

He hurried from the man's office as soon as Slughorn started making noises about dismissing them all for the night. Hermione tried to follow him, but Harry ducked into a side passage that conveniently made itself available for him — an unexpected perk of holding the Hogwarts wards was the castle's willingness to accommodate him, however it could. Harry had been sneaking around using Salazar's passages since he'd discovered them, but it was nice to have the other secret hide-aways available too. The other heirs certainly enjoyed it. The other day Hannah had delightedly told them she could get an extra twenty minutes of studying done after lunch most days thanks to passages to take her quickly from the Hufflepuff dorms to the upper levels of the school.

Speaking of the wards, as he walked through the passage, Harry began to feel an insistent sort of tugging in the corner of his mind the castle now occupied. It didn't feel urgent — it wasn't a student in trouble. More... the castle had something to show him.

Well, Hogwarts hadn't led him wrong yet. He followed the tug obediently, eyebrows rising when, once again, he was being led to the Room of Requirement. He was alone — the other heirs hadn't been called along too. It wasn't a problem with the Wardstone, then.

When Harry opened the door, his jaw dropped. He was staring at a seemingly endless room, full of piles of assorted *stuff*. Books and clothes and furniture and Merlin only knew what else; prank items and strange potions and sinister-looking weapons. Most of it was junk, and a lot of it looked older than even Dumbledore.

*The room of Hidden Things*, a voice supplied in his head. Harry looked around, and snorted.

"Hogwarts Lost and Found, more like," he muttered — everything the castle occupants had ever forgotten about, or tried to hide from teachers. Everything abandoned and unused and probably some stolen things in there, too; it seemed to have all wormed its way into this room. He peered closer at a stack of books, letting out an impressed whistle. He recognised many of the titles from the Seren Du library — they were rare books, old books.

"When was the last time someone sorted this place out?" he asked, feeling a vague negative sensation from the castle. A long time, then.

Another thing on the list of things to do once the war was over.

But there had to be a reason he'd been brought here, past just being shown to this treasure trove of odds and ends. He opened his magic up to the castle, waiting for more guidance. Slowly, Hogwarts began to nudge him down the aisles of junk, a clear destination in mind.

When Harry turned a corner, he knew immediately what the problem was. Thick, oily magic sidled up against his own. Familiar darkness — even without the matching darkness residing in his scar, Harry could tell immediately what it was.

"Another one? Here?" He stepped up to the bust of an ugly old man, beside which lay a tarnished silver tiara.

A tiara that was *leaking* with dark magic. Horcrux magic. Harry stared at it, wide-eyed. How long had this been within the school? Room of Hidden Things indeed — clearly Tom Ridde