Chapter 55

Here we are at the halfway point! Still plenty more fic to come~

Harry's jaw dropped, and he continued to stare at the portrait. The man, dressed in a very old-fashioned dark green robe, with long black hair and skin much the same shade as Harry's, crossed his arms over his narrow chest and stared back.

"*Are you daft, lad?*"

He was speaking Parseltongue. That shouldn't have been a surprise, given who it was, but Harry had only heard one person speak the language before and it was under very different circumstances.

"*I'm sorry,*" he replied, having to look at the painted snake wrapped around Slytherin's shoulders to make sure he didn't speak English. "*I wasn't expecting you. My name is Harry. Harry Potter.*" A pause. "*I'm your heir.*"

"*Potter, eh?*" Slytherin said, raising one imperious eyebrow. "*A strong family, good line. Though I don't recall our main lines combining — is it a recent tie? I confess, it's been so long since my last visitor, I rather thought the Slytherin line had died out.*"

A sudden, awful thought hit Harry. "*When was your last visitor? Was it a boy named Tom Riddle?*" Surely if Voldemort had found Salazar Slytherin himself, he wouldn't have left the portrait under the school. Nor all of these books, most of which looked as old as Hogwarts itself.

"*Riddle? No, no. It was a Gaunt lad, I forget the first name. Quite some time ago, now. Seventeen-something, maybe early eighteen hundreds.*"

Harry wasn't ready for the punch of relief that hit him, his knees buckling for a moment.

"*Should I know the name Tom Riddle? What year is it now, anyway?*"

"*Nineteen ninety-five,*" Harry relayed, watching the painted man's eyes widen. He swore, in a language that wasn't English but wasn't *not* English, shaking his head.

"*Good lord. What happened? The knowledge is supposed to pass down the line!*"

Harry gave a heavy sigh, Scourgifying the sofa before taking a seat.