

*“Well, you certainly have been busy,” the man hissed amusedly. “And you said this is your sixth year, now? The year you and your friends will begin to turn seventeen?”* He had an odd sense of urgency lighting his eyes, and Harry frowned at him.

*“Yes. Why?”*

Salazar shook his head. *“The castle is keen,”* he said, as if that was an answer. *“You are a particularly powerful group, this year; I believe it is eager to have such a surge of adult magic.”*

Harry continued to eye the painting suspiciously — that definitely wasn’t the full story. But he knew trying to get secrets from Salazar was like trying to draw blood from a stone, so he let it slide; from the sounds of things, he’d find out sooner or later, regardless.

*“How is your search for my unworthy heir’s horcruxes going?”* the painting asked, and Harry frowned.

*“Well, the ritual we found in here worked. The one in my scar is gone.”* He explained what had happened with the Ministry, and why they’d decided to get rid of it. Salazar looked pleased; at the end of the last school year, he had been one of the most firm advocates for removing the horcrux as soon as possible.

*“The problem is, now we don’t know how many others there are, or where to find them. If there even are any others.”* It could well be that Voldemort’s snake was the only remaining horcrux.

Salazar frowned in thought, stroking the head of his pet snake. *“I wish I could help, but I confess I’m in the dark as much as you are, lad. But do not fear — with how many of the rest have fallen into your path, it seems like the universe is on your side. I’m sure that luck will continue.”*

Harry wished he could have that sort of optimism.