holidays?"

Dumbledore sighed, feigning remorse. "It's true that I requested Harry's presence at Hogwarts during that time, but it was out of concern for his safety. Voldemort has returned, and I believed it was safer for him to remain at the school, where additional protections could be put in place."

Kingsley raised an eyebrow. "But threatening him with coming and collecting him even if you had to use force? Surely that's not how you conduct yourself."

Dumbledore's expression darkened slightly, and he replied, "I must admit, I let my emotions cloud my judgment. Fear can lead us to make choices we may later regret. But I assure you, it was not my intention to harm anyone."

Tonks leaned forward, her eyes narrowed. "What about the Gringotts document? It claims you placed compulsions on Harry and stole from his vault. What do you have to say about that?"

Dumbledore's demeanor shifted subtly, and he clasped his hands together. "The Gringotts document has been tampered with by dark magic. Voldemort's followers have infiltrated the bank and manipulated the evidence to cast doubt on my character. As for Harry, I have only placed protective enchantments on him, meant to shield him from Voldemort's influence."

Remus, who had been listening intently, finally decided to challenge Dumbledore's narrative. "Albus, I've known you for a long time, and I know when you're being evasive. Please, just tell us the truth."

Dumbledore's eyes flickered with irritation for a moment before returning to their usual calm. "Remus, my old friend, I understand your doubts, but believe me when I say that Voldemort's presence has an adverse effect on Harry. He is not in full control of his actions. We must trust in the bond between Harry and us, as it is the key to ensuring his safety and defeating Voldemort once and for all."

Molly, unable to stay quiet any longer, spoke up, "Albus is right! We must stand united against Voldemort's attempts to sow discord among us. Harry needs our support and protection."

Tonks and Kingsley exchanged uneasy glances, torn between their loyalty to the Order and their growing skepticism. Remus, however, couldn't shake the feeling that something was amiss. As Dumbledore continued to weave his web of manipulation, he resolved to keep a closer eye on the headmaster and to uncover the truth behind the recent events.

Albus breathed out in exhaustion before pushing forward. "Now, let's move on, we have to plan for tonight..."

2 hours before the ambush, minutes before the Yule ball

As they strolled down the dimly lit hallway, the atmosphere seemed to change, the air growing heavier with each step. Their light-hearted chatter and laughter faded into an uneasy silence as they approached the entrance to the main ballroom. Just as Harry began to sense something amiss, Luna appeared before them, her presence exuding an aura of seriousness that caught him off guard. The weight of her gaze made his heart skip a beat, and his shoulders tensed involuntarily upon hearing his full name, "Hadrian." It had been months since she had called him by that name, and he knew that it meant something important weighed on her mind.

Attempting to hide his concern, Harry relaxed his shoulders and put on a casual smile. "Luna, my darling, was it a wave?" he asked, trying to sound caring instead of unsettled.

Luna's distant, grey eyes locked onto his, seemingly peering into the depths of his soul. "Hmm, yes. I need a moment," she replied cryptically.

Understanding the unspoken message, Harry turned to Draco, his anxiety mounting with every passing second. "Draco, go ahead without me. I'll catch up in a few minutes," he said, although Draco looked puzzled and reluctant to leave them alone.

Once Draco had departed, Harry took Luna's hand and guided her towards the nearest sitting room. With a wave of his hand, he sealed the door to prevent intrusion or eavesdropping. The room felt suffocating, and shadows danced eerily on the walls, adding to the sense of danger surrounding Luna's revelations.

"Okay, Luna, spill it. Should I be worried?" he asked, trying to inject some levity into the tense atmosphere.

Luna squeezed his hand and smiled gently, but there was an underlying gravity to her expression. "The chickens are startled, and soon their heads will be cut off, but before that, they will peck and cackle," she said in her characteristic enigmatic manner.

Harry furrowed his brow, contemplating her words carefully. "When will they start pecking and cackling?" he inquired.

"Tonight," Luna replied solemnly, her voice barely above a whisper, as if afraid that speaking any louder might unleash some unseen force.

"How should I proceed?" Harry asked.

The room seemed to close in on them, the walls seemingly pressing in as if to keep their conversation hidden from prying eyes. Every moment stretched into eternity, and Harry's anxiety grew, uncertainty gnawing at his heart. But he knew there was nothing he could do to prevent what was to happen, messing with fate's plans rarely worked. He breathed out heavily, forcing himself to relax and focus instead on the ball.

They were surrounded...

The rose garden lay enveloped in an eerie silence, a contrast to the impending danger lurking within its shadows causing a high pitched ringing to resonate in the heads of those gathered. Harry and Tom found themselves surrounded by assailants, their movements deliberate and resolute as moved forward out of the shadows. Clad in dark cloaks reminiscent of the Death Eaters' attire, the attackers' faces obscured by darkness, they attempted to remain anonymous. However, Harry's keen senses detected the lingering traces of magic on them, betraying their identities. He may not have seen most of them for a century, but all magical scent was unforgettable to Harry.

Among the assailants, Harry recognised Fletcher, Doge, Podmore, Vance, and Jones, but the other four were strangers to him. Curiously, they seemed to be new recruits. Why would anyone join up with the disgraced old man's vigilante group? Yet, it wasn't much of a concern—the unmistakable scent of light magic lingered on them, indicating that they wouldn't resort to deadly dark spells.

Annoyed that Luna's prediction had proven true, Harry cursed his luck and the timing of the confrontation. He wasn't in the mood for this encounter. They ruined his evening, the least he

could do was return the favour.

Harry stood tall, his eyes ablaze with a dangerous glint that sent shivers down their spines. He cracked a sinister grin, reveling in the fear he instilled in his adversaries.

"Run along, little Order members," Harry taunted, his voice laced with arrogance. "This will end badly for you." With a flick of his wrist, Harry's wand soared gracefully into his waiting hand, an effortless motion that sent a ripple of tension through the ranks of the Order members. Harry was confident they wouldn't pose much of a threat, even without using more complex spells. He knew he could easily overpower them, his magical prowess far surpassing theirs.

A sinister grin curved his lips as he entertained the idea of unleashing his raw magic upon them. He knew the consequences - half of them would crumble under the overwhelming influx of death magic. After all, human bodies were ill-equipped to withstand the potency of his powers. He could defeat them with both hands tied behind his back and his mouth gagged. The thought of pulling out their souls, causing instant death, crossed his mind, but he chose to hold back.

To him, these people were nothing more than vermin, insignificant insects scurrying about in his shadow. They posed no real threat to him, and he reveled in that knowledge. But despite his disdain, he understood that there were steps he had to take, begrudgingly, to fulfill fate's plans. He couldn't let his contempt get in the way of what needed to be done.

Amidst the arrogance of his thoughts, echoes of Snape's voice taunted him, *'just like your father, Potter.'* He embraced the comparison, finding dark amusement in the twisted irony making his sinister grin widen.

The Order members exchanged uneasy glances but refused to back down. They knew Harry was powerful, but they couldn't allow him to remain in enemy territory unchecked.

Without warning, they unleashed a torrent of spells at him, each strike filled with desperation and fear. But Harry seemed to dance through the attacks, his movements elegant and precise, a deadly waltz of destruction.

As the enemies formed a tightening circle around them, the relentless barrage of spells continued. Five of them focused their attacks on Harry, while the remaining four attempted to subdue Tom. However, Tom showed little difficulty in fending off their assaults, keeping a cool and collected composure.

They maintained a defensive stance, countering each attack with precise skill. Yet, when Doge directed a particularly vicious spell at Tom, intending to render him incapacitated by boiling his blood, Harry's annoyance was quickly engulfed by an overwhelming surge of rage. The mere thought of anyone daring to hurt what belonged to him ignited an intense fire within.

"Wrong move, Doge. And it will cost you dearly," Harry muttered darkly, his voice carrying an ominous undertone.

Harry summoned a whirlwind of sinister shadows, shrouding the Order members in an eerie darkness that disoriented and blinded them. A maniacal cackle escaped his lips as he infused the shadows with a burst of malevolent green light, causing the darkness to contort into nightmarish forms that haunted their vision. The sound of screams echoed within the heavy fog of darkness, a sound that brought a twisted sense of satisfaction to Harry. He reveled in the fear he had instilled in his enemies, embracing the darkness that surged within him.

He felt the potent surge of Tom's magic reaching out, seeking to intertwine with his own. In response, he met it head-on with his own raw magic, their energies colliding in a dazzling display of overwhelming power. Amidst the ferocity of their magical clash, a subtle sound caught his attention - a gasp that seemed to escape from Tom's lips. He pulled his magic back, and it left him feeling incomplete.

The shadowy sea persisted for a while, Harry relishing in the terror it provoked. But soon, he grew tired of the muffled cries and the inability to discern their expressions. With a flick of his wand, he let the shadows dissolve into thin air, revealing the trembling and disoriented Order members. Yet, they wasted no time in resuming their onslaught.

The air crackled with the intensity of the duel, and the garden trembled with the sheer power being unleashed. Spells collided and exploded, sending shockwaves rippling through the earth but Harry wasn't paying it much attention.

With a wave of his hand, Harry summoned thorny vines that snaked their way towards the Order members, ensnaring them in a deadly embrace. He relished their cries of pain, their struggles futile against his magic.

In the midst of the sea of madness surrounding his mind, Luna's kind voice echoed through his head. *"Being a human can be difficult, Harry, I know, but that doesn't mean we can become monsters."* It made him twitch in annoyance. *Why should I apologise for being a monster, when it was the world that made me this way and never did it apologies.*

He shook his head to let loose of those thoughts. "Is that the best you can do?" Harry taunted, his voice dripping with menace. The Order members remained silent throughout the confrontation, casting only spells in response to his challenges. Harry yearned for more excitement.

"Come on now, are you going to let a mere 15-year-old outmatch you? How terribly embarrassing for you all. Two against nine, and not a single hit landed," Harry laughed, his head thrown back, seemingly unbothered by the spells hurled his way.

Still, there was no reply from the Order members. Frustration tinged Harry's voice. "How about I show you what real power feels like?" His eyes glowed with a mad, eerie green light, resembling the killing curse.

"Fulgari!" Jones roared, her attempt at boldness evident. In a stance as unyielding as stone, Harry stood, an unwavering pillar, as the lightning bolt hurtled forth. His gaze never faltered, locked on Jones as she lowered her wand, an acknowledgment of her spell's potential to wreak havoc upon the unguarded.

The bolt was a fleeting blur, a flash of wrath, yet Harry remained resolute, unafraid of the tempest bearing down upon him. With a swift, masterful motion, he raised his wand-free hand, extending it to meet the sickly yellow beam. Time seemed to hold its breath as the very touch of his palm cast a spell of stillness upon the electrified fury.

Confident, Harry stood before them, his wand hand lowered, while his free hand cradled the frozen spell, suspending it in a limbo between moments. The gaze of all present converged

upon him, drawn by the impossibility of his magic, while he donned a grin, a wicked symbol of triumph.

Silence draped like a shroud, the air quivering with anticipation, as Harry closed his fist around the spell encased in ice. A crystalline symphony resonated through the hallowed ground, notes of shimmering brilliance that seemed to pierce the veil between worlds. The frozen beam fractured, illuminating the darkness, cascading like stardust, to paint the earth in iridescent hues.

As the afterglow of this celestial spectacle engulfed them, Harry raised his eyes to meet the stupefied gazes of the gathered, his head tilting back, a visage of accomplishment. "Now," he proclaimed with unwavering confidence, his words wrapped in an aura of power, "that's real power," knowing full well the magnitude of his feat.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he continued to challenge them with an arched eyebrow. "Had enough? Or shall we continue this meaningless fight?"

But even his display of power wasn't enough to deter them entirely, as one of the members defiantly raised his wand and cast Glacius. Harry almost laughed at the audacity.

As the duel intensified, Tom watched in awe and concern, unable to tear his gaze away from Harry after that impressive display of power. Harry's confidence and sassy demeanor were both captivating and reassuring, and Tom couldn't help but feel a surge of pride mixed with worry for the man. That most have been extraordinarily difficult and strainius to do, how much longer would Harry last?

Every now and then, Harry would glance back at Tom, ensuring he was alright amid the chaos. Their eyes would meet, and Harry would give Tom a reassuring nod, silently conveying that he had everything under control. Though anxious, Tom trusted Harry's abilities now more than ever.

The Order members mustered their strength, pouring every ounce of magic they had into their attacks. But Harry seemed to absorb their spells effortlessly, his power a bottomless abyss.

In response, Harry's eyes blazed with an otherworldly light, and he raised his hands. A shield of white light enveloped them, causing the air to crackle and sizzle with energy.

As the barrage of spells intensified, Harry realised he had to hold the shield longer to have a moment alone with Tom. His concentration deepened, and he focused on maintaining the barrier despite the annoying, constant banging.

Inside the shield, he turned to Tom with a reassuring smile. "Trust in me, Tom?"

Tom nodded hesitantly. "I trust you. Be careful and don't do something reckless."

Harry's smile widened. "Don't worry, everything will be fine, I promise."

He whispered an incantation under his breath, and the shield glowed with newfound strength, blocking even more powerful spells.

"Fas est ab hoste doceri," Harry muttered, his voice barely audible over the cacophony of spells.

Time seemed to stretch as Harry held the shield longer than anyone expected. The Order members grew frustrated, their attacks becoming more frenzied and desperate.

Finally, Harry saw his opportunity. With a dramatic display of exertion, he allowed the shield to flicker, pretending to be on the verge of exhaustion.

The Order members saw their chance and redoubled their efforts, believing they had finally weakened Harry enough to capture him.

Tom turned his focus away from Harry and focused on the three sending spells his way, spells that were meant to hurt. As he glanced back at Harry he saw as Harry let himself be hit by a stunner, and he crumpled to the ground.

"No!" Tom's cry reverberated through the rose garden, his heart pounding in his chest as he watched Harry crumple to the ground, unconscious. Fear and desperation gripped him, and his hands reached out helplessly towards Harry's fallen form. Two men were quick to grab Harry.

"Let him go!" Tom shouted, his voice breaking with emotion. He'd never felt so paralysed, as if his very soul had fallen alongside Harry. The sight of the Order members roughly dragging Harry backward sent a chilling wave of helplessness through him.

Fueled by fear and desperation, Tom forced his legs to move, attempting to reach Harry's side, to tear him away from his captors. But his progress was futile, as a relentless rain of spells cascaded down upon him. He fought back, stunning two attackers, but the others remained steadfast.

Tom shifted his wand towards the two holding onto Harry. But he hesitated to cast any spells that could potentially harm Harry. The two who held Harry saw an opportunity, they yanked him up, using his unconscious form as a shield against Tom's attacks. Tom wavered, his wand lowering for an instant, but it was enough for them to vanish, apparating away with Harry in tow.

A guttural cry escaped Tom's lips as the air seemed to abandon him. The world around him blurred, consumed by a haze of smoke and despair. His heart constricted and shattered in his chest, the echoes of Harry's name resonated like a broken melody.

Unconscious of his actions, Tom's magic surged from within him, a torrent of burning light that erupted into a shockwave, sending the remaining attackers sprawling.

As the smoke cleared, Tom's eyes fell on the chaos he had unleashed. Three of the attackers lay unconscious, but the others had vanished with Harry, leaving a void in Tom's heart and mind.

His heart pounded loudly in his chest, its rhythm matching the frantic pace of his thoughts. For the first time in his life, fear gripped him with a strength he had never known. The image

of Harry's unconscious form being carried away replayed in his mind like a haunting nightmare, leaving him feeling powerless and unable to act.

He felt like he was caught in the midst of a turbulent storm. The mix of fear, anxiety, anger, and sorrow was an unrelenting tempest, pushing him to his emotional limits. Each heartbeat carried the weight of worry, and his mind struggled to find a solution to this harrowing situation.

His breaths came in short gasps, and his hands trembled uncontrollably, betraying the depth of his emotions. A knot tightened in his stomach, making it hard to breathe or think clearly. It was as if his body was reacting to the turmoil within, trying to release the pent-up tension but finding it impossible to do so.

Time seemed to slow down, each passing moment feeling like an eternity.

Tom sank to his knees, his hands clenched into fists as he fought back tears of frustration and dread. The rose garden, once a place of beauty, had transformed into a battlefield of destruction and despair.

'Fas est ab hoste doceri,' Harry had said. It roughly translates to 'one should learn even from one's enemies,' so Harry must have a plan, Tom thought.

But through the haze of pain, a flicker of determination ignited within Tom. He would find Harry, no matter the cost. He would go to the ends of the earth, face any danger, and confront any enemy to bring Harry back.

With plenty of deep breaths, he rose from his knees, his eyes hardened with resolve. Harry had asked him to trust, and he would honor that trust by continuing being a force to be reckoned with, just as Harry was.

As the moonlight bathed the darkened estate, Lord Voldemort stood before his loyal followers, a group he had not summoned in weeks. His resurrection had brought him back to power, but the matter at hand required more than just his might. He needed eyes and bodies, for he was powerful, but he was not a god.

Reluctantly, he admitted to himself that Dumbledore was no fool, and retrieving Harry from the clutches of the Order would prove to be a formidable challenge. The thought gnawed at him, even as he looked upon the Death Eaters who knelt before him. Among them were familiar faces – Barty, Lucius, Avery, Thaddeus, Gibbon and Rockwood. Many others were newly joined followers, informed of his return through their family members and privately assessed by Voldemort himself. In total, thirty or so individuals pledged their allegiance to the Dark Lord.

In the depths of his soul, however, he felt no satisfaction in witnessing these purebloods bending to his will. Instead, he was consumed by a clawing fear, much like the moment when Harry had been taken. Only two hours had passed since then, but it felt like an eternity.

Upon regaining his composure after Harry's abduction, he had rushed into the grand ballroom, causing quite the scene. Swiftly locating Madame Bones, he had briefed her on the situation. She wasted no time and rallied all the attending off-duty aurors, who began scanning the crime scene for magical signatures left behind by the assailants – a glaring oversight on their part. Voldemort had provided his memory of the incident, hoping it would aid the search.

As he gathered his followers now, he couldn't shake the feeling of restlessness and uselessness. Was this what caring for someone felt like? It made him question his strength. But he couldn't afford to wallow in self-doubt; he needed Harry back.

Addressing his loyal followers, he started, "My trusted followers, I am pleased at your swift response to my call." The words were a lie, he felt no pleasure currently. "There is something I have withheld from all of you, something that will change the course of the pending war..."

As he revealed Harry's secret alliance, he noticed disbelieving looks creeping across their faces. Perhaps he was divulging too much, but he cared not for secrecy at this moment. Finding Harry quickly was paramount.

"Harry is indispensable to our cause, and now, in the Order's clutches, I fear for what might befall him," he admitted. "They will not hesitate to use potions and enchantments if they believe him 'too far gone.' We must find him before his will is corrupted."

Lucius, standing tall among the gathered Death Eaters, received his orders. "Lucius, you will lead the team searching through the residences of the known Order members. Break into the archives at the Ministry if necessary," Voldemort commanded.

"This plan was not born of impulse. It was meticulously orchestrated, with faces concealed, but not their magic. I recognised some of the signatures – Jones, Fletcher, Doge, Podmore. There were five others, strangers to me. I need you to find them, extract the information from their very minds. We must discover Harry's location, and swiftly."

His gaze pierced through the assembled Death Eaters, singling out Thaddeus Nott with a commanding tone. "Thaddeus, you are in charge of this hunt. Use all means necessary. Our cause hinges on finding Harry."

A murmur spread through the followers as they noticed the unusual display of raw emotion in their dark lord. His fists were tightly clenched, and his shoulders tensed with an intensity that was foreign to them. The jaw, once so composed, now betrayed a rare vulnerability, and his eyes shimmered with something they had never witnessed before.

Harry, the name had escaped Voldemort's lips without thought, and the room seemed to tremble with its significance. His connection to the boy who lived was unmistakable. The dark lord's obsession with him was palpable.

Despite the show of authority, an icy sensation crept up Voldemort's legs and settled in his heart. He dismissed his followers, who quickly dispersed to carry out their assigned tasks. Alone now, he did something he couldn't recall doing since his childhood – he prayed. His dark heart reached out to every deity he knew, beseeching them to keep Harry safe and alive until he could be found.

The night wore on, and the weight of uncertainty bore heavily on Voldemort's shoulders. In his solitude, he wrestled with emotions he had long suppressed – fear, worry, and despair. Harry was more than just a pawn in his grand plan; he had become the fundamental part of Voldemort's soul, and losing him was not an option.

As the stars shimmered in the night sky, Lord Voldemort, the Dark Lord, longed for the presence of a boy he had once sought to destroy.

An hour after the ambush

The plan had always been to let the stunner hit him, but Harry hadn't anticipated it taking so long for the Order to capture him. Their dueling skills needed serious improvement, he thought dryly.

Throughout the ordeal, Harry resisted the urge to break free from the spell that held him still. He needed to be captured, and now that he was, he could only hope that Tom wasn't doing anything reckless to rescue him.

For what seemed like an eternity, Harry played the part of the unconscious victim, enduring several disorienting apparitions before arriving at his destination. Even without his sight, he recognised the familiar wards and layout of the old place - Moody's house, the very place where he had killed the ex-auror.

Rough hands gripped his arms, guiding his floating body through the dimly lit hallway, and he surmised that they were heading toward a bedroom. The sound of a lock clicking and a door opening confirmed his suspicions before he was unceremoniously dumped onto a bed and his wrist tightly bound to the headboard.

Despite his predicament, Harry remained motionless, biding his time until the right moment to 'awaken.' He needed to gather more information before revealing himself.

The anticipation grew as he heard soft footsteps approaching the room. His magic almost lashed out as he sensed the familiar magic - sickly and overripe - of the person he most wanted dead: Dumbledore.

As Dumbledore's voice filled the room, Harry forced himself to keep his breathing steady, and his mind sharp.

Harry ignored every instinct that screamed danger, that told him to flee - he was the true monster here.

Chapter End Notes

I might have tried to be a bit poetic, especially during the lightning bolt scene, hopefully it turned out alright. I am rather happy with this chapter, it turned out differently than planned but I did enjoy writing it.

More importantly, I'm gonna have to change my updating schedule to every other Saturday, it's just been getting really stressful lately for me. I've been working more hours and will continue working more hours now than I have ever done. After school I was forced to do military basic training (I'm not sure what it's actually called in English) as it became mandatory for those who could do it and weren't like totally against the whole military thing. After I finished that I was physically and psychologically exhausted, I spent a month in bed doing absolutely nothing. That was actually the time I started reading fanfics. But anyway, I haven't worked full hours since then mostly because I didn't have to. So now when my boss asked me if I wanted to work more I said yes and I hadn't really realised how exhausting it would be. Don't get me wrong, I'm fortunate to actually like my job and the people I work with, even if in my profession you get seriously underpaid for the amount of work. I'm blabbering on but that's the reason why I'm changing the schedule, I just don't want to lose my motivation to write this story and I feel like I will if I force myself to write so often.

So updates every other Saturday. Hope you all understand!

Horribly Horrendous Hosts

Chapter Summary

The monotony of captivity and the potential descent back into insanity it could trigger

Chapter Notes

Warnings: gore and torture (during Tom's POV)

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

"Ah, I see you've returned victorious. How did it go? Did the poor boy put up a fight or come willingly?" Dumbledore's voice grated on Harry's nerves, igniting a fiery desire to silence him forever.

"Victorious?! The **poor boy** left us all injured. Our success was due to his exhaustion! That child is a threat," one of the men retorted.

"Albus, you may think he's crucial, but persuading him seems unlikely. He laughed at us and used borderline dark curses. Sending him back or eliminating him might be best," the second man suggested, his tone wobbly but certain. Harry disliked the second man more for discussing his demise so casually.

Harry detected the rustle of fabric as Dumbledore advanced, though he remained feigning unconsciousness.

"Let the boy wake naturally. We must hold a briefing before he awakens," Dumbledore instructed. The trio departed, leaving Harry to his thoughts. He hesitated to make any sudden movements, opting to cautiously scan the room with his magic for monitoring spells or active wards. His search revealed none, allowing him to slowly peel open his bleary eyes.

The surroundings came into focus - a guest room he had briefly glimpsed during his previous visit to the house. Devoid of windows, the room had just one door connecting it to the outside corridor. Its decor remained minimal, featuring a lone chair and the bed to which he was bound to with magic suppressant cuffs.

He leaned against the headboard, wondering about his purpose here and Luna's cryptic guidance. Time dragged on, and he sighed in frustration, missing Tom and hoping he wouldn't jeopardise his new identity just for him.

As the minutes passed, Harry pondered if Dumbledore expected Voldemort to rescue his horcrux. But he was uncertain of Dumbledore's knowledge, when did he become aware that Harry was a horcrux? Harry couldn't recall ever knowing the answer.

As the moments dragged on, Harry thought of someone who might prove useful – someone who hadn't yet earned full forgiveness. Death – Kali – might offer valuable insights. He grasped the thread he had neglected and reached out to contact Death.

"Master?" Kali's voice reverberated in his mind, tinged with uncertainty.

"It's me," Harry responded.

"Master, is everything alright?" Concern now laced Kali's voice.

"Yes, everything's fine. I just have a few questions." Harry dismissed the matter with a casual wave, despite knowing Kali couldn't perceive his gestures.

"Feel free to ask, master. I'll do my best to provide answers."

Harry's gaze shifted from the cuffs cutting off his magic to his surroundings. "Is this necessary? Must I remain here? Can't I eliminate them and bring Dumbledore to Tom?"

Death emitted a contemplative hum. "You could, but that would compromise your plan, and dissent might swiftly follow. Dumbledore's demise at Voldemort's hands would likely inspire a rebellion."

"Do you believe people would turn him into a martyr, even after all that's been unveiled?" Harry shut his eyes, attempting to envision that scenario.

"Most people are like rats, Harry. Once one emerges from the sewer, others are bound to follow," Death replied thoughtfully. "Yet, I lack Luna's foresight. I can only convey what needs to transpire, not the precise methods. If you're weary of this game, if vengeance no longer entices you, then consider your choices. If you deem it's time, I trust your judgment regarding the timing."

Coincidentally, Dumbledore chose that moment to return. He entered the room with confidence, emanating a calming magical aura that sickened Harry.

"Still asleep, Harry?" Dumbledore inquired, his gaze upon the boy's sealed eyelids, which promptly fluttered open.

"No," Harry responded in a calm tone.

They exchanged glances, their scrutiny piercing. Harry, still clad in his dress robes, hair slicked back, appeared markedly different from the child Albus had known. On the other hand, Dumbledore donned his usual eccentricity, sporting layers of bright purple robes that vaguely evoked thoughts of a muggle princess. Utterly absurd.

However, Dumbledore's eyes bore a distinct alternation – devoid of their customary sparkle, brimming instead with an unfamiliar disdain. A flicker of amusement danced across Harry's lips, though he maintained a neutral façade, for the moment.

Dumbledore peered down at Harry, who was bound to the bed, his vulnerability apparent. A wave of pity emanated from the older wizard. Harry felt the imbalance of power keenly, or at least he wanted Dumbledore to believe so.

Dumbledore flicked his wand over Harry, causing him to stiffen in surprise. Evidently eager to enact his intentions, Dumbledore's purpose became clear moments later as Harry felt the surge of an obedience enchantment. It was a pathetic attempt, one that Harry easily deflected.

"How intriguing," Dumbledore mused after realising the enchantment hadn't taken hold. Harry knew exactly what conclusion the old wizard was drawing – he must have assumed Harry was ensnared by another's spells, rendering him immune to Dumbledore's manipulation. "Well, we'll address that later," Dumbledore muttered to himself.

A brief pause followed, during which Dumbledore gathered his thoughts before adopting a different tactic – one that grated on Harry's nerves. "Harry, my dear boy, what a transformation this past year has brought. Would you not enlighten me? What transpired over the summer?" Dumbledore's tone was gentle, feigning concern, but Harry despised that tone.

"Transformation?" Harry queried, tilting his head. "This is who I've always been beneath your compulsions. As for the summer, the reason is rather evident, isn't it? I broke free from your control."

Albus sighed heavily, his mask of care crumbling away as quickly as it appeared. "I did what was necessary, Harry. What had to be done, for the greater good."

"Not for me."

"No, not for you."

The acknowledgment didn't stir forgiveness within Harry; it only fueled his anger. He clenched his eyes shut, attempting to contain the overflowing magic that threatened to surge forth, focusing on managing this vexation.

"One life weighed against thousands," Dumbledore murmured, conjuring a chair and settling beside the bed. "I made my decision."

"It wasn't your decision to make."

"And how would you have chosen, Harry? Would you have acted more wisely on your own?"

"I would've made a fucking better choice than you."

"I want you to comprehend—"

"Save your lectures, old man. I'll never grasp how you could do that to an innocent child."

Harry turned away, disinterested in continuing this conversation. "Next time, send someone else in. Repeating this same conversation with you over and over again is beyond tedious."

To Harry's astonishment, a few minutes after Dumbledore's departure, a young man entered the room bearing a tray of food. He approached Harry in silence, though his trembling hands betrayed his nervousness. Harry didn't recognise him, but he appeared rather young, likely no older than twenty. Unremarkable was the word that came to Harry's mind, nothing about him stood out. Despite still wearing the dark robes from the ambush, his face was no longer concealed. Did he believe that Harry wouldn't be able to reveal his identity to the world?

"Hey kid, do you have any idea what you're getting into with these people?" Harry inquired, observing the man's clenched jaw and lack of response. Ah, perhaps he disliked being called a kid when Harry was supposed to be the younger one.

"You were careless, you know? Leaving a witness, such a foolish move," the man placed the tray beside Harry on the bed, yet Harry made no effort to reach for it. "Do you know who that was? The other man who accompanied me?" Harry asked with curiosity.

The man shot Harry a scrutinising look. "No," his voice sounded rough and hoarse, leaving Harry to wonder what spell had caused that effect.

"Well, well, you do talk," Harry commented with a grin. "Since you're so polite, let me enlighten you. That man was Marvolo Gaunt, the new Lord of House Slytherin and House Gaunt. He really dislikes interruptions, and he certainly won't be pleased when he tracks down your lot. Just a friendly warning."

The man's complexion paled rapidly. In a hurried exit, the man slammed the door shut. Not one to miss an opportunity, Harry discreetly cast a minor listening spell on the departing figure. While he doubted he would glean anything significant from this lower-ranked individual, attaching such a spell to someone more important, like Dumbledore, would surely be noticed.

He contemplated the idea of sleep to connect with Tom in their shared dreamscape, but ultimately dismissed the idea. He doubted Tom would be asleep and vulnerable enough to be dragged into Harry's mind. Plus, allowing himself to sleep while in the enemy's clutches felt far too risky.

But one puzzlement persisted: why did Luna and Death believe this experience was necessary for him?

Tom's anxiety mounted with each passing moment. Twelve hours had elapsed, and still, there was no sign of Harry. His precious, troublesome Harry could be enduring torture or undergoing personality altering spells right now. Why had he allowed himself to be captured? What was he scheming?

Tom's sanity was slipping away. He had encountered madness before, the furious kind, but never had he experienced this worrying brand. This helplessness, this fear for someone else. It was a sensation he couldn't quite fathom, a vulnerability foreign to him. Lord Voldemort, brought to the brink of helplessness – a scenario he had never imagined.

Desperation urged him to find Harry, lest he set the world ablaze. But such a reckless move wouldn't earn Harry's approval. Tom needed a diversion, and he needed it swiftly.

"Kol!" His voice boomed, summoning the elf to his side within seconds. "Bring me all the muggles currently residing in the basement."

Kol vanished and reappeared promptly, leading four muggles. While they had initially been earmarked for experiments, that was now of little consequence. Tom needed an outlet for the encroaching insanity, a way to stave off the worst of its engulfing grip.

He allowed his instincts to assume control, relinquishing worry and fear momentarily. His body acted without conscious consideration, culminating in his form becoming drenched in blood, transforming the once-white room into a crimson canvas.

"Please, please stop. Don't hurt us!" The muggle man's plea reached Voldemort's ears as he surveyed the cowering group huddled against the wall, futilely trying to distance themselves from him.

Diverting his gaze from the quivering muggles, Voldemort's attention shifted to the dissected corpse sprawled across the table. Limbs had been torn asunder from the torso, the legs barely holding on by thin strands of tissue while the arms were thrown halfway across the room. Whether he had accomplished this gruesome dismemberment with his hands or through magic eluded his memory. In the end, it held little significance.

He examined the decapitated head, unable to discern its gender due to the grotesque injuries. Deep, jagged wounds marred what might have once been a face, and clumps of blood-soaked blonde hair cascaded over the table.

Moving his crimson gaze to the remaining muggles, he raised a hand to summon the nearest one to continue covering every surface in red. Yet, as the woman hurtled towards him, her screams pierced the air in a cacophony so deafening that Voldemort almost wished to shield his ears. An impulse to silence her was swiftly carried out by ripping out her tongue, leaving behind only gurgling sounds as she succumbed to her own blood, her demise arriving all too easily.

As her soul departed her lifeless form, muffled cries of her companions resonated, witnessing her grim fate. Their realisation that their own demise was imminent manifested in their hoarse, agonised screams. Unmoved by their plight, Voldemort welcomed their terror, basking in the thrilling symphony of their torment.

Moments of lucidity intertwined with his descent into a familiar state, one reminiscent of his existence before reclaiming his corporeal form. Two lives had been extinguished, leaving two more to decide their own fates.

He observed the remaining muggles seeking solace within each other's embrace, a semblance of familial bond amid the terror that gripped them.

"Do you want mercy?" He asked. Their gaze never strayed from his, and his question kindled an array of emotions, rekindling a glimmer of hope within their eyes.

"Please, show mercy," the woman implored in a hushed whisper, a plea scarcely audible. It irked him; he preferred clarity.

"We'll do anything! Spare us, we swear we won't tell a soul of what happened!" The man's supplication reverberated, bearing an intensity that grated on Voldemort's senses.

"Lord Voldemort can exercise mercy. Harry, I believe, prefers compassion. He abhors gratuitous cruelty. Death will be swift," he deliberated, scrutinising the muggles. "Yet not painless."

Hope withered into paralysis, their eyes reflecting the terror that engulfed them.

"Tell me, who should meet their end first? I shall be granting you mercy by allowing you to determine who bears witness to the other's demise."

"Kill me first, I can't watch him die!" the woman shrieked, her words a desperate plea, while the man remained motionless, imprisoned by his own fear.

Lord Voldemort was a man of his word (when he wanted to be) and swiftly, he ended their lives, beginning with the woman. Approaching them, he seized her throat and thrust his fist into her chest, hunting for her heart. The man's screams and struggles to stand garnered no

attention as Voldemort ensnared him in chains against the wall using a spell. There it was – the pulsating organ. His fingers closed around the beating heart while he watched the life fade from the woman's eyes, transforming them into vacant pools devoid of vitality. Releasing her throat, she crumpled to the floor like a marionette with severed strings.

Without hesitation, he discarded the warm heart and turned his focus to the chained muggle, the lone survivor. He intended to take his time with this one.

...

"Would Harry be disappointed to witness this side of me?" He mused aloud, commencing his complete work.

"Probably not," a hissing reply reached his ears.

Tom turned so abruptly that he risked straining his neck, seeking the source of the voice. Nyx and Selene, Harry's serpents, came into view.

"Why are you here? Have you seen Harry?" He hissed at them with urgency.

"No, not for about a day. Master instructed us to find you after the gathering ended and he was nowhere to be found," the black one responded.

"He told us that we should tell you that he is a clever and resilient human and that no one can hurt him," the other one added.

Though Tom couldn't suppress all his rising anxiety, it was comforting to learn that Harry had taken more precautions than he'd assumed. *"Did he mention how long he'd be absent?"*

They shook their heads. *"No, but he urged us not to disturb him,"* they answered.

Damn it, Harry, what are you up to?

"Can you confirm his safety at the moment?" Tom queried, somewhat bewildered by the notion of seeking insight from snakes, yet hoping their bond was strong enough to determine Harry's well-being.

"He's safe, but he seems restless," the white one, Selene, offered.

"How can you tell?"

They regarded him with confusion. *"Can't you feel it? Master mentioned you share a similar bond."* Nyx hissed.

Realisation washed over him. He had been foolish indeed.

Throughout the night, Harry endured a barrage of questions, many trivial and nonsensical. Random visits from Dumbledore's entourage led to shouting matches, some he met with indifference or evasive responses, prompting them to leave.

Occasionally, Dumbledore himself appeared, delving into predictable subjects. However, one topic stood out, eliciting a touch of amusement for Harry.

"Why are you aligning yourself with Marvolo Gaunt?" Dumbledore inquired.

"Perhaps I've taken a liking to him," Harry retorted with an innocent smile. *"Can't you understand, Albus? Once, you too developed an attachment to someone similar, didn't you?"*

Dumbledore hesitated before answering. "I did, but I recognised my duty. I prioritised the greater good over personal desires." Came Albus' predictable response.

Harry almost felt pity for the old man, almost. "Ah, my convictions must run deeper, for I believe I can sway Marvolo to my beliefs. Your love for Gellert couldn't overcome your devotion to your perceived greater good. Did you even try, or did you discard him the moment his views clashed with your principles?" Harry asked.

When he didn't receive an answer he continued on. "Well, such considerations hold little significance now; the specter of death looms over both of you."

...

Another unexpected visitor made their way to Harry, although their encounter didn't unfold as they intended.

"Harry, what you're doing is wrong... it's evil."

"Evil?" Harry's brows drew together slowly. "Me, evil? Evil. I'm evil...? No, that doesn't sound right. Maybe I once dabbled in malevolence just formula one sake, but I've never truly been a malevolent person, you know?"

His eyes widened, vacant, as if peering into Remus' soul. "You understand the way the world operates, especially for me. It and all of you just kept pushing and pushing, expecting me to remain sane. How can I be expected to cling to goodness in a world steeped in cruelty and suffering? No, no. You may see me as evil, the world may see me as such, but I am not intrinsically wicked. If I were to end you, to end everyone, that wouldn't solely be my burden to bear. You think I'm evil merely for evil's sake? Is that your view? Perhaps if I commit something sinister, it wouldn't be justified or righteous. No, it would be pure evil." Harry fell silent for a moment. "Evil for the sake of being evil, hmm. Yes, perhaps I could give that a try."

"Harry-"

"Do you wish to see him?" Harry quickly steered the conversation in another direction.

Remus frowned. "See who?"

"Sirius, of course."

Remus' eyes widened in surprise. "You know where he is?"

Harry regarded him coolly. "Of course I do. I was the one who rescued him, after all."

Remus' mouth hung open, his breath stuttered. "Where is he, Harry?"

A twisted smile formed on Harry's lips. "Ah ah, that's a secret," he chided playfully, wagging his finger back and forth. "Would you like to see him? Well, then I'd have to take you there; attempting it alone would be suicidal."

Remus contemplated, lowering his gaze. "What do you want in return?"

Harry hummed thoughtfully. "Not much, really. Just for you to stay there and maintain neutrality in the impending conflict."

"Harry, I-"

"If not for yourself, at least do it for Sirius. He loves you, and I know you care for him deeply. You won't do this for me, but perhaps for him?"

"Harry-"

"So, do we have a deal?"

Remus scrutinised Harry closely before exhaling deeply. "Yes, I agree."

Harry's smile grew. "Oh? That was quicker than I expected. Perhaps you're already doubting the old man."

...

Even Molly visited him. She left in tears.

"Don't fret, Harry. You haven't crossed the point of no return; there's still hope to mend this."

"Fix this? I'm not too far gone? How far is far enough for you? Murder? Torture? Is that the threshold? Have I descended enough to be beyond redemption? Am I doomed, do you think?" Harry's head tilted, his eyes blank and piercing. "But does it even matter how far I've fallen? You'll let me off easy, won't you? Because you still need me? A hero is granted a certain leniency, right? They can kill, torture, assault, and it's all excused, isn't it? Ultimately, it doesn't matter, because all of you still require me. I am indispensable, I am potent, no one matches my power. You won't leave me in peace, will you? Because you believe my power belongs to you, to the world, to exploit and manipulate. Well, here's the grim reality: no one possesses the might to rival mine, let alone control it."

...

One of the newcomers eventually mustered the courage to confront him.

"Whose side are you on? What do you believe in?!" the man's voice cracked in a ragged yell.

For the past ten minutes, Harry had thoroughly bewildered the man, bombarding him with Muggle phrases like "biting off more than you can chew" and "don't count your chickens

before they hatch," each time the man probed him about his beliefs.

This time, Harry responded with unvarnished truth. "My own. And myself."

...

Eventually, they grew frustrated or tired, leaving Harry to his solitude for a couple of hours. Their brainwashing techniques clearly needed refinement. True brainwashing involved breaking someone down, dismantling their personality until they were vulnerable and receptive.

While Harry pondered the most effective methods for brainwashing, he eavesdropped on an order meeting, their discussion revolving around him, dissecting every word he had uttered. Most of it was mundane, until Dumbledore interjected, he was now certain that Harry was under the influence of someone else's enchantments or potions, given his inability to place his own enchantment. They deliberated on a solution, and Shacklebolt proposed a cleansing ritual. Agreement rippled through the group, but a hurdle remained: they needed to gather ingredients for the necessary potion. Wizards' rituals, Harry mused, were considerably more convoluted compared to the straightforwardness of goblin rituals.

Harry tightly gripped a knife in his hand, poised a mere second away from using it on the very same man – the new recruit – who had provided him with the weapon. Holding the blade in a downward-facing grip, he pressed it against his forearm. Consumed by boredom and exasperated by the feeble attempts at manipulation, he was on the brink of slashing the blade across the man's throat. He would claim self-defense if the situation demanded, a plausible justification for his actions. Just as he was about to act, the door swung open and Dumbledore entered.

Dumbledore's eyes swept over the scene, quickly fixing upon Harry's clenched fist, which concealed the blade. He immediately recognised the readiness for an attack – the loose posture and the way Harry had positioned himself towards his intended target.

Swiftly pointing his wand at Harry, Dumbledore placed his other hand on the man's shoulder, gently guiding him backward. "Keep your distance from Harry," Dumbledore cautioned the naive recruit, then turned to face Harry himself. "Appearances can be deceiving; he may seem like a delicate flower, but he is covered in thorns."

A smile began to spread slowly across Harry's lips, morphing into a wide, toothy grin that verged on the manic. The irony of Dumbledore seeing him for who he truly was struck him as profoundly amusing. Unable to contain it any longer, a manic laugh bubbled up from his throat. This was the one genuinely accurate statement Dumbledore had made all night.

Chapter End Notes

So we got to see Tom's darker side, even if he's kind and caring to Harry that doesn't mean he is a good person, he's always been a bit psychotic. I've never really written gore before, I think it was pretty mild right? Let me know what you think, I absolutely love reading all your comments!! Love you guys!♥♥♥

And spoiler, next chapter there will be fluff and a bit of process in Tom and Harry's relationship!

The Cruelty of Caring

Chapter Summary

Harry arrives at a few conclusions, escapes, is worshiped, is reprimanded, and finally, is adored.

Chapter Notes

Really like how the second half of this turned out, I'm always struggling with more emotional scenes but I think this one turned out pretty good. Tom is a bit fucked up but we all knew that already. Enjoy!

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

Amidst the hushed ambiance, Dumbledore's penetrating voice cut through the air, laden with anticipation. 'Is everything in place?' he inquired.

A voice, carrying a tone confidence, swiftly responded, 'Yes, all is prepared.' Without delay, a symphony of incantations erupted as seven figures, forming a circle around him, channeled their collective magical energies towards him.

Harry lay upon the bed, time slipping through his grasp as he delved into hours of meditation, questioning the very essence of this elaborate charade he found himself entangled in. The pursuit of vengeance, which once fueled him, had dulled into monotony. His time here had shown him that he was an adult in a realm of children, a reality that left him weary. The people around him held little significance, mere pawns in his grander scheme of existence. To Harry, they were like rodents beneath the notice of a snake, irrelevant in their comings and goings.

As his thoughts wandered, encompassing figures like Dumbledore, the weight of his so-called "responsibilities" as the master of death, the sting of Kali's betrayal, Luna's haunting words, and the enigma that was Tom, a sense of futility permeated it all. The cloak of

immortality draped over him, a god among men, rendering their struggles and triumphs inconsequential.

He is an entity apart.

Yet, what stood as a paradox was his possession of something denied to the other gods—an unwelcome gift, emotions. A sigh slipped past his lips, a small lament for the choice to reacquaint himself with these turbulent feelings. Life had been simpler, less burdensome, when emotions held no sway. Amidst this self-examination, a few conclusions surfaced.

First on his agenda was the permanent removal of Dumbledore and his cohorts, as soon as a chance arose.

Dumbledore's worldview remains starkly binary—black or white, with no gray areas. He's simple which makes him dangerous.

Having already exacted his share of revenge, Dumbledore's reputation lay in ruins, and his once mighty status had plummeted to unprecedented depths. With Harry's kidnapping, it was probable that Dumbledore had become a fugitive, wanted by the aurors. This wasn't to say Harry's disdain for the man had diminished, but the energy required to deal with him further seems unjustifiably excessive. Exhaustion had taken hold of Harry in its entirety.

Secondly, despite Harry's fervent wishes, emotions coursed through him, finding their zenith in Tom's presence. Undeniably, Harry craved him – every piece, every fragment. His desire encompassed the entirety of Tom, and he was even willing to force the horcruxes back into him if necessary, despite the hypocrisy it might entail. (*What has come of his soul these days?*) A fragment of his mind protested this notion, yet he dismissed it.

Thirdly, Harry held indifference towards the fate of the wizarding world as a whole, but his concern extended to a select few individuals within it: Luna, Draco, Theo, Pansy, and Blaise. Perhaps even Sirius. He resolved to assist Tom in achieving his objectives, with the caveat that the outcomes would genuinely improve lives. Injustice had never sat well with Harry, and concepts like discrimination, blood purity, and prejudice remained beyond his comprehension. While he might not be particularly invested, he acknowledged that if he could alleviate these issues without undue burden, he would do so.

Before Harry could assemble any further thoughts, the door was forcefully flung open, and the two new recruits strode in. One regarded him with sympathy, the other with disdain, yet Harry remained unaffected by their expressions. As they lingered hesitantly near the entrance, met with Harry's deliberate lack of acknowledgment, the prevailing fear of him remained intact, as it should.

The one who displayed disgust, not the individual who had brought him food, took a cautious step forward, prompting his companion to follow suit. Swiftly, they managed to release the chains from the bed frame, although they chose not to remove the magic suppressant cuffs. As they roughly seized his arms and hoisted him to his feet, Harry made no effort to oppose their actions. While his body quivered slightly and his limbs felt fatigued, he refrained from relying on his magic's sustenance, preferring not to unveil his mastery over it. With unsteady knees and weary muscles, he acquiesced to their guidance down the corridor.

Curiosity pricked at him, wondering about their destination. He held a speculation about their intentions, though he couldn't recollect Moody ever having a suitable chamber for such a ritual.

Imagine his surprise when they came to a halt in front of a brick wall, and a concealed door materialised as the bricks smoothly shifted apart—a door he hadn't previously observed. Harry chided himself inwardly for overlooking the room during his prior visit. While he hadn't actively sought hidden compartments, he ought to have detected the aura of magic emanating from that space.

A frown etched onto his face as they proceeded, venturing into the room concealed by the door. Ah, the absence of magic explained how this room had remained outside his notice. The lack of a magical signature stemmed from it not having one seeing as it was of muggle design—a clever concealment. Harry berated himself for overlooking this simple truth. After all, not every creation had to arise from magic. He had spent his childhood in the muggle world; he should not have overlooked such an approach. Well, he resolved to be more attentive next time.

The door unveiled a dim, cramped corridor that appeared unending as they continued walking for minutes on end. Harry couldn't help but wonder if Moody possessed an entire network of tunnels beneath his property, given their seemingly interminable trek.

Finally, a flicker of light emerged at the distant end, and as they drew nearer, Harry found himself nearly gasping in astonishment. It had been a while since he had encountered a

chamber like this. How on earth did Moody stumble upon it? Could he have constructed his house right over this ancient prayer room? Considering they were in Scotland, the existence of such a chamber here wasn't entirely implausible, but the fact that Moody had unearthed it left Harry somewhat impressed—it surely couldn't have been a simple feat.

Pressed down onto his knees in the center of the room, Harry found the unyielding stone floor rather uncomfortable. With a nonchalant shrug, he shifted, deciding to lie on his back, which seemed to surprise the others present. He must have appeared strikingly docile, a notion that brought a private smile to Harry's lips. Closing his eyes, he allowed the members of the Order to commence their task of inscribing the necessary runes. He knew this would take some time.

And here they found themselves. The chant persisted, yet Harry remained reclined—there seemed to be little point in sitting up. This ritual, the cleansing ritual, only inflicted discomfort if one was ensnared by spells or potions, which he wasn't. The ambient magic intensified as seven Order members devoted themselves to his purification. Encircling him, they stood amidst a multitude of runes etched onto the floor in patterns that, Harry knew, held no true bearing on the ritual's effectiveness, although that understanding had not yet been widely disseminated. As sweat trickled down their faces and their hands quivered with exertion, Harry couldn't help but once again ponder how goblin ritual magic was considerably more efficient.

As the chant gradually reached its conclusion, all eyes turned towards Harry, anticipation painted across their expressions, awaiting signs of pain that never materialised on his visage. As the chant subsided, leaving only the symphony of labored breaths, Harry extended his limbs in a stretch before sitting upright.

“Are we done here?” He directed the question vaguely, to no one in particular. However, the only response he garnered consisted of gazes marked by bewilderment and unease.

Harry exhaled audibly in irritation, flexed his fingers, and elicited a satisfying crack from his neck before rising to his feet.

"Ready to admit defeat, Dumbledore?" Harry inquired, his gaze penetrating the shadows of the corridor that led into what the Order mistakenly believed to be a ritual chamber.

From the shadows emerged Dumbledore, his complexion as pallid as a poltergeist, and his gaze as unyielding as one. His scrutiny traveled up and down Harry's form, a quest for any trace that could have disrupted the ritual, yet he found none. The boy emitted no magic that could have interfered with the ritual's purpose.

“Why do you hate me, Harry?” He inquired instead, appearing somewhat taken aback, if his expression was any indication.

Harry tilted his head, his voice infused with soft confusion as he responded, “hate you? I don’t hate you.”

Before Dumbledore could protest, Harry continued, "Every single time I see you, my mind twitches in response to your legilimency you forced upon me as a child. Your twinkling eyes pierce my body and breed beetles under my skin, taunting the very blood you proclaimed my advantage. Hate? No, I don’t hate you. In fact, as the light dies and crumbles at my feet, I want you there to see it. I want you there to plead mercy for their souls and to helplessly beg for forgiveness—forgiveness for crimes I shall never acknowledge. Your mind shattering as your carefully laid out plans collapse and are undermined by the one you deemed irreplaceable. Your hands shaking in defiance, your knees giving out in sorrow, your fist pounding the ground in anger. And I shall watch as your bones creak and break slowly, as they rot away into nothing but oblivion. How I shall never grant you the release you long for, the relief you crave. No, I don’t hate you. If I hated you, I could simply let you die, but no. Hate is a strong word, but not strong enough. No. No, I, I despise you. I shall never let you find peace in death."

Of course, Harry planned on killing him, but neither death nor he will offer mercy upon his soul. Dumbledore had better pray that other gods cast pity upon his soul and offer mercy, for otherwise his death would be more agonising than that experienced by any living creature.

Dumbledore's eyes widened in surprise, and Harry's lips curled into a sly smile. Tilting his head and raising an eyebrow when Dumbledore remained silent, Harry surveyed the room and the weary wizards around him before returning his focus to Dumbledore. He raised his arms in front of him, wrists pointed upwards. Dumbledore seemed puzzled by the gesture, and Harry's smile turned wicked as he let his magic flow. The cuffs snapped in half, falling to the ground with a resounding clunk.

It was time to make his exit.

He ran and ran until he spotted Harry seated in a chair beside Bones' desk, under the examination of a healer.

Fuck. Fuck.

Air surged into his lungs as if for the first time in what felt like years; he struggled to breathe.

Fuck. Harry—Harry was right there. Safe, alive.

Fuck. He came to a standstill as soon as his eyes fell on Harry, the weight that had pressed upon him for days finally lifting. His head spun, threatening to send him into unconsciousness.

Fuck. Harry was here.

His body seemed to crumble, drained of all the energy that had sustained him, the moment he felt sure Harry was unharmed. But he needed to confirm it, to get closer. He willed his legs to carry him a little farther, pushing onward. Step by step, he advanced—one step, then another—until Harry's gaze lifted from the ground to meet his.

Tom's knees weakened, threatening to give way, as Harry's vibrant, living, captivating eyes locked onto his.

Fuck. Tom wanted to unleash a primal scream, to bar everyone but Harry from the room, to keep anyone from getting near him ever again. He yearned to embrace him so tightly that their bodies fused into one, forever united. Fuck. He craved Harry, needed him. As the healer stepped aside, Tom somehow found himself standing in front of Harry, collapsing onto his knees before him.

Tom had spent hours attempting to breach Harry's mind, yet he couldn't quite grasp it. All he encountered were vague echoes of feelings and thoughts—insufficient, but a small consolation nonetheless. But now, a sense of brokenness overwhelmed him.

No words could encapsulate the depth of his fear. He knelt there, uncertain of what to say or do, merely gazing at the person who had absconded with what remained of his corrupted heart. Words struggled to climb his throat, yet they remained trapped within. His knees quivered, mirroring the trembling of his heart—beating rapidly as if it sought to flee his chest and nestle within Harry's lap. His body ached, tormented by his incapacity to meld into and consume every facet of Harry.

Once, he had believed that Harry would be both his damnation and his salvation. In this moment, he felt undeniably damned.

“Harry.” Perhaps it was a prayer, a benediction. He uttered Harry's name with a fervor that reverberated so profoundly that the entire assembly encircling them could feel it.

"Hi," Harry exhaled, his voice a delicate breath as he gently, oh so gently, cradled Tom's face. He peered down at Tom with eyes brimming with tenderness and concern—utterly perfect.

Tom's emotions swelled, threatening to burst forth in tears, screams, embraces. He couldn't breathe.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here," Harry carried on, his words unaffected by their onlookers.

Harry's trembling thumbs traced the contours of Tom's cheeks, and he tilted his head, planting a tender kiss on the palm of Harry's hand. Such a display of affection was unthinkable in the past, especially in the presence of observers witnessing this unguarded moment. Yet, any strength to maintain his façade dissolved in the presence of Harry.

"Don't, don't you dare do that again," he faltered on the words, his voice choking, "don't scare me like that again, Harry. I thought I was— I was losing my mind in your absence. If I had

lost you, I—" Tom's voice broke, unable to articulate the rest, uncertain of the lengths he would go to.

"I know. I'm fine. It's going to be alright," Harry reassured, leaning in to rest their foreheads together. Tom yearned to close the distance between them, but he couldn't bear to shut his eyes and risk losing sight of Harry again. His gaze raked over every fraction of Harry's face. Tired and pale, Harry appeared unharmed, yet appearances could deceive.

"Harry," he choked out once more, a plea certain in his voice this time.

"Shall we go home?" Harry proposed, his breath a gentle whisper against Tom's skin. *His savior, his salvation.*

"Let's go home," Tom agreed.

Of course, their departure wasn't as swift as they would have wished. Harry had to leave behind copies of his memories and pen a written account of the events, fortunately managing to complete the task in less than an hour.

As they materialised in Harry's bedroom, the floodgates containing Tom's anxiety and fear burst open, crashing against the walls of his composure.

Tom had been swiftly and fiercely consumed by his attachment to Harry. The term "addiction" seemed inadequate to encapsulate the raw ache he experienced, the gnawing compulsion for Harry's constant presence. He was like a prisoner to his yearning, and Harry had heartlessly torn away the only remedy.

Pressed against Tom, Harry's chin became captive to Tom's demanding grasp, forcing his eyes to lock onto Tom's blazing gaze.

"Did you deliberately gamble with your life, completely heedless of the torment it would inflict on me? Leaving me to wrestle with the suffocating tendrils of anxiety?!"

"Why do you consistently forego any semblance of foresight?!" The intensity of Tom's anger seemed to catch Harry off guard, leaving him temporarily dumbfounded by the tempest of emotions unleashed.

"How can you cavalierly court danger? Don't you comprehend the lengths I would go to if you dared to abandon me?!" Tom's hands trembled as he emphatically moved Harry's head, as if physicality could somehow jolt reason into his mind.

Tom couldn't lose him.

"Perhaps you relish dancing at death's edge so much that I should oblige by hurling a few killing curses your way! Or better yet, I could employ my bare hands to demonstrate the cost of your recklessness!" Tom's voice reverberated through the room, hurling back the very words Harry had once wielded against him in an attempt at seduction.

He waited for a response, anticipating a likely sarcastic quip. However, as seconds ticked by without any reply, he focused his gaze on Harry and was taken aback to witness silent tears tracing wet trails down his cheeks. Harry was crying.

In an instant, the reality of their positions hit him—the unyielding grip on Harry's chin, the angle at which he was tilting his head back. Tom's hand released Harry's chin as though it had come into contact with flames, an acute awareness dawning upon him that he had crossed a boundary. Harry was not a subordinate; he was Tom's equal, his soulmate, the one person who truly mattered to him. The last thing he intended was to inflict harm upon him. And yet, he had brought Harry to tears—Harry was crying.

His fury faded into obscurity as shame filled his entire being. His intention hadn't been to be so severe, but the realisation struck too late. Harry was crying, and the gravity of that fact was inescapable.

And there was Harry, gazing at him with eyes brimming with glistening tears and an overwhelming surge of emotion. Tom yearned for those eyes to remain fixed on his, a

constant connection unbroken by any wandering glance. But Harry defied his silent plea. Tears traced their path down Harry's face, a cascade of emotion, until he raised his hands to shield his eyes.

Tom fought to suppress panic, to keep his composure steady. Yet, as more tears fell, Harry's distress grew into quiet sobs that seemed to emanate from the depths of his soul with how violently they made Harry shake.

"I'm sorry I left you. Please, please don't leave me alone," Harry's voice cracked, a whimper escaping in a raspy breath. Harry's gaze appeared frantic as it locked onto Tom's face, yet a hazy glaze seemed to obscure his eyes, as if he were only partially present in the moment.

Driven by instinct, Tom sank to his knees on the floor, gathering Harry into his arms and cradling him tightly, drawing him impossibly close. Harry willingly and urgently sought refuge in Tom's embrace, his feverish warmth and rapidly thumping heart palpable against Tom's own body. A tidal wave of concern swept through Tom—was Harry sick?

"I won't leave you, I promise," Tom's voice was a soothing balm, an oath etched in his words. He pressed Harry's head against his chest, his own heart a thumping rhythm beneath his ribs, a reassurance against Harry's turmoil.

"Please don't cry. It's I who should apologise. I was far too harsh with you, driven by my own distress and fear, Harry. I'm deeply sorry," Tom's voice held a genuine note of remorse, laced with regret.

"You know I would never intend to inflict pain on you. You are precious to me, a treasure." As if to seal his words, Tom pressed a tender kiss to the crown of Harry's head, a gesture of reassurance as Harry clung tightly.

Harry's sobs gradually subsided, but Tom couldn't find any solace in this small victory; after all, he was the catalyst for Harry's tears in the first place.

"I didn't mean for any of this to transpire. I truly am sorry for not considering the consequences," Tom's voice was laden with anger, targeted solely at himself.

He exhaled softly, determined to expel every unproductive emotion from his thoughts. "Hush, my darling. It's alright. Everything will be alright," Tom's voice was a soothing murmur despite the buzzing in his head.

Beside him, all his worries, his heartache, sat in human form. All the troubles he carried were now a warm body leaning against him. Harry gazed at him for a fleeting moment, and Tom remained motionless, a steadfast presence. Then, as if a dam had ruptured once again, Harry's emotions overwhelmed him—a new round of tears and sobs burst forth, and Tom offered a steady, silent support amidst Harry's emotional turmoil.

Perched on the floor, cradling a lap full of weeping Harry, Tom found himself in an uncomfortable position. Yet, he did what he could to offer solace, rocking Harry gently in his arms, his touch tracing soothing paths along Harry's back and through his hair. All the while, he whispered words of reassurance and comfort, promises to ease the turmoil within.

The situation felt eerily familiar, the echoes of a past incident ringing in their current position. A pang of internal anger resurfaced within Tom as the memory resurfaced—once again, he found himself in the role of the transgressor. He couldn't ignore the undeniable truth that he had been the reason for Harry's tears on two separate occasions now. For the first time, he experienced a deep sense of regret, an overwhelming remorse of the likes he'd never experienced before. The weight of the pain and sorrow he had inflicted on Harry was the one thing he wished he could undo.

As time wore on, Harry's sobs gradually subsided, his shaking form gradually growing still.

"Harry, my darling," Tom's voice was soft, tender. "I'm so deeply sorry, my soul. Please find it in your heart to forgive my actions. This should never have happened, and I will take every measure to ensure it never does again." Determination echoed within his soul, he would not cause Harry anguish further.

In the quiet hush, Tom caught the faint murmur of Harry's voice against his robe, "It's okay. I'm sorry too for my lack of consideration. My own demise never held fear for me, but I'm sorry for the distress I caused you."

Harry's voice wavered, revealing a mix of vulnerability, confusion, and a trace of mild embarrassment. "I can't quite fathom what's come over me," he admitted, but Tom sensed that Harry wasn't sharing the whole truth; he knew the root of his distress. "I apologise for crying all over your robes. It's rather mortifying to have cried on you twice," Harry continued, his words laden with a mix of sincerity and chagrin.

Although Tom's heart ached at the sound of those words being uttered aloud, a faint smirk tugged at the corners of his lips as he drew Harry even nearer. "Don't worry, my darling. There's no harm done. And rest assured, despite this brief display of vulnerability, I still hold you in awe as a fearsome wild beast."

A snort escaped Harry, accompanied by a small, appreciative smile. "Thanks," he said softly.

Tom carried on, a sense of satisfaction blossoming within him as he managed to lighten Harry's mood.

"It's perfectly alright to feel upset, my soul. I understand that facing death isn't an unfamiliar territory for you, and I'm aware of your... unique perspective," Tom addressed, prompting a protest from Harry that was promptly cut off. Adjusting his position, Harry leaned back slightly to meet Tom's gaze.

"However, my reaction was unjustifiable, driven by my own fear that spiraled out of control. I am truly sorry, Harry. It's justified to feel hurt when someone you care for hurts you. Please understand that you, Harry, are a treasure to me, deserving of care and protection. I'll do everything in my power to ensure you never want for anything."

Harry seemed on the verge of tears once more. Had Tom misspoken? He tightened his hold on Harry's waist and watched as Harry leaned forward, their foreheads meeting in a silent exchange of emotions. The quiet stretched on, urging Tom to break it.

"It frightens me," Tom confessed, his voice soft.

"What does?" Harry's voice held a gentle curiosity, his fingers idly toying with the strands of hair at the nape of Tom's neck.

"The speed at which I'm plummeting into this," Tom's words flowed with an unexpected vulnerability. "My obsession for you, born from vengeful hatred, has transformed into something soft, tender. It terrifies me how quickly you've come to occupy my thoughts, overshadowing my plans, my ambitions. You've claimed my world as your own, leaving you at its center. What scares me most is what I will feel in the future if you have already nestled your way so deeply into my heart."

Tom exhaled, letting his confession hang in the air. Harry didn't interrupt, and Tom pressed on. "It terrifies me to contemplate a time when you might no longer be by my side. A moment when your beautiful self won't be there to soothe my anxieties, when the serenity you bring won't chase away my tensions. I dread imagining a world bereft of you, and I wonder how long it will be before such a day comes. How long can this last? For you, my dearest, I would annihilate the world, reduce it to ashes, if it meant preventing your departure from my life. How long will you stay with me?" Tom's voice wavered, every word charged with his sincerity and the depth of his feelings.

Harry's breath caught as he absorbed Tom's words, his eyes locked onto Tom's with a mixture of astonishment and raw emotion. Touched by Tom's vulnerability, Harry's heart swelled, and he finally found his voice. "Tom," he said softly, his fingers lifting to tenderly brush against Tom's cheek. "I know that feeling, that fear. We're both navigating uncharted territories, and it's okay to be scared. But, Tom, what truly matters is that we're facing these fears together and that we don't take them out on each other."

He paused, his eyes locked onto Tom's with unwavering determination. "I'm here to stay, Tom. Just as you're a part of me, I'm a part of you."

Tom's breath caught in his chest as his heart constricted with pain.

*When he speaks of **attachment** it's as if the syllables are laced with cruelty, each one a dagger that cleaves my heart in two.*

It's a cruel elegance to render someone utterly shattered through the gentle caress of a few poignant, beautiful words.

They spent the remainder of the evening enveloped in each other's embrace, cocooned in the sanctuary of Harry's bed. With Harry's voice serving as a soothing melody, he narrated the events of his short-lived abduction, unfolding the layers of his harrowing experience. Much of the narrative, however, was eclipsed by the sheer splendor of having Harry nestled contentedly in his arms, their hands tenderly caressing the other in comfort. Tom held onto this moment, etching it into the recesses of his heart, aware of the bittersweet truth that they couldn't stay in this moment forever.

In those hours, they exchanged gentle caresses with an innocence that bordered on reverence. Tom found himself spending nearly half an hour tracing the contours of Harry's hands, each touch a tactile exploration of his soul's essence, each detail a memory cherished.

As the night deepened, they drifted off to sleep, cocooned in each other's arms, basking in the warmth and contentment washing over them.

Just before Tom surrendered to the embrace of Morpheus, he nestled his face into the tangle of hair he had grown to cherish on the person he'd come to adore, and whispered a vow, "Usque ad mortem."

Harry had already succumbed to slumber.

Chapter End Notes

I need everyone's help, this is important. While we're not quite at the end yet, I need to decide on the ending now as it will impact the upcoming chapters. I have three different endings, and I'm struggling to choose between them. Please let me know which ending you would enjoy the most. I have a favorite, but I'm uncertain about how you all will feel about it.

Ending 1: a major character death, resulting in a sad ending with a tragic and painful conclusion.

Ending 2: bittersweet, with a period of happiness, but circumstances arise that prevent them from staying together. Harry ultimately chooses to leave.

Ending 3: a happy ending, where Harry no longer yearns for death and finds contentment in the life he's built with Tom.

These are the three distinct options I've been contemplating. I'm not saying I'll solely base my decision on your opinions, I will ultimately choose an ending that I believe works best for the story. I understand that it's impossible to please everyone, but I don't want anyone to hate it. Please share your thoughts, and if you have any other suggestions, feel free to let me know. Thank you ❤️❤️❤️

Hold me, Touch me, Choose me

Chapter Summary

Harry wakes up in the arms of the man who once killed him

Chapter Notes

So before we get to the chapter I just wanted to thank you all for all the encouragement and support, I never expected this story to get so much attention but I'm so infinitely grateful. So I've read all your comments on what ending you'd prefer and the overwhelming majority want a happy ending sooo I shall grant it, you will get a happy ending for Tom and Harry. I honestly planned for this story to have a sad ending despite preferring to read stories with happy endings myself, but sad endings are just so much more interesting to write. But I will write a happy ending, I promise, but I might make an alternative sad ending as an extra if I feel like it.

Anyway, happy ending for the win. Love you all and sorry for leaving you all hanging without an answer so here's mostly fluff to make up for it!

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

Summer 2018, original world

"Oh, Merlin, you're Harry Potter! Dad told me about you!" A high-pitched voice squeaked from behind him, and he turned to find a mini version of Draco, the only difference being the curly hair.

"Did he really?" Harry asked curiously.

"Oh yes, he told me all about you, how you saved his life and helped shape who he is today." Harry was taken aback; Draco had said that?

Feeling compelled to share, Harry added, "He saved my life as well, you know. He even aided me in the final battle by giving me his wand."

"Yes! He told me that... What are you doing here, Mr. Potter?" Scorpius inquired, looking around.

"Harry is fine. I'm visiting my friend Luna. What about you? Why are you here?" Harry walked toward the door, with Scorpius in tow.

"Dad had to go away for a bit, and my grandparents are sick, so I couldn't stay with them. Now I get to stay with Aunt Luna! She's so funny!" Scorpius shared.

Harry chuckled. "She's quite the hoot."

Scorpius nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, she's great. She took me to the forest over there to look for some creature, snork-something, I can't remember, but we didn't find any. Instead, we found these pretty purple flowers called aconite. Do you know what they're used for?"

"Ah yes, for Wolfsbane Potion," Harry replied without much thought.

Scorpius stumbled and turned toward him with a shocked expression. "What? How did you know that? Dad said you were awful at potions..."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at Scorpius's sincerity. "I was awful, but I'm better now. Besides, that's not how I knew. I knew because my godson's father used to use that potion."

Scorpius gasped. "He's a werewolf? That's so cool!"

Harry smiled at him. "Yeah, it was cool."

"Can I meet him? I've never met a werewolf before." Scorpius practically jumped with excitement.

Harry's smile turned sad. "No, I'm afraid not. He passed away a long time ago."

Scorpius's shoulders dropped. "Oh, I'm sorry for your loss." They fell into silence for a moment. "What about your godson? Is he a werewolf? Can I meet him?"

Harry looked down at the child. "I'll ask him, but just so you know, he isn't a werewolf, but he is a Metamorphmagus."

The next day, Harry brought Teddy along. "Hello again, Scorpius. This is my godson, Teddy."

"Hello," Scorpius said shyly.

"Hi," Teddy replied with a smile.

"I'm going to let Luna know we're here," Harry said as he walked away, leaving them to chat.

"Harry told me your father was a werewolf."

"Yes."

"I would have liked to have met him."

"Me too."

"I'm sorry for your loss. My mother died a year ago, so I think I know how you feel. But I guess it's even worse when you never get to know them..."

Harry couldn't hear more as he walked through the door. He felt rather ashamed; he hadn't been the best godfather to Teddy. Still, he was thankful that Teddy grew up to be such a wonderful and understanding person.

When Harry left Britain, it was rather abrupt. He made the decision to leave overnight and hadn't planned to tell anyone in person why he was going. But as he was holding the portkey, he kept thinking about Teddy's chubby little face, and he just couldn't leave without saying goodbye. He was glad he had told him; he didn't think Teddy would have forgiven him for leaving if he hadn't. (The next time Harry left Britain, he didn't tell anyone, not even Teddy, and Teddy never forgave him for that.)

The room was bathed in the soft, golden hues of early morning, and Harry gradually stirred from his slumber. A gentle sigh escaped his lips as he blinked open his eyes, greeted by the serene start of a new day. Oddly, he couldn't recall any dreams from the night before despite waking up from nightmares every time he attempted to sleep.

Beside him, Tom lay still, his features softened in the embrace of sleep. Harry's heart swelled with affection as he took in the sight of the man who had come to mean so much to him. His fingers moved with delicate care, tracing the contours of Tom's face.

Harry's gaze followed his fingers, affection obvious in their every movement. Every curve and line of Tom's face was etched in his memory, but Harry found solace in the act of tracing them once more.

Even in slumber, Tom responded to Harry's gentle caresses, instinctively leaning into his touch. A slow, contented smile graced Tom's lips as he nuzzled Harry's hand, planting a feather-light kiss on Harry's palm. His eyes remained peacefully closed, his long lashes resting against his cheeks.

"Good morning," Harry whispered, his voice barely louder than a sigh, a soft flush of affection coloring his cheeks.

Tom's eyes stayed closed, but his response was immediate. He shifted nearer to Harry, their bodies fitting together seamlessly like two perfectly matched puzzle pieces.

"Good morning," Tom murmured, his voice a tender, soothing melody. He slid his hands under Harry's shirt, his fingers dancing across the warm skin beneath, and began to playfully tickle Harry.

Harry's soft, melodic giggle danced gracefully through the morning air, a rare and cherished sound that tugged at Tom's heartstrings. Unable to resist, he opened his eyes, eager to catch a glimpse of Harry's expression. His anticipation was handsomely rewarded.

The gentle morning light lovingly embraced Harry's features, casting a golden halo around his tousled hair. His cheeks held a delicate blush, and his smile radiated a warmth that seemed to illuminate the entire room. Tom found himself utterly captivated by Harry's beauty, momentarily forgetting his playful tickles as he became lost in the enchantment of Harry's presence. Harry's features possessed a unique blend of delicate elegance and striking angles, a paradox that intrigued Tom. Despite knowing that softness wasn't Harry's defining characteristic, Tom couldn't help but think of him as a precious, delicate treasure. It was a captivating contradiction, so very deceiving, and yet, Tom found it utterly charming, much like Harry himself.

Meanwhile, Harry was also utterly captivated, his gaze fixed upon Tom, who lay on his side, wearing an expression Harry had never witnessed before—a gentle smile gracing his lips. Tom's half-lidded eyes held an intimate, intense gaze that left Harry breathless. He had never fathomed someone looking at him with such affection, especially not a man once known as the Dark Lord.

Turning onto his side to face Tom, they lay close, their hands tucked beneath their heads, and one hand resting between them, just a heartbeat away. It felt surreal to witness Tom so relaxed and serene; this wasn't the Voldemort he had once feared. This was Tom, *his* Tom.

Harry's fingers moved gently over Tom's, and he released a soft sigh as Tom intertwined their fingers.

"Would it be too much to ask to stay here for the rest of the day?" Harry inquired softly.

The corners of Tom's eyes crinkled as he replied, "I suppose not. Spending the day here with you would be quite a delightful prospect," he teased.

Harry's lips twitched. "How generous of you, Mr. Dark Lord," he quipped, his eyes gleaming with amusement—a sentiment that echoed in Tom's gaze.

"Lord Voldemort is a generous and merciful lord who treats his people fairly," Tom responded with a hint of pride.

Harry couldn't help but snort. "Does he really? I always thought he preferred a quick Crucio as the solution for any dissatisfaction with his followers' services."

Tom shifted slightly, contemplating Harry's words. "Hmm, perhaps you have a point."

A playful smile stretched across Harry's face. "And how does Tom treat his people?" he asked with a lighthearted tone, though a genuine curiosity lingered in his question.

Tom's eyes moved to Harry's lips, tracing a slow path over his face before settling on his eyes. "Tom only has one person, and he wishes to cherish and care for that person. He wants to offer them all the affection he can, even though he knows he can never provide all the care and happiness they deserve."

Harry's smile turned gentle. "I think he's doing a better job than he believes."

Tom leaned in, his fingers gently caressing Harry's cheek, their foreheads touching. Tom was someone who moved with precision and unwavering confidence, but now he had reached his hand forward with tender care, accompanied by a faint trace of hesitation.

It felt world-shattering.

Tom spoke in a hushed tone, unaware of the way his presence dismantled Harry's carefully constructed defenses into delicate pieces. "I'm certain he'd find comfort in hearing that."

Harry hummed in contentment, savoring the moment with closed eyes, even though he was secretly fighting the urge to scream. He pretended that none of this felt surreal, impossible, or haunting – as though Tom's teasing, his soft caresses, and his tender care wouldn't eventually shatter him and leave him bleeding on the marble floor once again.

A part of him wanted to implore Tom to release him, to stop speaking with such affection, to cease being so kind. Harry couldn't quite pinpoint why this mixture of comfort and delicacy affected him so deeply – perhaps because it was Tom, perhaps because he was Harry.

Yet, Harry remained silent, keeping his eyes shut and pushing those unsettling thoughts aside. He refused to let them ruin this moment, refusing to let them ruin him. Acknowledging them would be his undoing, and he couldn't afford to let Tom become his damnation.

For what felt like hours, though it was likely only minutes, Harry allowed himself to revel in the warmth of Tom's affection. The gentle strokes of Tom's thumb tracing across his cheek and their legs entwined with each other's made Harry deeply appreciate the newfound closeness between them. When he had initially considered a relationship with Tom, it had been filled with passion and heat, purely physical. There was no room in that vision for intimacy or tenderness, but now, he realised that both he and Tom yearned for the closeness they now shared.

He wouldn't complain; in fact, he hadn't felt this much peace in years.

Reluctantly, Harry opened his eyes and lazily lifted a hand to cast Tempus. It displayed the time as 9:23, with the entire day stretching out before them, and Harry felt a profound sense of relief.

Tom looked at him curiously as Harry's gaze returned to him. "What happened to your wand, Harry? I don't recall you mentioning the Order taking it."

Harry teased Tom with a playful smile. "Oh, my wand doesn't like others touching it, so it probably hid when I lost my grip on it. Don't worry; I'll just call it back later."

Tom's brows furrowed as he pondered Harry's response for a moment. "That's not a normal wand," he remarked, clearly intrigued and caught off guard.

Harry smirked in response. "No, it's not."

Tom seemed to find Harry's response both mildly infuriating and oddly arousing.

Harry noticed the intense, heated look in Tom's eyes and returned it with equal intensity. "One day, I'll share the truth with you, but for now, it's crucial that no one else knows."

Tom wasn't entirely satisfied with the answer but chose to drop the subject. Just as he was about to speak, a rumble emanated from Harry's stomach, startling them both. Tom's gaze followed the noise down to Harry's belly, and he couldn't help but snort when it rumbled again, even louder this time.

"Come, my dear," Tom said, reluctantly pulling himself away from Harry, "let's make our way to the sunroom and enjoy some breakfast."

Harry's cheeks took on a faint rosy hue as he rose from the bed without a word of protest. He couldn't help but find it slightly amusing that Tom was declaring their dining destination, considering that this was, in fact, Harry's house.

Breakfast passed with light-hearted small talk about Hogwarts and their shared experiences. Harry relished the opportunity to discuss his true feelings about the school's teaching methods, or rather, the lack thereof. They were engrossed in a conversation about how to improve the education system when an owl swooped in, dropping the morning edition of The Daily Prophet onto the table.

While Harry was busy crafting what Tom deemed "the sweetest cup of tea known to man," Tom snatched the newspaper. A wide and delighted grin spread across his lips as he perused the front page.

Harry regarded Tom with curiosity, his eyes shining with interest. "What is it? What does it say?"

Tom couldn't contain his glee and burst into laughter before flipping the paper over for Harry to read the headline.

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE UNDESIRABLE NO. 1, WANTED FOR KIDNAPPING OF BOY-WHO-LIVED

Harry didn't bother reading beyond the title. His gaze had already shifted from the paper to Tom's amused face, where his eyes crinkled with delight, and smile lines became prominent. It was an expression he had never witnessed before, one of childlike delight, and he couldn't help but find it rather endearing, though he had no intention of telling Tom that; there are things even he wouldn't dare to say.

"He really dug his own grave, didn't he?" Tom remarked, still wearing a wide grin.

Harry offered a crooked smile. "He's always been quite skilled at overestimating himself. Let's just hope they catch him quickly, and we can be rid of the annoying pest."

After breakfast, Harry decided to show Tom the garden and the nearby lake. They walked side by side, their shoulders brushing against each other, and their hands occasionally brushed.

Finally, when Harry couldn't stand not being connected to Tom any longer, he summoned some of his old Gryffindor bravery and quickly, without hesitation, grabbed Tom's hand and intertwined their fingers. For the remainder of the stroll, they walked hand in hand, taking in

the beautiful scenery of the frozen gardens. It felt so domestic that it made Harry slightly dizzy.

They hadn't discussed the nature of their relationship yet, and Harry wasn't even certain if Tom felt attraction or desired any form of sexual intimacy with others. Harry knew they needed to have that conversation, but he was apprehensive about disrupting the natural intimacy they had effortlessly shared thus far.

For the first time in a long while, Harry felt fear for the future - a sensation he hadn't experienced since Draco's death. After Draco, Harry had drifted through life, not living but not truly alive. Time blurred together, days merged into months, and years passed in a fog of emptiness and a growing void in his heart. People often said that time healed all wounds, but it wasn't true for Harry. His wounds ran too deep, and even now, he felt their presence. The smiles he once wore for Draco were gone, and his days of happiness and love had become hollow and numb. He had wondered if people saw it in his eyes, the absence of the person he once was. Decades passed in a static blur until one day, the numbness transformed into rage. Harry became determined to defy death and find a way to end his existence.

But he didn't succeed, and instead, he ended up here, with Tom. Inexplicably, for reasons he couldn't fathom, he found happiness in the arms of the man who had once killed him.

"Harry... Harry, are you alright?" Tom's voice broke through his thoughts. He turned to Tom and squeezed his hand before smiling at him.

"Yes, I'm fine, just lost in thought. I- I was just thinking," Harry paused, feeling somewhat immature asking a question like this but pushing forward nonetheless, "do you feel attraction? I- I mean like sexual desire, do you feel that, in general, I mean." He couldn't help but feel a bit flustered, wondering if it was the fact that it was Tom or simply the teenage hormones of his current body that were making this so awkward.

Tom halted and turned towards Harry, his eyes widening. As he observed Harry's flustered state, his tension eased, and he let out a small amused huff.

"I don't feel any-" Tom waved his hand in a nonchalant gesture, though there was a look in his eyes that was anything but nonchalant, "need for physical intimacy, but I don't dislike it if the right person offers it. I don't crave it, I don't fantasise about it, I don't actively seek it out,

but I don't turn it away either. Sex, to me, is just - just sex. It's just a physical act of pleasure; I don't require it, but I can enjoy it."

Harry wasn't entirely certain he understood. Luna had spoken of feeling something similar in his previous world, but he didn't quite grasp it then either. "What- what about romantic attraction?"

Tom focused back on him, his eyes softening at whatever expression Harry was wearing. "I haven't felt it before, or, well, not before you."

Harry stopped breathing, or at least it felt that way, unable to remember how to when Tom had just admitted such a thing as if it wasn't new, as if it wasn't unexpected, as if it wasn't something Harry desperately wanted to know.

Tom looked at him curiously, and Harry's heart flinched, he needed to breathe. His lungs ached, his heart pounded against his rib cage.

"I want you, Harry," Tom breathed out, and finally, Harry remembered to inhale. "What am I supposed to do now, Harry? Now that you are here beside me, now that I want to live my life with you, Harry. How am I supposed to-"

Harry cut him off by throwing himself into Tom, his arms winding around Tom's neck as he pressed his body against him.

Then, Harry was kissing him.

Desperately, messily, heavenly.

And Harry was breaking. He crumbled in Tom's arms. It was overwhelming, too much and yet not enough. He needed more; he needed all of Tom.

It was terrifying, exhilarating, and everything all at once.

Tom responded with just as much passion, desperation, and desire, kissing Harry back with equal fervor. Harry was lightheaded, his breathless state only adding to the intensity of the moment. He didn't mind passing out now; it was worth it.

Harry's hands roamed over Tom's body, fingers dragging down and up his torso, over his back, waist, chest, neck, and arms. It was all-consuming, as if he couldn't get enough of Tom's touch.

Harry forced himself to breathe, just so he could take in Tom's scent. It was clean, like cotton and fresh air, and Harry loved it. The world felt like it shifted on its axis, as if it had been crooked all this time and he hadn't noticed until it corrected itself right now.

It felt so right.

He never wanted to let go; he wanted to burrow deeper. A different kind of desperation crept into Harry's heart, one not born out of care and adoration but of possession and control. He wanted Tom to be all his, to hold Tom's soul in his heart and keep it safe and warm. He wanted their magic to meld together in a storm of passion, to show the world how perfectly they fit together.

Fuck, he wanted to consume him. He pushed forward, desperately trying to bring them closer. Tom had to take a step back to prevent them from falling to the ground.

Tom growled in his throat, and Harry shivered at the sound. He wrapped his arms around Harry's waist, lowering them over Harry's ass and settling them on Harry's upper thighs, pressing against them. Harry understood the message and jumped up, wrapping his legs around Tom's hips, hissing as he felt the hardness rubbing against his own. Tom walked them forward and pressed Harry against the nearest tree, moving his hips in a devastatingly slow manner in contrast to their mouths and hands.

Their kisses were filthy, devoid of precision or coordination, driven solely by instinct and thoughtless eagerness. Fervor and intensity described how they clung to each other, lips

locked and bodies blending in frantic movements.

Unfortunately, Tom pulled away from Harry's lips too soon, and as he leaned back, Harry let out a disappointed whimper. Tom's breath came in heavy, unsteady waves as he pleaded, "Harry, maybe we should slow down," even though the evidence of his desire pressed against Harry.

Harry, his eyes half-lidded and unfocused, countered with a playful, "Why?"

"Because it's not proper," Tom replied, though he himself didn't quite believe what he's saying. His own actions contradict his words.

Harry chuckled breathlessly, replying with a wicked grin, "Sure isn't."

Tom's lips twitched momentarily, but quickly fades as if never there. A raw vulnerability overcomes him—a side of him Harry had witnessed only twice before, both times after Tom had reduced him to tears. Harry's excitement faded, replaced by dread.

"The first time I saw you, a child clinging to the edge of a crib, I knew you were special," Tom began, but Harry interrupted with a sardonic comment, attempting to mask his growing unease.

"That's rather unsettling," Harry remarked.

"Please, let me explain," Tom continued. "I sensed your potential, the impact you could have on my life. When we met in the graveyard, you were a lovely threat, a young boy filled with untapped power. It frustrated me to think of your sacrifice, but I knew it was necessary. In our shared dreams, your presence ignited a fiery passion within me, breathing vitality into my existence. Then, at the ball, as you laughed and smiled in my arms, I couldn't help but fall. Your beauty, your significance in my life overwhelmed me. When I looked into your startlingly gorgeous eyes, the world narrowed down to just you—nothing else mattered." Tom gently lowered Harry to his feet but kept his arms securely around him, offering some form of reassurance before he continued on.

"I experienced a profound sense of helplessness for the first time when you were taken from me. I was paralysed, unable to think or act. It felt as though my entire world was collapsing, and it was collapsing alongside you. Even now, I carry the fear that I might someday lose you, that I might inadvertently hurt you like I did yesterday or that you'll choose to leave me. As I was attempting to convey before you kissed me, how are people supposed to live like this?"

In the sunlight surrounded by an icy landscape and a frozen lake, the tension between them hung heavy in the air. "Everything about you terrifies me so," Tom confessed, his voice trembling with genuine fear. His arms spasmed around Harry's waist, and his body tensed, but it was his wide-open eyes that revealed the turmoil within.

Harry met Tom's gaze, his own eyes a mix of understanding and compassion. With a gentle gesture, he lifted his hand, silently offering Tom a chance to retreat, to voice his protests or run away. Yet, Tom didn't flinch. So, Harry reached forward, his touch as soft as a breeze on a wild animal's fur, and spoke softly, "Tom, I know it's terrifying. I've had my own doubts and fears, but what we share, it's worth every moment of uncertainty, at least for me. I promise I'm not going anywhere...Do you not think I'm worth it?" Harry's fingers trembled against Tom cheek, his voice quivering.

Tom frowned, his head tilted in confusion rather than displeasure. His gaze explored Harry's face, taking in the worry in his eyes and the strain in his jaw.

"Of course, you're worth it," Tom replied with heartfelt sincerity. "To me, you are everything—everything I never believed I deserved but everything I've longed for. I'll protect and cherish you with every fiber of my being. There's nothing in this world I wouldn't do for you."

"Even endure all the feelings that come along with this?" Harry's eyes, a vivid green, shone with the pain his question evoked. Tom longed to see them glow with amusement and happiness alone.

"For you, yes. Without a doubt. But if we do this, you will get hurt. I will hurt you, in some way. I don't know how, but I know it's inevitable. It's bound to happen. I need you to understand that. I need you to know that I don't want it to happen, but it will. Somehow, in

some way. Most believe me to be heartless, and I'm inclined to believe them, but you have proven that fact not to be true." Tom's words tumbled out in a frenzied manner, a stark difference from his usual eloquence and sharp-witted demeanour.

A small smile tugged at Harry's red, bitten lips as he teased him lightly. "So dramatic, but alright, I understand. Perhaps I should warn you about me as well. I never get to keep my happiness, a curse from the gods, and right now, you are it, so something might happen to you. I know you are strong, and I know what you will say - 'I'm immortal, nothing could happen to me that's irreversible' - but if we are exchanging warnings, that would be mine."

Tom's eyes flickered between Harry's before the pain in them eased. He tightened his hold on Harry's waist and leaned forward slowly. Harry tilted his head back, allowing Tom to kiss him with reverence.

Their kiss was nothing like their first, but it was still full of devotion. It felt as if their insides were exposed to the world, and with every gentle touch, they reassured each other that it only made them more beautiful. It was soft and heartwarming.

Harry felt the urge to whisk Tom away to the nearest bed, to hold him, whispering soft words and offering innocent kisses until he was a pile of mush. Distracting them both from all the troubles they carried, instead Tom pulled away just enough to whisper against Harry's lips, "I need you, Harry, I need you to choose me. Choose me now and forever."

Harry was more than happy to offer Tom the words he craved, to ease the burdens that weighed on him, and have those swollen lips on his again. "I choose you," Harry told him with conviction as he leaned forward and closed the distance between them once again.

The words he longed to express reverberated through his mind.

I'm aware that in other realities, I might have made different choices, leading me to different places or different people. Yet, my heart aches for every 'me' that missed the chance to meet you.

Chapter End Notes

This took me forever to write, fluff and emotional stuff just doesn't come naturally but whatever it worked out in the end and they kissed! Finally! I hadn't planned it, it sort of just happened. But after 150k words, perhaps it was time. Let me know what you think! And spoiler, next chapter will be mostly fluff as well, this chapter got too long so I saved some for the next chapter like them finally giving each other their Yule gifts.

Have a great week all you lovely people! ♥♥

Home is where the Heart is

Chapter Summary

Harry enjoys the comforts of home with Tom and celebrates Yule

Chapter Notes

I can't for the life of me remember if I ever mentioned any dates for when the Yule ball was happening, so I have no idea what the date is when this is happening. I wrote it as if it's taking place after the 25th but I don't know if that works with the previous timeline. Ahhh, I'm so frustrated with myself, why don't I take notes on these things. Well whatever, if any of you noticed if I mentioned a date for previous events let me know and I'll move things around.

Anyway, enjoy the new chapter which is mostly fluff and a totally smitten Tom, perhaps I've made him too smitten but I'm not backing down now!

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

After their walk, they retreated to the library, a room Harry had grown quite fond of during his summer stay. Eager to show off the centuries-old knowledge hidden from the public eye, most of it authored by the Peverells, Harry excitedly clutched Tom's hand and led him through the towering shelves filled with ancient books. Although Harry had previously introduced Tom to the room, he had yet to delve into the specifics of the information it held.

"Here, we have illusionary magic and shadow magic," Harry explained, occasionally flashing a warm smile towards Tom. "These subjects are often overlooked, but their combination and refinement can be incredibly useful. When you look beyond their flashy appearances and return to their original intent, rather than how they're used today as mere party tricks..."

Tom found himself utterly smitten, though it would have been comical if it weren't so genuine. He had developed deep feelings for this young man, something he never believed himself capable of. It made him feel youthful and giddy, like a teenager. It was akin to what he had heard from his former classmates when describing their relationships and the warm, fuzzy emotions they brought – something he had never experienced until now.

Tom absorbed most of Harry's words, yet it proved challenging to concentrate on them, given the exceptional expressiveness that had taken over Harry's face. It felt like a cherished gift, an extraordinary rarity he felt immensely fortunate to witness, and an offering for which he was deeply grateful. Without overthinking it, which he often did when choosing his words, Tom spoke up, interrupting Harry mid-sentence.

"Harry," Tom whispered, his voice laden with a seriousness that seemed oddly out of place in the moment. "I consider myself immeasurably fortunate to have crossed paths with you. Despite the turbulent moments that may have touched your life because of me, I treasure the precious chance to have you in my world, where dreams are nurtured within the warmth of your embrace."

Harry's mouth fell open, forming a soft "oh," as a myriad of thoughts and emotions danced across his eyes, too intricate for Tom to decipher. Wide-eyed and taken aback, Harry mumbled, "I never thought Voldemort would be so romantic."

The genuine confusion in Harry's statement, coupled with his lack of self-awareness while speaking, struck Tom as oddly amusing. He stifled a manic giggle and settled for an overly toothy grin, saying, "He isn't. Whatever cold, unbeating heart he possesses is yours with just a few pretty smiles and a kind word."

Tom tilted his head and placed his palm on Harry's cheek, gently swiping his thumb along the high of his cheek. "Now, do you see what you've reduced me to, my soul? You've vanquished Lord Voldemort and turned him into nothing more than a teenager pretending to be more poetic than he is."

This statement snapped Harry out of his stupor, and he laughed, his voice trembling with amusement. "So you're saying I've defeated Voldemort with the power of *love*?"

"You've dismantled him with a single gentle touch, my darling."

Laughter filled the library as Tom gazed upon Harry with an adoring expression. Harry's eyes crinkled at the corners, and his cheeks flushed with pink; he was truly wonderful.

Unfortunately, Harry's giggles subsided too quickly for Tom's liking, but he was rewarded with another beautiful smile as Harry's eyes met his. "You know, I used to find it annoying when you referred to yourself in the third person. I'm not sure when it started being endearing."

"Perhaps it was around the time I began to savor your teasing."

"Hmm."

"Shall we go sit down? There's something I wish to give you now that we finally have the time."

What Tom wished to present to Harry turned out to be his belated Yule gift, though the delay did nothing to diminish Harry's delight. In Tom's trembling hands, he held a small box swathed in green paper, its surface sparkling with a festive finish.

"Do you want to open your gift at the same time?" Harry asked, a mixture of excitement and a hint of nervousness in his voice.

Tom smiled gently and replied, "I would love to."

With matching smiles, they settled onto the couch in front of the grand fireplace. Harry leaned forward, meeting Tom halfway, and their lips met in the softest of touches, an innocent peck that held them both captive.

Harry pulled back slightly, just enough to speak. "Wait here for a moment," he said, stealing another quick kiss before standing up. Tom's eyes followed Harry's retreating figure, tempted to run across the room and drag him back, not wanting to look away from him for even a second. Tom often felt as though he knew the contours of Harry's silhouette better than he knew the details of his own reflection.

Only a few minutes later, Harry returned with a similarly sized box. He settled down beside Tom, turning to face him.

"Here, I hope you like it," Harry said, placing the package into Tom's waiting hands.

"Receiving a gift from you is enough to make even the coldest of hearts plead for your favor," Tom remarked, a teasing glint in his eyes.

They locked eyes for a brief moment before both broke into smiles, their anticipation building as they unwrapped their gifts.

Harry was the first to unwrap his gift, and he remarked with a grin, "Ah, it appears great minds think alike." His smile held a playful tease, but it was also brimming with happiness and awe.

Tom had momentarily looked away from the gift to gaze at Harry's face, drawn to him like a moth to a flame. At Harry's prompting look, he returned to opening the package.

Ah, indeed.

With slightly unsteady fingers, Tom reached for the bracelet – the courting bracelet. The same kind he had given Harry, a symbol of their budding courtship. Tom looked up and found Harry watching him, and he couldn't help but let out a soft, joyous laugh. He wanted to touch Harry.

Oh. He could. That's what this bracelet meant, wasn't it? That they belonged to each other now, from this moment forward until they chose to remove them – if they ever did, which Tom sincerely hoped they wouldn't.

Without the need for words, as they felt unnecessary, Tom reached out and gently held Harry's hand, his thumb stroking the knuckles within his reach. With his other hand, he picked up the courting bracelet meant for Harry. He looked at Harry and waited for a sign to

proceed, receiving a quick nod as confirmation. Carefully, he slid the bracelet onto Harry's right hand, and together, they watched as it softly glowed before resizing to ensure it could only be removed by Harry.

It was a promise – a promise that some might deem too soon or hasty, but such trivial matters paled in comparison to Tom's certainty that Harry was the one. Harry made him feel more alive with a single glance than he had ever felt on his own throughout his life.

If Harry were to ever ask him for his very life, he would surrender it without hesitation, his heart content in the knowledge that its final beat had been offered to Harry.

He was willing to give his life for Harry, for that was the depth of his emotions, despite the part of him that yearned to deny it. Tom was undeniably in love with Harry, and nothing else could rival the immensity of his feelings. These emotions were so overwhelming that they threatened to engulf him, ready to drag him under should he ever deny his heart. Tom instinctively understood that if Harry were to perish, he would follow him into the abyss without hesitation.

Tom longed to express his feelings to Harry, but it remained an unspoken yearning. His teeth ached within his head, as though they might crumble to dust if he dared to vocalise his emotions. He reminded himself that the right moment would come; they had all the time in the world now.

Unaware of the turmoil brewing within Tom, Harry went ahead and reciprocated the gesture by placing the bracelet around Tom's wrist. The bracelet Harry had chosen was a traditional and ancient one – a slender silver band adorned with a complex design that, upon close inspection, revealed countless tiny runes intricately incorporated into it. The black design twisted around the bracelet in a swirling pattern, reminiscent of a serpent, Tom thought. It was a pattern he hadn't seen before, but he found it quite appealing; it suited him well.

However, what truly delighted him was the possessive desire that radiated from Harry's gaze as it locked onto the silver bracelet encircling his wrist. It sent shivers of anticipation down his spine.

Their eyes met, and in an instant, their lips were locked in a desperate, fervent embrace. Harry had flown into his lap with such swiftness that Tom couldn't be entirely certain he

hadn't apparated.

Tom's hands found their place on Harry's waist, and he couldn't help but appreciate the beauty of Harry's slender, firm waist – a perfect fit for his hands. In response, Harry's hands moved with the same urgency as the person they belonged to, exploring Tom's chest, traveling up his neck, and tangling in his hair with fervent desire. Harry couldn't seem to sit still; his body trembled and quivered against Tom continuously. Not that Tom minded; it simply made it more challenging to maintain his own self-control.

Harry's lips left his, and Tom followed them as they retreated, leaving just a breath of space between them.

"When did you buy it?" Harry asked, his breathless voice, while his hands remained busy, slipping beneath Tom's shirt.

Tom took a moment to comprehend the question before answering, his voice sounding almost normal. "A week before Yule. You?"

"Two weeks before," Harry replied with a smug smirk.

Then and there Tom knew his love was selfish. He realised that he wouldn't just offer himself for Harry; he would willingly end the entire world. The very idea of Harry no longer sharing the world with him would leave him suffocated.

What was the quote, Tom wondered, 'flectere si nequeo superis, acheronta movebo.' Yes, that was it, 'If I cannot move heaven, I will raise hell.'

...

This revelation also indicated that they had both been clandestinely preparing to court each other long before their official status as a couple. The sheer absurdity of the situation flooded Tom with a sense of amusement, and an unrestrained, genuine laugh escaped from him.

Harry's eyes widened in awe before he dove back in, devouring every crevice of Tom's mouth.

"Am I at your mercy, or are you at mine?" Harry inquired between kisses.

"It appears," Tom began before being silenced by another kiss, "we're dancing on the edge of mutual surrender, are we not?"

They continued kissing until their lips were raw.

Harry, after years of grappling with the thin line between life and death, had finally known what it meant to truly live. Yet, he had lived for what felt like an eternity, and he had longed for the comforting embrace of home.

It was a stroke of fortune that he had found it once more.

They had reclined on the sofa, Harry resting his head comfortably on Tom's chest while Tom ran his fingers soothingly over Harry's back. The tranquility was briefly interrupted by a loud pop, but neither of them felt any urgency to rise.

"Master Hadrian," Kreacher's rough voice cut through the peace Harry was enjoying.

Harry lifted his head and found the little elf looking at him with poorly concealed disgust. "Yes, Kreacher, what is it?"

Without answering, Kreacher snapped his fingers, and a letter floated in front of Harry's face.

"Thank you, Kreacher," Harry said neutrally as the elf bowed and promptly disappeared.

Tom leaned closer to take a peek at the letter. "What's that?" he asked curiously.

Harry leaned against him as he opened the letter. "It's from Sirius," Harry replied, scanning the letter before continuing. "He says it's been nice to have Remus there, but they don't understand what's going on. He mentioned that I promised to visit, so I'd better get there before they find me." Harry's brows furrowed. "He also says that Remus told him about my abduction and asks if I'm okay, as if Remus didn't tell him a hundred times that I was fine."

Tom hummed but pulled Harry closer, knowing that Harry cared for Sirius Black and that this was important to him. "Have you told them anything about what's going on?"

Harry grimaced. "Not really. I told them Dumbledore had some *sinister* plans for me and intended to use Sirius as leverage. I haven't told them that I've completely switched sides."

Tom wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulder and held him closer. "Will you tell them?"

Harry gazed down at the letter, taking a deep breath before he spoke. "I don't know, they won't react... well to the news."

Tom studied Harry's side profile, recognising that this wasn't just about a letter but something deeper. "You're worried about losing them," he stated, understanding it as a fact rather than a question.

Harry's face contorted with agitation, and Tom realised he hadn't seen Harry this worked up in a while. "I guess. I'm not sure how I feel. I want them to be safe and happy, and preferably not hating me, but it's mostly out of obligation. I care for them, but not like I used to. I once saw them as the closest thing I had to parents, but I don't really know them, and they don't really know me. I don't want to base my decisions and opinions on their beliefs. I am my own person," Harry ranted.

Tom brought his hand up to Harry's head, running his fingers through the surprisingly soft hair. Harry relaxed against him, the tension in his shoulders fading away.

"You don't have to decide now, darling. Go see them and give them a diluted version of the truth if that's what you want. You don't owe them anything. You've already saved their lives, and that's enough."

Harry nodded softly against Tom's shoulder but didn't say more.

Tom didn't like seeing Harry in such a somber mood, so he decided to lighten the atmosphere with a touch of humor. "You know, if things don't go well tomorrow, I'm fully prepared to offer my... unique negotiation skills. A good session of torture has been known to put things into perspective for some."

Harry's lips twitched, and he chuckled quietly, a genuine but subdued laugh. "You're a psychopath," Harry replied in a light tone.

Tom raised an eyebrow with a playful grin. "Ah, but remember, I'm a *pretty* psychopath. Don't forget the 'pretty.'"

This time, Harry's laughter was fuller, and it lifted the heaviness that had settled between them. Tom couldn't help but feel a twinge of relief. The things he would do for Harry's happiness.

Soon, silence settled in, and it remained that way until an elf popped in with their afternoon tea, which they sipped in comfortable silence.

Tom couldn't recall the last time he had simply sat down and done nothing; it was... nice. He didn't think he'd enjoy it frequently, especially not on his own, but with Harry by his side, it felt peaceful.

After they finished their tea, Harry summoned a book. "Can you read to me?" he asked in a small voice.

Tom smiled tenderly at him, his voice carrying warmth, "Of course, darling."

The remainder of the afternoon was dedicated to immersing themselves in a book about illusionary magic. They continued until evening, when they embarked on a traditional Yule celebration.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, bathing the room in soft, warm twilight hues, Harry and Tom prepared for their private Yule ceremony. The hearth had already been adorned with an exquisitely carved Yule Log, its aged oak wood showcasing perfection.

In their most comfortable loungewear, Harry and Tom settled on the carpet in front of the hearth. With a mischievous glint in his eye, Tom leaned in and whispered to Harry, "Shall we light the Yule Log together, my soul?"

For those unfamiliar with the tradition, Tom's question might not carry significant weight, but for those in the know, it signified something reserved for families and married couples.

Harry's eyes sparkled with anticipation as he nodded in agreement. Together, they raised their wands and, in unison, chanted the incantation to ignite the Log. A gentle, golden flame sprang to life, enveloping them in a warm and inviting glow.

The Yule Log, symbolising their commitment to each other, seemed to pulse with life. Harry and Tom watched it with shared wonder, feeling their magic gather and envelop them, cocooning them in a blanket of warmth and comfort. For Harry, who had only observed these traditions alone in the past, this experience was unlike anything he had felt before. It was a profound moment, as if they were truly one and the same, and that all magic was interconnected. Harry relished in the sensation.

Hours passed, although it felt like mere moments. After the Yule Log had dwindled to embers, Harry and Tom ventured out into the moonlit garden. The night air was crisp and

filled with an electrifying sense of anticipation. The garden, bathed in silver moonlight, exuded an aura of sacredness.

The secluded stone circle stood in profound reverence, its ancient stones gleaming beneath the moon's tender embrace. Even nature seemed to pause, acknowledging the gravity of the moment.

Harry and Tom stood hand in hand within the circle, their fingers intertwined tightly. Their wands, held with utmost respect, rose in perfect unison, aimed at the starry expanse above. The incantation began, their voices intertwining in a harmonious chant that resonated throughout the garden.

The stones appeared to respond, emitting a soft, resonant hum as if they, too, partook in the magic being woven. A gentle breeze stirred the frozen leaves, and the nocturnal creatures added their voices to the mystical symphony.

With each uttered word and shared gesture, Harry and Tom's connection deepened. As the ritual reached its zenith, they lowered their wands.

In the moonlit garden, they sealed their bond with a kiss. The night itself seemed to revel in their unity, stars shining brightly overhead.

After their nightly escapades, they returned to the house in a daze. Somehow, they managed to make it to a bed, and Harry fell into slumber as soon as his head touched the pillow.

It couldn't have been more than an hour or two later when Harry woke up, his head throbbing as if he had gone on a wild binge. He supposed they must have expended a significant amount of their magic for him to feel this disoriented.

Harry turned over with the intention of snuggling closer to Tom's side, but he was unpleasantly surprised to find the bed empty. While most times Harry wouldn't have bothered to get up and search for Tom, he was feeling rather grumpy, and he longed for the comfort of

being held. With a shiver running through him, he climbed out of the warm bed and hastily grabbed the nearest blanket to wrap around himself before venturing out.

Fortunately, Tom was in the first room Harry checked – the library. Tom sat behind a desk, facing the window, and appeared not to notice Harry's presence, which only underscored how magically drained he must be.

With a mumbled "Tom," Harry ventured closer, his tired eyes meeting Tom's as he spun around in his chair.

"What are you doing?" Harry asked, his voice carrying a scolding tone, though it was slightly softened by the effort it took for him to keep his eyes open.

"I received a letter from a follower, and once I'm awake, I find it difficult to go back to sleep," Tom responded.

Harry looked at him, clearly annoyed, before letting out a huff. "Let's go back to bed," Harry demanded. However much Tom enjoyed hearing Harry take charge like that, he wanted to finish this task first.

Tom offered Harry a gentle smile in apology. "In just a moment, darling. I want to finish this first. It won't take long. Go back to bed, sweetheart."

Harry didn't seem too pleased with the response and hesitated for a moment before climbing into Tom's lap. His knees straddled Tom's hips, bringing their chests close together. It was a snug fit, considering they were both too big to comfortably sit two in one chair. Tom waved his hand, expanding the chair wandlessly, not to distance himself from Harry's warmth but to ensure it remained intimate.

While Harry wasn't short, he was of average height, whereas Tom was quite tall. Yet, as they sat face to face, chest to chest, they appeared to be at the same eye level. It felt oddly fitting, Tom thought. He wrapped his arms around Harry's waist, and whatever reserve of energy was keeping Harry upright seemed to dissipate as he slumped forward against Tom.

Harry leaned his head against Tom's shoulder and nuzzled his face into Tom's neck, his hair tickling Tom in the process.

"Well, this works as well," Tom commented before turning his attention back to his paperwork, all while Harry remained comfortably nestled in his lap.

From time to time, Harry would nuzzle his nose up and down Tom's neck, eliciting a response from Tom, not of discomfort, but of unfamiliar sensations. His stomach twisted and fluttered in ways Tom had never experienced before. He didn't dislike it, but it was undeniably unfamiliar. It was a sensation he'd likely have to grow accustomed to because Harry appeared to be naturally touchy and affectionate, almost as if he had been starved for touch. Tom didn't mind, as he himself had probably been touch-starved without realising it. He couldn't recall the last time someone had touched him without harmful intentions.

Harry snuggled even closer and wrapped his arms around Tom's waist. Tom saw this as an opportunity to ask Harry some questions.

"Harry, are you going to visit your godfather tomorrow?" Tom inquired.

Harry responded with a quiet, "Yeah," his warm breath sending shivers down Tom's spine.

Tom acknowledged this with a thoughtful hum but didn't press for further details about that visit. Instead, he posed another question that had been on his mind.

"Darling, it must be exhausting playing with children all day. How long do you plan to stay at Hogwarts?"

"Just until the end of term, I don't want to go back after," Harry mumbled, his words clear enough for Tom to hear.

"And OWLs?" Tom inquired.

"I'll take them in the summer," Harry replied, shifting his knees inadvertently, causing them to brush against Tom's awakening interest. *Not now*, Tom reminded himself.

"Will you join the Wizengamot, then, darling?" Tom continued.

Harry hummed his affirmative.

"How many seats will you occupy?"

"All."

"Ah, all seven. That will undoubtedly be a considerable advantage. Lucius just sent me the latest proposal for the vampire segregation act that the Light has put forth. It's preposterous, of course, but there's a chance it might gain approval. I'll likely have to appoint a representative for my house. Perhaps I'll have Lucius cast my vote until I've officially joined upper society..." Tom pondered aloud, delving into the intricacies of politics. But as he continued to speak, he noticed the absence of Harry's response. When he glanced down, he found Harry fast asleep.

In slumber, Harry appeared rather adorable, Tom couldn't help but think. He looked so soft and delicate, a far cry from the typically tense and rigid persona Harry displayed when awake. A small, fond smile involuntarily tugged at Tom's lips as he observed him. He continued working for another hour before deciding to call it a night.

He rose from his chair, his arms cradling Harry's form with tenderness, and carried him back to their shared bed. With utmost care, he lowered Harry onto the welcoming mattress.

As Tom turned to change into more comfortable attire, a faint but firm grip on the back of his shirt stopped his movement. He paused, shifting his gaze over his shoulder to meet Harry's half-lidded eyes.

In that moment, the room seemed to hold its breath, as if recognising the weight of Harry's whispered plea. "Don't leave me, Tom," Harry's voice, though soft, was filled with longing.

"Never, my soul," Tom responded with an unwavering and resolute conviction. "As long as I draw breath, I'll be here to remind you, every time you doubt, every time you wonder if someone cares, that I'll always be here."

It was Tom's turn to offer his unwavering assurance to Harry. With a flick of his wand, his clothes vanished, and he gracefully joined Harry in bed, drawing him close until their bodies melded together perfectly.

"Do you believe me, my Harry?"

"I do."

"Good, that's my good boy. You are far too good to me, my darling." Tom lifted his fingers and gently traced them down from Harry's forehead to his neck and further down his back. Harry shivered at the fleeting touch.

"Dream of me tonight?" Harry asked.

"If you are not in my dreams, what would be the point of dreaming?" Tom responded before closing his eyes and drifting off.

Harry's eyes were closed, but his heart raced, and his lungs ached. He didn't speak again until he was certain Tom was asleep, his breath deep, and Tom's arms secure around his waist.

"I can't bear to be alone again," Harry whispered into Tom's chest, the words barely audible as he was held so tightly that it left him feeling both comforted and confined.

He pondered, not for the first time, how he hadn't imploded yet. After all, magic thrived on emotion, and he certainly felt an abundance of it.

In a distant memory, Kali had once shared something with Harry, and now those words resurfaced.

"The gods, in their eternal existence, both pity and envy humans. They understand that each fleeting moment in your life carries the weight of significance, for any could be your last. They envy your mortality because it imparts a unique beauty to existence. Everything becomes more vibrant, more alive, and infinitely precious when you live with the knowledge that you are destined to face the inevitable."

Back then, Harry's response had been plain and unbothered. "I'm not human."

Kali had simply replied, "No, you're not. But your other half will be."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed that!

Thank you all for your patience with this story, I honestly want to finish this story soon but I don't think that's realistic. The plan is that it'll be completed by Christmas at the latest but we'll see.

Next chapter, spoiler, will not be as fluffy as ch 34 and 35, it will be a bit more angsty, I think, I haven't actually had time to write anything just plan it.

Anyway, next chapter will be posted on October 7th, until then take care!

Duelling My Desire

Chapter Summary

Harry and Tom. Harry and Sirius. And finally, the promised duel.

Chapter Notes

So I'd like to start off this chapter with an apology. I haven't been responding to any comments for about two weeks now and I'm really really sorry for leaving you all hanging. I read every single comment and I appreciate them sooo much, I love you all for the lovely and kind words! I have been having a weird time for a few weeks. I've been going through a rough patch in my personal life with a lot of drama and stress at work. And I know that's just an excuse. Lately, everything feels so... difficult. But I promise to start responding to your comments again because I want you to know how much they mean to me. Also, sorry for this chapter being a day late; same excuse, just a hectic day yesterday.

Anyway, love you all! Enjoy the chapter! ♥

Order of the Phoenix Faces Interrogation Amidst Dumbledore's Elusive Escape!

Well, well, my dear readers, Rita Skeeter here with an exclusive scoop that will send shockwaves through the wizarding world. While Dumbledore remains slippery as a Quick-Quote Quill, the Ministry of Magic has successfully rounded up most members of the so-called noble Order of the Phoenix, leaving them entangled in a web of questions surrounding the mysterious kidnapping of none other than our beloved Harry Potter.

Sources within the Ministry whisper of an unnamed ritual conducted on the Boy Who Lived during his harrowing abduction. The details are murky, but trust me, dear readers, Rita Skeeter is on the case, ready to unveil the secrets that have been hidden behind the veil of secrecy.

Names that once resonated with heroism are now tainted with suspicion. Take, for instance, Nymphadora Tonks—known for her metamorphic abilities, but could her powers have been used for darker purposes? And what about Kingsley Shacklebolt, esteemed Auror turned

possible conspirator? Shockingly, even members of the Ministry itself, who should be upholding the law, have been implicated in the Order's tangled web.

As the hours of questioning drag on, it has become evident that Dumbledore's absence is not the only perplexing factor. The once unblemished reputations of members like Arthur and Molly Weasley now hang in the balance, with connections to the clandestine ritual raising eyebrows and speculation.

The wizarding world is left to ponder: Did those we trusted most betray the Chosen One? How deep do the roots of this conspiracy run within the Ministry?

Waking up enveloped in Tom's embrace was an ecstasy Harry never wanted to end. He inhaled deeply, savoring the intoxicating scent that clung to Tom, his face buried against a chest that felt like the safest haven.

Fingers traced soothing patterns on his back, lulling him into the brink of sleep until Tom's voice pierced the tranquility. "When are you leaving?"

Harry hesitated, not due to uncertainty but because the impending situation after leaving bed was one he'd rather avoid. Old Gryffindor courage compelled him, though. "After breakfast, I suppose. Then I'll visit Luna and Draco, maybe swing by the ministry to prove I'm still among the living."

Tom's fingers continued their dance, and Harry felt the occasional twitch whenever his lips grazed Tom's chest. The desire to press closer and maybe leave a mark lingered, but Harry restrained himself, unsure of Tom's approval.

Tom, possessive as ever, might even appreciate the mark... Interrupting Harry's thoughts, Tom spoke, "I have work and a meeting to attend. Much has changed since I last addressed my followers."

Even as Tom's fingers maintained their comforting rhythm, he shifted back to look into Harry's eyes, a proximity that always left Harry both startled and strangely thrilled. "Want to join?" Tom asked, his smile tempting.

"The meeting?" Harry clarified, a teasing smile playing on his lips. "You just want a front-row seat to me cursing your followers."

Tom's fingers gently traced Harry's cheek. "Well, that's tempting, but I had something else in mind... You don't have to reveal yourself completely. Most of my followers will catch on however, except perhaps Crabbe and Goyle senior, but they're not known for their astuteness."

Harry chuckled, "They're like a walking advertisement for the perils of pureblood inbreeding—looks, mind, magic, in that order."

Tom smirked, "True, they do embody the consequences. They need a wake-up call."

"Good luck with that, dear," Harry quipped.

Tom laughed, "So, will you join me?"

Harry leaned closer, pressing his lips against Tom's jaw, leaving butterfly kisses as he trailed up to Tom's ear and softly bit down on his earlobe. "Do you want me to come?" He asked as he traced his previous path down with another round of nibbles.

A hand came up to the back of his head and held him in place against Tom's jaw. "I would like nothing more, darling."

Harry hummed. "Nothing more? Then I suppose I should stop what I'm doing now, seeing as being beside you is all you want," he said in a low teasing voice.

Tom threw a leg around his hips as Harry attempted to back away. He didn't get far before he pressed firmly against Tom. "Don't you dare move away from me, Harry Potter. Is this your attempt to kill me with how easily you play with my heart?"

Harry smiled, amused and deeply smitten. "Should I be worried about your heart? Didn't you say I could have whatever is left of it, and it's mine to cherish however I like?" Yielding to temptation, he bit down hard at Tom's jaw, making Tom spasm in surprise. "But don't worry, Tom, despite how much you make me ignore my own rationality, I would never willingly do something to shatter the world I hold in my hands."

Small imprints of his teeth could be seen over and under his jawline. An extraordinary heat settled heavily in Harry's lower stomach as he licked the teeth marks, and Tom's hands found their way under Harry's shirt, caressing all they could reach.

"You are so very distracting, my naughty little darling," Tom said in a husky voice that added more volume to the heat already in his stomach.

"There is nothing little about me, Tom," Harry declared, pressing his lower half more firmly against Tom and shifting his hips to ensure Tom could feel precisely what he was alluding to.

The needy moan that escaped Tom's mouth at the movement was something from dirty dreams, from fantasies.

So filthy, so delicious.

Harry wanted more.

However, all fun must come to an end, apparently, as Tom gripped his hips tightly and thwarted any further attempt at seduction.

"So will you come?" Tom asked with his usual casual tone, but his eyes remained hungry, pupils blown wide and dark.

Harry pondered, "I'll play along, but the moment I feel the urge to kill someone, I'm out." He did his best to suppress the urge to push for more, for whatever he wanted, Tom would give, willingly or not. Harry wanted him to have no doubts when they finally took that step.

"Deal," Tom agreed with a smirk as he loosened his grip on Harry's hips.

"See you tonight, then? We'll summon them together?" Harry asked, no uncertainty in his voice about joining the meeting despite being unsure if it was wise.

Tom's gentle smile accompanied a soft kiss on Harry's forehead. "I'll see you tonight."

After breakfast, Harry left rather quickly, not wanting to drag out the goodbye for longer than they already had. They parted with a kiss, and Harry was off.

...

"Harry!" he heard before he was enveloped in such a tight embrace it was more likely to be called a confinement than a hug.

"Sirius," Harry greeted calmly despite his hammering heart.

"You're alright, you're okay, right? You're not hurt?" Sirius frantically asked as he leaned back and checked every surface of his body for injuries.

Harry huffed out a quiet laugh. "They wouldn't be able to get rid of me that easily, Siri. Have you not heard? I'm unkillable."

Despite Harry's attempt at lightening the mood and Sirius being very easily humoured, he didn't laugh. He didn't even smile. He just looked at Harry with concern and apprehension that didn't quite look right on Sirius's face.

"Are you alright, Harry?" Sirius asked again, with a look in his eyes that tempted Harry to deny him the answer just so he could see Sirius's frustration grow. But Harry wasn't that cruel, or well, not most of the time.

"I'm fine, Sirius. As fine as I can be, I suppose. Though I've grown quite used to living under a threat to my life, so... you know," Harry ended the sentence with a shrug and was rewarded with his answer by seeing anger seeping into Sirius's features.

"The old man will pay dearly, Harry, I promise you that. If I ever get my hands on him, he'll see why my family is known for its so-called Black madness." Sirius spat out the words as his hold on Harry's arms tightened.

Harry looked at Sirius curiously but didn't reply.

Sirius closed his eyes and gathered himself. "Can you tell me more about what's been going on, Harry? I've been quite closed off here. The only news I've been receiving has been from the pages of the Prophet. And I'm sure most of what they spew is nonsense."

"Have you read Rita's articles about Dumbledore, her exposé, or whatever she calls it?" Harry wanted to know if Sirius could believe what she had written; it would be an indication of how much he had swayed from Dumbledore's grasp.

Sirius huffed and threw an arm around Harry's shoulder; they were the same height now, which seemed to throw off Sirius for a second. He looked Harry up and down before guiding him forward.

"I've read them. I can't believe how much he's gotten away with over the years—I mean, I don't exactly trust Skeeter, but some of what she said I had heard whispered about before, and with what I saw from the memory you sent me, it doesn't seem far-fetched," Sirius said as they neared the family lounge.

Harry was pleased with Sirius's answer but showed none of his satisfaction as he settled on the couch beside Sirius. "It's all true, Siri. I provide Rita with quite a bit of the information she's used. Of course, she did her own research as well, but I'm the one who put her on the path."

A mischievous smile grew on Sirius' face before he threw his head back and laughed loudly. "Good one, you are so much like your father," he said between breathless laughs.

Harry froze, as did his magic, which was always hovering around him, ready for an attack. It grew cold as ice, and Sirius must have felt it because he too stiffened and shut up.

"Pup?" he asked with wide and startled eyes.

"James... it's always James, isn't it," Harry breathed out deeply before looking up into Sirius's pained eyes with conviction. "One day you will see him again, Sirius, but until that day comes, you have to stop looking for him in people who never knew him."

"One day perhaps you shall meet someone who makes you feel as seen and alive as James did, but I can promise you now that I am not that person, I am not who you are looking for."

Harry tried not to pay attention to world-ending feelings such as this, for his world had ended more times than enough for him to hope it couldn't happen again. It shouldn't affect him so much.

"I'm- I'm sorry, pup, Harry. I didn't mean anything by it, I - I just," Sirius's eyes flew around the room, and a shaky hand was raised as he ran it through his curly hair. "Even if you never knew him, Harry, he's still part of you and I... sometimes when I look at you I see glimpses of who he was. I know you're not him, but it's hard sometimes to remind myself of that." Sirius had chosen his words carefully, Harry could tell, but it did little to ease the tension lingering in his body, the hurt squeezing his heart.

Harry, pushing down the resentment, replied, "Well, you need to remember. I'm not here to replace anyone. I'm here as myself because you asked me to come. And because I want you to accept who I am."

Sirius's tone softened as he spoke. "I'm with you, Harry, always."

But Harry doubted that. Sirius is a stubborn man, if nothing else; he wouldn't turn his back on his principles, he wouldn't support the side his family inadvertently taught him to hate.

Sirius Black had turned James Potter into his world. *Had no one ever taught the man that you cannot turn people into homes without them collapsing?*

Harry was old. He might only remember this lifecycle, these 140-something years, but his being was older. He had existed for a long time. He couldn't be certain how long, but this was his fourth? lifecycle, so his existence must be at least half a millennium old. And right now he felt it, the weight of years of experience, of witnessing human nature; it was disappointingly predictable.

All love, all happiness, seemed like a fantasy, a fleeting dream. With Tom, Harry preferred to dwell in the dream, but with Sirius, Harry had been abruptly awakened.

He had not known Sirius for long before he passed in his original dimension, only for a few years, but that didn't mean he hadn't been a part of Harry's life after that.

He had remembered Sirius longer than he ever knew him. It had hurt, but not as much as the sting of confronting reality again. Perhaps it was best if, after today, Sirius became just a part of his memories.

Harry breathed out and gently squeezed Sirius's hand. "Okay... Hey, where is Remus, by the way?"

Harry spent an hour with Sirius before Remus joined them, and by then, he was firm in his decision, though he lacked the courage to speak it out loud. He contemplated obliterating Sirius and Remus and sending them to some remote island.

As he grabbed the Elder Wand with trembling fingers, his traitorous magic retreated into his core, and with the stubbornness similar to that of the one who wields it, had refused to act. Magic, body, and mind—what one needed to be in control of the outcome of their fate. Two of the three had failed him now.

When sticky fingers withdrew from his wand, his magic sprang back to life, and all Harry could do was compromise with himself. He strongly suggested they leave the country and stay at the Black vacation home in France. They agreed easily enough.

Now, Harry was back home, alone, for he could not find the will to see more people today. His plans to visit Luna and Draco were scrapped in favor of sending a letter inviting them to visit him, for he would be staying here the remainder of the holiday. Attached with the letter, they received their Yule gifts—specialised death runes meant for protection and safety. Instructions were included on how they work: simply lay the sheer paper, on which the runes were drawn, on any part of their body and infuse it with a tinge of their magic so it would melt into their skin. The tattoo was not a normal one, however, and could be removed with intent but only by them.

A few key words were attached to the runes, and when said, activated a different function. One of which was 'safe haven,' to which they were swallowed by the shadows, bypassing any ward, and spit out in Peverell castle.

Harry had hoped it would be an adequate gift when he fashioned them, but right now, he felt too hollow for such feelings to penetrate his heart.

He walked with no destination in mind and somehow found his way to the dueling room.

Ah, this would be a nice distraction.

Tom had spent the day immersed in tedious plans and strategic discussions with his most trusted allies, diligently gathering information and enforcing necessary actions. Despite the monotony, it was work that demanded attention.

Upon returning to Peverell Manor, he harbored a hope to unwind in Harry's company, envisioning a few hours together in front of the fireplace, perhaps lost in the pages of another shared book. The mere thought brought a genuine smile to Tom's face, a happiness that felt strangely unfamiliar, almost unnatural.

Had it not been for Tom's thorough testing of every mind-influencing potion and spell known to wizardkind before the holiday rendezvous with Harry, he might have suspected foul play. Yet, there was none. What he felt was natural, defying the odds of what he might have believed just a year ago.

Tom, the embodiment of stoicism and ruthless determination, discovered a newfound willingness to embrace softer emotions—gentleness, love, and care—all for the sake of Harry. He was desperate to succeed, to navigate uncharted emotional territories.

His quest for Harry led him to the dueling room, where he found Harry wielding wild magic with breathtaking precision. Unlike the controlled magic drawn from one's core, wild magic was sourced from the very earth beneath one's feet. Harry exhibited an uncanny mastery over it, unleashing controlled chaos that left training dummies shattered.

Tom was captivated, rooted to the spot, unable to tear his gaze away from Harry's mesmerising performance. To move would be sacrilege, a distraction from the spellbinding spectacle unfolding before him.

Only a handful possessed the rare mastery to harness magic not perfectly aligned with their own essence. Harry, however, defied this magical rarity. He wielded it with a lethal combination of precision and control, a dance of devastation that left any onlooker in awe. Every flick of his wand resonated with accuracy, as if magic itself bent willingly to his command.

He bore the raw power of wild magic with an ease that bordered on nonchalance, a breathtaking performance that betrayed no inkling of awareness regarding the potential

consequences. His body moved in seamless synchrony with the unpredictable forces he commanded, a testament to his unparalleled skill, and a reminder that magic, in his hands, was a force to be reckoned with.

Harry was divine, a godly presence that made Tom's knees weak with the desire to fall and pray. Yet, even the act of praying felt sinfully inadequate in expressing the full devotion Harry truly deserved.

Harry continued to outclass the dummies, effortlessly conjuring more than a dozen additional targets. He wielded wild magic with a raw efficiency that saturated the room in its unrestrained overflow of energy. Tom found it hard to breathe, though the realisation barely registered amid the spectacle unfolding before him.

Harry was nothing short of magnificent.

Tom pondered how he ever entertained the notion of defeating such a force—what else could you call a being with such immense power?

Yet, Harry hadn't always possessed this awe-inspiring prowess. Just before this summer, the boy Tom saw lacked this overwhelming presence. Sure, there was potential for growth as a powerful wizard, but nothing of this magnitude. Harry was merely 15 years old and already more powerful than any being in this country. What could he evolve into?

Tom berated himself for not realising this sooner. Why hadn't he considered the extraordinary nature of Harry's power, acquired seemingly over a single summer? Did Harry purposefully make him overlook it? No, he couldn't accuse Harry of such intentions. If anything, it was Tom's fault—for underestimating Harry, for failing to recognise his potential, for labeling him as a mere child.

The question lingered: How did Harry become so powerful? Who was his teacher?

He supposed he'd have to ask—ask when the time was right. Harry always had been cagey about sharing what happened during the summer.

Tom's gaze refocused on Harry just as he released the hold on the surrounding magic, grounding himself back to his core.

After giving him a moment, Tom stepped forward. "Quite a show you put on. Was that for me, attempting to intimidate me before our own duel?" Tom teased, a crooked smile playing on his lips as Harry turned to face him. Any thoughts about the peculiarities of Harry's powers vanished as Harry's tight, serious expression melted into one of relief and happiness.

Harry was **his**.

"Tom, you're back," Harry exclaimed as he practically tackled Tom, throwing himself at him. It seemed like he must have had a challenging day, given the strength of his embrace. Tom squeezed back just as tightly, taking a step back to prevent them from toppling over as Harry wrapped his legs around his hips.

Harry's not small, and Tom has never been happier to have enhanced his strength with rituals than he is now. It allows him to hold Harry as he needs to be held without any struggle.

"Tough day?" Tom asks, and Harry nods against his neck. "It didn't go well with your godfather, I take it. Need me to take care of him?" The tone he uses is light, joking, but they both know he'd do anything Harry asks in a heartbeat.

Harry huffs in amusement and muses, "No, no need for that. Though I did plan to obliviate them for a moment but decided against it for now."

Tom hums, conjuring up an armchair in the middle of the dueling platform they are on—it stands out terribly. He sits down with Harry in his lap. "What happened? How much did you tell them?"

Harry takes a deep breath, and Tom suspects he's smelling him, but for some reason, Tom enjoys the thought. Harry leans back so Tom can see his face.

"Not much, nothing really. Just about Dumbledore's plans for me and the wizarding world. I told them I've found allies within the dark, but I didn't tell them about you. They were supportive..." Harry trailed off.

"But?" Tom prodded.

Harry's eyes drifted down from his, "but nothing really. It went alright, they support me and trust me," Harry lifted his eyes back up, raising an eyebrow, "*however*, I don't think they did it for me. They did it for my parents. For who I am in relation to my parents."

"Oh?"

"I've decided I don't want to see them again," Harry declared.

"Not ever?" Tom asked skeptically, drawing soothing circles with his thumbs on Harry's waist.

"Not anytime soon. I care for them and all, but every time I see them, it just hurts me. It hurts too much, and I don't want to hurt anymore," Harry said in a small voice.

Tom understood to some extent. He did the same with his parents when he was young, refusing to think about them, for what good did it do when it only hurt? And when he finally decided to find them, what good did that do? He discovered his mother was a rapist and his father was a snobbish high-class prat who abandoned him. There was no point in dwelling on them when it did nothing but cause pain. So, to some extent, he empathised with Harry's feelings.

"If that's what you want, darling, it's what you should do," Tom said with confidence, hoping to convey acceptance, understanding, and encouragement. Harry's eyes searched his for reassurance, and Tom projected it all in his gaze.

Harry nodded slowly, “I told them to leave the country, and I may have influenced their decision to do so, just a tiny bit.” Harry confessed, but not with guilt lingering in his voice—no, it was with levity.

Tom smiled widely at Harry, “Oh, and how long do you think they’ll decide to be gone?”

Harry’s lips twitched just slightly, and Tom got the strange urge to kiss the corner of his mouth, so he did just that. Just a quick peek, but as he leaned back, Harry was smiling happily at him. “Just until I tell them it’s safe to come back, and who knows how long that’ll be. Months, years? Who knows.”

Tom leaned forward at that and devoured Harry’s mouth fully this time. He couldn’t help himself; the mirth in Harry’s voice was just making him too tempting. Harry didn’t seem to mind, as he kissed back just as fiercely.

Harry rose to his knees and scooted closer until they were chest to chest. Tom's hands were firmly settled on Harry’s waist, holding him back from pulling at his hair too roughly. Harry really seemed to like his hair, as he pulled and combed through it every chance he got.

Tom attempted to slow the kiss down, but Harry was having none of it. He squirmed and shifted his body constantly against Tom, apparently unable to sit still.

Tom, while a man who valued being in control, really enjoyed the way Harry was dominating this session. He let Harry take the lead for a few minutes until he felt a part of himself starting to come to life. Then, he parted from Harry’s mouth with a sorrowful expression. Harry chased after him like a man dying of thirst.

“Harry, darling, slow down. We shouldn’t stress this; we have time to do this right.” Tom knew he was being a hypocrite right now. After all, he lost his virginity when he was thirteen, but he didn’t want Harry’s first time to be rushed or forced. He wanted it to be perfect, for Harry deserved nothing short of perfect.

Harry rolled his eyes, a playful glint dancing in them. “Oh, I'm well aware of your strict 'no more than kisses' policy. Who would've thought the mighty Dark Lord could be such a

prude?" He teased.

Now it was Tom's turn to roll his eyes dramatically. "I'm not a prude, you brat. I'm just determined to make your first time perfect, and I'd prefer it to happen when you're officially an adult."

Harry's eyes flashed with an indescribable intensity, a fleeting emotion that Tom couldn't quite decipher.

Soon, it was replaced by amusement. "You do realise I'm legally an adult now, right? So I suppose that means you can have me whenever you want." His voice was a low, hungry murmur, and Tom couldn't miss the challenging glint in his eyes.

I dare you, Harry's gaze seemed to say. It had been a while since Tom witnessed that challenge in Harry's eyes, and he hadn't realised how much he had missed it.

"If I can have you whenever I want, then I suppose that means I can also have your magic whenever I want," Tom remarked, subtly shifting his hips against Harry's, as if it were an unconscious act.

Harry gazed at him, a trace of confusion evident on his face, his head tilted to the side in an adorable manner.

Tom's hands slid slowly down Harry's waist over his ass then unto his thighs. He effortlessly pulled Harry up to his knees, the sudden movement catching Harry's breath. Tom wore a devilish smirk, relishing Harry's wide-eyed surprise and the slight parting of his lips.

Tom leaned in, his lips almost meeting Harry's, and he spoke in a seductive, husky voice, "Then I want your magic and your body right now, Harry darling. I want," Tom kissed Harry teasingly before withdrawing, "the duel you promised me."

Harry was breathless with want by the time Tom had finished speaking. Tom lifted him off his lap and stood up himself. Harry looked at him with a dazed look for a few moments before the words seemed to register. "What, you want to duel? Now?"

Tom snorted undignified at his startled demeanor. "Yes, that's what I want right now, a duel. So, do you accept?"

Harry's wide-eyed expression shifted into one of excitement and anticipation. "You're on, Tommy boy! I will not hold back after your little game there." Tom's eyes sparkled with glee as they positioned themselves on opposite sides of the dueling platform.

With a subtle nod and a flirtatious smile from Harry, the duel commenced. Spells unknown flew back and forth at an extreme pace, beams of light thrown and deflected simultaneously. Neither seemed to be slowing down, testing each other's magical prowess without any real strain. They engaged in a dance of spells, waiting to see who would falter or reveal a sign of weakness first.

Yet, such a moment never arrived. Minutes passed without either revealing a weakness. The walls were scorched, the floor uneven and stained with remnants of spells. Tom recognised the aftermath of Harry's last spell, a containment charm gone awry, freezing its target in a gelatinous substance. Tom's hasty counter caused the substance to explode, covering the floor in slippery goo.

They reached an impasse, unable to outduel each other with basic maneuvers and spells. It seemed Harry reached the same conclusion, evident as he began channeling magic through his feet into the stone floor beneath. The stone responded, rippling like liquid waves flowing towards Tom.

Caught off guard, Tom swiftly ascended a few meters above the ground to evade the rippling stone waves meant to unbalance him. Simultaneously, he dodged the relentless curses Harry hurled his way.

"You always did have a flair for the dramatic," Tom quipped, a wry smile playing on his lips as he countered with a wand movement, sending tendrils of shadow weaving through the air toward Harry.

Harry chuckled, seemingly unperturbed by the shadows now enveloping him in complete darkness. "Just trying to keep you on your toes, dear," he said before a blinding light dissipated the shadows with a high-pitched screech.

Despite his prowess, Tom couldn't shake the feeling that Harry was holding back. It was as if Harry danced on the edge of his own power, teasing Tom with glimpses of what he was truly capable of. Harry Potter was a dangerous force, wielding more power than any human could.

As the duel progressed, the complexity of their magic intensified. Harry conjured illusions that twisted reality, making it difficult for Tom to distinguish between truth and illusion. Tom retaliated with curses that seemed to rewrite the fabric of space itself, but Harry effortlessly sidestepped them.

The room echoed with the clash of their magical forces. Harry, ever the opportunist, used the environment to his advantage. He transfigured the walls into mirrors, reflecting Tom's own spells back at him. Tom, growing weary, began to sense the tide turning against him.

"You're holding back, Harry," Tom said between gritted teeth, parrying a particularly powerful spell that left the air tingling with residual magic.

Harry raised an eyebrow, "Am I? Maybe you're not giving me a reason to go all out."

With each passing moment, Tom's movements became more sluggish, his once precise spells losing their edge. Harry, fueled by determination, pressed the advantage. He disarmed Tom with a flick of his wrist, sending Tom's wand clattering to the ground.

The room fell silent as Harry stood over the disarmed Tom. A triumphant smile played on Harry's lips as he cast binding spells, securing Tom in place.

"Looks like I won this round, and I must say, I do like the look of you tied up at my feet," Harry said, his tone a mixture of victory and want.

Tom, though bound, couldn't help but smirk. "Oh, I think I would prefer you tied up to a headboard." Harry's eyes roamed over Tom's body for a moment, and Tom preened at the hunger he saw in Harry's eyes.

With a flick of his wand, Harry released Tom and conjured comfortable chairs for each of them. As they caught their breath, the remnants of their magic still lingered in the air, and Tom was captivated.

Harry smirked at Tom, leaning forward with eagerness shining in his eyes, devoid of the exhaustion that weighed on Tom. "So, up for another round?"

....

As the morning unfolded after the tumultuous meeting with Tom's followers last night, Harry eagerly anticipated a day spent with Tom, who had teased a surprise for the evening.

However, the bright day took a sharp turn when, seated at the breakfast table, a copy of the Daily Prophet landed ominously between them. The title loomed dark and foreboding amid the glittering reflections from the crystals on the chandelier:

"DEATH EATER ATTACK ON MUGGLE VILLAGE: HE-WHO-MUST-NOT-BE-NAMED BACK!"

Cries of the Innocent

Chapter Summary

Harry throwing around accusations like candy, the death eater meeting, a glimpse of Tom's childhood and the patronus charm

Warnings: mentions of pedophilia, and child abuse. Not explicit but implied. Tom also talks about an attempted SA when he was a child but he escaped before anything happened.

Chapter Notes

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

As Harry delved deeper into the article, his eyes widened, and upon reaching the end, confusion overwhelmed him.

“Tom, tell me you didn’t order this.” Harry said, dread evident in his voice.

So many muggles died in vain last night. Harry has witnessed enough death and destruction to last a lifetime; he doesn't want more, especially when it's unnecessary.

Tom, who had been calmly reading the paper, startled at Harry's question. A look of disbelief grew upon his face as he responded, “Of course, I didn’t. Why would I do that, and when would I have found the time? I came here with you after the meeting, and except for the 10 minutes I spent in the bathroom, I didn’t leave your side.” His tone was even, but Harry sensed the betrayal hidden beneath and winced.

Harry lowered his eyes. “Yes, that’s true. I do believe you wouldn’t do something this stupid, Tom, but I had to ask.”

Tom breathed out, closing his eyes for just a moment. “It’s fine, Harry. I know this is just the type of thing I would have done if I was still insane.” This time, there was no hidden emotion in his voice.

Harry reached forward, interlocking their fingers on the table, and gave Tom his best puppy-eyed look, hoping it would soften the blow he had just delivered. Tom's lips twitched against his will, and Harry breathed out a sigh of relief.

“It says you were spotted there,” Harry continued, “*dressed in dark robes, flowing around him like an ominous shadow.*” He grimaced. “Yikes, they really need to work on their writing.”

Tom shook his head in astonishment at their stupidity. “Of course, I wasn’t there, but that poses the question, who was? I can’t think of anyone except Dumbledore who would have the nerve to impersonate me.”

"Hmm, but would Dumbledore really go this far?" The question lingered in the air, a puzzle neither felt equipped to solve. They shared a mutual disdain for Dumbledore, yet couldn't fathom him committing cold-blooded murder.

For a fleeting minute, they sat in silence, thoughts forming and dissolving as they grappled with understanding. Harry's gaze dropped to the article before him. "That's strange," he mumbled to himself.

Tom's eyes, intense, focused back on him, with a scrutiny that would have made Harry blush under different circumstances. "What is?"

Harry shook off unneeded thoughts. "Rita didn't write it," he replied, pointing to another name on the byline.

"What's strange about that? There are other journalists, you know." Tom teased, but his tone came off rather dry.

Harry scoffed. “I know, but after Rita published all those articles about Dumbles, she’s been getting all the juicy articles.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, and I’ve never heard of this Reginald Cobbe guy before.” Harry furrowed his brows, attempting to recall the name, but it remained elusive, absent from any part of his memory.

Tom mirrored Harry's frown. “I haven’t either.”

Harry squeezed Tom's hand, which he still tightly held. “Do you think this has anything to do with the meeting last night?” Tom looked up at Harry, detecting a hint of worry in Harry’s expression.

Tom’s features softened. “I can’t be sure. Perhaps, but I can’t imagine my followers would be foolish enough to upset me,” Tom said with a serious expression and a low voice.

Harry's lips twitched slightly at Tom's certainty. “You mean they're scared enough of you not to do something that would risk punishment.”

“Exactly,” Tom affirmed with a nod.

Harry snickered—a light sound that loosened the tension ever so slightly.

Last night

Severus Snape was many things — a potions genius, a mean-spirited professor, a very clever spy, and a survivor, to name a few. But if there was one thing he wasn’t, it was a coward. Yet, at this moment, he'd never felt more like a coward.

As the Dark Mark on his arm had started burning, the first feeling was dread and fear — blood freezing, breath halting. The second, that quickly followed, was acceptance, acknowledging the imminent prospect of his own demise.

Despite accepting his fate, he remained paralyzed, the overwhelming desire to evade death and its aftermath gripping him. What scared him most was the prospect of encountering Lily again. It was for that final sentiment that he now considered himself a coward.

He couldn't endure having to hear her angry voice, yelling and crying, cursing him for mistreating her son. He knew forgiveness was beyond reach; there was no explanation for his behavior — he just despised the child. Doing only enough to avoid breaking the vow wouldn't shield him from her wrath if they were to meet again.

The searing pain in his arm had numbed to a point where its cessation went unnoticed. The hum of his wand, however, jolted him back to the present - the potion was ready and demanded his attention.

Acting on instinct, he moved mechanically, removing the potion from the fire, expertly decanting it into vials, and stowing them away in his cupboard.

Then realisation struck - he had to leave. With a perfunctory efficiency, he seized a calming draught, consumed it with a desperation bordering on necessity, and apparated into the unknown.

'He who fears he shall suffer, already suffers what he fears.'

The first person Severus encountered was Lucius, a predictably unsurprising occurrence in the grandeur of Malfoy Manor where he found himself.

“Severus,” Lucius greeted, surprise subtly etched on his face, evident only in the raise of his well-groomed eyebrow.

“Lucius,” Severus replied with a polite nod.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you, Severus. I didn’t know the Dark Lord had brought you back into the fold.” Lucius turned, assuming Severus would follow.

Without hesitation, Severus did. “I haven’t been. This is the first time he’s called me. Before now, I’ve only been able to speculate about his return.”

Lucius turned slightly, studying Severus from the corner of his eye before humming. “Hmm, I see.”

Severus briefly considered probing Lucius for more information about the Dark Lord and events since his return. However, he knew Lucius to be an opportunist, likely to exploit his curiosity and possibly even bring it forth to the Dark Lord. Minutes away from the Dark Lord's presence, it wasn't a risk worth taking.

They walked in silence for a few minutes. To an outsider, the stroll might have seemed calm and casual, but the tension between them was palpable. As they approached, the Dark Lord's magic extended around them, intensifying with each step. It seeped into their bones, rendering them shaky and unsteady in their own bodies.

Severus found himself torn between an admiration for the Dark Lord's formidable power and the underlying fear that gripped him.

Finally reaching the imposing white wood doors, Severus placed his hand on them, only to feel a lightning-fast thread of magic wrap around his core, tying a knot where knots shouldn't be. Turning to Lucius for an explanation, Severus found a troubled expression that offered no answers.

What had that been? A bind, he recognised, but its purpose eluded him. The unfamiliar magic lined the walls, stretching further—a force binding whoever entered this room to something unseen.

Raising his occlumency walls as high as possible, Severus walked inside with a feigned confidence, concealing the unease within.

And promptly froze.

Glad for his raised defenses, Severus was confronted with something indescribably disturbing.

Harry Potter was seated across the Dark Lord's lap.

Severus felt his head spin.

The Dark Lord touched Potter with a gentleness Severus hadn't thought him capable of.

But it was the way he looked at Harry that disturbed Severus the most. As if Harry embodied the beauty of the world, as if he had finally found meaning in life, settled comfortably in his lap. Two halves of a person, completed by the other.

A man drowning in the depths of his beloved, sinking so deep that no others could reach him.

Severus felt a profound sense of despair, as if he were irreparably broken.

How had Lord Voldemort, amidst hate, been rewarded with love?

Why had he found love, and why was Harry the one he'd chosen?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Severus's existence had been a relentless interrogation of whys.

Why did his father abuse him?

Why didn't his mother love him?

Why did the other children hate him?

Why didn't Lily choose him?

Why did she die?

Why was he alive?

Fatigue weighed heavily on Severus. Yet, an internal force had always propelled him forward, shoving aside obstacles mercilessly for survival. It was this resilience that had impressed the Dark Lord upon their first encounter—a trait Severus detested within himself.

Briefly succumbing to the abyss of despair, Severus redirected his focus to the most perilous entities in the room—the two men who exchanged smiles and laughter like newlyweds. The mere thought of them in such terms sent a shiver down Severus's spine, intensifying his discomfort.

Severus couldn't discern the exact content of their conversation, concealed by a privacy ward as they were, but the deep dialogue was evident from the frequent movement of their mouths.

The sight of Harry Potter comfortably seated in the Dark Lord's lap, surrounded by dark wizards, should perhaps have been more surprising to Severus, but it wasn't. Dumbledore had forewarned of an inevitable connection, though not precisely like this. Dumbledore's warnings suggested Potter's proximity to the dark side, teetering on the edge of an alliance. Severus himself had harbored suspicions about Potter's true nature, sensing his magic darkening during moments of distress or anger, especially in his fourth year. This year, the shift toward darkness had become even more pronounced.

While it was unexpected to witness such closeness between Potter and the Dark Lord, the man responsible for his parents' demise, here they were—Potter lounging in his lap, engaged in conversation that seemed easy, as if they were intimately familiar.

Surveying the room, Severus noticed the inner circle, or what remained of it, attempting to conceal their surprise and disgust. It became apparent that this revelation wasn't common knowledge among them, prompting curiosity about why Potter and the Dark Lord chose this moment for such a disclosure.

His attention returned to the Dark Lord, feeling a surge of nausea as Potter leaned in, whispering something in his ear while the Dark Lord's hand ventured higher up Potter's thigh. Suppressing the urge to vomit, Severus couldn't fathom how long he stood frozen beside Lucius, observing the unsettling scene.

In a sudden shift, the couple turned their attention to the gathered crowd. The Dark Lord addressed them, "My dear *friends*, how lovely for you to join me on this blessed occasion. As you see before you, the status quo has shifted, and the war is ours."

Severus struggled to redirect his focus, but his gaze remained locked with Potter's, the latter sporting a smug smirk. The connection broke when Potter turned his glowing eyes to the next person, leaving Lucius visibly startled by the thorough scrutiny.

Potter continued studying each person present with curious intensity as the Dark Lord outlined plans for seizing the opportunity presented by Dumbledore's less-than-honorable disappearance.

Suddenly, Potter rose swiftly, causing even the Dark Lord to falter in his speech. The unnerving red eyes of the Dark Lord fixated on Potter's advancing form, but Potter's attention remained fixed on Dolohov. His green eyes glowed with fury and power as he approached Dolohov's rigid figure.

"Harry?" the Dark Lord questioned, yet Harry chose to disregard it—a grave sin in the Dark Lord's eyes for anyone, except, it seemed, for the Boy Who Lived.

Striding gracefully, fierce as a panther, his movements calculated and flawless, Potter's gaze remained fixed on Dolohov.

The Death Eaters parted like shadows yielding to the encroaching dawn, their attention fixated on the formidable presence of Harry Potter.

"Will you tell them what you've done, or shall I enlighten the world of your disgusting sins myself?" Harry inquired, though it wasn't a mere question. Magic swirled around Potter, coalescing into a dark storm, poised to strike down anyone standing in his way.

"Answer me!" Harry demanded harshly, his words coated in magic that compelled obedience. Dolohov, confronted by Harry, opened and closed his mouth, akin to a fish out of water. Seeking refuge in the Dark Lord's gaze, Dolohov found only malicious glee directed at him and naked desire aimed at Harry.

A shiver ran down Severus's spine.

Growing tired of Dolohov's silence, Harry's anger intensified, aggravated further by not being the sole focus of Dolohov's attention. Severus thought it foolish to divert attention from such a dangerous entity. Despite his disdain for Potter, Severus acknowledged him as an immensely powerful wizard who now seemed to possess magical control in abundance.

Potter made no move for his wand; instead, he lowered his gaze, and Dolohov sank to his knees in unison with Harry's eyes. The sound of bones cracking and breaking echoed around the room as he slowly descended.

Severus had to concede; Dolohov endured the shattering of his bones without uttering a single sound.

"Tell them. What. Did. You. Do?" Potter ground out through gritted teeth. Severus stole a glance at the Dark Lord, indifferent as his newest companion instilled terror in his old follower.

Dolohov's mouth opened but closed swiftly. Potter narrowed his eyes, and as he spoke again, his voice resonated through the hall, compelling them all to confess their sins. "TELL ME NOW!"

Finally, the words tumbled from Dolohov's mouth in a jumble, "I did nothing wrong — they are filthy Muggles, they deserve worse! They are nothing more than animals! They should be honored that I decided to use their bodies — the filthy beasts are nothing more than toys. I regret nothing!"

The magic pouring from Harry's body at Dolohov's confession saturated the room, making it hard for anyone to breathe anything but the heavy black magic that burned their lungs. Severus, unable to maintain control over his own thoughts, struggled to comprehend the gravity of Dolohov's admission.

As Harry reined in some of his magic, the room echoed with the collective heavy breathing of the onlookers.

"They were children!" Harry roared, raising his hand. A red beam shot from his palm, and the next sound that engulfed the room was the desperate, pleading screams of someone on the brink of death.

The hushed gasps from those around them were overshadowed by the cacophony of screams. Nevertheless, Severus observed the looks of amazement directed at Harry for such a formidable display of magical power. Wandless and wordless magic was a skill reserved for the Dark Lord alone until now.

Amidst the chaos, the Dark Lord had silently moved behind Potter, not intervening or protesting Harry's treatment of his follower but observing with awe and wonder. Even the Dark Lord recognised that, in this moment, he couldn't stop Harry.

The agonised screams persisted seemingly for an eternity until Potter closed his fist, abruptly cutting off the spell. Dolohov lay still on the ground, twitching occasionally, indicating that he was still alive.

Many would consider being left alive a mercy, but Severus saw no mercy in Potter's actions, only a prelude to his slow, impending, torturous doom—a relentless damnation.

The Dark Lord whispered something in Potter's ear, prompting a slow nod from him. Raising his hand again, Potter waved it over the crumpled body, which vanished without a sound, as if it had never existed. Yet, a stark smudge of blood remained on the white marble floor, proof of Dolohov's existence.

Potter and the Dark Lord walked back to the podium, settling into their chair before turning their attention back to the gathered men, seamlessly resuming the meeting as though nothing extraordinary had transpired.

Severus harbored a stark certainty that his survival was doubtful.

The meeting pressed on without further interruption, and everyone else left physically intact but emotionally shattered.

Severus lived to see another day, yet gratitude eluded him.

Present time

“Do you think one of your Death Eaters is collaborating with Dumbledore? After seeing me there yesterday, they've decided to rebel? If Dumbledore offered them protection, perhaps they could be persuaded to act against you.” Harry contemplated out loud.

Tom's eyes narrowed in thought, his jaws clenching harder, the possibility weighed heavily on his mind. "I'll have to gather them tonight and make sure there are no traitors amongst us. They will have nowhere to hide."

Harry's thoughts drifted back to the previous night and what he had uncovered in the darkest corners of Dolohov's mind. Initially he was just scanning surface thoughts, but Harry delved deeper when he reached Dolohov. His mind had been preoccupied, fixated on something that fueled excitement. Harry had been intrigued, but regret settled in swiftly as he witnessed the sick, deprived actions of the evil creature—more a monster than a man.

The gruesome acts Dolohov had committed against Muggles, against children, were etched in Harry's mind, irreversibly staining his memory. The desire to obliterate the man had surged within him, but he refrained, knowing that it wouldn't be enough. Dolohov deserved hell before Harry ushered him into Death's embrace, and even in death, he would find no peace—Harry would ensure that.

But now Harry wondered, how had Tom not known? The unsettling thought crossed his mind—had Tom known and chosen not to act?

No, Tom was cruel, but not needlessly so, especially not against children, muggle or magical. Harry believed Tom would have intervened if he knew, but he needed to hear it from Tom himself.

"You weren't aware? About Dolohov, I mean." Harry glanced at Tom, attempting to conceal the emotions clouding his judgment and forcefully suppressing the bile rising within him. He knew he was throwing around accusations, baseless as they were, but they needed to be voiced. His mind would never settle if he didn't know.

Tom's eyes narrowed in anger and disgust. If Harry weren't familiar with Tom's expressions, he might have feared the intensity was directed at him rather than something in Tom's mind.

"**No**. I did not. I occasionally delve into their minds, but I only scan for thoughts related to betrayal or lack of loyalty and belief in me. I don't invade their private thoughts if there's no need. Dolohov is one of my oldest followers, and I granted them more privacy than newer recruits. A mistake on my part, I can see that now. A mistake I will not repeat, I **swear** to you, Harry." Tom looked into Harry's eyes with determination.

Harry stared back, and Tom continued, "If I had known, I would have put him down. I do not condone such vile behaviour, never. Not after what I—" Tom abruptly cut himself off, but resumed quickly as if Harry's heart hadn't stopped beating. "Not even when I was insane would I have allowed it." Tom's voice was hard and certain.

Harry believed him. "I know that. I just needed to hear it. Your hesitancy even in simple gestures like kissing or touching me, just because I'm younger, was a clear indication of how you feel about ped- *them*." Harry hesitated to voice the word, guessing it might stir unsettling thoughts in Tom's mind.

The details of what happened at the orphanage remained a mystery, but Harry had always carried a heavy suspicion of the horrors it held.

Still seated at the abandoned breakfast table, their food neglected and cold, Harry impulsively rose to his feet. He took Tom's hand, pulling him up before enfolding him in a tight embrace, and apparating them both to the library sofa. As they landed amidst the soft pillows, Harry fell backward, cradling Tom in his arms.

This new arrangement defied their usual dynamic; Tom, typically the one offering solace to Harry, now lay on top. His head found refuge in the curve of Harry's neck, arms tightly wound around Harry's back. Tom's weight pressed into Harry, making each breath a challenge. But what did comfort matter in the face of Tom's needs? The discomfort became inconsequential, a small price for the comfort Harry sought to provide.

Tom had not spoken a word since he saw Harry accept his words as truth. Yet, words weren't needed for Harry to sense Tom's vulnerability, the rawness of emotions coating the air. Heavy memories lingered at the forefront of Tom's mind, and Harry wished he could provide more than simple comfort.

He wrapped his legs around Tom's hips, clinging to him with desperation. His hands settled around Tom's waist and at the back of his head, offering whatever steadiness and security he could.

Desperate to offer any distraction, Harry reached for a magical creature book, choosing the most remote topic from the memories echoing in Tom's mind.

Harry read until his throat felt raw, and then he read some more. It was all he could do for Tom, and he'd continue until Tom signaled it was enough.

Harry had almost been lulled into a state of relaxation, fingers playing with Tom's hair as he read from the hovering book in front of him. Tom's breathing was even and deep, akin to sleep. However, the illusion shattered when he spoke in a hollow tone, causing dread to gather in the pit of Harry's stomach.

"They used to look at me in the most disgusting way," Harry's reading came to an abrupt halt as Tom spoke.

"Their eyes filled with want, filled with sick anticipation. I didn't understand it at first; I was just a child. I couldn't interpret what they wanted, but I knew they wanted *something*."

Harry's heart quickened in fear, and he clung even closer.

Tom spoke, his voice void of emotion, yet his magic burned with intensity. "I was five at the first attempt. I was brought to a room in a part of the orphanage we weren't allowed to enter, and I knew something bad was about to happen. He told me to strip and when I didn't, when I backed away, he grabbed me and told me to behave, or there would be *consequences*," Harry couldn't breathe. "I still didn't listen. I knew that whatever was about to happen would be far worse than any punishment. The dark look in his eyes told me as much. He had looked at me like that before, but not as intensely as now."

Tom shifted ever so slightly, and Harry felt a surge of overwhelming heartache. "He ripped apart my shirt and threw me on the bed. When he tried to pull off my pants, I—I was so

scared my magic reacted and cut him across the chest. He screamed, and I ran. I ran, but I couldn't run far. I hid under my bed until his wife came and dragged me out."

Harry swallowed, attempting to keep the despair out of his voice. "His wife?"

Tom nodded against his neck. "She worked as a nurse for the orphanage. I told her what happened, she slapped me across the face and told me not to lie. That I had attacked her husband and that I would go without supper for a week as punishment."

Harry hadn't noticed the tears streaming down his face, but Tom must have felt them because he looked up at Harry. Tom's face crumbled just the tiniest bit upon seeing Harry's broken expression.

He pushed up until he was face to face with Harry, gently wiping away Harry's tears with his thumb. "Why are you crying?" he asked gently.

Harry suppressed the sob that threatened to escape him. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry that happened to you, Tom. You—you were just a child. You should have been protected, cherished. Instead, he tried to—" Harry's ragged breath stuttered; he felt like a stone was stuck in his throat.

Tom looked at Harry as he broke down beneath him, leaning forward to kiss away the tears that fell from his eyes. "It's alright, Harry. He learned his lesson not to try anything, and I quickly learned to control my magic. No one else could touch me again," Tom reassured.

"It's not alright, Tom. That's horrible. For a child to have to learn to protect himself, that's—that's not alright," Harry said between ragged breaths. "I'm sorry; I should be comforting you. Instead, I'm the one who's breaking into pieces."

Tom continued kissing his cheeks before replying, "I don't mind, Harry. I made peace with my past a long time ago. I got my revenge against all those who wanted to hurt me. But it feels...better now that I've told you. I don't like to see you crying, but seeing that it's for my pain, it's... soothing." The words flowed slowly, uncertain, as if he struggled to express what he meant.

Harry laughed wetly at Tom's struggle to find the right words and the concentrated expression he wore. "I'm glad I can offer some solace."

Tom smiled softly at him, "you do. I'm glad you're in my life."

Harry smiled softly back, tears almost spilling over again. "Me too."

After lounging around in the library for a few more hours and having lunch while Harry shared Luna's insights on magical creatures, they headed to the dueling room. Tom had surprised Harry by asking an unexpected favor as they finished eating.

"Teach me the Patronus charm?"

Harry blinked in surprise but quickly agreed, so here they were, with Harry demonstrating the spell's movements. However, Harry was almost certain Tom already knew them; he must have attempted to master this spell before.

"Keep the turn sharp and precise, and don't move too slowly, or it'll cause the magic to flow unevenly into the spell," Harry explained.

Tom nodded in understanding and executed the movement perfectly on his first try. Harry wasn't surprised.

"You've tried this spell before. Why didn't it work last time?" Harry asked.

Tom focused back on Harry before leaning in and kissing him on the forehead. Harry's heart stuttered; each kiss he'd received left him longing for more.

"I've only ever produced the tiniest sliver of mist. I believe it's related to the memory I chose. I tried out a few, all with different kinds of happiness, but none of them worked."

Harry nodded in understanding, lowered his head in thought, and contemplated the best way to teach Tom. "Show me, please."

Tom complied, executing perfect form and pronunciation, but nothing emerged. He repeated the process several times, closing his eyes between attempts, summoning whatever memory he had chosen.

"What memory did you use?" Harry asked curiously.

Tom didn't seem surprised by his failure and replied without the slightest annoyance, which Harry found just slightly surprising. "The same memories I used last time: going to Hogwarts, finding out I was the heir of Slytherin, having my old roommates kneel before me."

Ah, not really happiness then. Harry shook his head, "those memories might hold more satisfaction than happiness in them, and they aren't purely happy; they are mixed together with other feelings, bitterness, sadness, anger. It needs to be pure."

Tom looked at him with confusion. *Didn't he understand?* Harry thought.

Harry took a deep breath and tried to explain more clearly. "Tom, producing a Patronus is not just a spell; it's a manifestation of your most profound positive emotions. It's about summoning a memory that is so pure and genuinely happy that it becomes a potent force. Think of a moment, maybe when you felt a deep connection, unwavering love, or sheer joy. It's crucial that this memory resonates with the truest essence of your emotions. The incantation and wand movements are important, but they're not the main focus. The Patronus is a guardian born from your happiest moments, a shield that thrives on the lightness in your heart, capable of dispelling the darkest forces, the darkest thoughts. Find that memory, Tom, and let it consume you."

Tom looked more hesitant than confused, so Harry took that as a win. Tom closed his eyes, relaxed his body, and breathed.

He remained in his mind for a few minutes. Harry longed to reach out to him, to hold him tight and give him all the happiness in the world. He knew this spell was difficult; he knew the memory was less important than the way it made you feel. He knew letting yourself feel such happiness was a vulnerability, one that Harry himself struggled with when he tried to produce the spell. He wasn't sure Tom would be able to accomplish it.

Harry's gaze was already on him when Tom opened his eyes and sought him out. Tom smiled so beautifully when their eyes connected. While keeping his eyes on Harry, he lifted his wand, "expecto patronum." The incantation was but a breathless whisper, and that was all that was needed.

Out of his wand, a bright mist sprang forth before forming into a large animal.

Harry's breath stuttered as he saw what was formed, his Animagus form, one he hadn't shown to anyone in this dimension. A panther.

Tom's eyes followed Harry's to the animal, his smile widened into an excited grin.

There was something utterly innocent in Tom's smile. Despite successfully performing a challenging spell after only a few tries, magic most couldn't master, Tom smiled like a child witnessing magic for the first time.

"That's - that's me," Harry breathed out as the panther spotted him, cuddling against his side. Harry ran a shaky hand over its head. "What did you think of?" he asked, even though he already knew the answer. He eagerly wanted to hear it.

"I thought of you," Tom confessed, cupping Harry's cheeks and drawing him close. "You're my happiness." Tom effortlessly expressed his affections, as if it cost him nothing to declare Harry's significance. Harry kissed him desperately before he knew it.

Chapter End Notes

So definitely not my favourite chapter. I contemplated not even posting it, I just couldn't get it right and now after rewriting it so many times it feels messy. I don't know how I feel, I know some people wanted to know about Tom's childhood so here is a glimpse I guess, not great to say the least.

This was planned to be more explicit but I couldn't bring myself to write it. I felt super uncomfortable just writing this and I honestly cried when I tried to envision the scene with young Tom before I even wrote it. That might be why I made Harry cry? Channelling my own emotions through him?

I might go back and edit this chapter when it's not been haunting my dreams for two weeks but let me know what you think please. If it felt weird or too uncomfortable please let me know!

Investigations, Invitations and Infestations

Chapter Summary

Harry and Tom investigate, Harry has some guests over when an uninvited visitor crashes the gathering and Tom is on an emotional rollercoaster

Chapter Notes

IM REALLY SORRY FOR POSTING LATE!! I don't have any explanation really, just my own laziness and perfectionism getting in the way.

I'm sorry, I'll try to make it up to you guys by posting the next chapter a few days earlier.

Please accept this filler chapter as my formal apology.

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

Time danced swiftly in Tom's company, each day a stolen moment of happiness and warmth. Harry basked in the glow of the happiness, savoring the completeness Tom brought, like a missing melody finally harmonising in his chest.

Harry reveled in happiness and contentment, though the impending departure cast a looming shadow.

Their days, mostly tranquil, were occasionally punctuated by the weight of an investigation into the death eater raid.

Tom, determined to uncover the truth from his followers, initially planned to use veritaserum for its efficiency in gathering information from a large group. He informed Harry of his plans, leading Harry to disclose another secret he'd learned in the future.

Veritaserum, seemingly infallible, had three ways to be resisted.

Firstly, one could cultivate immunity through minuscule, consistent doses over years. Harry was almost certain that Snape had built up this immunity, prompting Tom to plan an alternative method for questioning him.

Secondly, "—someone with strong occlumency shields could theoretically defy veritaserum's effects by compelling themselves to believe lies to be truth and vice versa. I doubt your Death Eaters possess skills needed, except perhaps Snape, but it's something to be aware of."

Tom's frown deepened as he pondered Harry's words. He didn't question how Harry had this information; he had come to realise that Harry possessed knowledge beyond expectation. "Is strong occlumency all that's needed? It seems too simple..." Tom mused, trailing off in thought.

Harry shook his head. "It's far from simple; it's a difficult challenge to trick your own mind so thoroughly, to swiftly switch mindsets. The process is excruciating, requiring an exceptionally high pain tolerance. Daily exposure to pain from a young age is almost a prerequisite for success without risking your mind crumbling under the weight."

Tom nodded his head in understanding, "Is there a way to prevent someone from succeeding in this?"

Harry tilted his head in contemplation. "Well, the mind succumbs more readily to external pressure, same for occlumency walls. Torture can render the mind more vulnerable, hindering attempts to bypass veritaserum."

After Harry elucidated how to resist veritaserum, Tom left with a pensive expression. When he returned, his demeanor revealed a mix of satisfaction and irritation, which Harry found quite endearing.

And if Harry, in the presence of Tom's dilated pupils which were exuding a hint of sadistic pleasure, couldn't resist pressing him against the nearest surface and indulging in devouring every part Tom willingly surrendered, it was no one's business.

None of his Death Eaters had participated in the attack or betrayed him, leaving the investigation at a standstill. What both forgot was the third way to thwart veritaserum—a method only the simplest of people could achieve: obliviation. It would only work if someone overlooked inconsistencies in their own memories and failed to realise memories were gone or replaced. Those with full control of their minds, like Snape or Tom, would notice being obliviated and therefore fail to truthfully reply to questions such as ‘have you betrayed the dark lord?’ Seeing as they couldn’t know for sure, but simple minds could potentially escape detection.

And then there was The Daily Prophet which buzzed with discussions, dissecting the attack's strategic intricacies, mourning the fallen, and speculating on the dark lord's return.

In the midst of the chaotic rambles, Harry saw a thread of truth in the articles. Too close to home for the scribbles of an amateur, the words too insightful not to be from a closely related party. Reginald Cobbe remained a faceless man, a mystery they both sought to solve.

Driven by a thirst for answers, Harry delved into the bowels of the Daily Prophet's main office, wielding his hero status as both shield and sword.

“Hello, I'm looking for Reginald Cobbe. I’m quite eager to have a word with him,” he told the lady at the front desk, flashing his most disarming smile.

The lady's eyes widened, her chair clattering to the floor in her haste to stand. "Oh, Harry Potter! It's an honor! I've followed your story since the defeat of he-who-must-not-be-named, and I—" Harry tuned out, his mind wandering amid her effusive praise of his achievements.

What achievements? he mused, though the question remained unspoken. Patiently, he let her words flow until the river of admiration finally ebbed, leaving her red-faced and breathless.

“Thank you for your kind words and support, Madame,” Harry smiled modestly, suppressing the urge to roll his eyes. "I'm really eager to speak with Reginald Cobbe. His insights in the Prophet have been invaluable, and a personal conversation would mean a lot."

Her response left him at a crossroads. "Cobbe doesn't work in-house; he's an independent journalist," she explained.

Undeterred, Harry took a gamble, trying to elicit any useful tidbit. "Have you ever met him or seen him around? I believe he could help me with everything that's been happening, especially regarding *Voldemort* ." The woman flinched at the whispered name.

She sighed, looking at him with concern clear in her watery eyes. "I haven't met him, and no one here has. Cuffe hired him based on an article about the attack, written within an hour of its occurrence. He was impressed by the speed and depth of information, Cuffe hired him on the spot." Harry couldn't help but think Cuffe sounded like an idiot. Who hires someone without even meeting them, they could be a death eater for all he knows.

The lady glanced around the deserted reception room before speaking in hushed tones, "I could probably find his address if it's really important for you."

Harry nodded eagerly, emphasising, "Yes, ma'am, it's imperative I talk to him."

After a brief disappearance behind a door, she returned, handing him a piece of paper. "This is all his personal information. Don't show this to anyone; I could get fired for this, you know." She offered a secretive smile, met with Harry's grateful nod.

"Thank you, Madame. You won't regret this."

Once home, Harry and Tom sat on the nearest sofa, poring over the single sheet of paper with an address, a name, and a vault number written on it.

They started with the address. Their visit to the address revealed a peculiar find: a muggle invention called a PO Box, a storage for mail, as explained by the helpful man they encountered.

It had led nowhere. The only option left was to station a spy at the post box, so Barty was assigned the task. Harry held little hope for a breakthrough.

Their focus turned to the bank vault. Armed with leverage over a goblin, Harry was promptly escorted to the vault's door. The lingering magic on it was sufficient for Harry to force it open, a sign of Cobbe's recent presence.

However, the vault's contents were disappointing—a mere handful of gold.

Harry sighed audibly, facing an annoyed Tom. "Maybe it's time to let this go for now. Running in circles won't help, and we both know who's behind this, proof or not."

Tom's frown softened, and he swiftly pulled Harry close, holding him tightly. Despite the familiarity, Tom's proximity managed to fluster Harry in a way no one else had.

A blush must have tinted his cheeks, as Tom smiled smugly and planted a soft kiss on the top of his head. "Let's head home," he said, "as you suggested, there's no need to delve further."

The evening unfolded, a post-dinner affair at a posh restaurant in muggle London—a place Tom had eyed enviously as a child. Harry felt an immense gratitude that Tom had shared this childhood fact, allowing them to now share this experience.

Playfully teasing Tom about the restaurant's age, Harry relished the banter. Tom chided him in response, but his lack of discomfort in the face of age-related teasing was a victory Harry savoured.

"Harry!" Draco shouted as he spotted his friend entering the Floo room. He ran towards Harry who was immediately engulfed in a bone-crushing hug.

“Hello, Dragon, I missed you too,” Harry whispered in his ear, his hands gently stroking Draco's back.

Harry slowly let go, only to be taken by the hand and guided into another embrace with Luna. “Hello, my little moon. Sorry for leaving so abruptly.”

Luna, already privy to where he'd been and what would have transpired, smiled gently as she leaned back. “Hello, Harry. I believe your darling snake has been treating you well.” Stated more as a fact than a question, but Harry answered nonetheless, eager to share.

“It's been great, Tom is great,” Harry's smile turned adoring without his knowledge, “but I'm glad you're here—both of you.” His eyes shifted from Luna to Draco and back.

Draco looked at the two with growing frustration, “Who even is Tom, and what the hell happened, Harry? And who only sends two letters after literally getting kidnapped?! I need to know everything!” Draco's voice grew more and more frantic.

Harry lowered his eyes, looking at his shoes in shame. “I'm sorry for not telling you more; it's been rather...busy here. Come, let me tell you everything.” Harry guided them through the seemingly endless hallways into one of the reception rooms.

Sinking deeply into a plush chair beside the fireplace, Harry took a deep breath. Draco and Luna settled opposite him, awaiting the tale of his kidnapping and the holidays that followed with Tom.

“...and then he took me to this beautiful restaurant in London—you would have loved it, Draco—and he was so sweet. He'd prepared this whole thing with the menu—oh, I guess that's a story for another time, but anyway—and after dinner, which was so very delicious, we went down the Regent's Canal and rode these boats, and it was so lovely. And then—” Harry rambled, unaware of the passing time, overflowing with happiness that needed to be shared.

Draco and Luna listened intently, each for different reasons and with distinct impressions, but both could see their friend was completely smitten.

After Harry recounted his time with Tom, Draco shared his past few days, less exciting but pleasant nonetheless. Luna had spent most of the time in the forest surrounding Malfoy Manor, befriendng the animals. A twinge of guilt hit Harry as he realised he'd left her alone there, with people she barely knew and without a family to celebrate Yule with. Luna assured him it had been a great Yule, urging him not to worry about her when she noticed his distressed expression.

Draco seized the lull in the conversation, his curiosity bubbling up in a carefully crafted question. "So, what's the verdict? Hogwarts in your future plans?" Despite Draco's attempt at nonchalance, Harry detected a subtle undercurrent of *hope*.

Harry decided to savor the moment, watching Draco's expression tighten like he had bitten into a sour lemon. The banter and gentle taunting felt like an old, comforting tune, prompting a satisfied smile to grace Harry's lips.

After a deliberate pause, he finally relented. "I had intended to return, but now... the desire has waned."

Draco, with a playful eye roll and a sarcastic tone concealing a hint of sorrow, quipped, "Yeah, the tough choice between domestic bliss with your boyfriend and the thrilling world of boring studies and nagging teachers." Crossing his arms, he leaned back with an air of mock superiority.

Harry's soft smile met Draco's gaze as he extended a hand, easily captured and squeezed by Draco, whose initial uptight demeanor softened into one of reluctant acceptance.

Their tender moment faced an unexpected interruption as Luna spoke. "You're still needed at Hogwarts, Harry. Returning with us is crucial; the consequences of absence will be weighty."

Harry furrowed his brow in contemplation. "Is this related to Dumbledore? Is it time for the final move?"

An encouraging smile grew on Luna's lips as she illustrated with her hands, creating an imaginary square in the air. "When the air warms enough for the windows to open," she enacted, pushing the ethereal window ajar, "—that's when you'll have your chance."

Harry presumed that meant the time would come around at the end of term. He supposed it was best to remain at Hogwarts with his friends then, if for nothing else than to keep them safe. "I see," he said after the silence had grown ominously deep.

Draco cleared his throat, steering their attention back to him. "So, will we finally get to meet this mystery man of yours, or must I continue entertaining guesses about him?" His voice adopted a rare tone of arrogance, oddly reassuring to Harry.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist," Harry teased, relishing Draco's scandalized expression. "If you're curious, we can meet him now. I believe he's in his office."

Draco's expression reached new levels of scandalized disbelief. "He's living here?! What—You can't—That's just—just *improper*. You're not even engaged yet, are you?"

Harry erupted in laughter as Draco stumbled through his words, briefly glancing at his wrist where the bracelet from Tom was concealed under a glamour.

Luna's giggle, barely audible over Harry's laughter, accompanied the scene. Just as the mirth reached its peak, Tom made his entrance. "What's happening in here? I could hear your chortling from across the manor." Tom's words carried a neutral tone, but a hint of concern coated his demeanor, enough to transform Harry's laughter into more of a hearty guffaw.

Tom's eyes narrowed at Harry's audacious laughter, yet the fiery red lacked true intensity.

"Are you finished, darling, or should I make acquaintances while you catch your breath?" Tom gracefully advanced into the room, making his way toward Draco and Luna.

"Marvolo Thomas Gaunt," he announced, offering his arm for Draco to grasp. A faint hesitation crossed Draco's expression, leaving Harry to ponder whether it was the concealed red beneath the glamoured blue or the predatory gaze itself that unsettled him.

Under Tom's predatory stare, Harry never felt like prey; instead, he met it with an equal measure of danger in his own eyes.

"Draco Malfoy, well met," Draco greeted with a steadiness that surprised Harry.

"Well met. It's regrettable we didn't get a chance to chat at your family's ball, but circumstances demanded attention elsewhere." Tom's measured mention of Harry's brief kidnapping cast a solemn tone over Draco's expression.

"Yes, the timing wasn't right then. But now, with Harry safely back and considering his connection with you, I'd like the opportunity to know you better." Draco's voice, usually soft and slightly icy, took on a hardened and determined quality. Harry admired how he stood firm against a more powerful wizard, a resilience not lost on Draco himself.

Harry's heart warmed at the realisation that Draco was summoning courage in the presence of a formidable adversary for his sake.

Tom's smile sharpened at Draco's words, and he shifted his attention to Luna. "Miss Lovegood, delightful to see you again."

"And you, Tom." Luna's knuckles received a kiss, and she returned the gesture with an innocent smile. Harry couldn't discern whether she was playfully teasing him, aware of the name's implications, or genuinely oblivious. The ambiguity amused him more than it probably should have.

Before Tom could respond, a hissing noise resonated through the room, prompting Draco to startle. All eyes shifted towards the origin of the sound, revealing the presence of Harry's familiar.

“Master, there is an intruder at the outskirts of the shiny bubble, the smell of sour fruit, and they are draped in colors most awful,” Nyx hissed frantically. *“Selene is watching the threat, but he’s doing magic. We must hurry.”*

Harry promptly briefed his friends on the situation and hurriedly left. Turning the corner toward the door, he caught a glimpse of Draco appearing upset, Luna offering quiet words and a comforting hand on his shoulder.

With urgency dictating his actions, Harry shadow-walked to the grounds and traced his bond to Selene. Upon reaching her, the acidic scent in the air affirmed the gravity of the impending situation.

“Master, the ugly one left just now when he spotted me looking his way. Forgive me, Master, for failing to protect you.”

Harry knelt down and gathered Selene in his arms. *“No need to apologise, dear. You did well scaring him off. He has no business being here.”* Harry caressed her scales with a gentle hand before draping her around his neck. Stepping beyond the wards, he entered the very space where Dumbledore had just stood.

The air tingled with residue magic, strong and lethal, smelling of burnt flesh and acid. He must have been trying to alter the wards, Harry thought with a frown.

How very foolish to believe he could corrupt magic that has stood longer than Hogwarts. *No* , he must have been doing something else. Dumbledore was foolish but not a fool; he knew what was possible to accomplish with wards, having much experience altering them.

The air thickened with the acrid scent of burnt flesh, a sinister precursor to the malevolent magic at play. Dark magic, perhaps blood magic, lingered in the air like an ominous prelude. The runes etched on the ground hinted at something more complex than a mere monitoring charm or area hex.

Suddenly, a chilling realisation gripped Harry's senses—his magical core shivered under the impending threat. A magical infection, in the manifestation of slimy crawling worms, sought

to invade his very core, a curse designed to devour his magic and leave nothing but desolation in its wake.

The dark tendrils within the curse whispered of viciousness, a depth of malice that left Harry both disturbed and begrudgingly impressed.

Dumbledore had delved into realms of magic that even the Black Library's secrets had only lightly grazed.

As Harry scrutinised the runic patterns etched nearby, Tom materialised in a swirl of obsidian shadows, propelled through the air like a dark cloud.

Harry's heart froze in terror as he neared the tainted wards. "STOP! TOM! Don't get any closer to the wards!" His voice echoed with a desperate plea.

Tom slowed to a cautious halt, his voice laced with anger. "What is it? What did he do?" The darkness in Tom's eyes mirrored the lethality of the curse.

Harry leaned back, a cascade of unruly hair framing his upset expression. "He infected the wards with a curse, a magic-eating curse, if I were to simplify. Anyone who passes through the wards will be infected."

A silence enveloped them as the weight of Harry's words settled upon Tom's shoulders. The anger etched on Tom's face crumbled into a chilling abyss of dread and fear, an expression Harry had never witnessed before—a cocktail of anguish and terror etched across the usually composed visage of the dark wizard.

Tom, driven to the edge of panic, knelt in a desperate grasp of his own hair, whispering a vehement denial. "No, no you can't be—You're not infected. How quick-acting is it? I'm coming to you; I'll blow the wards to pieces if I have to." His white-faced fear clashed with the determination burning in his eyes.

"Tom, stop, don't come here. I'm fine; it's all gonna be fine. I won't leave you." The desperation in Harry's voice was palpable, yearning to provide comfort. The ache to reach out, to pull Tom into a reassuring embrace and kiss his worries away, tugged at him. Instead, he channeled his magic, weaving a protective cocoon around Tom's stiff form.

"You feel that, right? I'm fine; my magic is fine. His curse can't get through. It's trying to—I can feel the itch of it on my skin, but it can't penetrate it. Remember the death runes; I can't be affected by curses like this. I'm fine, I promise." Harry's words were a lifeline, an attempt to anchor Tom in the storm of emotions.

Tom exhaled, a fragile calm settling over him at Harry's reassurance. Yet, beneath that facade, Harry discerned the tremor in Tom's hands and the unsteady wobble of his legs. Despite his outward composure, Tom was undeniably terrified. Harry's own elation at Tom's obvious care now felt like a distant echo, drowned out by the urgent reality they faced.

"Go back inside, Tom, and entertain Luna and Draco while I take care of this," Harry pleaded, the urgency in his voice carrying the weight of the imminent threat. Yet, Tom's response was an abrupt refusal, his words cutting through the air with a forced sharpness.

"No, I'll stay here with you," Tom insisted, his determination clashing against the plea in Harry's voice. Harry pressed on, he could not dismantle this curse if Tom wasn't safe behind the manor walls.

"Please, Tom. I'll be back in 10 minutes at the most. You can't help me here, but I don't want Luna and Draco to worry, so please keep them company." Tom's frown deepened, the internal struggle evident on his face.

Harry continued his persuasion. "Please, Tom, for me."

It was a strategic choice of words, and Harry watched as hesitance wrestled with resolve on Tom's features until, finally, Tom reluctantly nodded. "10 minutes, or I'm coming back and collapsing the wards with my bare hands if I have to."

With Tom reluctantly retreating, Harry delved into dismantling the intricate spellwork, his focus unwavering.

As he worked, the unsettling reality of Dumbledore's proximity gnawed at him, an uneasiness he refused to acknowledge.

Upon completing the task, Harry retrieved one of the crystals stored in his moleskin pouch, obtained from his previous theft from the Parkinson's. With a focus and effort, he funneled the remaining clinging magic into the crystal, effectively imprisoning it within.

Uncertain about the cursed crystal's future purpose, Harry stowed it back into his moleskin pouch after checking the trapping of the magic. After checking the wards' integrity again he shadow-walked to Tom.

The instant Harry emerged from the shadows, Tom's gaze locked onto him. In a blink, Tom traversed the room, pulling Harry into a tight embrace. Harry nestled his head in the curve of Tom's neck, inhaling the comforting scent that defined Tom. As Tom's hand moved reassuringly over him, and his magic meticulously scanned for any trace of harm from the curse, Harry felt cherished. Once Tom completed his thorough check of Harry's well-being, a deep exhale escaped him, as if he had been holding his breath since the moment he lost sight of Harry. Tom wrapped an arm around Harry's waist, cradling his head with the other—Harry had never felt safer.

....

After having explained what had happened and ensuring his friends that everything was fine, they had eaten a delicious meal prepared perfectly by his talented elves. Dinner was thankfully free of difficult topics and was mostly spent by Draco interrogating Tom.

Harry found the whole thing very amusing and entertaining. When he thought of Draco's reaction to finding out he'd been questioning the motives of the Dark Lord, Harry couldn't help but let a grin spread across his face. Only Luna seemed to notice and shared a grin of her own with him.

Later that night, Harry engaged in their established routine of reading to Tom. As Harry voiced the words of books he enjoyed, Tom listened attentively, feigning ignorance of most titles and pretending to be oblivious to the occasional trivia Harry shared. Yet, the sheer fact that Harry was the one reading made even mundane details captivating, ensuring Tom's unwavering attention.

Leaning against the headboard, Harry felt the comforting weight of Tom resting against his chest, the rhythmic thud of his heartbeat serving as a silent reassurance of Harry's well-being to Tom. When Harry's unoccupied hand found its way through Tom's soft hair, from forehead to neck, Tom shuddered at the gesture—a consistently endearing response.

Harry sees a truth about Tom that he knows will remain unspoken—the profound, almost desperate yearning for love. He sees his own desires mirrored in Tom's lingering touches, the hunger for closeness, security, reassurance, warmth, and understanding. Though not quite ready to declare love, Harry is certain he's headed in that direction, and he hopes Tom senses it too.

What lies ahead for them is a future brushed with hues of affection, tender sweetness, and a love so utterly consuming.

....

When Tom drifted into slumber, burying his face in Harry's chest and ensconcing his arms and legs around him for security, Harry gently withdrew just enough to glimpse Tom's face. In sleep, Tom appeared remarkably young and innocent—something Harry hadn't told him but now imagining Tom's affronted reaction; he probably would come morning.

Reflecting on Tom brought Harry to dwell on the memory of Tom's expression as he stood within the wards—eyes filled with a fear so profound, one might think he was on the verge of death. Despite the joy derived from Tom's profound care, Harry couldn't shake the discomfort of witnessing such deep-seated pain in Tom's eyes. The thought of seeing Tom in that state again was something Harry wished to spare both of them from.

Are you not a god, shouldn't you be able to prevent it from happening again? Harry pondered silently, but he wasn't alone.

"You are not. You are closer to a human than you are to us," Death's response echoed in his mind. Harry remained composed; Death had been appearing more frequently lately, as if aware that Harry's current contentment overshadowed any lingering resentment.

Despite Harry's internal questioning, he found Death's perspective unsettling. He didn't identify with humanity as others did; he saw himself differently. Death seemed to sense this.

"It's a gift, Master, not a weakness. Humans possess unique strengths. They can change; they can evolve."

Harry frowned, even knowing Death couldn't see his expression, his strong disagreement was palpable. "I do not change; I do not evolve. My body remains frozen in time at seventeen—I cannot be considered the same as them."

Death hummed, the sound echoing and reverberating like whispers in a tunnel—slightly eerie. "Of course, you change, Master. You are not the same person as when you arrived."

"How so?" Harry questioned with a scoff.

"You have changed. Remember what you wished to be called when you came here—Hadrian. You insisted you were not Harry. Yet, did you notice when others called you Harry? Did it bother you when you referred to yourself as Harry in your mind? You constantly change; you evolve. Your mind, thoughts, and feelings. Mine remain the same."

"That can't be true. You change your mind all the time...?"

"If I think something now, I've always thought so. If I feel something now, I've always felt so. I am constant, unchanging, unyielding. My existence stays the same, for I do not exist like you. I do not live."

Harry, grappling with the concept, didn't fully understand. Death seemed to contradict their own assertion. "I can't say I live much either. Humans all die; in the end, I will not... Did I ever get to actually live in my other lifecycles?"

"For a while, you did find happiness, contentment, as you do now. But humans can be cruel, and fate, even crueler. When she sensed you deviating from your path, she forced you onto another. I cannot pretend to know her thoughts, but there must be a reason."

Choosing to sidestep the resentment bubbling within him, Harry seized upon another thread of conversation. "You refer to fate as 'she.' Gods aren't confined to one gender, correct?"

"I call her that because it's how you perceive her. As a woman. *Like her.*"

Harry's shoulders tensed. "Do not speak of her. I don't understand why I associate her with fate—maybe because both set me on a path, or perhaps because they both hide behind their purpose as they wreak havoc on others. I don't know, and I don't need to know."

"Understood, Master. I won't speak of it again. But, if I may say, you won't fully live until you release what's holding you back. The feelings that bring you nothing but pain."

"You mean Dumbledore, right?"

"Yes. You must let go of revenge if you want to live, if you want happiness with Tom."

"I won't be happy until he's gone. I cannot allow myself to be happy while he remains out there. When the chance comes, I'll get rid of him, once and for all."

"You won't hold onto the pain after that?"

"No."

"I hope that's true," Death's voice was low and solemn, a departure from what Harry had heard before, making him flinch.

"Best you sleep now, Master; the future is never certain. It's best to be well-rested for whatever might occur."

Chapter End Notes

So Tom is going through it, so many new emotions, wonder if he'll boil over soon...

Let me now what you think! I'll really try to answer you comments quicker, I do appreciate them so very much!❤❤❤

Comforts of a Crumbling Man

Chapter Summary

Harry leaves for hogwarts and Severus Snape is in trouble

Chapter Notes

Gah, I really tried to get this out earlier like I promised but I just couldn't. I didn't like it, but I do think it's better now. Hope you enjoy it as well, it's extra fluffy seeing as Harry and Tom won't physically meet for a bit.

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

Original world

Istanbul

2063

The world had undergone scant transformation since he last ventured outside, Harry thought, observing the unsteady figure before him.

Despite the boy brandishing a knife at his stomach, Harry remained unperturbed, retaining an air of composure and emotional detachment in the face of potential peril and death.

"And how old might you be?" he queried, tilting his head slightly.

The boy hissed through gritted teeth but offered a response nonetheless. "Tch, I'm fifteen now; HAND OVER YOUR WALLET!" The knife in his grasp trembled, perhaps a result of the fading adrenaline coursing through his veins.

Harry paid the trembling blade little heed. "So young; I suppose I now understand the source of your idiocy," he murmured, primarily to himself.

The boy, catching only the initial words, regarded Harry with a blend of confusion and frustration.

"Give me your money!" he shouted, thrusting the knife forward, narrowly avoiding piercing Harry's skin.

Having anticipated this juncture, Harry exploited the child's lack of experience, seizing the moment with precision and speed. He deftly seized the hand wielding the knife, contorting it backward so that the blade now hovered threateningly near the boy's throat. A swift sweep of his leg brought the young assailant to the ground.

Maintaining a firm grip on the knife, Harry held it steadily against the boy's throat. Without his steady control, the boy might have inadvertently stabbed himself during the fall—a novice mistake made in getting too close for Harry to seize control.

Now assuming the advantageous position, Harry straddled the boy, knife poised at his throat, while restraining the other hand above his head. With an inscrutable expression, Harry gazed at the boy, blinking slowly as he leaned forward.

"Kid, do you know what goes on in a child's mind?" Harry asked. "They often feel invincible, but that belief can make them vulnerable. The unfounded confidence baffles me. Even now, as you lie here, vulnerable and at knifepoint, with no avenue of escape, your recklessness persists—such a childish trait."

Looking at the angry child, Harry's blank mask slowly faded. His eyes lit up, eyebrows rose, and a smile formed—a process akin to a wax mask melting away and being replaced by another underneath.

Fear, a familiar emotion to Harry, grew on the boy's face. "Let me go, you bastard," the child's voice, once steeped in overconfidence, now quivered with poorly concealed fear.

Harry's smile widened. "Maybe this will teach you something. Not everyone runs from a knife. Some might even take it from their own bleeding flesh and turn the tables on you." Harry moved the knife away from the boy's throat, guiding it to the side. The child dropped the knife, and it slid across the floor, hitting the wall with a quiet sound.

"If I see you again, I will be the last person you ever see," Harry warned, satisfied. He got up swiftly. "Off you go, little lamb."

Harry watched the boy run away. He sighed quietly, running a hand through his hair.

Qui totum vult totum perdit - he who wants everything loses everything.

Harry was miserable. Today marked his departure, and an unsettling start in the middle of the night had left him grappling with elusive dreams, their details slipping through his grasp.

Recent nights were haunted by dreams that, upon waking, cast him into a sense of emptiness and melancholy. He longed for the bygone days when his nights were filled with the furious presence of Voldemort, even when those when Voldemort pretended not to relish their conversations.

A smile graced Harry's lips as he glanced at the man who had unexpectedly captured his heart and breathed vitality into his existence. Yet, now, he was poised to leave, just as Harry had found him.

Reluctantly acknowledging the necessity of this separation, driven by both Death and Luna's assurances of its worthiness, Harry couldn't shake the unease that lingered. The prospect of months without seeing Tom weighed heavily on him, but a glimmer of relief surfaced at the idea of sneaking out to visit him during the night.

Harry spent hours lying beside Tom, captivated by the act of watching, meticulously mapping every detail for the hundreds time. His imagination wandered into the realm of what lay concealed beneath the clothes, contemplating the potential enjoyment they could share if unburdened by layers.

Even innocent touches carried a breathless allure. Yet, despite Harry's best efforts, his human nature couldn't resist the temptation to let his mind wander in the presence of such a striking man—Tom, arguably the most attractive person Harry had ever encountered. Perhaps biased, but Harry believed anyone would be enchanted if this man merely cast a glance their way.

Hmm—did Tom's previous ability to amass followers owe itself to his looks before the horcruxes altered his appearance?

Lost in contemplation, Harry unintentionally fixated on Tom's slim waist for a bit too long, oblivious to the intense gaze now focused on him.

“You're donning such a *dark* expression. What might occupy your thoughts this early in the morning?” Tom's husky voice instantly grabbed Harry's attention, his eyes widening as the first syllable escaped those plump lips.

A shiver ran down Harry's spine at the sight before him. Tom regarded him with half-lidded eyes, a possessive gaze that made Harry feel like he was on the verge of being consumed. Yet, Harry could be tempting too.

Drawing closer, he threw a leg over Tom's hip, hands gripping Tom's chest with a firm hold. As he relaxed, Harry delicately stroked his hands from Tom's ribs, over his chest, and back down. Their faces were so close that their noses touched, and in a hushed tone, Harry spoke, "I was thinking... since this is my last morning here for a while, we should make it a memorable one."

Tom's eyes darkened, and his hands around Harry's waist spasmed. "You're playing a dangerous game, my darling," his voice, low and rumbling, sent vibrations through Harry's very bones.

With an innocent smile, Harry gazed up at Tom through his lashes. "Playing? I prefer to call it winning," he teased, lightly biting down on Tom's bottom lip—just enough to be felt without causing pain.

Tom offered no verbal reply. Instead, he closed the distance between them, pressing his lips against Harry's with a hunger that stole Harry's breath away. In that moment, they became immersed in each other, bodies pressed closely, tongues exploring every inch of each other's mouths.

Every stolen kiss echoed the novelty of their first, Harry's heart pulsating erratically as the world condensed into a singular focus: Tom and the intricate dance of their tongues. It could be deemed filthy, perhaps wet and sloppy, but undeniably passionate.

While Harry harbored a desire to escalate the intimacy, he found profound satisfaction in their kisses that transcended mere physicality. It wasn't just about sex; it was about comfort. The knowledge that a simple kiss could evoke a sense of being cherished and adored by Tom brought profound satisfaction. These kisses were more than a physical connection; they were a manifestation of the emotional bond that already existed between them.

As they finally parted, both left gasping for breath, Harry gazed up at Tom with eyes filled with wonder and desire.

"Are you sure, my little serpent? Because judging by the pleasure on your face, it seems like my victory," Tom remarked.

"In that case, from what's currently pressed against my stomach, I'd say the win is mine," Harry replied in a breathless stutter.

Tom smirked before skillfully grinding his hips forward in a circular motion, meeting Harry's own aroused response. A loud groan escaped Harry as he pressed back.

Continuing the rhythmic movement, Tom ground his hips against Harry's, simultaneously planting light kisses along Harry's throat. The room echoed with Harry's unrestrained moans and groans.

"Do you want me, darling?" Tom whispered into Harry's ear, teasingly biting down at his jaw.

"Yesss," Harry hissed out in Parseltongue without conscious thought, eliciting a loud moan from Tom in response.

Tom moved quickly, pushing Harry roughly into the mattress, efficiently straddling his waist and left Harry blinking in surprise. Tom's breath was labored as he focused intensely on Harry, who shivered involuntarily.

Leaning forward, as if initiating a kiss, but a hand over Harry's mouth interrupted any contact. "Then let's get married in the summer." Tom said seriously.

"W-what?" All impure thoughts vanished as Harry processed Tom's unexpected statement. *Married? Get married?*

"If you wish to sleep with me, we have to get married first," Tom declared, seemingly unfazed by the timing of his proposal.

Harry felt his mouth fall open, stunned. He looked at Tom in shock for a moment before speaking again. "Are you trying to get me to marry you by dangling sex in front of my face?" Harry asked, more confused than angry.

"Yes," Tom replied, so unapologetic that Harry could only stare in astonishment. "Don't you wish to marry me?"

The question was posed casually, but Harry, familiar enough with Tom, sensed its significance.

"Of course, I do. I gave you a courting gift, didn't I?" Harry almost forgot about the bracelet at that moment, but saying it out loud made him realise its weight. "I want to marry you. It's just... it's shocking to hear you ask that, but I'm—I'm happy." A warmth enveloped him, and he suspected he resembled a tomato at that moment.

"You don't doubt my feelings for you, do you, darling?" Tom inquired seriously.

Harry hesitated for a moment too long, and Tom's eyebrows furrowed.

"I adore you," Tom declared. The stunned expression on Harry's face struck Tom with a potent mix of pain and endearment.

For Harry, his lungs filled with air, yet he felt breathless.

Tom tenderly cradled Harry's cheeks, his voice a whisper of raw emotion. "Have I not proven my unwavering devotion to you? Can you not see that you are my singular heartbeat, the constant in my tormented existence? In the depths of night, my eyes tirelessly seek the solace of yours, finding peace amid life's chaos. You, Harry, are my everything. Your touch ignites a fervor within me, a burning desire for closeness even in our closest moments. I ache when you're away, yearning for you during the mundane and the extraordinary alike. Each day spent with you is a cascade of happiness, a joy I hadn't known until our paths crossed again. It's all for you, all because of you. For the first time, I've embraced what I once denied myself—love, hope, happiness—all because you showed the way. I wish I could articulate the perfection that is you to me. You are my soul, my life, my very reason for being. Falling in love, a beautifully violent affair, and I would not trade it for the world. If you asked, I'd willingly kneel and offer it to you. I want you, I *need* you. You are my salvation."

Tears dripped down Harry's face in slow, heavy drops.

Faced with such a heartfelt declaration, Harry grappled with how to express his feelings in a way that matched Tom's eloquence. How could he convey his feelings in a manner that would make Tom's heart ache as his own did? How could he make Tom understand that even in his presence, Harry longed for him? Even when he seemed to be the most despicable person in the world, Harry's heart belonged to him. Unable to unravel these complex emotions, Harry chose to convey the most profound offering of himself.

"I will live for you." Bright, wide eyes conveyed promise as he uttered words he never thought he'd want to say.

Tom may not fully grasp the depth of those words, but he senses their importance because the smile Harry receives in return radiates joy. "I'm glad. It's decided then; we'll marry this summer." Tom leans forward, kissing Harry chastely before shifting away from Harry's waist.

In the aftermath of discussing marriage, Harry almost forgets the previous activities, grateful that his prior predicament had deflated.

"Come, my darling. Let's have breakfast before you have to leave," Tom suggests, heading towards the closet. Despite the reminder of the impending separation tugging at Harry's heart, he rises, dresses as if nothing is amiss, and follows Tom.

They share breakfast, a daily ritual filled with teasing and banter, just like the recent days.

"How can I go back to tedious planning without you *constantly* reminding me of all my past mistakes and failures?" Tom's voice is teasing, but his words hold a sincere note.

He will miss me. A younger Harry might have swooned at such sentiment.

"You speak such *pretty* words, Tom. It's almost like you want my heart," Harry retorts with a teasing look.

Tom's eyes darkened. "Darling, I want more than your heart. I want all of you."

Harry grabs Tom's hand, launching into a playful complaint about spending time with children and nagging teachers. Tom pretends to share his dismay, while Harry pretends not to fear the return.

Harry knows he's dragging out the moment, but the desire to linger prevails. It's 8:30, and he must leave at 9:45. With little more than an hour left, he craves more, needing to soak in every precious moment before departure.

They found themselves in the library after breakfast, following their regular routine. Numerous routines had evolved in less than a week, inevitable when every waking moment resisted separation, leading them to discover reasons to stay close.

Their days unfolded seamlessly—breakfast, followed by an hour or two of reading in the library, sometimes together, sometimes apart. Then off to Tom's office for planning and scheming before lunch. Post-lunch, they dueled or taught each other new spells, resulting in sweaty exertion that prompted a trip to their room for separate showers or baths—although Harry persistently attempted otherwise.

Tea and engrossing conversation followed, often losing themselves in each other. Dinner, whether at home or out, marked the busiest time of their evenings. Visits to Tom's followers, information gathering, or meetings were scheduled under the cover of darkness. Eventually, they retreated to their bedroom, indulging in some light touching before Tom deliberately slowed things down. They fell asleep nestled against each other, ready to repeat the pattern the next day.

The familiarity of their routine was comforting, but now, Harry faced the prospect of being alone for most of the day. He shouldn't let it bother him—he had Luna, Draco, and even Kali. Reminding himself that he wasn't truly alone, still the feeling persisted.

Tom noticed Harry's distraction, breaking the usual focus he had when Tom read for him. "Is something the matter, my dear?"

Exhaling, Harry decided not to burden Tom further, aware that Tom was grappling with letting him go as well. "No, it's nothing. Just thinking about Hogwarts. I always considered it my safe place, but now—I'm not sure. It feels different, even though I know Dumbledore won't be there. My intuition tells me something is bound to happen."

Tom's arm, casually draped over Harry's shoulder moments ago, now pulled him closer to his side. "You think the remaining order will try something?"

"I'm sure the order will attempt something sooner or later. Most might be caught, but not all of them."

Tom hummed before posing a question with a tone that made discussing terrible deeds sound light and airy, akin to a casual conversation about the weather. Oddly, it made Harry smile. "Do you want me to kill any of them?"

"Hmm... no, I think I'll do it myself," Harry replied in the same tone, unsure whether he was joking.

Tom's hand found its way into his hair, gently combing through the knots. "Do you think Dumbledore will come for you personally?"

Harry didn't doubt it. "Even a worm will turn."

...

The reality of his departure settled in. The cold spread, and an uncomfortable squeezing feeling settled in his gut. Breathing became challenging, as if the darkness was encroaching, demanding his attention before he passed out. He didn't want to leave, didn't want to face separation, especially now that they had finally found each other. Perhaps it was fear speaking, heightened by recent sleepless nights and excessive paranoia, but logic didn't bring comfort. He sensed a presence standing beside him, likely picking up on his turbulent thoughts.

"Harry, look at me." The voice spoke beside him, but he resisted moving, unwilling to acknowledge the inevitability of his departure. A gentle hand gripped his chin, turning it toward the voice, but his eyes fixated on the bookshelf behind. "Harry," spoken lightly, accompanied by loving caresses of his jaw.

Finally, Harry relented, meeting Tom's gaze with burdened, heavy eyes. "I don't want to go," he whispered hoarsely.

As their eyes locked, Tom felt a unique intensity in Harry's gaze, causing him to second-guess the decision. Unable to articulate the depth of his feelings, Tom leaned in, a featherlight

touch of his lips meeting Harry's.

They lingered, foreheads pressed together, breathing in each other's air, and feeling their magic intertwining. Breaking the silence, Tom reassured, "When you're done, I'll still be here waiting for you. You'll still be there, ready to come back to me. Whatever brought us together is of no importance; what matters is that this is where we were always heading. I could not live without you by my side anymore, and I wouldn't want to. This is not goodbye, darling. We will see each other in our dreams. Everything will be fine. I'll make sure of it."

"Okay," Harry whispered back, a desperate desire to cling onto him and never let go, held in check. "I'll see you tonight?"

"Of course, darling, in our dreams."

"In our dreams," Harry promised in return.

Original world

Scotland

2019

On Severus Snape's birthday, a solemn tradition takes place—a journey to his grave. Draco, weighed down by the past, faithfully performs this ritual annually since the war's end. Clutching a bouquet of delicate lilies, symbols of remembrance and loss, he approaches the sacred site. Gently lowering himself to his knees before the weathered stone, Draco immerses himself in an unusual stillness, understanding that silence is what Severus prefers. In this tranquil moment, he grapples with conveying his thoughts and emotions without relying on words. He concentrates, allowing his sentiments to flow like a whispered secret, hoping they reach the departed soul.

This year, however, Draco is not alone. As the significant day approaches, Harry, now a constant presence in Draco's life, surprises him by deciding to accompany him. Harry

harbors no fondness for Severus; their encounters during their time at Hogwarts intensified his misery, and the memories of those bitter moments still linger. A grudge persists, yet some form of gratitude tugs at the corners of Harry's heart, whispering words of obligation.

Snape shielded Draco, protecting him from a cruel destiny. The old animosities may endure, but Harry recognises the significance of that sacrifice. Snape guided Draco, lending a hand to bear the burden of an impossible task thrust upon him by Voldemort. For this, Harry feels a peculiar debt of gratitude, entangled in a web of contradictory emotions.

The graveyard stretches before them. Draco remains tight-lipped, upholding the hushed pact he shares with the departed professor. However, unable to suppress his emotions, Harry steps forward. His gaze fixes on the weathered headstone, the name etched in stone, stirring something within him.

In a voice tinged with conflict, Harry unleashes a torrent of words upon the quiet graveyard. He recounts Severus Snape as a terrible person, a harbinger of pain who wounded him in ways Voldemort never could. Resentment spills forth, shadows of the past unfurling at his feet.

Reluctantly, Harry acknowledges the paradox within his heart. He recognises Severus's role in protecting Draco, the tether binding them in the present. With a hint of grudging acceptance, he offers thanks—an acknowledgment both pained and sincere.

In this strange convergence of bitter memories and fragile gratitude, Draco and Harry stand side by side, finding solace in each other's presence. The wind whispers secrets, carrying their words and emotions to the other realm where Severus Snape rests. Although the man himself is no longer among them, his actions continue to shape the reality they find themselves in.

(In his new world, Harry no longer harbours gratitude for Severus Snape.)

Tom Riddle was a man consumed by an insatiable thirst for power and control, driven by a profound desire to attain immortality and become the world's most formidable wizard. However, as he delved deeper into the realm of dark magic, he lost sight of life's true essence.

Isolation gripped Tom more tightly with each passing day, severing ties to any semblance of normalcy. He perceived himself as superior, a being of immense power and intellect, while regarding others as mere pawns in his pursuit of dominance, to be utilised and discarded at will.

Tom's descent into madness wasn't solely fueled by the craving for power; it was fueled by his fear of death, the dread of loneliness, and the anxiety of losing control. These fears consumed him, propelling him to explore dark magic and push the boundaries of possibility.

Despite his power and control, Tom remained unsatisfied, ceaselessly searching for more, relentlessly pursuing greater heights of power and mastery. The humanity within him faded away, leaving behind a mere shell of the man he once was.

In his journey toward madness and transformation into Voldemort, there was a certain romanticism to Tom's story. His quest for power wasn't solely a selfish desire for domination; it reflected an inner struggle to find meaning and purpose in life.

Now, Tom found meaning and purpose, yet he couldn't escape questioning at what cost. In the madness, he lost himself, and now, he felt lost in Harry.

Who was he, truly?

I have no idea who I am becoming, or who I have become. The old me has expired, but I can't help but dip a finger in sometimes.

Despite his worries and struggles, one thing remained clear—it is far safer to be feared than loved. Love had always been a fear, a weakness he couldn't afford, and, most of all, something he didn't believe he could have.

What he felt for Harry made him aware of the power Harry held over him, a potential doom he had considered. However, he never pondered that love could be the damnation of every man.

"—I do not regret it, my lord, for whatever I did, I did it for her," Severus rasped, his voice carrying the weight of pain and despair.

Ah, and here it was—the climax in the tragedy of moral men: love.

Summoning Severus after Harry's departure, he sought solace, something to distract him, and perhaps, in the depths of his mind, something to ease the relentless turmoil. Little did he know that this meeting would unfurl into the shocking revelation of Severus's betrayal.

While the warning from Harry about Severus's faithlessness lingered, it couldn't have prepared him for the raw truth that now unfolded. Delving into Severus's mind, initially in search of implications in the staged Death Eater raid, he unearthed not merely hate but an overwhelming reservoir of resentment, cleverly concealed behind a wall of love for Lily Evans. The revelation echoed through the chambers of his consciousness, leaving a haunting sense of betrayal in its wake.

Severus felt the weight of doom the moment his Lord plunged into the recesses of his memories, particularly those entwined with Lily Evans. Unlike Tom's curiosity about his beloved's mother, Severus understood he was on the precipice of his downfall. As his Lord exited his mind, Severus didn't hold back; he spilled his guts, emptying the reservoir of resentment and hate towards Lord Voldemort as if purging himself of guilt.

Rather than being met with Tom's expected fury, an eerie uneasiness and foreboding settled in. If a man of Severus's caliber could plummet so deeply for love, a chilling question lingered—what could that foretell for Tom?

"What of Harry? Why swear to protect him? I have seen your memories, Severus. I know how profound your misgivings toward him go," Tom's voice sliced through the tension, a cold and collected cadence that sent shivers down Severus's spine.

The absence of Tom's usual fury only intensified the gravity of the situation, leaving Severus teetering on the edge of dread.

Severus shifted on his knees, the pounding in his head echoing the throbbing pulse of imminent doom. As the weight of the moment bore down on him, a chilling realisation seeped in—he must be on the brink of his final hour. His time had inexorably run out.

"I had to, for Lily, it's what she would have wanted. I needed to honor her and protect her child. I care nothing for the boy, but for her—for her, I'd do anything." Severus felt the weight lift as he finally uttered the truth, a confession that cut through decades of deceit.

"Then what shall I do with you now, Severus? Go on, *tell me*. What punishment would be fitting for betraying your lord and cause?" Voldemort's voice echoed, cold and empty, his magic hanging in the air like a snake ready to strike.

What was most fitting? Would death truly be a punishment? Severus had always longed to join Lily, so he didn't fear death. He dared to look up at those burning, inhuman red eyes and shuddered, quickly looking back down.

What does he want to hear? Death would be an escape.

The tension in the air thickened, hanging like a heavy curtain, as Severus awaited the judgment that could tip the balance between life and a torturous end.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo... how do we feel about Snape, should he live or die? It doesn't really matter now that I've decided on doing the happy ending, if I had chosen the sad ending he would have had to live because he'd be a part of the ending but now...he doesn't really matter.

So let me know! Im thinking of doing a torture scene with him in the next chapter but I might just have Tom keep him prisoner until he's maybe needed again.

Oh and we are nearing the end of this story! So exciting! I loved writing this story but I really want to try writing something else, I already have like four other fic ideas that I want to try out so I want to finish this fic before the new year. Not sure how I'll accomplish that but it's the goal anyway.

If there's anything you want to see in the coming chapters like more fluff or smut (I only have one explicit smut scene planned) or something about one of the characters, now the time to tell me! I've mapped out the coming chapters but things never really go as planned so....

Anyway, thanks for all the support and love! Hope you have a nice week! ❤️❤️❤️

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