Mr. Potter!"

Harry sighed, creating a sour note that sounded remarkably like Hedwig's hoot, and turned. "Yes, Professor?"

"What on earth are you doing up at this hour?!"

Harry couldn't help but be incredulous. "I'm your average insomniac, Professor McGonagall. What's your excuse?"

"Mr. Potter!"

"Yes, that's my name, please don't wear it out any more than it already has been," Harry said dryly, twirling his recorder absently in one hand.

"…"

"Look, can you people just leave me alone? I've been up for…what time is it? Five? Forty-seven hours now. I'd like to play some more before the school wakes up."

"Mr. Potter, what is an insomniac?" McGonagall questioned.

Harry looked vaguely surprised from what she could tell in the dim lighting. "An insomniac is when a person can't sleep regularly, Ma'am. Or, if you want the dictionary definition, an insomniac is a person affected by the chronic disorder of insomnia, which really doesn't help if you don't know what insomnia is."

McGonagall looked like she wasn't quite sure what to make of that.

"You'd be surprised how bored I get," Harry said, looking fairly amused. "I've read my dictionary five times now. It certainly explains why I've been at the top of my year for the past seven years."

"Sheer boredom?" McGonagall summed up into a question.

"Well, what are you to do? Sit around and do nothing for the entire night? Even I get tired of playing my recorder after a couple of hours. So I could do homework. Study. Read a book. Think. Pace. Draw. I found a grand piano on the fourth floor. I dusted and tuned it up one night. This castle has all sorts of hiding places, ya know? And after ten years of evading the Dursleys when I wanted to pace, Filch in this place is easy."

"There's a grand piano in Hogwarts?"

"Of course, it seems to have everything else," Harry shrugged, moving past her and going down the staircase. "The Grand Staircase never ends, did you know that? And the higher you go, the more cramped it is, and the more wonky the magic up there is. Kind of like the staircase version of Alice in Wonderland."

"You know that was written by a man on crack?"

"Yes, I am well aware, that's why I did a drug test to make sure I didn't inhale anything weird when I came back down," Harry said amiably, stepping off the staircase at the fourth floor. "Why is Hogwarts such a big castle, Professor? Most of the rooms are empty. Did the rooms used to hold other electives or classes or clubs?"

"I do not know, Mr. Potter," McGonagall said, frankly amazed at how chatty he was.

"See? Grand piano," Harry said, trailing his fingers over the cream keys, playing a quick Auld Lang Syne, the piano perfectly in tune. "I'm surprised that you didn't know of it, Professor. I would've explored every inch of the castle if I knew that I was going to be here for most of the year for years on end. Which, precisely, is what I'm doing."

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"Mr. Potter, are you really out again?" McGonagall asked, sounding exasperated.

"Last I checked, I wasn't a glamour, but if you want to check for me, you're welcome to," Harry said dryly. "I'm going up to the seventh floor. Want to come with?"

She said nothing, but she followed him, no doubt rolling her eyes.

"There's something over there, but I can't crack how to get into whatever it is," Harry said offhandedly to her, pointing at a seemingly blank wall across from a tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. "But seriously, the magic over there is like, off the charts. Whoever made whatever it is, it's complex. And possibly sentient. Now that I think about it, the third floor girls' bathroom is the same, especially around the sinks. You know, the abandoned one with Moaning Myrtle in it?"

"Yes, I am aware."

"Don't know how to get into that either. And it took me this long to find this one, simply because it has no magic around it," Harry said, smirking, walking over to one of the wall sconces and pulling on it hard. It came down like a lever, and a door popped open. "This had to be made sometime around the Founder's and not added in later, like several passageways are," Harry said, walking into the passageway.

"Why?"

"Well, when humankind switched from hunting and gathering to farming, people's growth got stunted because of the lack of significant nutrients within the plants, because all people ate were things that they grew. So for four thousand years, the average height of humanity dropped like fifteen centimeters. Only now is our height climbing back to where it was from before, but only in the first-world countries. So this school was built couple thousand years ago? Doorways would've been a heck of a lot shorter. Thus, the short doorway. Coupled with the fact that when I found it, the place had definitely not been touched in at least a hundred years, this place hasn't been modified like the rest of the school over the years."

Impromptu history lesson, McGonagall thought dryly.

"Where does it come out?"

"The roof of the Astronomy tower, strangely enough," Harry said cheerfully. He opened a door that swung inwards, painted to look like a window. Waist-high bars stopped you from falling a very long way to the ground.

"Oh, goodness…"

"The bars are actually pretty strong, despite having been there for who-knows-how-long," Harry remarked, leaning against the railing. "I might just come up here more often," he said softly, looking at the dazzling array of stars splayed above them. "Look, there's Orion's Belt. Mars. Unicorn. Cassiopeia. Perseus. He was honored in the stars and in life, you know? Supposedly a son of Zeus, he's the one who borrowed Hermes's sandals and Athena's shield and slew the most feared gorgon, Medusa, the lady with the really bad hair life—probably because she didn't have hair, but snakes coming out of her head. Medusa supposedly turned people to stone if they looked into her eyes. Perseus was one of the few Greek myths that got a happy ending. They were really into tragedy. Oh, look, Phoenix, like Fawkes. Although you have to admit that the stars look nothing like the actual person or thing."

McGonagall murmured an agreement.

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The next time McGonagall happened to wake up ridiculously early, she sought out Harry. She finally found him glaring at a wall. It was quite amusing, because he looked fairly insane.

"Hi, Professor," Harry said, still glaring at the wall.

"Mr. Potter, what do you hope to come from glaring at an inanimate piece of stone?" she asked, mirth clearly in her voice.

"Actually, I'm just thinking very hard, and it comes with the added bonus with hoping to intimidate said wall into revealing whatever it's hiding," Harry remarked offhandedly.

She couldn't help but laugh.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't intimidate well," he added ruefully. "For a while there, the bricks said HA. Either I'm not very intimidating or the wall doesn't intimidate well. Then again, I probably look like a shrimp compared to Snape's glare. Although I don't believe that Snape would suffer the indignity of glaring at a wall for an hour straight."

*I will not laugh…I will not laugh…I will not laugh…I will not laugh…*

Harry finally gave up on glaring at the wall and began to pace, tripping and falling flat on his face when he passed the area for a third time and a door appeared. "Seriously?" he growled, opening the door. The look on his face… "Oh. Oh my…That's a lot of stuff."

McGonagall strode forward, curious despite herself. She did a double take at the sheer volume of things in the room. "That, Mr. Potter, was a severe understatement."

The professor made to move forward, but faster than she could believe, Harry had an arm in front of her. "No," he said firmly, momentarily that she was his professor, turning and shutting the door without entering the room. "There are more Dark things in there than the classroom that I found that had to have been the classroom for the Dark Arts course at some point or another," he said grimly. "Neither of us are going in there. I see why it was so hard for me to figure out now."

"Mr. Potter—"

The third-year turned to her with a glare that was pure Lily Evans. "You want to be under the compulsion to put a sweet teddy bear with a sleeping child and have said teddy bear suffocate the child, go right ahead. There's everything from forgotten and therefore useless potions to rusted swords to cursed items like the teddy bear I mentioned. I would recommend that you get a team of cursebreakers to go through the room over the summer."

"Then how did you get rid of the things in the former Dark Arts classroom?" McGonagall challenged.

"I set up a fire- and ventilation-shields on the walls and across the doorways and windows and torched the place," Harry grinned with all teeth and no humor. "All that's left is a bunch of soot. Even the desk was cursed. I can't do that in there, because a) I can't set fire to that much stuff unless I resorted to Fiendfyre, which is something I'm not doing, b) some of the things have some nasty protections that activate from trying to destroy it, and c) there are some incredibly valued artifacts turned Dark items that I would hate to destroy."

They glared at each other for a couple more minutes. McGonagall relented after seven minutes straight. "Such as?"

Harry opened the door, never crossing the threshold. "See the marble bust? See the crown on the thing? That crown has an aura of Dark that I can't believe. However, I have reason to believe that that is the lost Diadem of Ravenclaw."

McGonagall paled dramatically.

Harry pointed in a different direction. "Do you see the stack of trunks? Do you see the statue of the first Headmaster of Hogwarts poking out? The statue is cursed to have you sit there and stare at it until your eyes dry up and you go blind when you get within the proximity of the curse."

McGonagall suppressed a shudder.

Harry pointed at something quite near. It was a statue of a snake. "That's a statue of the basilisk I killed. Magnify that by about seven hundred and you get what I fought. I think it also holds the curse on the DADA position, thus the close proximity to the doorway. Too far away, and it wouldn't work. Have I given you enough reasons to not cross the threshold?"

Hesitantly, she nodded, and Harry closed the door. The door melted back into the wall, leaving nothing but bricks.

Harry regarded her with a frankness that surprised her. "When you go to Professor Dumbledore," he finally said, "don't let him bully you into thinking that the small army of cursebreakers that will be needed, won't be needed to empty and de-curse the room. And definitely don't let him in there by himself. Come get me if you must, I can provide a twenty-four-hour protection on the doorway, you know that quite well."

She snorted.

Harry sagged, leaning against the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. "Well," he said weakly. "Now I just have to crack the third-floor girls' bathroom, besides the Chamber of Secrets. That floor is driving me as barmy as this guy," he said, jabbing a thumb at the tapestry to which he was leaning against.

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True enough, the next year, Harry was still trying to crack the third-floor girls' bathroom.

McGonagall watched him hiss in frustration, the Chamber of Secrets open, and then watched him turn around and hiss furiously at it, probably 'close' with a great deal of cursing to go along with it.

"I don't think that anything else is going to react to Parseltongue," she remarked.

"I've tried nearly everything else," he groaned, gesturing at the wall. "I had to try. It's right there, taunting me, and I thought, 'hey, it's practically next door neighbors with Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets, might as well give it a shot'."

"Have you tried tapping the tiles?"

Harry narrowed his eyes in thought, his eyes roving over something she couldn't see. "I could be in here for ages, tapping that many bricks. There are over two hundred tiles that the area extends over. That many different combinations would wind up in the millions, if not the billions. I don't know how many different bricks I'm supposed to tap. Four? All of them? Who knows? The creator. Is the creator still alive? Who knows? Would he or she care if he or she were still alive? Who knows?"

His fingers drifted over the tiles, his emerald green eyes slits, sparks flying off his fingers. "Mr. Potter—"

"Shh," he hushed her.

"Don't burn the place down."

"Shh! Can you hear that?"

She listened for anything unusual, but there was nothing that she could hear. All she could hear was their own breathing. "No."

His hand drifted towards the end of the tile, above both their heads, hooked his fingers around the top of the tile, and pulled. The tile seemingly came away in his hand, and she opened her mouth to berate him for damaging school property, but at the look of triumph on his face and the small click of a door opening, she shut her mouth.

"Oh—my god, Hermione would have a heart attack," Harry laughed in amazement. "Were you aware that Hogwarts had another library? And there's only one cursed item, and it's very weak, you'd practically have to touch it in order to be affected by it," he reassured her, looking up. "I think we're under the Ravenclaw tower."

"Under?"

"Of course, bending space is just one of the many things that magic can do, am I right? But look," he brushed his hand against an exposed bit of stone and rubbed his shiny fingers. "Moisture. We're underground. This is obviously a House secret, because this place is remarkably clean for being abandoned for supposedly nigh on a thousand years." He glanced nervously upwards, where she presumed the cursed object was. "I wonder how miffed Ms. Ravenclaw and Mr. Slytherin were when they found out that their hiding places were right next to each other? Oh, holy crap, don't touch anything."

McGonagall froze, knowing very well that Harry's magic senses were much better than her own.

"No, you're okay, just don't stick anything you want to keep into small spaces between books. There are weapons hidden," Harry said, a jewel-encrusted dagger dangling from his fingertips, a look of fascination on his face. "I think it still has traces of basilisk venom on it."

She could've sworn that he sounded delighted. "Put it down!"

Harry, coming to his senses, hurriedly put the dagger down onto a bookshelf. "I don't fancy cutting my finger off, immunity to basilisk venom or not," he said, thanking her.

"What?"

"I never got the antivenom," Harry said, shrugging. "So my body adapted. I daresay my blood could burn through the stones. Don't worry, I've been careful not to do that."

McGonagall ran a hand over her hair, exasperated at Harry's misadventures. "No one ever thought to give you the antivenom?"

"By the time I was in the Headmaster's office, I was perfectly fine. Fawkes helped the adjustment along, healing the damage the poison had already done. It would've been pointless to give me an antivenom by then. A pepperup potion would've done more. I didn't get one of those, either."

She closed her eyes and sighed at the incompetence.

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McGonagall found him in the Astronomy tower's roof, clutching his hand and a wad of burned bandages next to him. A look of frustration and pain was etched on his face.

"Mr. Potter? Why are the bandages burnt?"

For an answer, Harry picked up another wad of bandages and pressed them to the back of his hand. When he came away, it was nothing but ashes that he scornfully tossed over the side of the railing, still trying to stem the bleeding.

"I told you that my blood was corrosive," Harry snapped. "I never realized how irritating it would be if I couldn't stem the bleeding because she used a damn Dark item that I'm going to set fire to the next opportunity that I get. Then I'm going to drag Aurors to the school and show them the heavily warded and cursed safe that she has in her desk that would rot the fingers off of anyone but her if they touched it. She can scream Senior Undersecretary all she wants, but mark my words, she'll be out of a job and in Azkaban by the time next Friday rolls around."

His voice was cold with hatred, a feeling that she had never seen on the young man, and it sent chills down her spine.

"By now I would hug Snape if he took the DADA position," Harry finally said tiredly after a long silence. "At least I know he'd be good. Probably even better than Lupin."

"That's something I never thought I'd hear," she said dryly. "Snape and hug in the same sentence."

Harry cracked a grin, his green eyes turning to rest on her. "Thanks, Professor."

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"What do you want, Potter?"

Harry strode forward, some kind of statue in his hands, his eyes hard and determined, each step with purpose. "I found the origin of the curse on your position. Despite our differences, you're better than all of our previous teachers in this position, and I'd like to keep you here. I thought you'd like the honor of destroying the centerpoint of the curse."

Dark eyes studied Harry with a little bewilderment. "What happened to you, Potter?"

A cheek twitched like Harry was suppressing a smile or a grimace. "You gained my respect, sir."

He set the statue on the desk and walked out.

"Potter," he said. Harry stopped and half turned, obviously listening. "Where was this?"

Harry continued to walk out, reaching up and slapping the top of the doorframe. A cubicle grated open, showing a space just big enough for the statue on his desk.

"Wonderful," he grumbled. He took the statue and smashed it against the floor.

Yards away, Harry smiled as he felt the curse slowly start to dissipate.

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"How much of the school do you know of?" Snape asked.

"I know there are a grand total of three backways to get into the Slytherin common room," Harry said calmly. "One's collapsed, one's full of dust and spiders the size of my foot, and one's guarded by a snake Inferni that will attack unless you're able to talk to it, like I am. And no, I have not invaded anyone's personal space."

Snape sat back in his chair. "How would one get out of the castle without being detected?"

"The Chamber of Secrets," Harry answered promptly. "So are you just fed up with the school or is this something else?"

"Why do you ask, Potter?"

Harry smirked. "Because, sir, for all her faults, Umbridge was right about one thing: I am leading an army. An army of personally trained kids against the Death Eaters. And they're backing me. Not Dumbledore. Not the Order. Not the Ministry. We've given up on anyone acting before this gets out of hand again, so we took it into our own hands. So we regularly use the Chamber to get out of the school."

Snape just sat there, looking a bit like a deer in the headlights.

"So, you can tell me where you're going and I can ensure your safety to the wards. But if you're planning on letting your Death Eaters into the school, you can forget it."

"I needed to go to Diagon Alley to stock up on potion ingredients," Snape finally said.

"I'm surprised you don't use the Forest," Harry commented with a sharp 'follow me' signal. "Despite the overabundance of dangerous creatures, the plants really thrive there. Everything from unicorns to malaclaws and then some."

Several people had to stare as Snape was clearly following his famed rival.

"Do you know how to harvest a sixty- to seventy-foot basilisk?" Harry asked suddenly.

Snape's head whipped towards Harry. "Whatever for?"

"I killed one in second year. All the people I've contacted have no clue how to harvest one that big, and it's really annoying me and the rest of our group. We have to work around it, and that's not as easy as that looks. And, of course, I forgot that you were a Potions Master now that you've been in the DADA position for two years. Granted, that's an accomplishment, but I really shouldn't have forgotten about that."

Harry smiled at Moaning Myrtle. "Hey, Myrtle."

"Harry!"

"How're you doing?" Harry asked the overexcited ghost.

"It's so boring, Harry, without you and the other two always in here," she sighed dramatically.

"I'm sorry, Myrtle," Harry said softly. "We're still trying to get your killer to face his crimes." She sniffed and held up a hand, something like a 'stop' position. Harry held his own next to hers. "Both you and my parents' and so many others. Take care, okay?"

Myrtle nodded and vanished.

"What was that all about, Potter?"

Harry shrugged. "She's tired of being tied to this world. I can't blame her. Being stuck in a teenage body in an abandoned bathroom for sixty or seventy years? I really can't blame her. As soon as I kill Voldemort, she can go on. She was his first kill. For someone who has killed so many, she marks the beginning of an era. When that era ends, she has a choice: to stay or go. She'll go, quite happily, I might add."

He hissed, and goosebumps rose on Snape's arms. The sinks sunk into the floor, and the pipe morphed into stairs. "Watch your step. The stairs are as slick as a wet bar of soap in some places."

They descended into the darkness, making their way to the Chamber.

"Is that the snake?" Snape asked, seeing the glint of scales.

Harry shook his head. "Just the basilisk's shed skin. There are dozens of them around here. This one must be pretty old, because it's tiny compared to the snake."

What little color there was in Snape's face drained. "This has to be thirty feet in length and six feet in diameter…"

"Tiny," Harry repeated. "That's the snake."

He pointed to a seventy-foot carcass lying limply in the middle of the Chamber.

Snake had more teeth than brains, Snape thought weakly.

"Yes," Harry agreed, and Snape realized that he'd spoken aloud. "Mostly because it was a mostly-dead spirit controlling the thing, and spirits aren't all that…sensible."

He pushed on a brick that stuck out of the rest of the wall slightly. A grating sound and a small click, and Harry caught the door as it opened.

"Here we go. We've already cleaned out all the nasty things that would harm or kill if they had a chance, so you're safe. Straight ahead, don't take any side passages. Leads you straight out of the wards. When you see a ladder, climb it. You'll end up on the other side of the lake, somewhere around the train platform."

Snape stared at him. "That would include going straight through the Slytherin dorms."

"One word: magic."

Harry stepped back, and the door shut, and lights flickered on.

"Brat," Snape seethed.

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Harry's green eyes shone with satisfaction, despite being held at wand point by Voldemort. "Any last words, Harry Potter?" Voldemort sneered.

The Boy-Who-Lived smiled softly. "Operation Brotherhood is go."

Pandemonium erupted, and Voldemort got clunked in the head with a textbook. Death Eaters were disarmed, bound, had their identity revealed, and got tagged with a Portkey. Within a minute, Voldemort was without followers, and Voldemort was still recovering his balance from Colin Creevy's well-aimed throw.

"Since I can't get revenge for my parents on Bellatrix, I'll settle for you!" Neville snarled, driving the sword of Gryffindor straight through Voldemort's heart.

Voldemort soundlessly gaped as he stared at the grisly sight of the sword sticking out of him. Neville ripped it from his chest, and Voldemort collapsed slowly to his knees, and then faceplanted into the dirt.

Harry turned, pride and sadness shining in his eyes as he wrapped Neville in a hug, hiding the body from Neville's sight.

"Dog pile!" Colin Creevy shouted, tackling the two. Pretty soon everyone was just a mass of limbs and grins.

Harry vanished from under the pile to reappear outside of it, standing. He turned to Severus Snape. "Thank you."

Snape gripped his shoulder. "You all made it out alive. I consider that a miracle."

"You can thank Pansy Parkinson when she gets unburied," Harry said with no little amusement. "She was a true Gryffindor for a couple of seconds."

"Compliment or insult?"

Harry thought about it. "Right now? Compliment. Draco Malfoy was a true Gryffindor as well. I consider that an insult. He characterized all of Gryffindor's less desirable qualities. Like a lack of subtlety. Quick to anger. Reliance on others. I wish I could've said that to him, because the look on his face would've been priceless. Pansy Parkinson stood both by her beliefs and by what her script was stubbornly and didn't let anyone get their way, despite the severe flak that she could've gotten."

Snape looked at him curiously. "Should've been in Slytherin," he said grudgingly.

A muscle jumped in Harry's jaw as he reacted as though he'd been slapped. Snape's curiosity just increased. Harry coughed in embarrassment. "Well, the Hat did try," he mumbled.

Snape fainted dead away.

Harry doubled over, laughing.

McGonagall looked at the pair in disbelief.

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"I can see why you like it up here," Snape said, seemingly appearing out of the gloom.

"Sinstra?" Harry asked.

Snape shrugged.

Harry took it as a yes.

"I'm going back to Potions," Snape finally said after a long while.

Harry knew he didn't mean teaching Potions. He was going to set up a Potions shop. "Good for you," he congratulated. "Gets you away from the dunderheads, huh?"

"You knew this was coming, didn't you?"

"Oh yes," Harry agreed, mentally tracing out the constellation Casseiopeia. "Once you destroyed it, the curse lost its potency. But you had already been affected by the curse. I assumed that you'd get two years, three years in the position. It lingered on you. I could see it. Once you leave, the curse will be well and truly gone."

"You're an Aura Seer, aren't you?"

Harry made a noise of disagreement. "I don't know, to be honest. I just am rather sensitive to magic and the intent behind it. I can't find it in any book that I've read. I just know that magic is there. It's why I loved Hogwarts, especially at night. The castle fairly shimmered with centuries upon centuries of embedded with magic. Every night, it was like a fireworks show for me."

Snape studied him, not saying anything.

Harry just sighed wistfully. "I'm definitely going to miss it."

"McGonagall's going to offer the DADA position to you," Snape told him.

The Boy-Who-Lived turned and studied Snape with Lily's eyes. "Really? Maybe I'll take her up on that offer later. I'd like to get out of Britain for a couple years and hopefully not stumble across any more Dark Lords. And really, after Voldemort…I think I can handle it."

He leaned against the railing again, running his hand over a deep gouge in the metal.

"What happened there?"

A bit of a smirk found its way onto Harry's face. "I bled on it. My blood never got rid of its corrosive tendencies after second year's annual disaster."

Snape closed his eyes in exasperation. When he opened them, Harry was gone, and a falcon let out a screeching cry of freedom.

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"Where's Harry?"

Snape turned. "Potter says that he might take you up on the offer of the DADA position at a later date. Right now, he's probably somewhere in Denmark."

"He's gone?" Hermione asked, stunned.

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Use your eyes, girl."

And the Bat of the Dungeons swept away, out of Hogwarts.