

Across the table, Susan smirked. “Then well met, Heir Nott,” she greeted, offering an open-palmed bow. “Sit down. We’ll catch you up.”

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Harry spent more nights than he probably should down in the Chamber of Secrets. He knew it was inadvisable — when added to the nights he spent with Draco, he was coming back past curfew often enough to be incredibly suspect should any of his dorm-mates notice. He was lucky that Ron was such a sound sleeper, or Dumbledore would surely know by now that Harry was up to something.

He couldn’t help himself; he was learning so much from Salazar. The founder was more than happy to teach him about the history of his life and the school, regaling Harry with stories of his travels from Persia to England in his early teens, and meeting the other three founders. While Harry browsed the office library looking for books on horcruxes, Salazar explained to him the truth behind the story of the ‘tragic fight’ between himself and the other three founders. Apparently, Salazar had left the school not because of his disgust at them allowing muggleborns, but because his cousin had become a Dark Lord back in Persia and he felt it his duty to go and bring him to heel. The other founders, and his own wife and children, had not wanted him to leave, and that was what they had fought over. Salazar had gone back to Persia, and died there in the fight against his cousin.

It was an awful tale, made all the worse by how Harry knew time had twisted it.

When Salazar wasn’t telling him about the founding of Hogwarts, he was guiding Harry through his library, recommending books he thought the boy might be interested in. Harry didn’t have the free time to get stuck in to any of them really, with his busy schedule, but one day when things were calmer he was going to *devour* those bookshelves.

And some nights, like this one, Salazar sat and watched Harry work on his magic, occasionally offering advice. Mostly he was silent on those nights, especially when Harry was working on his animagus form.

He was getting closer and closer to achieving the final transformation. The book Sirius had given him said that after the partial transformations there would be a sort of wall, where the body’s magic was trying to figure out how to get the whole form to shift at once. Harry had hit that wall, and just *knew* he was close to pushing past it.

He sat on the sofa, deep in his magic, chasing down the sneaky little fox within him. It was getting more and more wily, like it was aware how close Harry was and wanted to make him *really* work for it. He raced through his own mindscape, focus entirely on the dark red creature, the white tail-tip bobbing along in front of him. Putting on an extra burst of energy, he lurched forward, and pounced.

And opened his eyes.

The world was different. He was much lower down, for one, but even without that everything was... sharper. The colours were muted, but somehow it all felt so much *more*.