

If Myrtle was present in her bathroom, she didn't pop out to say hello, even when Harry removed his cloak. He wasn't sad about that — it meant there was no witnesses when he stared at the tiny snake engraved on the tap, and hissed. "*Open.*"

The yawning entrance to the Chamber of Secrets revealed itself. The blast of stale, decaying air made Harry wrinkle his nose, directing a Cleaning charm at the pipe.

Without delay, he clambered over the edge, and slid down.

The first section of the Chamber was just as disgusting as Harry remembered, littered with small animal skeletons and scraps of snakeskin. Performing a Bubblehead charm on himself to keep out the smell, Harry forged onwards, pushing past the insistent press of memories from his second year.

The hole that he and Ron had dug for him and Ginny to escape through, in the pile of rubble caused by Lockhart's failed Obliviation, might have fit twelve year-old Harry but certainly would not fit fifteen year-old Harry. A flick of his wand and an astonishingly overpowered Repairing charm fixed that, the magic rushing eagerly through Harry, reminding him of how little opportunity he'd had to truly stretch his magical core.

That was why he was down here. Partly, anyway. He could have used the Room of Requirement, but... he wanted a place that was outside the student wards, where he could use as much magic as he wanted and not risk getting caught by the wrong person.

As he grew closer to adulthood, his magic grew stronger, his connection to his family magics much deeper. He was noticing it in classes; spells came easily, and if anything he was having to worry about them being *overpowered* rather than under. When conjuring in Charms, he'd almost conjured a dozen pillows instead of the requisite two. If Umbridge had allowed them to use spells in class, he likely would have had to worry about injuring one of his classmates.

And that's why he had to train. If he was going to be teaching his friends, he didn't want to hurt anyone. He wanted to grow his magical core, but he *needed* to control it.

His heart was beating hummingbird-quick when he stepped into the enormous main chamber, laying eyes on the basilisk for the first time in two and a half years.

It was... really quite large.

He hadn't had the chance to properly appreciate it back then, given the basilisk was trying to *eat* him, but it had to be at least sixty feet long. Harry edged closer, expecting the smell of rotting meat, frowning when it didn't hit his nostrils. The basilisk was astonishingly well preserved; he'd expected it to be little more than a pile of putrid flesh and sagging scales by now. Was it magic, keeping it in tact? Or something else? Something that clearly didn't work on all the rodents and other creatures that died in the bowels of the Chamber.

With a little cleaning and some proper lighting, the Chamber really could be very impressive. It was impressive *already*, but mostly in a creepy dungeon lair kind of way, with the pool of stagnant water in the corner, and the centuries of grime built up.