1943. At the start of his fifth-year Tom Riddle found a book about the possibility of alternate timelines and time travelling and became obsessed with the idea of travelling to the future. Now, a year later, he's finally ready to carry out his plan.

1995. Harry is about to start his fifth year at Hogwarts. A year that will be difficult not only because Voldemort has returned, but because the Ministry will interfere at Hogwarts and because most of the wizarding world is against him. But Harry doesn't know that year the threat of Voldemort will be closer than he expected, that he will be more sane and dangerous and that he will try to convert him to his cause. And between the threat of Voldemort and the hate of the wizarding world, he'll find hard to resist his offer.

Will Harry be able to resist the temptation being offered to him or will he end up being changed?

Notes

Hello. This is my first Harry Potter fanfiction, but first the most important thing: the disclaimer. I don’t own Harry Potter and everything else that sounds familiar, J.K. Rowling does (but really, was anyone expecting something different? : ) )

Like I wrote in the first sentence, this is my first fanfiction, but I hope you'll like it. I have no beta and English is not my mother language, so I’m bound to make some mistakes. I hope
there won’t be many. :)

Important symbolism linked to this story:
Dahlia: warning, change, travel
Fir: time
Purple: royalty, nobility, spirituality, mystery, transformation, wisdom, enlightenment. cruelty, honor, arrogance, mourning
Dark. It was dark in the room. The sort of darkness that oppressed everything and sent the senses alight with a strong feel of foreboding. The room in itself was quite nice, a rich furnished little study. A side of the study was decorated by dark wooden bookshelves, homes of lines and lines of ancient tomes with dark, leathered covers. Different languages could be discerned reading the titles of the covers: English, Latin, ancient Greek, and a strange sort of squiggly language. On the corner a warm fire, the only source of light in the chamber, crackled inside an ornate stone hearth, projecting a curious canvas of lights and shadows around the study. In front of the hearth were placed two plush armchairs in deep green and between them laid a soft black rug.

An eerie silence reigned inside the room, interrupted only by the crackling of the fire and the scratching of quill against parchment. Sat in a comfortable dark high back chair with green upholstery, in front a cherry wood desk, was a young teen. A tall, handsome adolescent partially covered in shadow. He had pale skin and aristocratic features. On his head, short, chestnut coloured hair perfectly styled. His eyes were the same mesmerizing blue of the deep ocean and on one of his long, elegant fingers he wore a gold ring with a black stone. On the desk, before the page in which was writing, laid a well-kept diary with a dark leathered cover. And beside it, a book, open. Every once in a while, the teen lifted his head from the parchment in which was writing and looked at the book, writing something down. The page was filled with strange symbol and drawings, used, it appeared, to represent some sort of ritual.

After a while, he stopped writing and lifted the page to observe his work. His features stretched in a grin and his eyes flashed red.

“Perfect!”

Sorry if this chapter is a little short, but this is only the prologue. The next chapters will be longer.
Please comment and tell me your opinions. Constructive criticism is greatly appreciated.

:)
A Dementor problem

Chapter Notes

Hello, this is the new chapter. :)  
I wish to thank all of you who left kudos and comments. Thank you very much, they made me really happy. ^.^  
In this chapter the events are pretty much like the events in canon, but I need it for setting the foundation of the story and there are a couple of details that will become important in future chapters. I hope you will enjoy and all mistakes are still only mine.  

Disclaimer: Harry Potter still don't belong to me. He, just like anything familiar is propriety of J.K. Rowling

A Dementor problem

Harry Potter was having a horrible summer. He was, like every evening, hiding under the open window of the living room of Number 4, Privet Drive, waiting to hear the news. Every time he hoped to hear about some strange or unexplainable event, like some mysterious death or disappearance or something else even remotely unusual, just anything that could give him some idea of what the Dark Lord was doing. Voldemort, in fact, returned at the end of his fourth year, just a couple of months ago.

He could still remember that night so clearly. The past year Hogwarts hosted the Triwizard Tournament, a competition in which the participants were three students of three wizard school. The chosen wizards (and witch) had been Fleur Delacour, for Beauxbatons, Victor Krum, for Durmstrang, and Cedric Diggory, for Hogwarts. Unexplainably, Harry too had been chosen as a champion, and was forced to compete in the tournament as a fourth contestant. The trials had been difficult, but he was able to pass every single one and in the end, he found himself before the cup, with Cedric. To this day, he still regretted what happened in that maze. In that moment, with the two of them so near the victory, they had started to argue about who deserved to win more out of the both of them. Harry, injured from the battle with the last obstacle, an Acromantula, thought that Cedric was the one who should win. The other teen disagreed, because the raven-haired teen had saved him from the giant spider. In the end, Harry proposed to take the cup together and to tie: Hogwarts would have win, it was the perfect outcome. Cedric easily accepted, happy to be one of the winners, and helped Harry to reach the cup. Then they both grasped a handle and the cup whisked them out of the maze. From then all went downhill.

They found out that the cup was a potkey that transported them in an old cemetery. There, waiting for them, was a man carrying a strange bundle of robes. This was Wormtail, the man responsible for Harry’s parents’ death, and the bundle was what remained of Voldemort, the Dark wizard who actually murdered his parents and then tried to kill Harry, too, failing. From that moment on, it was like living a nightmare. Harry could still recall everything: the ritual, the duel, his escape. He was able to survive and return to Hogwarts, but Cedric wasn’t so lucky. The teen was killed by Wormtail
the moment the man appeared. He was murdered in front of his eyes and he hadn’t been able to do anything. The guilt still plagued him and the nightmares hadn’t left him alone all summer. Every night he had to revive that night and watch Cedric die, unable to help him.

Worse than this were the unhelpful letters of his two best friends and his godfather. Harry, so starved for information, isolated in the summer prison that was his relatives’ house, unable to find anything from either the Daily Prophet (the wizarding newspaper) and the Muggles’ news, had placed all his hopes on the letters he received from the three most important people in his life, but he didn’t obtain anything. All the letters had been just as informative as his other sources and, in the last two weeks, had even stopped completely. None of the people he cared about had written to him lately and that’s was the reason why he found himself hiding under the living room’s window, trying to gain some kind of information.

Unfortunately, his hopes were crushed: he laid there until the end, but heard only the same useless reports of all summer. And so, was left wondering what Voldemort was doing, why nothing was happening and why Ron, Hermione and Sirius had stopped writing to him.

His musings were interrupted by a sudden noise that had him drawing immediately his wand and putting himself in a combative stance, all his senses alert, searching for every sign of danger. Problem was, he was expecting danger coming from the outside and not from inside the house, so he didn’t notice his uncle coming closer until two big, fat hands closed around his neck and started to choke him. The man was screaming something about the noise and his wand, but he couldn’t understand him really well because the lack of air was starting to affect him. He tried to pry the hands off him, without avail. The struggle kept going for a couple of seconds, until, when he was close to lose consciousness, a strange energy surged from his body, forcing the fat man to release him. He walked away a couple of steps, spluttering, trying to regain his bearing.

This event was followed by a heated argument with his relatives, which ended with him insulting them and then leaving in the direction of the park. Reaching his destination, he lowered himself on one of the swings and resumed his musings. He didn’t remain here for long, though, because soon Duddley and his gang appeared, laughing loudly, exchanging farewells, and heading towards their respective homes. Harry got up from the swing and walked towards his cousin. All his pent-up anger and frustration came to the surface when he fell in pace with the fat boy, causing him to start taunting the teen. This evolved into a fight that escalated quickly, until Harry found himself threatening Duddley with his wand. He knew using magic was prohibited, but he was so full of anger, hatred, and frustration that, there and then, the possibility of expulsion was the last thing on his mind. He could only think about making his cousin pay about making fun of him, about ridiculing him because of his nightmares.

His cousin, so pampered, so spoiled, didn’t have any right to mock him. He didn’t know what it means to risk his life every single year. He never had to fight just to see another day, never had to look death in the eyes, knowing that his possibilities to survive were low at best. And he never had to return to a house that was more like a prison than anything else, after nearly dying, being plagued by nightmares, wishing for some form of comfort, and instead having to cover his bad dreams because they were a weakness he couldn’t allow himself. A weakness that could only became a weapon, in the hands of his relatives, in the same way it was happening then.

He was just about to curse Duddley, the spell on the tip of his tongue, when everything went dark. Dark and cold. And it was a hot summer. Harry knew only a kind of creature that had this powers: Dementors.

“No, it can’t be. They can’t be here.” Muttered. He turned around, wand drawn and body tense, trying to track the direction the creature would come from. Behind him, his cousin was trembling.
“What are you doing? W-wh-why it’s so dark and cold? What are you d-d-doing to me?”

“Duddley, shut up. I’m doing nothing. Now be silent, I need to listen.” He was trying to hear the Dementor coming near and there it was, the distinctive sound of his breathing, and…Oh, Merlin! There were more than one!

“Stop, please. Stop. I-I’m warning you. If you don’t stop…I-I’ll hit y-you!”

Harry turned his eyes on Duddley, his ears still trying to track the creatures movements. “I told you that I’m doing nothing and to stay silent! I’m trying to save ourselves there and I need to be able to hear from where the enemies will come to do that!” But it seemed like his cousin had reached the end of his tolerance. His fear overpowered him and he hit Harry, catching him on the side of the head and sending him sprawling on the floor. The clanking of the wand, escaped from Harry’s grip, on the floor was covered by the echoing of the steps of Duddley’s run.

“Duddley, you utter moron!” Coursing under his breath and frantically searching for his wand, he screamed: “Don’t go that way, you are running towards them!”

Wand, wand…where is it?! He started to panic: could hear them drawing near, but couldn’t find his wand. “Duddley, whatever it happens keep your mouth shut! Did you hear me? Keep your mouth shut!” His cousin didn’t answer, but he could only hope that he had heard him; if they wanted to get out alive of that situation, he needed to find his wand.

Losing his patience, he shouted out the Lumos spell, without expecting anything to happen, and incredibly, miraculously, above him appeared a luminous globe, lighting up the street and showing the position of his wand, a couple of feet from him. He scrambled to pick it up and reached it just in time because, just as he was lifting himself up, one Dementor appeared in front of him. His mind froze, but his body acted on instinct, his mouth shouting out the Patronus spell. And from the tip of his wand erupted the familiar stag, as bright as always, that hit the creature, sending him flying away. Harry remained frozen for a couple of seconds, before his mind caught up and he remembered that Duddley was still in danger. He immediately got up and started running towards his cousin, Prongs behind him. He found him crouching on the floor, hands on his mouth and a Dementor looming over him, leaning down, prying his hands away. He spurred Prongs forwards and the patronus charged the Dementor, getting rid of him too, like he had done whit the other, and then dissolving, bringing the light back with him.

Harry waited a couple of seconds, just to be sure that the danger had passed, and then run towards Duddley, crouching beside him. He was just trying to decide what to do when, from the corner, came out Mrs Figg.

From then on, it was all a blur. Mrs Figg explained about her being a Squib, about him being followed and about Dumbledore’s orders. He saw his guard appear and then suddenly disappear to tell the Headmaster what had happened.

Then, when he reached Number 4, Privet Drive, a new argument between him and his relatives took place (this time about what had happened to their precious son). And it was during this, that the letters came. Two were from the Ministry, the first telling him he was expelled and the second rectifying the first, informing him that he was simply suspended and that he needed to present himself at the Ministry for a hearing just a couple of days from the current one, on the 12th of August. The
third was from Mr Weasley, telling him to not leave the house, and the fourth was a Howler. For his aunt. The situation was worsening with every passing second and his uncle had just reached the point in which just couldn’t bear anything anymore, going as far as shouting at him to leave the house, when the last letter came, changing the mind of his aunt, who informed him he was staying and then sending him to his room.

Entering there, the first thing he did was writing three letters, one for Sirius, one for Ron and one for Hermione, telling them about the situation and demanding answers. Then he waited for Hedwig and when she arrived, sent her off with the task of carrying his letters and return with replies at every cost, even if she had to hurt the receivers to obtain them.

Watching her flying off, Harry kept thinking about the strange night and about the fact that, even if probably by now his godfather had been informed about the Dementors’ attack, Sirius hadn’t written to him.
Three days passed before something happened. Three days spent locked in his room, trapped in his thoughts.

On the fourth day, a group of people called the Advance Guard, of which were part Remus Lupin, Alastor Mad-Eye Moody, a fun young witch named Nymphadora Tonks (that preferred to be called simply Tonks), who was a Metamorphmagus, a black, tall wizard called Kingsley Shacklebolt and a couple of other people, came to move him to the Headquarter of the Order of the Phoenix, which turned out to be a gloomy and decaying old house.

And so here he was, in front of the door that would apparently lead him to the bedroom he would share with Ron. Yes, he had also discovered that his two best friends had lived in this Order Headquarter for the past month, both of them, and neither had bother to tell him this. They didn’t even mention there was something like the Order, let alone explain what this exactly was. Not that the Advance Guard did it. Even Mrs Weasley, the first person he met in this house, didn’t tell him anything, because apparently, there was an important Order’s meeting taking place and so, she simply sent him up to his room, before hurrying down the stairs and vanishing inside a room down in the hallway. Anyway, since at the end of last year Dumbledore spoke about calling back the old crowd, Harry speculated that this were the people the Headmaster was talking about and that they were probably a group that was opposing Voldemort in some way.

He exhaled a long breath. His emotions were in turmoil and the most prominent ones were anger and frustration, the same feelings he had while he was at Privet Drive. He knew he had to calm himself at least a little: he wanted explanations and he wouldn’t obtain them if, just after entering the room, started to shout at whoever stood on the other side of the door (Ron, most certainly and maybe even Hermione). So, after being sure to have somewhat settled himself down, he lowered the handle, pushed open the door, and went inside.

What greeted him was a room just as gloomy and dirty as the rest of the house, but he had a little time to study his surrounding, because his vision was immediately covered by a copious amount of bushy hair. Hermione had hugged him as soon as he had landed in her line of sight, and now she was firing him question after question, asking how he was, if he was angry with them, if he was
worried about the hearing, and then proceeding to lamenting about the injustice of the circumstances and how they couldn’t expel him since in the laws stated that an underage wizard could use magic when his life was in danger. Ron, who was behind Hermione, smiling, interfered, telling her to let him breathe. When the girl dislodged herself from the raven, a soft hooting flew through the room, and a white figure swooped down towards Harry: Hedwig. She perched herself on his shoulder and proceeded to preen his hair. The raven reached one hand upwards and started to absentmindedly stroke her. He had missed the white owl very much in the last days, and his two friends, too, of course, but now that he could see them, the sense of betrayal he felt when he thought about them together while he was blocked at the Dursley had returned in full force and he found himself preferring the presence of his beloved owl over their own.

Ron and Hermione, made uncomfortable by his muteness, tried to coax him to speak, talking about how Hedwig pecked them when they did not write, and their thoughts about the attack and the hearing. During all that time, Harry kept his silence, not trusting himself to not start screaming if he opened his mouth. He surprised himself thinking about how he wasn’t sorry in regards the wounds Hedwig gave them. On the contrary, he mused, he had a right to do this, since the two teens hadn’t bother to write any letters in the last couple of weeks. Something that Ron said, anyway, spurred him to ask about one of the things that plagued him the most while he was at the Dursley. “Why didn’t you wrote to me this last weeks and why didn’t you ever mention the Order?”

“Well…” Ron began awkwardly.

“We wanted write to you Harry, really, we did, but Dumbledore made us swear to not do it and to never write something important in the letters because they could be intercepted.” continued Hermione in an anxious voice.

“He made you swear, I understand…” Harry voice was cold like ice. “So, he told you to not tell me anything and you just did it?” The boy forced himself to maintain his temper under control, but he was beginning to found this increasingly difficult.

“Well, we tried to tell him this was a bad idea, mate. Hermione especially, kept saying you would end up doing something stupid if we continued to keep you in the dark.” Ron began.

“But he refused to change idea. He seemed to think that was for the best.” Hermione ended quickly. Her speech was progressively speeding up, sign that she was becoming more nervous as the conversation went on.

“For the best. Of course.” Stated the green-eyed teen in a strained tone, feeling his anger mounting.

“He appeared to feel like you would be safe at your relative’s house.” Said Ron.

“Oh, really? Because you both were attacked by Dementors, too, weren’t you?” grit out Harry. The anger in him was starting to feel like a volcano that was going to explode at any moment.

“No, of course, no. but that’s why there were people of the Order on guard out of the house.” Put in Hermione.

“That didn’t end up to be really useful in the end, didn’t it? I had to save myself again, didn’t I?” Spoke Harry, bitterly thinking that he was lucky to have done so, because, looking at the situation, Dumbledore seemed to have in mind to left him at his relatives’ house for the entirety of the summer.

“Oh, he was so furious, you should have seen him, it was scary.” Said the girl, shivering at the memory of the power radiating from the Headmaster in that occasion.
“Yes, we thought for sure he would kill Mundungus. Well, he wasn’t the only one looking ready to murder him. The whole Order was angry. Mum and Sirius especially. Sirius looked like he was going to transform in his animagus form and start to tearing Dung apart.” Revealed the red head.

Harry didn’t want to think about his godfather. The lack of letters from him was harder than that of the two teens. Sirius was the only adult he felt he could rely on, the only one that had tried to look after him as a parent and the last link he had with his family. The lack of missives from him really hurt. Wanting to change the topic and leave his depressing thoughts, he asked: “What is this Order of the Phoenix, anyway? Is any of you going to tell me?” This came out more resentfully than he intended, but their words, the looks they sometimes exchanged, how the entire part of their conversation seemed to be rehearsed, and the complete lack of useful information was seriously putting to test his already strained temper.

“It’s a secret society. Dumbledore founded it during the last war. The Headmaster is the one in charge and the member are all the ones that fought against You-Know-Who the last time.” Hurried to explain the bushy haired girl.

“And who is in it?” Continued Harry, really curious about how many allies they could count on in this battle against the Dark wizard.

“Quite a few people” began the red head “we saw some of them, like Moody, Lupin, McGonagall and the other ones that went to collect you, but we reckon there are more…”

The raven nodded, thinking about the ones that had come to collect him and beginning to pace around the room. They were quite a group and if there were more, then their chances at fight weren’t so bad.

“Well?” demanded the raven-haired teen, stopping in his tracks, and turning to look at his friends.

“Er…well what?” asked Ron, confused by the boy demand.

“Voldemort!” shouted out Harry, control starting to slip. The others both flinched at the name.

“Where is he, what is he doing, what are we doing to stop him?”

“Well, we didn’t exactly know. Mum doesn’t let us sit on the meeting. She said we are too young…” Muttered the read-head.

“But we know some things.” Hurried to add Hermione, catching the dark look Harry was giving them.

“Yes, Fred and George had invented this new joke product, you see. They are called Extendable Ears and can be used to eavesdrop on conversations even dozens of feet from you, so we have been able to listen to the meetings.” Added Ron “Apparently, some of them are tailing some known Death Eaters…”

“Others are trying to convince people that You-Know-Who returned and recruit more people in the Order…” Intervened the girl.

“And they are even guarding something, because they are always speaking about turns of guard duty.” Concluded the red head.

“And it couldn’t have been me, could it?” Spat Harry, venom in his voice, remembering about the fact that he had been followed for all the summer, that there had been a wizard just outside of the house and he hadn’t known anything. Apparently, everyone else did, however.
“Oh, right.” Said Ron, with the expression of one that had suddenly been given an obvious answer to an extremely difficult question. Harry wasn’t impressed.

“And how is everything going?” Demanded the green-eyed teen, deciding it wasn’t worth to linger on the topic of him having been observed.

“Well, from what we caught up the tailing, at least, is going pretty well. The recruiting, on the other hand…” Answered the tall boy, shaking his head.

“It’s the Phrophet fault. They are really making things difficult for us.” Kept going Hermione, a frown on her face.


“Ehm…” started the girl, nervously, “Haven’t…haven’t you receive the paper?”

“Of course, I have.” Confirmed the raven.

“And did you…ehm…read everything?” Went on the bushy haired girl, biting her lip.

“No, only the first page. But it was enough, wasn’t it? After all, when those idiots at the Ministry will decide to see sense and accept the fact that Voldemort is back, that will be a first page’s new.” Answered the green-eyed teen. He was starting to have a bad feeling about this.

“Well, then you wouldn’t have seen it, since it didn’t make the headlines, but the Ministry is firmly anti-Dumbledore at the moment.” Started to explain Hermione. “They are stripping him of his titles, removing him from all the important positions and keep going on about how he’s becoming old and going senile. They are assuring themselves that nobody will believe him when he says You-Know-Who is back.”

“Are you telling me that we can’t do much because the Phropet is not only refusing to acknowledge Voldemort’s return, but is even socially fighting the only person that’s telling the people the truth!? Did I miss something?” Exclaimed Harry disbelieving.

“No, this is pretty much the situation…” Confirmed the girl without looking him in the eyes. Harry had a sudden feeling that she was hiding something.

“And that’s all? Are you sure there’s nothing else you need to tell me?” Said the raven suspiciously, setting his piercing gaze on his friends.

“What?” Squawked Hermione. “Of course not. That’s all. There’s absolutely nothing else” She was starting to panic, Harry noted, and still wasn’t looking him in the eyes. Actually, none of them was. They were surely hiding something from him, and from their behaviour he had a feeling he wouldn’t like it.

“Yes, mate, do you really think that we would hiding something important to you?” Added the red head. The two were still refusing to meet his gaze. From their tone, he felt like they were hiding something related to their current conversation, but that was not all. Probably this other thing didn’t have anything in common with their current discussion and yet must be something of a certain importance, if the guilt buried deep in their eyes was any indication. His eyes narrowed, but decided to focus on the more pressing topic for the moment. Later he would investigate further on the other matter.

“You are lying. What are you hiding?” Demanded Harry. His face was devoid of any emotions.
Something that unnerved greatly the two teens. They knew it was only a matter of time before their friend would explode.

“Not-” Started the red hair.

“Don’t lie!” Spat Harry, his temper rising. The other boy flinched.

“Har-” Tried the girl.

“Hermione.” Said the raven in a cold, emotionless voice. “I know you two are lying, so please stop pretending and tell me the truth.”

The two shared a nervous glance and then, gulping, Ron carefully began.” You see…it’s not only Dumbledore that they are attacking in the papers, they are doing the same thing to you.”

Harry’s face darkened, his eyes flashing in anger, but Hermione keep bravely going on in a small voice. “They are continuing what Skeeter had been doing. I’m sure you remember her horrible articles of last year, well, the Prophet is now doing something similar, only that is so much worse. They slip your name in absurd article at least two times a week, picturing you like an attention seeking kid, a delusional teenager that likes to be famous and tells tall tales only to keep his notoriety.” She said all this very fast, as though this would make all that less unpleasant for him to hear.

The raven was shocked. It couldn’t be. How can anybody believe that he would love the fame he obtained at the cost of his family?

“I never…never wanted this, never! I became famous only because Voldemort killed my family, but wasn’t able to kill me! Who wanted to be famous for a thing like this?!” Screamed Harry incredulous. His anger was bubbling under his skin and he could feel his emotions, which had tried so hard to control, slipping from his grasp. Even his magic was reacting to his anger, rising, and overflowing in waves out of him. A fearful look appeared on his best friends’ faces and Hermione quickly tried to calm him down.

“We know Harry, we know! It’s really horrible what they are doing, that’s why we didn’t want you to know.” Anxiousness pervading her being and slowly mutating into panic. Harry was only moments away from exploding, that wasn’t good. She needed to calm him, who knew what would happen otherwise…the magic flowing out of him didn’t promise anything good.

“Oh, so you wanted me to find this out once returned to school? When everyone will look at me like I’m mad?” He spat out sarcastically, his temper painfully near the breaking point. Now Hedwig, too, sensing his distress, tried to calm him down, nibbling at his ear, seeking to gain his attention, and distract him. But Harry was too lost in his own rage to paid her attention.

“We thought…Dumbledore…” Hermione tried with a feeble voice, eyes wet with tears. Dumbledore. That name was the last straw. His control shattered and his anger exploded, followed by his magic.

“DUMBLEDORE!? HE IS YOUR ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING!? I SUPPOSE HE TOLD YOU THAT THIS WAS FOR THE BEST, DIDN’T HE? JUST LIKE KEEPING ME IN THE DARK WAS! OF COURSE, IT WAS FOR THE BEST!” Harry laughed. His tone cold and sarcastic. His two friends took a few steps back, trying to put distance between them and the raven anger. Unfortunately, it had happened what they had feared since the beginning of the discussion: Harry had exploded and now his magic was creating havoc around the room. “I MEAN, IT’S NOT LIKE I WOULD EVER FEEL THE NEED FOR INFORMATION. AFTER ALL I WAS
ONLY THE ONE TO SEE CEDRIC DIE AND VOLDEMORT RETURN TO LIFE. AND THEN... THEN I WAS JUST DUMPED OUT AT THE DURSLEY, ENDING UP BEING COMPLETELY ISOLATED FROM THE WIZARDING WORD. AND YOU, THE ONES THAT MUST BE MY BEST FRIENDS, NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW ALONE I WOULD FEEL? DID YOU STOP, EVEN FOR A MOMENT, TO THINK ABOUT IT? ONE MONTH! ONE MONTH I SPENT IN THAT HOUSE! DESPERATE FOR ANY KIND OF INFORMATION, NICKING PAPERS FROM THE DUSTBINS, TRYING TO FIND ANYTHING!" Something in the room shattered. His magic was flowing around him, filling the room, generating crack in the walls. His eyes were glowing, just as luminous as the killing course. Hedwig, that until that moment had remained on his shoulder, flew off when he started shouting, perching herself on top of the wardrobe, hooting in indignation. Hermione was in tears and Ron was shocked, his eyes wide. Fears etched in both of their features, mixed with guilt. Because even if anger was the prominent emotions in their friend, there was hurt too, buried deep in that resentment.

“"You are right, Harry, you are right.” Said Hermione, tears finally spilling from her eyes, guilt and shame filling her.” I’m so sorry, we are so sorry. We shouldn’t have listen so much to the Headmaster and at least told you something. I, too would be furious in your place. I’ m sorry.”

“"Yes, mate, we are sorry. Really. We should have at least told you that Dumbledore has made us swear to not tell you anything.” Ron too was feeling like Hermione. He knew his friend, knew the raven would brood during the summer, guilt eating him for not have been able to save Cedric. How could he just ignore it? Oh, Merlin. We had been so stupid. And they really had been: the proof was in the hidden pain in his best friend eyes.

Harry looked at the two teens, seeing the sadness in their eyes and it was that, in the end, what vaporized his anger. He was still not happy about what they did, but he could see that they were truly sorry so, he closed his eyes, exhaled slowly, and spoke in a cold, but resigned voice. “Yes, you should have.” He reopened them and looking firmly at them, decide to forgive the two. He was about to inform them of this much, when two loud, twin crack resounded in the room, announcing the appearance of Fred and George, Ron’s twin brothers. Apparently, they had decided to apparate in the room, sparing themselves of the time of descending the stairs. The twins lost no time to greet him and then proceed to joking about his loud shouting and the semi-destruction of the room, successfully diffusing the still lingering tension.

The real reason they had come down, anyhow, was that they were trying to eavesdrop on the reunion taking place downstairs. It seemed to be a pretty important one, since Snape was there to made report. They were just discussing the presence of the potion’s professor and what role he had in the Order, when Ginny made her entrance informing them that it was useless trying to listen on it because the door had been imperturbed. After the initial delusion, the discussion topic shifted on the older Weasley brothers: Bill, Charlie, and Percy. The first had come back in Britain so he could help the Order, the second was part of it, like Bill, but was yet in Romania. His job was to make contacts with foreign wizards and see if he could bring them into the Order. At this Harry asked about Percy because the last time he had saw him, the third older brother was working in the Department of International Magical Co-operation, so he should have been the best suited to do what Charlie was doing. The rest of the Weasley, with their mood darkening considerably, explained him all about the fall out between Percy and the rest of the family, something that actually shocked him. He had never really liked much the older teen, but he would never had thought that he would put his job over his family.

The discussion kept going until Mrs Weasley entered in the room, informing them that the reunion had ended and effectively putting a stop to their chat. She saw the damage done to the room, but fortunately didn’t pry too much, choosing to tell them that dinner was ready and to come down in the kitchen, instead, without forgetting to also remind Harry the warning against making too much noise.
she mentioned when she sent him up the stairs.

Carefully, Harry followed Ron and Hermione out of the room and in the hallway. He tried to apologize to them, but they immediately stopped him, insisting it was fine, since it was their fault, and that he was right to be angry with them. Reassured, he smiled a little and in that precise moment a loud noise resounded from the entrance. After seeing off a group of Order’s members, Tonks had tripped over the umbrella stands at the entrance in her way to the kitchen. She hurried to apologize to Molly, who was scolding her, but soon their voices were drowned by a loud screeching coming from the painting of an ugly, black-haired woman, shouting out obscenities. Startled Harry turned around to look at the painting, previously covered by the dark curtains he noticed ascending the stairs to reach his and Ron’s room, the function of which had questioned himself about at the time. Lupin and Mrs Weasley rushed to shut the curtains closed, but the latter quickly gave up, choosing to stun the other portraits, who had started screaming whit the black-haired woman, instead and make her way down to the kitchen. In her place came out a dark-haired man, who, with the help of the werewolf, successfully forced the curtains closed. When the man turned to face him, Harry recognized his godfather, Sirius Black.

The members of the Order that had remained for dinner ate happily the food prepared by Mrs Weasley. Meanwhile conversation was freely flowing between them. From his position beside Sirius, Harry could see Tonks giving Ginny and Hermione a show by changing the shape of her nose; Lupin, Mr Weasley and Bill discussing about goblins and Fred, George, Ron and Mundungus laughing about something the latter was narrating, while Mrs Weasley was looking at them in a disapproving way. He, himself, wanted to talk to Sirius, but didn’t know what to say. After greeting him, his godfather had explained him that this was his parent’s house and how some of his summer went, but since they had sat around the table, the thought of not receiving anything from him in the past weeks had stopped him from speaking to him. The silence was beginning to feel awkward.

For his part, Sirius, too didn’t know what to say. In the beginning, everything seemed fine between him and his godson, but now Harry had closed off and refused to even look in his direction. Racking his mind in search for something he could have said that may have possibly trigged this reaction, he failed to see the boy shaking his head and steeling himself to ask the question that was tormenting him in that moment. Without looking his godfather in the eyes, he demanded: “Why didn’t you write to me?”

“What do you mean?” Hearing his tone of voice, Harry turned around to look at his godfather. Sirius seemed extremely baffled by the question.” I wrote to you.”

It was Harry’s turn to sound surprised. “No, at least not in the recent weeks. Even after the dementor’s attack. I thought that you would have written to me something then, at least.”

Still bewildered, but with a look of drawing comprehension on his face, Sirius asked, with the appearance of someone who just wanted to confirm something he already knew. “So, you didn’t receive any letter from me in the last weeks?”

Harry shook his head in a dejected sort of way. Sirius cursed under his breath, understanding what the problem had been. “Dumbledore!” He spat. It was surely the old man fault. He should have known that he would have used a dirty trick like this, after their quarrel. The Headmaster must have guessed that he would have written to Harry, despite his orders of not doing so. Like he would ever contemplate follow that kind of orders. Sirius knew his godson and was sure that the boy would have
preferred to have known about that event before he would find himself faced with it. Sirius would have felt the same way in his situation.

“What about him?” Asked the raven, confused.

“He didn’t want me to write to you about something. He said he wanted to let you have a relaxing summer or some such thing. At least, that was his excuse. Anyway, he must have stopped my missives from reaching you” Sirius sighed, a frown appearing on his face.

Harry was outraged: not only did the Headmaster leave him at the Dursley, but forbid his friends to write to him and even stopped the letters of his godfather. On the plus side, the idea that Sirius wrote to him cheer him up greatly, even if he never received those letters. This definitely dissipates any barrier between him and the man, making their conversation more easily.

After a little explanation of his summer, on Sirius demand, Harry asked the man what happened that spurred Dumbledore to block his godfather’s missives and the man confessed that, unfortunately, what happened around two weeks ago, the old professor still didn’t want him to know, so he couldn’t tell him, even if he thought it was stupid, since now that he was here, he would end up knowing soon enough. He proceeded explaining that had tried to tell the Headmaster this, but the old man hadn’t bulged and had asked them to still kept the secret. Since everyone in the room agreed whit the old man, Sirius couldn’t say anything more than this. Harry only ended up more confused after Sirius told him this, but just when he was about insist with his godfather to obtain elucidations, Mrs Weasley interrupted them warning Sirius about telling him anything. This result in an argument between the two adults where Sirius fought for Harry’s right to know, even knowing it was a lost cause, and Mrs Weasley, taking the side of Dumbledore, insisting that the Headmaster knew what he was doing and that the man was only doing what was best for Harry. In the end, thanks to Lupin and Mr Weasley, who backed Sirius decision about telling the raven at least something, she relented and accepted to let Sirius answer Harry’s question, but forbid to tell him anything regarding the event that took place a little before two weeks ago. Sirius scoffed, but complied anyway since all the member of the Order in the kitchen were on the woman side regarding that instance. Turning to the raven, told him to ask any question he wanted, except those regarding the reasons that prompted Dumbledore from stopping his letters, meaning everything except the ones regarding the event he mentioned.

Harry sighed, but, recognizing defeat, started posing question about Voldemort. His godfather, anyhow, didn’t exactly tell him much more than what Ron and Hermione had told him before and just as the man was about to tell him some truly important information (about something that Voldemort was searching to obtain), Mrs Weasley interrupted him and sent everyone to bed.

When they reached their room, he and Ron started discussing about the new acquired details (the weapon Sirius mentioned), and were soon joined by the twins. Unfortunately, they weren’t able to go really far with their speculations, because the Weasley’s matriarch began to make rounds to assure herself that they were all sleeping, even going as far as listening from outside the doors, forcing the twins to reapparate in their room. When he was sure the woman was gone, Harry decided to ask Ron about the event that they were all mentioning, but seeing that the red head was extremely uncomfortable talking about it, he resolved to let it go and ask again to Sirius the next day, when they were alone.

The raven was sure he wouldn’t be able to sleep with all the information and questions crowding his mind, but he didn’t make in time to lower his head on the pillow, that he was fast asleep.
Harry slowly opened his eyes and sat up on his bed. His night had been plagued by images of a long corridor and a closed door.

He remembered having similar dreams when he was at the Dursley, but he had always written them off as some sort of representation of his feeling of being trapped. If this was the case, though, then those dreams should have stopped now that had finally left the house, but this wasn’t the case. How strange. If they don’t represent an imprisonment kind of feeling...then what do they mean? If this wasn’t enough he can sense a sort of foreboding atmosphere in the air, something that certainly hadn’t felt the night before.

Wanting to drive these thoughts out of his mind, he decided to go in the kitchen and have breakfast, so he woke up Ron and told him he would be waiting for him outside the door. There he found Hermione. She was waiting for them so they could go down to breakfast together, like she always did when they were at Hogwarts. He noticed that she was a little nervous and kept looking around, like she was expecting something to suddenly pop out from around the corner. He wanted to ask the reason for her strange behaviour, but he had a feeling he would have had the same luck he had with Ron the night before, so he decided to occupy the time talking about idly things, while they waited for the other boy to came out.

It passed nearly half an hour before the red head joined them. From his still half asleep look, it was obvious he had returned to sleep and had just awoken again. He and Hermione exchange a half-exasperated look, but by now were used to the other boy less than morning personality. Finally, they move out from the hallway and towards the kitchen. They were barely half down the stairs when Harry heard a voice behind him, a voice he hadn’t heard since he was twelve.

“So, the mysterious Harry Potter has finally arrived. I wondered when I would have been able to meet you.”

Harry froze. That wasn’t possible. He shouldn’t be hearing that voice. He quickly spun around and there he was, just on top of the stairs.

Pale skin, dark eyes and chestnut hair perfectly combed.

Tom Marvolo Riddle.
Dumbledore's explanation

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter still don't belong to me. He, just like anything familiar is propriety of J.K. Rowling

Hello, this is the new chapter. :)
I apologize for the long wait, but this chapter ended up being harder to write than I had anticipated. And longer, too. I hope that it will be worth the wait and that the length will make up for the late update. :D

My thanks to all the people that left comments and kudos. ^.^
All mistakes are still only mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dumbledore's explanation

Tom Marvolo Riddle.

The teen version of the Dark Lord was here, in the Order’s Headquarter, looking at him from the top of the stairs, just as handsome as he remembered from the time in the Chamber and Harry’s immediate reaction was denial. He closed his eyes, praying with all his might to simply be under the effect of a horrifyingly realistic hallucination. This couldn’t be true, it just couldn’t.

Unfortunately, the teen didn’t seem to be a vision, because, when he reopened his eyes, Tom Riddle was still there.

Harry remained frozen on the spot, looking at the teen with disbelief, his mind trying to come to terms with the fact that a young Dark Lord was there, in the Headquarters of the resistance against Voldemort. Said teen was leisurely leaning against the railing, looking extremely at ease, like he owned the place. He was smirking, staring at him with a strange glint in his eyes that made Harry very uncomfortable. The look Riddle was sporting reminded him of the one worn by the Diary Tom when the two of them met in the Chamber. And yet…something was different. Harry felt like the other teen lacked something that the raven had always found in all the others manifestation of the Dark Lord he had met, even if he couldn’t exactly identify what this something was.

A moment passed before the green-eyed teen was able to pinpoint this difference and, when he did, he felt a shiver run down his spine. What this Riddle lacked, that all the other versions of Voldemort possessed, was hatred. Every time he had met the wizard, it didn’t matter in what form, the Dark Lord’s eyes always held a look of deep loathing in them. In this teen, however, that emotion was missed. There was hunger, yes, the same obsessive hunger present in the shard come out from the Diary, coupled with a strange sort of fascination, but no trace of ill thoughts. And this, this only worried Harry more, because he had a feeling that being the object of Riddle interest was more dangerous than being the target of his hate.
He was still gazing at the teen without really seeing anything, lost in his thoughts, when the voice of the boy brought him back to the situation at hand. While he wasn’t paying attention, the young Dark Lord had come closer and now there were only a couple of steps separating them.

“Well? Are you going to stare at me for much longer?” Even his voice caught him off guard. When Tom Riddle had previously called him, he had been too shocked to really pay attention at any peculiarity of the words coming out from the teen mouth, but now that they were so close, he couldn’t stop himself. Tom Riddle voice was deep and warm. It came out in a controlled sort of flow, like calm water drifting through the stones of a river, covering everything in his path, encasing it in his overwhelming embrace. It was nothing like the sharp, cutting hissing noise of Voldemort. Hard and cold, aimed at destroying his opponent, making him cower in fear at his feet. This Tom Riddle’s voice was the voice a charmer. The melody of a predator that captured his prey with his beauty, taking away all their will, until they would happily let him devour them. But in this instance, it wasn’t only charm coating his words, there was also a great deal of amusement. “I must say this wasn’t exactly the way I imagined this meeting to unfold.”

“No? And what exactly did you expect?” Asked the raven, still partially in shock. Part of him wanted to attack the other, the young version of the person that had tried to kill him since he was a baby; the most rational part of him, however, was protesting, warning him to not act too hastily: the other teen didn’t seem to know what kind of relation there was between the two of them, or having any intention of harming him, for that matter. At least if the emotions in his eyes were to be believed. Then there was the fact he was in the Order’s Headquarters: he doubted Doumbledore would have let the teen stay in the house if he represented a danger. True, he hadn’t harboured very nice feelings about the Headmaster since the start of the summer, his emotions always leaning towards resentment and frustration, but he knew that he could at least trust the man to recognize the potential danger posed by a young Voldemort, and don’t put the boy in Grimmauld Place without some form of assurance. “After all we don’t know each other and this is the first time we meet.” Added Harry. Yes, pretending was the best course of action, decided. Considering he was in the dark about what this Riddle aimed to achieve, feigning ignorance about the young Dark Lord identity was the best solution. He wouldn’t antagonize the teen. Not yet, at least. For the moment, he would simply observe him and then decide what kind of behaviour he should adopt.

…Or at least that was the plan.

“Oh, Harry, you don’t have to pretend. I know who you are and the kind of relation there is between us. We have quite a history, don’t we?” Tom’s voice lowered until it became a soft purr, the smirk changing into a charming smile. Amusement, intrigue, and an identifiable dark emotion were dancing in the teen’s dark orbs.

At that, confusion took possess of Harry mind. The other knew him…how was possible? What exactly was this Riddle? And…if the teen really knew that Harry vanquished the Dark Lord, making him an enemy of said man, then…why was he looking at him in that way?

“Anyway, to answer your questions, taking into consideration our relationship I thought you would have attacked or at least ignored me, while, at the same time shooting distrustful and hateful gazes in my way.” Tom’s eyes were latched on Harry and they didn’t wander for even a moment, nor did his expression change, while he was speaking. “I really wasn’t expecting this sort of silent shock. It doesn’t quite match the image of you I portrayed listening to the talks of the people that reside in this house. Unless…” The smile left his face, replaced by a slightly thoughtful expression. Tom Riddle cocked slightly his head to the side and his gaze became more intense, seeming searching the answer of his unvoiced question inside the green eyes of the other. “…unless you weren’t told about what happened. If you happen to be in the dark about who I really am and the reason that brought me to be here, then your unusual reaction can be easily explained.”
He sighed then, shaking his head in a small, graceful movement. “Well, considering the way those people were always discussing about how much was needed to be told to you, I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. It seems like I shall introduce myself, then.” The charming smile reappeared on Tom’s face and relocking his eyes with Harry’s he said: “My name is Tom Riddle, like I’m sure you already suspected, and I came here from the past. From 51 years ago, to be precise. It’s a pleasure to meet you.” His gaze intensified and a red glint flickered for a moment in that deep ocean eyes. “A real pleasure.”

A shiver run down Harry’s spine at the other soft tone and intense gaze. He noticed that Riddle eyes had darkened a little at the end, reaching the same shade of a cloudless night sky. A moment passed before the information registered completely into Harry’s mind and when it did, the shock, that until that moment had reigned inside the raven changed into disbelief. “So, you are a young version of Voldemort come here from the past?!”

“From the past of another timeline, if we want to be accurate, but essentially, yes. Although I shall ask you to refrain from calling me by that name.” Tom’s expression changed, turning into a blank mask and a speck of disgust shined rapidly in his eyes, before vanishing entirely. “I read about what my counterpart has become and I must say that I’m in no way impressed and I certainly have no intention to become like him.” After this his expression cleared and his focus returned to the current discussion. “Anyway, I’m really surprised nobody told you. More than two weeks had passed since I came in this timeline. I thought that somebody would have warned you about my presence, considering our past history and relationship. It’s quite strange nobody did, not even the two people behind you that preached to be your so called ‘best friends’. And here he glanced for a mere moment at the two teens behind the raven, before refocusing his gaze on him.

Harry felt Ron and Hermione flinch at Tom’s words, but didn’t turn around. His anger was mounting again.

Last night he had told himself he was fine with not knowing, that he could have waited to speak with Sirius about what he knew everybody was hiding from him…but his friends’ omission still hurt. He had seen that both Ron and Hermione were keeping something important from him, something that made them uncomfortable to maintain secret, and he hadn’t pressured them into speaking, certain that if it was something he needed to know, they would have told him. That they would put him, their best friend, over their Headmaster orders. And this was what he gained.

They knew about the relationship between him and Voldemort and they knew about the relationship between him and Riddle. In their second year, he had been the only one to reach the final room in the Chamber, the only one to really confront the boy appeared from the Diary. They knew what kind of danger the presence of that teen represented, especially for him. And yet they told him nothing, absolutely nothing! Just like the letters, just like the information about the Order, they listened to Dumbledore and kept him in the dark. He forgave them last evening, but now the sense of betrayal was back again and he regretted his decision. He knew that this time would have a harder time passing over this, forgetting their actions.

They were his first and closest friend, so he treasured them a lot and, therefore, he had always been honest with them. For the most part. Sure, he had, and still was, hiding some things about himself, like how truly bad was his relationship with his relatives and what really happened at the end of their adventures, when he had found himself alone fighting for his life; but these were things he felt like they didn’t need to know and he never kept anything of major importance for himself. Like the last evening. When he was offered answers, Mrs Weasley had demanded the two went to bed, but he had vouched for their stay, despite the still lingering hard feelings. And this was how they repaid him: keeping on lying.
He could feel the gaze of his friend on his back, but he still refused to turn around. He knew they were probably waiting for him to look at them so they could start apologizing and explaining themselves, but he was not ready to forgive them, least of all to listen to their excuses. After all he already knew the reasons behind their actions: Dumbledore said what to do and they simply followed him, believing he knew best.

The hard feelings he harboured for the old professor since the start of the summer flared to life. A deep resentment clouded his mind. Dumbledore, too, knew about the relation between him and Riddle, so how could he ever have thought that hiding this from him was a good idea? Especially now that both of them were staying in the same house! Did he really think that they wouldn’t meet? It wasn’t possible, so…what was the true reason behind his decision to stop everyone from telling him about Tom Riddle?

**Tom’s Pov**

While Harry was lost in his thoughts, trying to comprehend the reasons behind the Headmaster’s decisions, Tom let his gaze flicker again, even if only for a moment, on the raven’s friends. The two were standing awkwardly behind the teen, looking with concern and anxiousness at his still form. He sneered briefly, being careful to not be seen. Such pathetic people. He still remembered how they acted the first time he met them: they had been wary and fearful around him, even with the reassurance that he couldn’t harm them. And within the passing days, this fear only became more apparent, increasing in dimension.

In the beginning had been entertaining see them jump every time he moved, but soon their behaviour had become really annoying. He had been forced to spend a lot of time with them: Dumbledore, the irritating old man, had given the teens the job of being his “babysitter”. In short, they had to control him and make sure he didn’t do anything…unsavoury. Hah, like they could truly stop him if he truly wanted to do something. Ridiculous!

Spending time with the two had really been a chore. He disliked people in general and found bothersome to socialize and dedicate hours of his time to them. He only tolerated his ex-Slytherin housemates because he could use them and that’s was the only reason why he kept them around. They were beneath him, just like everyone else and they knew it. They were his followers and nothing more, paws he could use and sacrifice if needed. He was the Lord, they simply had to bow and follow his orders. The teens he met there, on the contrary, were of no use to him. They were neither useful, nor interesting (maybe with the exception of the two twins. They had some interesting ideas, pity they used them for pranking). Especially those two. The red head was incredibly dense and the bushy haired girl, even if in possess of some modicum of intelligence, was too ready to believe everything the books and the authority figures told her. He had tried to find the reason, but he still wasn’t able to comprehend why Harry Potter had chosen these two as his best friends. He couldn’t see any redeeming quality in them.

In the beginning he thought that, since his friend were so dull and uninteresting, the boy who was said to be his worst enemy would be just the same. A little powerful, maybe, since he had been able to escape death until then, but nothing more. Oh, how had been wrong. He had never been more elated to have made a mistake in his life. The other teen was just so interesting. He wanted him. And he would have him.

When he returned his attention towards the green-eyed teen he noticed that his eyes were unfocused, showing he was lost in his thoughts, and his posture was tense. Probably, whatever he was thinking about wasn’t pleasant. He smirked, his eyes flashing with smugness and glee. That morning he had thought he would meet some difficulty in obtaining the teen, but it seemed like the object of his interest would be easier to gain than he anticipated. The lies of his two friends had obviously hurt
him, creating a rift between them. And this was aided by the fact that the boy and the girl had preferred to listen to Dumbledore instead of doing what was best for Harry. It would pass some time before the raven would completely forgive them, and that gave him a lot of time to wooing the boy and making him his. Before they knew what was happening, Harry would leave them with the intention of never return. Well, too bad for them: they shouldn’t have isolated him so much. It was their loss and his gain.

Deciding he had left enough time at the raven to settle his thoughts and wanting to recapture his attention, Tom made a step forward, further reducing the distance between them and was about to speak when a voice he knew very well called the raven, stopping him.

**Harry’s Pov**

Harry was still lost in his thoughts when a voice calling his name brought him out of it. He refocussed his gaze, and immediately took a step back, noticing that, while he was distracted, Tom had advance again and now was just too close. After re-establishing a safe distance between him and the young Dark Lord, the raven turned around to see who had called him and found out that the voice belonged to the esteemed Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore.

“Harry” The man in question quietly repeated his name, using it like a form of greeting and then shifted his gaze on the teen behind him, repeating the process. “Tom”

“I’m surprised to see you out of your room, Tom. I was under the impression that you wanted a little time to yourself to research more about the past actions of your counterpart and that you wouldn’t leave the bedroom before at least a couple of days had passed. And from what I know, you started this research just yesterday.” Dumbledore was speaking in a calm, but grave voice, pinning Tom with hard, distrusting eyes.

The teen, outright, didn’t react in any way except smirking at the old professor and answering his statement in a tone full of amusement and a touch of mockery, but inside he was deeply annoyed at the interruption. “Well, professor, I planned to. In truth, yesterday I entered my room with the full intention to remain there for the next couple of days, but you see, last evening happened something that made me…reconsider, such decision.” There the mockery became more pronounced. “Oh, I’m perfectly aware of the fact that you and your precious Order were just waiting for a similar occasion so you would have been able to go and collect Harry. And in truth I was perfectly content to let you run things in your own way, but the events taking place last night changed my mind. After all, I’ve been really interested in encountering the boy who defeated my counterpart, so, after hearing he was there, I just had to meet him.” And there his gaze settled again upon the raven, looking at him with the same intensity as before.

Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed with suspicion. “And how exactly did you come to know about Harry’s arrival?”

Tom chuckled quietly, glancing briefly at the Headmaster, before his gaze found itself resting again over the emerald-eyed boy. “You see, last evening an argument took place in the room of Weasley here. It was a pretty heated discussion and it hadn’t been neither quiet, nor hard to listen to. I think everybody had heard it, or better, everybody who wasn’t in the meeting, since the silencing ward put there will block not only every sound from coming out, but also every sound from getting in.” During his speech, Tom’s eyes hadn’t strayed from Harry’s, not even for a moment, and in the end the raven felt himself blushing slightly. He knew he hadn’t exactly been quiet the evening before, but he hadn’t been expecting the presence of the other teen, and the dark brown-haired teen words had made painfully clear that Riddle had hear everything he had said. The smirk on the boy’s face certainly implied so.
“I understand.” The Headmaster’s gaze travelled also towards Harry, making him speak in a tired and defeated tone. “Well, then, if you don’t mind, Tom, now I would like to speak with Harry alone.” This captured suddenly all of the teen attention, making him divert his focus from the young Dark Lord towards the old professor.

Behind him said teen’s eyes darkened. He had found that he quite liked hold all of the raven attention, and he didn’t appreciate losing it. However, he knew he couldn’t do anything about it for now, so kept silent. Looking at Dumbledore saw that the old man had noticed his expression, but it didn’t matter. The old professor couldn’t do anything, after all: he didn’t spend much time in the Order’s Headquarters. Instead, Tom, would be spending his summer there, and this mean he will be able to pass a lot of time with Harry. The best Dumbledore could do would be warning the raven against him, but Tom knew that the teen didn’t need that kind of advice: from what he gathered he knew Tom pretty well. The chestnut-haired teen knew this would be a problem in the beginning: he would need to put a little bit of work into developing their relationship, and wooing him to his side carefully, but he was nothing if not determined. Oh yes, he was planning to take Harry for himself and away from his pathetic little friend and Order’s people, and looking at how the things were between them it seemed like it wouldn’t be too difficult. If everything went as planned, he would accomplish this just in time for the beginning of the school year, and he was pretty sure that the plan he had worked on while he was speaking with Harry was going to work. Assured by this, Tom just smirked at the professor and walked past him, making his way towards the kitchen. Just before entering he turned around towards the raven, addressing him in a silken, purring voice. “Well, Harry I’ll see you later. I can’t wait to speak with you again” And, smiling, he disappeared inside the room.

Dumbledore looked him leave and sighed. He had known Tom would reveal himself to be troublesome to deal with, but it was better having him here, where he could at least control him a little, then in any other place, where the boy would be able to do everything he wished. Pushing away the thoughts of what kind of problem an uncontrolled Tom Riddle would be, he turned towards Ron and Hermione, smiling kindly. “Like I said, I would like to speak with Harry alone. Mr Weasley, Ms Granger would you be so kind to leave us? Maybe you could go down to breakfast, I’m sure you should be hungry, Harry will join the two of you soon.”

The two teens shot a quickly nervous glance towards Harry, who still ignored them, and then scurried down into the kitchen. After they left, Dumbledore slowly approached his student. “Well, my boy, it’s seems like we have much to discuss. Why don’t we go to the drawing room? Molly told me they had yet to finish cleaning it, but there are usable seats and is one of the tidiest rooms.” His tone was gentle and warm, but it was tainted by sadness and worry. Dumbledore knew Harry and, even if he believed that in the end the teen would understand his reasons, the old wizard still dreaded the reaction his favourite student would have at the revelations he was going to make.

Harry glared a little at Dumbledore, wanting nothing more than scream at the professor in the same way he had done with his two friends, the anger at the man still present, bubbling inside him, threatening to unleash itself, but the prospect of answers was too much tempting to pass on, so he simply nodded and, reigning his temper, slowly followed the Headmaster into the drawing room.

Harry and Dumbledore were seated on two opposite armchairs in the drawing room. Silence a dark cloud between them. The Headmaster had his fingers intertwined, hands resting on his lap, and head up, facing the wall just behind Harry. His gaze was unfocused, recalling past events and thinking about the best way in which he could illustrate the situation to the young Gryffindor.
The raven was seated across him. Posture stiff, arms crossed, and fist tightly closed. His emotions fluctuating between deep resentment and irritation, and nervous anxiety and uncertain eagerness. The green-eyed boy didn’t know exactly how to act: he wanted answers to the dozens of questions swarming his mind, but at the same time he was a little wary about interrupting the silence cloaking the room. Deciding to let the Headmaster to his thoughts, at least for now, he searched for something to occupy himself with in the meantime, ending up simply observing his surroundings.

The Black’s drawing room was, as the rest of the house, grimy and dusty, but presented signs of recent cleanings. The floor and the twin plush armchairs, like the sofa on their side, were tidy, every trace of previous dust and decay having been removed. The design of the furniture was an old, high class Victorian style, with dark tones and a lavish appearance. The seated arrangements reminded him of the ones in the Slytherin common room, seen during his second year. The difference was that these chairs were a lot more comfortable compared to the couch in which he and Ron had sat during their interrogation of Malfoy, but, reasoned Harry, that could perhaps be attributed at the different situation. The two Gryffindor, were, at the time, in enemy territory, so to speak, and under Polyjuice, trying to gauge information out of Malfoy and the threat of being unmasked and punished could have, admittedly, something to do with this slightly biased opinion. After all, is difficult to find anything even remotely comfortable when you had to watch your every move trying to avoid being discovered.

“Harry” A long sigh and his name brought back his focus on the old man sitting in front of him. “I know that you have probably a lot of questions to ask and a great deal of resentment towards not only your friends and your godfather, for not warning you of Tom presence, but towards me as well, for stopping them from telling you.” The Headmaster was still staring at the wall, but before continuing, his eyes glanced at Harry for just a fraction of second. “Please, know that I didn’t do this with malice, I simply thought that this was a delicate topic, so I wished to explain everything to you in person. I had hoped to reach you before the meeting between the two of you could take place, and that was why we took so much time to collect and bring you there: Tom has a habit of take interest on various topics on almost daily basis and then isolate himself to research for long periods of times.” At this, the man stopped taking for a moment, his expression showing the signs of someone who was reminiscing a memory of his past, one not very pleasant, and Harry thought that probably the professor was thinking about all the times he had saw Tom researching something in the library and the less than savoury topic target of said study. Gaze flickering towards the raven’ face for a second time, the old wizard kept going in a grave tone. “Since yesterday he expressed the intention of deepening his knowledge on Voldemort, I thought I would have been able to speak with and prepare you for this encounter.” An apologetic smile appeared on the old man visage. “Unfortunately, like you saw, he seemed to have found out about your presence sooner than I thought, and decided to put a stop to his research in favour of meeting you, leaving you completely unprepared for this encounter.”

“And from what I had understand, it was something that happened between you and your friends that let him know about your arrival. Could I ask what occurred?” Dumbledore didn’t seem to be particularly displeased by this, but neither looked happy. His expression was blank, incrutable, and his eyes were still trained on the wall behind the raven.

“Yes, about that…maybe I have let my frustration have the better of me and so he must have heard the argument I had with Ron and Hermione. But nobody told me anything this summer and they stopped writing to me just around half the month has passed without giving me even a trace of an explanation.” Harry truly didn’t regret pouring his anger on his best friends, he felt his frustration justified, but he was feeling a bit uncomfortable in knowing that was that argument the trigger that pushed the young Dark Lord to anticipate their meeting. At the same time in his tone there was a not so veiled accusation, not only directed at his best friends, but also at his Headmaster. After all, if they hadn’t kept him in the dark, he wouldn’t have reacted the way he did. They couldn’t refuse to tell
him everything and just expect him to be okay with this, accepting their decision in silence. He may still be young, but he wasn’t a child and he hadn’t been one for a long time.

Dumbledore looked at him with a strange expression from atop his half-moon spectacles. Harry knew the Headmaster had caught the blame hidden in his tone, but didn’t comment on it, preferring going on with his explanation, explaining Harry the reason behind the lack of contact, at least. “In this regard, and I mean about your letters, I had to stop them because I knew Sirius would wrote to you about Tom and some other things related to the Order. This is the same reason I prohibited your friends to write to you: I knew they wouldn’t have been able to hide this from you for very long and would have ended up telling you everything in no time. I simply wanted to give you a normal summer with no preoccupations.”

Harry scoffed lightly, but kept his silence. How could have the man expected him to have a normal summer? Even without taking into consideration the awful treatment of his relatives, did he really expect him to be able to not think about what had happened in June? To just forget Cedric’s death and Voldemort’s resurrection? And the duel?

“I know that now, you may find difficult believing this, but trust me, Harry, I simply did what I thought was best for you.” Dumbledore’s voice was earnest and his expression seemed devoid of any hidden purpose, so the emerald-eyed boy knew the Headmaster truly believed in what he was saying. Pity he was wrong.

“Anyway, I’m sorry, but unfortunately, I can’t stay here for long, so we should discuss about the situation regarding Tom and leave this discussion for a later time.” Apologized Dumbledore. “How much did he tell you?” Inquired then.

Harry’s anger flared for a moment. Figures the Headmaster wouldn’t have time to explain him everything. He would have to content himself with what the old wizard could tell him, or more correctly, with what he was willing to tell him. Hiding his annoyance, Harry just shrugged and answered in a sort of detached tone. “Not much, in truth. Only that he is, in fact, Tom Riddle and that he comes from the past of another timeline.” Harry stopped for a moment after this, thinking about that, pushing his dark emotions aside in favour of obtaining answers at his questions. And the most important one was: “Is it true professor? Did he really come from a world parallel to our own?”

“I’m not really sure, Harry, but I think it’s extremely probable, if not undoubtedly certain.” Answered the man with a troubled look.

“But…if this is really true…how did he do it? I wasn’t ever aware that different timelines existed, less of all that was possible travel between them.” Exclaimed the boy in disbelief.

“I’m sorry to say that, about this I have no idea, my boy. Tom Riddle had always been a very powerful and clever boy, so it didn’t surprise me that he found out about the possibility of different worlds and a way to travel between them, because I know that this is a branch of magic largely studied, even if only by very few wizards. What really troubled me is that he actually succeeded in reaching our world. For what I know he is the first to have been able to do so and this feat should have been impossible.” Explained the old wizard, wearing a thoughtful look.

“But are you absolutely sure that he isn’t Voldemort, or something like the Diary?” Inquire Harry, still sceptic about the whole thing.

“Oh, of this I’m most certain, my boy. This Riddle is not Voldemort and neither something even remotely similar to that Diary.” Assured Dumbledore. “And, since he himself claim to have come from the past, I think we should believe him, at least about this.”
“Now, I assume you would like to know why exactly he is here, in the Order’s Headquarters, right?”

It was posed as a question, but Harry knew that this was what Dumbledore really wanted to talk about with him. He nodded anyway, because this was the other thing that worried him the most. Even if the teen wasn’t linked to their Voldemort in some ways, he was still a young version of the Dark Lord and the fact that he was staying in the Order’s Headquarters, the base of a group which had as objective the destruction of the dark wizard, disturbed and confused him a little.

The Headmaster exhaled slowly, and gazing at the wall, started to narrate. “Well, to answer your question, I must tell you just how I met Tom riddle. It all happened at Hogwarts, just a little more than two weeks ago…”

**Flashback**

It was a hot day around middle July. Dumbledore had just returned to Hogwarts after a very stressful day. It wasn’t really something new: in recent times, every day had been like this. Since the end of June, every day had looked like a lost fight. A flock of lost battles, piling up one over the other: against Voldemort, who was trying to gain the prophecy regarding him and Harry, hoping it held the key of how destroy the boy; against the Ministry, who still refused to acknowledge the Dark Lord’s return, and instead insisted on declaring war against him and a boy, who was not even a young man yet, under the fear of losing the power they held as an institution; and even against some people in the Order. He knew that not all of them agreed with all of his decisions and there had been some that had strongly argued with him about his judgement in certain specific situations.

The most problematic one was Sirius. He had foreseen some kind of problems with the man, taking in account how much his ex-student cared about his godson, but he hadn’t thought it would have been this bad. The dog animagus was always arguing with him about Harry, in every single meeting, persisting in his demands of bring the raven teen in the Order’s Headquarters and let him know what was going on with Voldemort. Insisting that keeping Harry in the dark was not good for the boy and informing how the teen was constantly angry and frustrated, at least from what could be gathered in his letters. Harry’s friends, too, were asking him the same thing, but they were a little more manageable, being young and not yet adults.

Dumbledore knew that the young Gryffindor wasn’t having an easy summer. He had Arabella looking out for him and she had told him how the boy looked like he was constantly ill and how he was always in a dark mood. The old wizard wasn’t surprised, after all the boy had seen one of his schoolmates being murdered and had to fight for his life not even a month ago. Nobody would be fine after a similar experience. This, however, was the main reason for which he didn’t want to transfer his favourite student in Grimmauld Place: he wanted Harry to enjoy a normal summer, without having to preoccupy himself with thoughts related to Voldemort. Seeing the direction in which was going the Ministry and all the articles published in the Prophet, the teen was already going to have a difficult school year ahead of him. There was no need to worry him so soon. Especially knowing that this year he wouldn’t even be able to help him and would need to maintain a bit of a distance, looking over him only from afar. The last year had showed him how the connection between Harry and Voldemort was becoming stronger and he knew that now, with the Dark Lord’s return, this connection would be stronger than ever. Standing near Harry would only put him in danger, pushing Voldemort to try and control or hurt the boy using the connection. He couldn’t risk this, keeping his distance would offer the teen some sort of protection, or at least would make the dark wizard less tempted to do something. And, speaking about the connection, he would need to employ Severus and convince the man to teach the raven teen Occlumancy. Dumbledore sighed tiredly. He knew that these lessons would be difficult: not only the potion’s professor loathed the boy, Harry also didn’t trust the man. Unfortunately, he didn’t have anyone else in which he could rely on regarding that matter.
Quickening his pace, Dumbledore headed towards his office. He couldn’t wait to reach it and finally rest. This day had been one of the most difficult so far. Between Severus prolonged absence, resulting in a lack of information about Voldemort’s side, and the difficult argument he had with Sirius, that day’s meeting had been incredibly tiring. And the worst part had been learning about the Minister’s plan. It seemed like Cornelius was feeling every day more threatened by Harry and himself and that he was searching for ways to get rid of them both. How could the man even thinking about attacking a child he didn’t know, but was well aware just what kind of weak-willed man the Minister was, and power-hungry to both. It wasn’t a good combination. He knew Cornelius would do anything in his power to maintain his position, seeking to destroy everything that could make him lose it. Namely, him and especially Harry, who he would see as an easier target, being the boy underage and less unable to defend himself.

He continued to muse about this, trying to foresee all the possible moves Cornelius would try in order to get rid of them, so he would be able to counter them with his own actions. After a couple of minutes, he reached the gargoyle that led on his office and, after stepping past him, he proceeded to ascend the stairs, open the door, and enter in the room. He headed immediately towards his sleeping quarters, without sparing a single glance around the room and was just about to open the door, when a voice he didn’t expect to hear called him.

“Hello professor. It passed quite a lot of time since we last saw each other, didn’t it?” It was a smooth, silken human voice the one that called him and not the glacial high pitched sound seemly coming from the depth of hell. A voice devoid of any inhuman hissing quality. He turned around and there he was, comfortably slouched on his chair: a young Tom Riddle. The boy had always possessed an unnatural grace, one that he lost on his quest of becoming Voldemort, and that now demonstrated sitting in the Headmaster’s chair. It seems impossible that a slouched posture could be graceful, but someway Tom Riddle was able to make it look so.

Dumbledore froze in his place. Normally this would not have happened, but his age and the fatigue of the day were taking a toll on his mind, which was struggling to process what his eyes were seeing. The boy in his office was exactly like he remembered Tom Riddle looking at sixteen: powerful, intelligent, arrogant, charming, but so very fragile, so very Human. Only a couple of seconds passed before his mind managed to catch up with the situation at hand and then he immediately unsheathed his wand pointing it against the teen chest. He was about to shot a potent stunner, when the boy in question hold up his hands in a non-threatening gesture and spoke.

“You can calm down, professor: I have no intention of attacking you or create any problems, really.” His dark, deep blue eyes lift to look inside his more light, azure ones. “Actually, I’m here to offer you a…cooperation of sorts, something that would be beneficial for both of us, I assure you.” The deep ocean orbs were sincere, but showed that there was an ulterior motivation hidden under the boy proposition. There was always an ulterior purpose concealed in the dark brunet words, always something that would, in the end be more beneficial for him than anyone else.

The elder Headmaster relaxed in his stance a bit, but didn’t lower his wand and his gaze kept being suspicious. Before answering he took his time in observing the teen. He certainly wasn’t Voldemort: he was too sane and human to be him. Neither he was a piece of soul that Tom Riddle discarded in his adolescent years, hiding him in some powerful artefact with the sole purpose of guaranteeing his survival: the boy was too real and lacked the peculiar aura that an Horcrux possessed. So, if the Tom Riddle in front of him was neither, what exactly was?

“What exactly are you? You are neither Voldemort, nor a part of him, am I correct? So, from where did you come out?” Dumbledore asked the question calmly, but in truth the answer worried him: they were already having problem with one Voldemort and this Riddle, even if younger was not less dangerous.
“Excellent observation, professor, but I didn’t expect any less from someone of your calibre.” His tone was soft, smooth, meant to flatter the recipient of his attention.

“Quit the act, Tom, you know perfectly well that with me it never worked.” His voice, in contrast, became a little sharper, less gentle. The tiredness was making itself know, reducing the control he normally possessed on himself. It was in a dangerous situation, he knew: not being able to manage his emotions would mean not having control on this meeting, meaning that Tom would be able to direct it in whatever way he wished. He knew this, but could do nothing: the boy had caught him by surprise and he knew he had done this on purpose, so he would be able to obtain whatever he was after. But he had still some cards to play and he had every intention to play them well.

The charming smile, that the boy had worn until then, evaporated as easily as dew under the sun, replaced by a smirk more vicious in nature. “Oh, I know, professor. But I’m a little ashamed to say that old habits die hard.” The smirk widened and the worry inside the old wizard increase in intensity. “Anyway, coming down to business.” His features levelled, becoming more serious, but a trace of a smirk could still be found in the depths of the blue eyes. “Like you deducted I’m not a version of the Voldemort you know, and I claim no connection with him. I’m Tom Riddle and for your question about my origins...I came from the past of an alternate timeline.”

Dumbledore was dumbfounded for a moment. From what he knew, many had tried the kind of travel the teen had done, but nobody had ever been able to accomplish it: the quantity of magic necessary was just too much. He knew Tom had an unusually big core, but even he didn’t have enough power to succeed in this endeavour. And yet, he was there. How could this be possible? There were certainly other factors at work, powers that probably even the boy wasn’t aware about. After all, Tom Riddle was too arrogant and often dismissed little details because he thought himself too great to bother about them. Anyway, this would be a research for another time. Now he needed to sort things out with the young Dark Lord comfortably sit in his chair. “And why have you come here? What do you wish to accomplish?”

“Are you sure that you want to know the truth, professor?” Tom’s tone was irreverent. The old wizard’s eyes narrowed and the teen laughed. A calm, limpid, controlled sound. “I know what you are thinking, professor. You are probably imagining all sort of nefarious motivation behind my presence, and are already planning to find a way to send me back, but I’m afraid I must disappoint you: you can’t, it’s impossible. The spell I used was one of my invention and, unfortunately for you, gave birth to a one direction only kind of path.” The laugh subsided, but the mirth remained in his voice. “Oh, don’t worry professor. I didn’t lie when I said that I were here to offer you something advantageous. In fact, I’m here to offer my help.” His eyes were bright and made worry and suspicion stir inside the old wizard.

“Your help?” Asked with doubt lacing his every word.

“In defeating Voldemort.” Specified Tom.

Dumbledore looked not even remotely reassured, and more than a little troubled by the dark brunet words. He had been Tom Riddle’s professor for seven year and had passed many others studying him. He knew the boy didn’t do anything that wouldn’t end up favouring him in some way, so he was aware that his help would comport paying a price. A price that risked being too high. On the other hand, his aid would be invaluable: after all, who knew Voldemort better than himself? Accepting the boy assistance would increase their chances of victory, but was this worth the payment Tom was surely to request in exchange for his help? Unfortunately, the answer was yes. So many lives could be spared with the teen support, maybe even Harry’s. He needed to risk and take this chance. “Very well, Tom. Assuming that I will accept your offer, what will be your price? What do you want in exchange for your aid?”
Tom arched slightly one eyebrow, and his features morphed into an incredibly convincing innocent expression. If Dumbledore didn’t know him as well as he did, he would have surely fallen for it.

“Absolutely nothing, professor. Well, nothing bar the chance to frequent Hogwarts until the end of my education and a vow that neither you, nor the ones that follow you will harm me.”

Dumbledore hesitated. This vow could represent a problem, true, but if Tom would do one of his own, then the risks that the teen would end up being a worse threat than Voldemort would be greatly reduced. Problem was: how could persuade the boy into taking this kind of vow? Well, first he need to ask him and see just how much adverse the dark brunet would be to the idea. “And you will be willing to make a similar vow of your own?”

“Of course.” Answered Tom without blinking. The Headmaster was taken by surprise for the umpteenth time that evening. He didn’t expect the teen to agree so quickly. It made him extremely suspicious, but he couldn’t allow himself to renounce this possibility. He would agree, but he would be careful and have the boy controlled. He wouldn’t risk another war after the one with Voldemort would be over. The headmaster sighed. “Fine, I accept your offer, and we’ll make the vows.”

“Marvellous.” Tom smiled and lifted himself from the chair.

“However, you will have to excuse me, if I still don’t feel like I can trust you. But, taking into consideration what have you become, I’m sure you can understand me. And if you truly wish to join us, I don’t think you will be opposed to be the first to swear the vow.” Continued the Headmaster. He may have accepted the teen proposition, but wasn’t foolish enough to make the vow before the boy.

“Of course, it’s not a problem.” Tom conceded. He had stopped smiling, but his expression showed that this was something he had expected. The dark brunet straighten himself, fixed his clothes, removing all the wrinkles, and hold up his wand hand. Then intoned in a clear and confident voice. “I, Tom Marvolo Riddle swear on my life and magic that I will apply myself for the destruction of the Dark Lord Voldemort and that I would do whatever is in my power to help Albus Dumbledore and all of his allies in this quest. Furthermore, I swear to never consciously aid in any way Voldemort or any of his supporters and to never consciously cause any harm to all the ones that are against the Dark Lord Voldemort, until the defeat of this one. So, mote it be.” After this he looked the Headmaster straight in the eyes. A perfect brow elegantly raised in a questioning way. “Will this be enough?”

Dumbledore paused for a moment before answering. “Yes, for what concern Voldemort, but I still can’t trust you to not become like him. if you really want me to give you a chance I want to have an assurance that this won’t happen.”

The dark-haired teen sighed, an annoyed glint flashing in his eyes, but complied anyway. “I, Tom Marvolo Riddle swear to never become Voldemort, so mote it be.”

“Are you satisfied now?” Demanded the teen, voice laced with contempt. “I didn’t plan to become like him, anyway. From what I was able to gather he is a complete failure. It disgusts me thinking that I could have ended up like him, if I had remained in my time.”

Dumbledore observed the young man for a moment. He didn’t know how the dark brunet had been able to gather all these information, and he had a feeling that the boy wouldn’t tell him, even if he asked. Anyhow, it was a blessing, in a way. He could feel that Tom really was disappointed and disgusted of what had become of his future self and the old wizard knew that, even if he couldn’t trust him, he could count on the fact that he would never end up like Voldemort. It wasn’t much. Tom Riddle was still someone who aimed to rule over others. He was still cruel and void of any capability to care for others. But he was sure, or at least he hoped, that he could become a better
person with a little bit of help. And he knew just the right person that could change Tom. It would be a little difficult to persuade him, and the road the two boys would undertake wasn’t going to be easy, but he was sure they would be able to establish a strong relationship. First, though, he needed to make the vow.

“I, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, swear on my life and my magic that neither I, nor my allies will purposely cause harm to one Tom Marvolo Riddle, the one who came from another timeline. So, mote it be.”

It was done. Now there was nothing that could be done to cancel the vows. Later he would need to make the other members of the Order take the same oaths. He hoped it wouldn’t be too difficult.

Tom Riddle smirked, victory and smugness dancing in his eyes. He knew the teen believed to have won, but unfortunately for him, he hadn’t finished. It was time to establish some sort of control on the boy. “Yes, Tom, I’m sure you are happy to have obtained all that you wished for, but I’m afraid there are a couple of conditions you have to comply if you want to attend Hogwarts.”

The smirk vanished immediately from the teen face and his eyes darkened. A dangerous red light flashed in them for a moment. “What kind of conditions?” Asked the boy in a dangerous, dark voice.

“Oh, nothing too tasking, I assure you.” Answered the Headmaster jovially. Now that the threat was gone he had returned to his usual kind and eccentric self. “The conditions are only three: first, you’ll have to spend the rest of the summer in the Order of the Phoenix’s Headquarters, oh, the Order is an organization which aim is to defeat Voldemort; second, since there is no record of you in this time, and I doubt you will go with the name Tom Riddle, you will have to create a new identity for yourself and retake your O.W.L.S., meaning you will be sorted in fifth year; and last, it doesn’t matter which House you will end in, I would assign a student to keep you under surveillance and you will have the same timetable and classes as him. Do you accept these conditions?”

Tom didn’t look happy, but nodded anyway: he knew he hadn’t a choice. He would need to make some sacrifices if he wanted his plans to come to fruition. “Very well, I accept. And for the matter of my new identity, I planned to maintain my first name and change my last name to Gaunt, my mother’s last name. The story could be that I’m a distant relative of Voldemort, living in hiding until then since my parents feared for my life because of the relation I have with the current Dark Lord. You could say that you found me during one of your travels in search for ways to defeat Voldemort and decided to bring me back to help you with this task. Your Order I suppose will know the truth and for the student body I could simply be a new transfer student. I imagine there will be no problems regarding my physical looks. I doubt there are many people alive who still know how Voldemort looked like when he was young.”

“Yes, don’t worry, your physical appearance won’t be a problem. And I’m sure that the story you plan to use will work. Well, then, I think we should get going. I will take you to the Order’s Headquarters and explain the situation to the ones that are there. Don’t worry, I plan to have them take the vows, too, so you won’t have to fear any attack from them. Tomorrow I was thinking we can go to Gringott’s and the Ministry to legalize your presence in this time and enrol you at Hogwarts. Your sorting will take place with the first years, so your story of a transfer student will gain credibility. What do you think?” The Headmaster made his way towards the door leading to the stairs. It seemed like sleep will have to wait. This would certainly be a long night.

“I don’t find any problems with this plan. Ok, let’s go, then. Ah, one last question.” Tom had recovered, it seemed and was back to his usual controlled, aloof self.

“Who will be the student that will be assigned to ‘babysit’ me?” The tone was detached, but it was clear that the boy was struggling to keep the anger out from his voice.

“He’s name is Harry Potter. I suppose you know about him, since you know about Voldemort.” Answered Dumbledore, eyes twinkling.

“Yes, I do.” Confirmed Tom. A strange, contemplative look entered in his dark orbs. Dumbledore’s eyes stopped twinkling. A foreboding feeling taking place inside of him. He was about to demand answer from the teen, but decided otherwise, instead motioning for the young man to follow him.

The two wizards left the office together, heading to Number 12, Grimmauld Place, London.

End Flashback

After the end of Dumbledore’s tale, the drawing room was covered in silence. No sound could be heard coming from its two occupants, who were both lost in their thoughts.

Harry was sitting rigidly in the armchair, looking in front of him at the wall behind the Headmaster, eyes glazed, thinking about what the old wizard had told him. He was trying to come to term with the fact that the problem of Voldemort now had doubled, since they couldn’t send the boy back. True, Tom had made vows that forbid him to attack them and seemed to truly want to help them, but what would happen after Voldemort’s defeat? Would Tom remain their ally or would he became another Dark Lord, worse than his counterpart? Probably the second. And since they had made vows, too, it would be impossible fight him. What a mess.

Dumbledore was observing his student, his troubled expression and tense stance. He had known that the boy would have taken the news about Tom hard, after all, he had just learned that he was going to spend the rest of his summer holidays and the entire school year with a young version of the person that had ruined his life and was still trying to kill him. A news like this would disturb anyone.

The old wizard wanted to comfort his student, reassured him in some way, but he didn’t know what to say to do so. What exactly could he say? It didn’t matter what words he would use, they would be lies all the same. He could only hope that, with time, Harry would be able to change Tom and that the two of them would open up to each other, forming a good relationship all on their own.

“So, I will have to spend all my time with Riddle, once at Hogwarts?” Demanded the raven, gazing at the old Headmaster. If I will be able to return, added to himself bitterly. He was unsure about the outcome of the hearing. Sure, the law was on his side, but would it really matter, which with the Ministry so against him?

The old wizard sighed, and answered in an apologetic tone. “I fear the answer is yes, my boy.” Harry opened his mouth to protest, outrage clear on his face. “I know you are not happy about this and I can’t blame you, but you must understand: we can’t completely trust Tom, so I need someone to keep an eye on him. And you are the only one I can trust to do this.”

“Why me?” Inquired the raven. Hadn’t he enough things regarding Voldemort to worry about without adding “babysitting” a young Dark Lord to his list of things to think about?

“Because I hope you will be able to change him.” Answered truthfully the Headmaster, completely shocking the young Gryffindor.

“What?” The emerald eyes of the boy were wide with disbelief and he was looking at the old wizard like he had lost his mind. “Do you really think that Voldemort can change, professor?”

“He’s still Tom Riddle, and yes, I think that, with the right motivation he will be able to change and
become a better person. You don’t?” Inquired Dumbledore, observing the boy from the top of his half-moon spectacles.

Harry was caught by surprise by this question. His immediate answer was to say no, that it was obviously impossible. But something stopped him from actually voiced it. “I…don’t know.”

Voldemort and the Riddle he had met in the Chamber were clearly out of every possible help. If someone had asked if it was possible to change them he would have answered no without any doubts, but this Riddle seemed – was – different, and he wasn’t so certain that he was already a lost cause.

Dumbledore smiled at the raven obvious internal struggle. Harry was really a special boy and he was sure that he would be able to stir Tom on the right path. “Listen, Harry, this Tom Riddle is not Voldemort, nor is a shard of him like the Diary you met in your second year, but is still a cold, cruel and manipulative boy. He’s still unable to care for others and would do anything to obtain what he wishes. Now, he seems to have developed an intense interest in you, so I fear he would try to sway you to his cause. You must be careful.” The Headmaster felt like he needed to warn the raven, even if, from his expression this wasn’t needed. “Even so…” The raven looked sharply up at him. “Are you willing to help Tom, saving him from the dark path he’s set to go down to?”

The emerald-eyed boy seemed unsure, but in the end straightened up. “I’ll try.” Stated firmly.

Dumbledore smiled, eyes twinkling. “Wonderful. I knew that I could count on you, Harry. Now, I apologize, but I must go. I’ll see you on a later time, my boy.” And saying this, the Headmaster pick himself up and left the room.

Harry followed him out and watched him left the house with a strange feeling curling up inside him, something akin to delusion, confusion, and sadness, but he couldn’t place the reason behind these emotions.

He decided to head to the kitchen for breakfast and it was only when he reached the door leading inside the room that he understood the reasons behind his feelings. He froze with his hand on the handle and it was then that he noticed that the Headmaster hadn’t look at him directly in the eyes. Not even once, for all the duration of their discussion.

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think about Tom? Did you like his Pov? In truth, in my plan, this chapter should have been totally different and first Tom's Pov should have been in a later chapter. When I wrote it, though, Tom sneaked in the story and managed to take all the last part of the meeting between him and Harry for himself. I still don't know how it happened. XD

Anyhow, I hope it was good enough.

Now I had a question: would you like to see Tom's arrival at Grimmauld Place and the reactions of the people at the Headquarters to his presence or would you prefer only a mention of it?
Harry opened the door and entered in the kitchen, the discussion with the Headmaster still fresh in his mind.

The first thing he noticed after walking in was the tense atmosphere cloaking the room. It was heavy and oppressive, and came from the people seated around the table. His godfather was seated at the head, scowling, and shooting dark looks alternatively at Mrs Weasley and Tom Riddle, showing both his distrust towards the boy and the resentment towards the red-haired woman lingering from the argument happened last evening. Mrs Weasley was going in and out from the cooking area, busing herself with making breakfast and bringing it on the table, doing her best to ignore Sirius’s stare, but shooting him disapproving glances every so often. Lupin was seated on Sirius left, reading the paper, and casting surreptitious glances from behind it to the young Dark Lord and Sirius, seeming ready to intervene at a moment notice, in case of problems. The twins and Ginny were seated in the middle of the table and were speaking between them, looking at the boy warily from time to time. Ron and Hermione were in front of them looking like they didn’t exactly know what to do, but trying to hide their nervousness.

For his part, Tom was seated reclined on a chair on the right of the raven godfather, a free seat between him and the man, and was smirking mockingly at all the people at the table. He was the only one who looked unbothered by atmosphere in the room. When he heard the door being opened, he looked up and, upon seeing Harry, his eyes sparkled and his smirk widened, losing the mocking quality. He straightened himself and proceed to gaze at the green-eyed boy with clear amusement and a great deal of smugness dancing in his dark orbs. His dark blue eyes. Harry still couldn’t get over the fact that Riddle eyes were blue, the same deep blue of the deepest ocean waters. He had always thought that the young Dark Lord’s eyes would have been the darkest shade of black, bottomless pits of charcoal dread, so much worse than Snape’s ones and so much like those of the Diary’s shard. They certainly looked like that in the dim light of the Chamber. But this Tom Riddle wasn’t the same of the one he met in his second year: not only wasn’t a part of Voldemort, but even his attitude was different. Shaking his head to get rid of these troublesome thoughts, Harry looked towards his godfather, searching for a free seat near him and consequently landing his gaze on the only available one near the man: the one between Sirius and the dark-haired teen. Suddenly the
emotions in said teen dark orbs made sense. If he wanted to sit beside Sirius he would have to bear Riddle proximity, too. Sure, he had said that he would try to change the boy, but that didn’t mean that was okay with spending a lot of time so close to him. Judging from the behaviour of the other teen, however, from earlier on the stairs and now with the seated arrangement, it seemed like avoiding him would reveal itself to be a challenge. Exhaling slowly, he moved resignedly over the chair on Sirius’ right, not missing how Riddle eyes brightened and his smile broadened just a little more, showing a glimpse of perfectly white and straight teeth. Deciding to ignore the teen for the time being, he lowered himself on the chair, startling everyone else, since nobody, except Tom had noticed his arrival, and, turning the head towards his godfather, smiled.

“Good morning, Sirius.” He had debated about how should act towards the man. He, too, didn’t tell him anything, but after thinking about it, he decided to not hold a grudge towards his godfather. Sure, the man told him nothing, but not for lack of trying: he had tried to send him letters, who had been blocked by Dumbledore, and the evening before had tried to warn him about the presence of the Dark Lord, only to be hindered by the other people in the Order. So, they should be the ones he should be angry at, and not the person who was the closest thing he had ever had as a parent.

Any noise died at the sound of his voice as everyone, with the exception of Tom and Sirius, stiffened, especially Ron and Hermione. All of them seemed to be expecting him to release the same temper he had unleashed the night before and he could see, from the corner of his eyes, that his two best friends were lancing guilty glances towards him, probably trying to catch his attention so they could apologize. He, however, kept his focus on Sirius. He wasn’t in the mood to listen to their excuses, nor felt the desire to forgive them.

His godfather expression cleared instantly at his greeting and his eyes softened looking at him, returning the smile. “Good morning, Harry. Did you sleep well?”

“Mmh…fine” The raven replied in a neutral tone, without elaborating further, and the dog animagus watched him with understanding in his eyes, like he knew that his nights were plagues by nightmares. Sirius was about to said something, when Mrs Weasley’s voice interrupted him. The woman approached Harry with a pan in her hands overflowing with sausages and another floating beside her containing scrambled eggs.

“My dear, Harry dear. I hope you slept well.” She smiled kindly, full of motherly concern.

“What would you like for breakfast? Here I have eggs and sausages, but there is toast, too, if you prefer.”

“Er… sausages and eggs are fine. Thank you, Mrs Weasley.” Answered Harry, awkwardly, forcing himself to be polite. He didn’t know how to act towards the Weasley matriarch. She had always been kind to him and last evening she had also claimed to view him as one of her sons. At the same time, though, he couldn’t forget that she was one of the ones completely supportive of Dumbledore’s decisions regarding him. Well, to be fair, every adult seemed to be: the only one who looked to be on his side was Sirius.

Mrs Weasley, oblivious to the raven internal debate, lost no time to fill his plate. “You are welcome, dear.” Then she turned towards Tom. “And you, Tom, what would you like?”

“Oh, what you gave Harry will be perfect, Mrs Weasley, thank you. All of your cooking is simply delicious.” Riddle replied politely, smiling charmingly. Harry observe in disbelief: he was obviously trying to gain Mrs Weasley’s sympathies and he wasn’t even bothering to be subtle about it.

Mrs Weasley blushed a little at the compliment. “Thank you dear.” And she filled Tom plate, too, like she had done with Harry’s smiling at the boy in the same kind way. The raven couldn’t believe his eyes: she knew how Tom Riddle was, which with the incident of the Chamber and the Diary
possessing Ginny, and she still fell for the boy’s manipulations? It seemed like her motherly instincts greatly overruled whatever caution she would normally exercise towards a young Dark Lord. Or maybe it was only the effect of Riddle’s charm. The boy was undoubtedly good, so both were equally possible. And judging from the reactions, or better, non-reactions of the others in the room, that wasn’t an uncommon occurrence, meaning that she was probably already completely charmed, already a lost cause.

Mrs Weasley proceeded to distribute breakfast to the other occupants of the room. “I was thinking about finishing the drawing room today.” Said Mrs Weasley extremely formally, without looking at Sirius.

“Wonderful.” Muttered sarcastically Harry’s godfather, before speaking aloud in a very formal tone, too, picking moodily at his food. “I think it’s a great idea.”

“Good, I expect you in the room to help, too.” Added Mrs Weasley, addressing sternly her sons and the two girls. They all nodded, groaning when she turned around. “Harry, dear, you’ll help too, wouldn’t you?” Continued the kind faced woman, looking at the raven.

Harry, taken by surprise, was quick to answer. “Oh, of course, Mrs Weasley.” Really, what else could he said? It wasn’t like he could refuse.

The motherly woman, smiled. “Thank you dear.” Then, addressing everyone. “We’ll start right after breakfast.”

Sirius rolled his eyes, and the other teens in the room, except Tom and Harry, grumbled under their breath complaining about endless cleanings. Remus sent everyone a sort of amused, pitying look.

“I’ll help, too.” Silence filled the room and everyone turned towards the source of the words, looking shocked at Tom Riddle. That was the last thing the raven expected: he didn’t think that the dark brunet would have ever lowered himself to cleaning. He had always pictured the other teen as the sort of person who would regard this sort of things as ‘plebeian’ work, so house elves’ work, and, from the thunderstruck expression of the other occupants in the room, he hadn’t been wrong.

“But…you never wanted to help before, dear.” Commented feebly Mrs Weasley.

“Yes, I know, and it was terribly remiss on my part.” Sighed Tom in a very convincing guilty expression. “Since I, too, reside here, I should have contributed to your efforts of making this house liveable again. Well, no matter, I can start now.” Ended the boy, smiling.

“And how come that you have suddenly gained this new mentality? You are not the kind of person who would help someone for the sake of it. Especially if this action involved something as ‘undignified’, your words, not mine, as cleaning.” Asked suspiciously Sirius.

“Well…” Answered unfazed the dark brunet. “You can say that I have seen the errors of my ways and…” And there his gaze flickered towards the emerald-eyed boy. “I just acquired a reason for helping you.” His eyes darkened sending a shiver down the raven spine, who stared at him hardly believing what he was hearing. It seemed like avoiding Tom would be harder than he expected, but no matter, he would ignore the boy until after the hearing. For the moment, he had enough to worry about without adding Riddle to the list. He would concern himself with only trying to pass the hearing of the 12th of August, and then he would think about changing Riddle.

**Tom’s Pov**

Tom looked at the astonished expression on the raven face with barely hidden amusement. In truth, it
was quite endearing. The way those emerald orbs expressed every emotion so openly…

Those eyes were really lovely: his favourite colour, the green symbolizing Slytherin and were the same shade of his favourite curse, the Avada Kedavra, to both. Such lovely eyes, indeed. And he wanted them always looking at him, like now, even if he couldn’t quite understand the reason behind his desire. Well, it didn’t matter why he wanted this, only that he did. And he always obtained what he wanted.

His gaze flickered towards the man seated at the head of the table and, even if outwards his expression didn’t change, there was annoyance bubbling inside him. The raven’s godfather was a problem. He had suspected that would be the case, but he hadn’t thought it would be so much of a one. Observing Harry reaction towards his friends before, and the behaviour towards the other people in the room, he knew that the raven was greatly annoyed with everyone for not having told him about his, Tom’s, presence (the fact that the boy had only greeted Sirius was a dead giveaway), but he thought that would be the same with the dog animagus. True, the man had tried to warn the boy, but in the end, he had kept silent like everyone else. Apparently, though, the attempt had been enough for the younger male. And this brought Tom back at the situation at hand: the man was an obstacle. Because it didn’t matter that Harry would ignore his best friends, and the other people, Order’s ones too, he would still listen to Black, who would stop him from spending too much time with Tom. And it didn’t matter how well he played his cards, even if he would be able to reach a point, in his relationship with Harry, where the younger boy would happily choose Tom over his friends, he still risked that this would not be the same with Black. And that was the reason he had decided to help with the fixing of the drawing room. He wanted to keep himself near Harry as much as possible, getting to know him, and if this could be obtained by cleaning a room, then so be it. He had never thought he would ever decide to do, willingly, something as plebeian as cleaning, but if this would help him spend time with the raven, his raven, he would do it.

The cleaning of the drawing room was revealing itself to be a horrible experience. Really, this room had already been partially decontaminated, so the job shouldn’t be so hard, and yet it was. He couldn’t believe how much dirt was in the room, for not speaking of the creatures that had breed here! Currently they were disinfesting the curtains. They were full of Doxys, who needed to be sprayed with Doxycide, that would effectively immobilize them, before being thrown away in a bin. So, here they were, half face covered by a cloth, with a bottle of Doxycide in hand. At Mrs Weasley signal they all started to spray the curtains and toss the stunned Doxys away.

I can’t believe I’m doing this. They possess a house elf, why don’t they order him to clean the house? Loathing for Black aside, the little creature must follow the orders of his Master, so the man could have the horrible thing do this kind of works. He exhaled in annoyance: this was worse than the chores he had been forced to do in the orphanage. Those had never been so bad and had stopped completely once he learned to use his magic, when he still didn’t know the name of what he was able to do. Well, he supposed that there was something positive about this disgusting work, and here he glanced on the side. From the corner of his eyes he saw Harry, spray in hand, hitting the tiny poisonous creatures one after the other, before throwing them in the bin, and then approaching one of the twins, who was putting an unconscious Doxy in his pocket. They started to talk about something that he couldn’t hear from where he was, and were joined after a couple of seconds by the other twin.

Maybe now was the right time to approach again the raven. Early had been blocked by the boy’s
godfather, but the man had gone out of the room just before the start of the disinfection and hadn’t come back since. He waited till the conversation between Harry and the twins ended, just to be sure that nobody would interrupt his talk with the teen, before moving towards him.

“So, how did your meeting with Dumbledore go?” He asked casually, making sure to whisper low enough to not attract the attention of the Weasley woman. That woman was so overbearing: it was very lucky that he had been able to charm her so that he could have his space.

Harry, startled by the sudden question, turned quickly towards him before calming down and refocusing on the de-Doxying. “It went ok.”

Tom frowned a little at the short, curt answer, but kept going with the conversation. “It appears that we’ll be spending a lot of time together this coming year.” He glanced sideways at the shorter male.

“So it seems.” Commented the boy in a flat voice. The frown deepened. The conversation wasn’t proceeding like he wanted: Harry was being rather hostile in his replies. At least he was responding, though, and not ignoring him. He supposed that this should count for something. He was ready to make the conversation going on, when he caught the Weasley woman looking at them and so he begrudgingly returned his focus on the Doxys still coming out of the curtains. He would resume his task at work done.

The de-Doxying ended up requiring an insane amount of time. For the time they ended, lunch had rolled around. Mrs Weasley vacated quickly the room in favour of going down and prepare some sandwiches for them all and he busied himself with removing all the cleaning’s paraphernalia. On the side, he saw the youngest Weasley’s son and the Granger girl trying to catch his raven attention, but the emerald-eyed teen was stubbornly ignoring them, apparently still crossed because of the lies. He caught immediately the chance to resume the conversation with Harry, and he was halfway towards him, when the twins engaged the raven in yet another, surely, stupid discussion. This was seriously beginning to irritate him: he was trying to stir up a conversation with Harry, but everyone seemed set on stopping him and the worst thing was that he couldn’t even curse them for this!

Eye twitching slightly and dark, hot anger curling inside his stomach, he watched Harry laughing with the two red-heads menaces, imagining different and not seriously damaging curses that he could use on them. Fortunately for them, soon the mother of the red-heads children returned, bringing along lunch. Seeing the teens throwing themselves on the sandwiches and the raven standing just a little bit back, he seized the opportunity and approached him, now that there weren’t annoying people in the way. The raven caught him coming near and sighed.

“What do you want now, Riddle?” Demanded crossly.

Not dissuaded in the slightest, Tom put on a beautiful charming smile, as captivating as the gleaming scales of an eastern coral snake and just as dangerous as his bite. “Well, Harry” he began in a smooth voice “I thought that, since we’ll be spending a lot of time together, we could try to know each other better.”

“I don’t think so.” Was the clipped comment of the younger boy, before heading towards his godfather, who had just entered in that moment. Anger yet again blazing inside of him, he watched the raven engaging in a conversation with the dark-haired man (apparently about the animagus’ family, since they were standing in front of the tapestry representing the Black’s family tree).

Tom exhaled a breath and a sharp, dangerous smile blossomed on his face. So, this was how Harry was going to play. It appeared that his raven was going to ignore him. Well, this just wouldn’t do. He wanted Harry attention and he would have it.
And if the emerald-eyed boy wasn’t going to give it to him, then Tom was going to force him to do so.

---

**Harry’s Pov**

Harry exhaled in relief. Riddle had spent all morning trying to talk to him, despite his rude responses, but in the end, seemed to have caught the hint and the afternoon cleaning session had, fortunately, run smoothly. They were able to clean out the cabinet of all the undesirable objects and end disinfecting the drawing room. The only things remaining, in the end, were the tapestry, which had a Permanent Sticking Charm placed upon, and the rattling writing desk that supposedly contained a Boggart.

He reached the evening longing to go and rest in his bed, even if he wasn’t looking forward to sharing the room with Ron, who would surely try to talk to him, once they were alone. He sighed tiredly. He had spent the day successfully ignoring his best friends. He knew that he couldn’t do this forever and that soon he would have to talk with them, but he was still angry with the two for lying to him and he wasn’t ready to forgive them. He had decided after his talk with Dumbledore that he would ignore Ron and Hermione for a couple of weeks before letting them apologize. In this way, maybe they would understand how he had felt when they had ignored him, while he was at the Dursleys.

He was heading towards the kitchen with everyone else, when a sudden noise coming from upstairs attracted his attention. Immediately he run towards the source, followed by his friends, Ginny, the twins, Mrs Weasley and his godfather. At a more leisurely pace followed Tom. The source revealed itself to be the room he shared with Ron. Opening the door, they were met with a shocking sight: it seemed like a small bomb had gone out in there. Debris were covering the furniture and Doxys were swarming inside. He couldn’t help to be glad that his beloved Hedwig (and Pig, too, of course, even if his friend’s owl was more of a side note) wasn’t currently in the room, but in the little back garden, to which the window of this bedroom looked upon, enjoying a little bit of fresh air (since they couldn’t send them out at night, he had asked Sirius if he could let his owl out, providing she stayed in the back garden and, upon receiving an approval, he had let her out just before beginning the cleaning of the drawing room).

Anyway, now they had another problem: the room had become unsuited for sleeping and they didn’t have time to clean it up now. He heard his godfather swearing and then summoning his and Ron’s trunks, before shrinking and pocketing them. Closing the door, he turned towards them.

“Well, it seems like we have a problem. Harry and Ron can’t return in this room tonight and unfortunately we haven’t other clean, unoccupied bedrooms in which they can move.” He said in an exhausted tone: fixing this house was truly beginning to wear him down. “Ok, I propose that we all go down to dinner and after that we’ll decide how to resolve this.”

Everyone agreed since for the moment there weren’t other solutions, and all of them were quite hungry, and headed towards the kitchen. Harry found himself thinking about what could have caused such damage in the room. He couldn’t understand: sure, his magic had created a little havoc yesterday’s evening, but he doubted that the destruction could be the result of any residual magic, especially considering the presence of a flock of Doxys. These last could have been Kreacher’s fault. The old house elf he had briefly met during lunch seemed to hate them all and was more than happy to generate problems, and he had heard stories about similar things happening from Fred and George.
They said that it usually happened when a particular precious Black’s heirloom had been trashed, so it could have really been the elf to place the Doxys in the room as some form of vendetta, considering all the precious Black’s objects they had trashed that afternoon, but the destruction couldn’t be his fault. The elf loved the house so he wouldn’t have wrecked the room. But then, what caused all that? He was still musing on this when, out of the corner of his eyes he caught a glimpse of Tom Riddle’s face. The dark brunet had a little, but satisfied grin adorning his features and he exuded a controlled aura of sheer smugness. No, it can’t be possible...he had been the one to do that!? On what purpose?

Harry had a feeling that he was going to find out the answer very soon.

Dinner was a quiet affair. Harry found himself seated on his godfather’s right, Tom beside him, like that morning. Strangely the other teen didn’t try to stir up a conversation and this made him all the more suspicious to the raven, who kept shooting him distrustful glances during all the duration of the meal. After everyone finished, they refaced the problem of the rooms. The first to speak was Sirius.

“Like I said we haven’t other tidy rooms and that bedroom is going to require quite a bit of work to return like it was before.” Commented the man. “I offered this house as Headquarters because of its countless protections, but with how much problems its creating I’m beginning to think that it was a mistake. All these complications greatly outweighed any benefit the protective spells offer.” Complained the animagus, passing a hand through his hair in a frustrated gesture.

“Don’t say that, Sirius. True, this house has some problems, but we have made great progress in cleaning it up and, with the return of Voldemort, we need a place as warded and protected as possible. And you said so yourself: there’s no place as safe as this.” Tried to reason Lupin. The werewolf had been absent for all day, being out doing some work for the Order, but had returned for dinner, since he lived there with Sirius for the time being. The other two permanent tenants, Mr Weasley and Bill, though, were still at work. “I don’t understand what the great problem is. We could simply move Harry and Ron in some other room.” Said rationally the werewolf.

“This is true. I mean, we can move Ron in Bill’s room, there there’s still space, but Harry…” Began Mrs Weasley. “It would be too crowded having three boys in the same room.” She looked really conflicted about this.

“We have no choice, Molly.” Put in Lupin. Sirius had gone silent, a very put out expression framing his face. It was clear, from his posture and behaviour, that he would like nothing more than shave the entire house to the ground. “So, if Harry and Ron are ok with this, I think we could…”

“Harry can share my room, if he likes.” Interrupted suddenly Tom. Everyone in the kitchen immediately turned to look at him. That had been the first time he had spoken with anyone, except Harry, since breakfast. Even during the afternoon’s cleanings, he had kept his distance from everyone and hadn’t bothered to talk to any of them.

“And why is that?” Demanded Ginny aggressively. Out of all of them, she was the most hostile towards Riddle, Harry excluded. “I clearly remember you not wanting to share the room with anyone, since you are so ‘superior’. So how come that you suddenly are willing to offer to share the place with Harry? We know you’ll never do this without some ulterior motive.” She hissed like a cat; hazel eyes narrowed, arms crossed.
The dark brunet didn’t react, merely adopting an expression of pure innocence. “Whatever you mean? I’m simply offering my room, since this way will be more comfortable for everyone.” He then turned towards the raven, a beautiful smile on his pale lips. “Only if for Harry it’s fine, obviously.”

So that’s the reason. Though the raven. He knew that was strange that the other teen hadn’t done any ulterior moves to try and speak with him. He must have noticed that his attempts were leading him nowhere and decided to change approach. What should he do? He could refuse, but he had a feeling that this wouldn’t go down too well: who knew what Riddle would do in order to obtain what he wanted. He wouldn’t be able to ignore him forever: he could clearly see this fact deep inside the other eyes; Tom wouldn’t let him and the next time he could even hurt someone if this would gain him the raven attention. He didn’t have a choice. He noticed Riddle smile morphing into a grin when he saw that Harry had made his decision.

“I don’t have any problems with this.” Said the raven in a sort of defiant tone. Smugness started to radiate from the taller boy and Harry hurried to add. “After all we are simply going to sleep in that room and the other bedroom will be fixed soon.” He may have accepted to share room with the other boy, but he could still ignore him: he wouldn’t let him have his way. At the defiance in the emerald eyes, the smugness evaporated from Tom, soon replaced by amusement. Harry knew that if the other had been Voldemort, he would have been on the receiving end of a Crucio, but strangely it seemed that this Riddle enjoyed the challenge.

“Well, this would resolve the problem, sure, but…” Started Lupin. He didn’t seem very comfortable with letting the young Gryffindor rooming with the young Dark Lord.

“Are you sure it will be all right, Harry?” Asked Sirius concerned.

Harry smiled reassuring at his godfather “I’ll be fine, Sirius, don’t worry. It’s only for sleeping and for a short time. I’m sure there won’t be problems.”

“Of course, there won’t be problems: I vowed to behave myself, remember?” Commented Tom cheekily.

Sirius answered glaring at him and sarcastically spat: “I remember, but, for some strange reason, I don’t exactly trust you.”

The dark brunet simply shrugged. “Then this is your problem. I don’t think I have done anything to deserve your distrust, but I understand why you felt it’s needed.” Then he rose gracefully from his seat and headed towards the door. “I’m going to head to my room.” And turning towards Harry, he added: “I’ll wait for you.” Then he slipped silently out of the kitchen.

Everyone else observed him leaving with varying emotions in their eyes, going from distrust to apprehension. “Well, I suppose I should put the trunks in the rooms. Are you really sure about this, Harry?” Demanded Sirius again, worry still shining in his eyes.

“Yes, I am.” Responded Harry confidently. His godfather looked in his eyes, then simply nodded and rose from the table, proceeding towards the rooms to deposit the two trunks. Harry exhaled and rose, too, deciding to head to bed. He wished everyone Goodnight, then left the room. He had taken only a few steps when he heard other footsteps and someone calling him. “Harry!” The voice belonged to Ron. He kept going, ignoring the call.

“Harry, wait, please!” Hermione. He didn’t want to talk with them, but the plead in her voice made him stop just at the foot of the stairs.

“What do you want?” Asked in a cold voice, without turning around. “If it’s apologizing, don’t
bother. I knew you are sorry.” He heard his friends exhale in relief “However” he turned around pinning them with a hard stare “this doesn’t mean that I forgive you. I will need some time to do this and even more time to forget that you, who should be my best friends, had choose Dumbledore over me.” And with this, he left, leaving his two guilty friends behind.

On the top of the stairs he met Sirius. His godfather simply put a hand on his shoulder and said: “Be careful, pup. He may have made a vow, but he’s still dangerous.”

“I know.” Whispered Harry, before going on. He reached the door to Riddle’s room and stopped for a moment. Exhaling deeply, he reorganized his thoughts, then he lowered the handle and walked in.

Inside, Tom was seated on his bed, smirking, and waiting for him.

Chapter End Notes

And so Tom decided to take a drastic action, how will the two boys cope with being roomed together? (Well, Harry, mostly, since Tom has absolutely no problems with this arrangement. :3 )
And now Ron and Hermione know that Harry will not forgive them easily. What will they do and how long will the boy ignore them? :)

If someone is wondering why Harry is speaking with the twins, this is because the two of them apologized for not warning him and explained that they didn't do this because they thought Ron or Hermione would have done it, since these two are the raven's best friends. So, they, like Sirius had been forgiven by Harry.

About next chapters: updates will require around the same amount of time of this one to be posted or even more. I'm sorry, but exams are coming closer and so I will need to spend most of my time studying.
Harry walked carefully inside the room, wary of the smirk gracing Tom Riddle’s features. Ignoring the teen, he headed towards his trunk, crouched down and busied himself with pulling out his pyjamas.

“So” Tom’s voice was soft and warm, with a dangerous purring quality coating all the syllables. “It seems like we are going to spend even more time together.” Smugness was practically oozing from him in waves.

Harry straightened himself. “Don’t think I don’t know what you are doing, Riddle.” His tone was harsh, Avada coloured eyes ablaze with anger.

Tom assumed a confused expression. Innocence cloaking and pouring out of his entire being. “I really have no idea what you are talking about.”

Harry gritted his teeth. He was good, he had to admit it. If he didn’t know just what kind of person the other was he would have probably believed him…maybe. One thing he was proud about was his instinct, so he liked to believe that he wouldn’t have fallen for the other’s act in any case (despite the insistence of his inner voice, who stubbornly reminded him that he had, in fact, fallen for it in his second year. Shut up! I was twelve!). “I know you are the one responsible for the destruction of the room. I don’t know how you did it, but I know it’s your fault.”

The innocent expression slipped from Riddle’s face like water, a smirk quickly taking his place. “Well, Harry, it’s your fault, really.” A faux regretful light entered in his eyes. “I didn’t want to do this, but you forced me. I mean, I simply wanted to talk to you, but you kept ignoring me.” And now he had started pouting. Pouting! Who had ever heard of a Dark Lord (or a future Dark Lord, in this case) pouting!? That boy was driving him insane and he didn’t know how to act around him. This Tom Riddle was too different from the Voldemort he was used dealing with and never acted like he expected him to.
“Well, excuse me for having enough problems, even without you incessant pestering!” Exploded Harry. “I’ve already a hearing to worry about, so really, you are the last person I want to spend time with!” And huffing, he turned around to change in his night clothes.

A surprised expression replaced the pouting on Tom’s face. “A hearing? Why?”

Grumbling, Harry turned to face the teen, eyebrows risen, suspicion marring his visage. “Do you mean to tell me that you really don’t know? Everyone there does and you don’t?”

Tom scoffed. “Maybe I didn’t make this clear enough with my behaviour today, but I don’t exactly enjoy the company of this people, Harry. Or people, in general, really. You are, quite frankly, an exception. Before your arrival, I spent a lot of time in this room. So, no, I don’t know.”

“Oh, yes, sorry. I forgot that you think yourself so above others that you don’t bother spending time with them.” Exclaimed Harry, rolling his eyes. Tom didn’t respond at this and continued to look at the raven with an inquiring expression, clearly expecting an explanation. “If you really want to know, and I want to make clear that I’m telling you this only because you’ll end up hearing about this anyway sooner or later, the hearing is about my use of magic: I had to cast a Patronus to save me and my cousin from two Dementors.” Harry couldn’t keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“And you have a hearing because of that?!” Questioned Tom, voice full of disbelief. “Are you telling me that you can be expelled only because you used magic in self-defence?”

Harry didn’t answer. Anger and worry squirming in his gut like living things at the idea of the trial. Tom cocked his head and observed the raven: his tense posture, his tight clenched fist and his vivid green eyes, alight with anger.

“It’s related to what it’s written in the Prophet, isn’t it?” Looking at him, Harry noticed that the dark brunet expression was unusually blank.

“Yes..” Answered Harry a little unbalanced by the sudden change in the other boy.

“I understand.” Even his tone was void of emotions. Despite this, the raven could feel that Tom was really angered. It was similar to the way he could tell when Voldemort was angry, despite the distance separating them, and yet, it wasn’t exactly the same. Every time Harry felt some emotion belonging to the Dark Lord, his scar always hurt; this time instead there was a soft, pleasant tingling, barely even present, like a distant echo of a long-lost emotions. But why would Tom feel angry? This had nothing to do with the young Dark Lord. The other boy was really a puzzle. He could understand Riddle faking anger to try and gain Harry’s trust: showing himself angered over the raven behalf will surely gain him points with him, in the dark brunet mind. What troubled Harry, though, was the fact that the emotion was real. Tom Riddle truly was angered by the situation in which Harry found himself in.

The raven was so lost in his thoughts that failed to notice the shifting of the bed and the soft padding of feet on the floor, indicating that the other teen had decided to stand up and approach him. The suddenness of the velvety voice being so near surprised him greatly, nearly making him jump. “Do you want help?”

The unexpected question took him aback so much that he needed a few seconds to catch what the other said. “I…what?”

“I asked you if you want my help with the hearing.” Responded the dark brunet without missing a beat, a touch of concern shining like a lonely star in his dark eyes.
Shock quickly left space to disbelief. “Your help?” Asked the raven just to be sure to have heard right and, when the other simply nodded, kept going on, tone rising with incredulity. “And what could you do to help me? For that matter, why would you want to help me?”

Tom sighed in a sort of exhausted tone before answering. “I think you have gained an incorrect impression of me, Harry. I won’t deny that I had done many things in the past that Voldemort, too, did, but I’m not like him. I saw where his path had led him and I don’t want to end up in the same way. I’m willing to try and change, if this will help me avoid that fate.” Then he locked his eyes with Harry’s, showing him the truthfulness of that statement. “And about the reason that I’m offering you my aid…is the same reason for why I wanted to spend time with you: I want to be your friend, Harry. There is no hidden meaning, no ulterior motive, I simply want to gain your friendship. Please give me a chance and let me help you.” His tone was sincere and full of emotions, pleading the raven to just believe him. Harry was enthralled by the deep blue of Tom’s eyes, calm and soft like the ocean waters on a sunny day; clear like spring water, seeming void of any hidden deceitfulness. They looked so open, so honest, that the raven nearly believed the dark brunet. Nearly.

The raven knew too well how good of an actor the other teen could be, so he kept silent, distrust not leaving his emerald eyes.

“I see that you still don’t believe me.” Commented Tom, correctly interpreting the raven silence. “Mmh… then what do you think about making a deal, instead?”

Wary, Harry demanded: “A deal?”

“Yes.” Responded coolly the dark brunet. “You don’t trust me, and I can understand this, so we can make a deal. You let me help you with the hearing and I’ll promise that I won’t bother you, not till after the trial. Deal?” And he smiled disarmingly at the raven.

Harry, still wary, thought about this. It didn’t seem a bad deal, considering Riddle standards. But was wise accepting it? The answer was yes, unfortunately, in this kind of circumstances. If he refused the dark brunet would simply continue to relentlessly try to catch his attention. On the other hand, if he accepted, Tom would leave him alone and he would even receive help with the hearing, and he really needed help because he had a feeling that the trial would reveal itself to be a great problem. In the end, there was only a choice he could make, really.

“…Fine.” A dangerous smirk blossomed on the other teen face, full of self-satisfaction and triumph, and Harry felt uneasiness flaring up inside him. “What will you gain from this?”

“Well, considering the circumstances, I think to know the direction your hearing is going to take and, if you want to get off, you need to learn a lot of things. And this means that we’ll have to spend a lot of time together this coming days.” The smirk on Tom’s face widened and Harry froze. He had been played: he should have known that it would have ended like this. He couldn’t believe he had been so stupid. “Ah, in case you are wondering, it’s too late to cancel the deal, since you have already accepted it. the moment you agreed, it was like we formed a magical contract, so none of us can step back now.” The dark brunet informed him, victory shining in his eyes. The raven cursed under his breath. It seemed like he was stuck. He glared at the young Dark Lord and noticed that his eyes were sparkling like morning dew: he seemed disturbingly amused by the situation. Scowling, Harry get in his bed, stubbornly facing away from the other teen. He knew that it wasn’t wise showing his back to his roommate (it was practically showing his back to the enemy), but in that moment he was too angry to care.

He heard Tom locking the door, probably using a spell, and was incredibly tempted to ask him how could he use magic, without worrying about the Ministry, since he was still underage, but restrained himself. “I hope you won’t mind me locking the door. I suppose you know the reason behind my
action, since you already spent a night here.” Harry didn’t answer. Yes, he knew the reason: Kreacher. Ron had done the same thing the previous night. “Well, I suppose we’ll speak tomorrow, then. We’ll start our ‘lessons’ after breakfast. Goodnight, Harry.” The last phrase was said in a soft and sweet tone, but the raven still refused to acknowledge the other boy. He remained still, facing the wall, ignoring the other and, when he felt Tom entering in his bed, sleep finally claimed him.

---

**Tom’s Pov**

Tom remained awake for a long time after he went to bed, listening to the softening of Harry’s breath, informing him of his transition from awareness to unconsciousness. When he was sure that the other boy had finally fallen in a deep sleep, he got up and sat on his bed, watching him.

In his slumber the raven had shifted and was now facing the dark brunet. The older teen let his eyes roam over the other boy’s lithe form, dark eyes glittering in the darkness. A ray of moonlight shone on the raven features, illuminating the dark, unruly hair that framed the soft contour of his relaxed sleeping face. He was a beautiful sight, even with his vibrant green eyes, usually containing a wild forest of emotion, closed. Deep blue ocean’s pond burned crimson. It made something dark twist in the pit of Tom’s soul, something that he had never felt before and that he wasn’t quite able to name. It was a sort of aching want coupled with a dark desire to have Harry all to himself.

It all started the previous night.

**Flashback**

Tom was in his bedroom, reading a book about soul magic. The Order was keeping an irritating close watch on him, on Dumbledore’s order, and the books he wanted to read, but they had underestimated him because of his young age and this gave him the chance to pick up this book, and a couple of others, from the Black library. He wanted to learn more about Horcruxes, hoping to understand what happened to transform his other self in that disgusting creature. He had thought that splitting his soul was a successful and risk-free way to gain immortality, but hearing about what his counterpart had become, showed him the falsity of his belief and that the price to pay was dehumanization and insanity.

He had already created two Horcruxes and, even if till then he hadn’t felt anything different, he wanted to make sure there won’t be any consequences. So, here he was, searching for more information. And, since he had the habit to isolate himself while he did research, this had the added bonus of letting him avoid the other people in the house.

He was quietly reading his book, when he heard a piece of a conversation, apparently an argument, coming from somewhere in the house.

“DUMBLEDORE!? HE IS YOUR ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING!? I SUPPOSE HE TOLD YOU THAT THIS WAS FOR THE BEST, DIDN’T HE? JUST LIKE KEEPING ME IN THE DARK WAS! OF COURSE, IT WAS FOR THE BEST!”

Confused, he put his book aside. The voice didn’t seem to belong to anyone he had met until then. Did this mean that there was someone new at the Headquarters? He remained puzzled for a couple of seconds, before he remembered having heard that Harry Potter was bound to arrive at some time that week. From the shouts reverberating through the house it seemed like the boy had arrived and had
also discovered that his friend had lied to him. Tom smirked. It looked like the boy wasn’t happy. Well, he could honestly say that he would have felt the same in his position, so he couldn’t blame him for losing his temper.

Keeping on smirking, he reopened his book and was about to restart reading it, when a surge of powerful magic reached him, making him gasp. It was so powerful that he could almost taste it. The sweet flavour, with a hidden note of bitterness pervaded his senses: it was an alluring sensation. And the most shocking thing was that this powerful magic seemed to complement his. His magic, in fact, had rose from his body as soon as he has sensed the other, seeming to want to reach it and, where the two forces collided, the dark brunet could sense them merging, creating a wonderful symphony. Both magic danced together, giving out a feeling of joy and elation: Tom had never felt so euphoric as he had in that moment. Nor this powerful. Oh, he knew he was better and more powerful that anyone else, but the power he could feel from the merging of his magic with that other was so much more than what he could conjure by himself. And the state of bliss in which he had descended was addicting. So much so, that, when he felt the magic retreat he groaned at the sense of loss.

It was in that moment that he decided he was going to do everything to obtain the person who could produce such magic, whoever he was. And since he hadn’t felt that magic till that night, he knew perfectly well who the person was: Harry Potter.

End Flashback

Recalling the sensation he felt that night, made him want to experience it again, so he lifted himself up from the bed and went to sit near Harry. Putting a hand on the shoulder of the other boy, he called forward his magic. Immediately the raven’s magic responded, rising from the sleeping body and merging with his. Tom closed his eyes in bliss. He had missed this feeling so much, even thought he had only experienced it one time the night before. The worst part was that he had kept feeling little sparks of power flew between Harry and himself for all day, especially when they had been particularly close. And Harry had stubbornly ignored him: it had been maddening. It was clear that the raven’s negative emotions towards him were blocking the feelings from reaching the boy or he wouldn’t have avoided him. This was made more obvious from the way Harry was reacting to his touch in that moment: the hand that had been resting on the teen shoulder had moved on his head and had started to thread through the incredible mess of raven coloured hair, and the boy was leaning towards it, his expression mirroring Tom’s, even in his slumber.

Tom observed the peaceful expression of the raven and a surge of possessiveness rise inside him: he would take Harry all to himself and wouldn’t share him with anybody. The emerald-eyed boy was his! He simply needed to find a way to bring them closer. The dark brunet smirked. Fortunately, the teen had accepted his offer of help regarding the hearing. This would help him immensely in forming a bond with the younger boy.

Suddenly Tom stilled and the smirk changed into a frown. His magic bubbled with anger and Harry’s started to flutter around his own, trying to soothe him. When he heard the boy made a soft noise of distress, Tom tried immediately to calm himself, as to not wake him up. He exhaled slowly willing his magic to settle down; his fingers resumed to thread thorough the teen’s hair, successfully calming not only the slumbering teen, but himself, too. Still, he couldn’t stop feeling angry: to think that the current Minister was so incompetent that he was willing to publicly slander a boy so he could continue to live in his little perfect world filled him with contempt. The fact that the boy in question was someone he had claimed as his, made this fact only worse. But he would make him pay. After the war, when he become the ruler of the wizarding world, the current Minister would know what happened to those who touch something belonging to Tom Riddle. A shark like grin stretched on his features: oh, he would enjoy torturing him. In the meantime, he would need to content himself with the deeply embarrassing figure the man will made after the trial. It was a pity he wouldn’t be here to
see this in person, but he was sure the raven wouldn’t be opposed to share with him the memory (he
was sure that the man would make at least an apparition to assure himself that all was going
according to his plans). Especially after the time they would spend together.

He really looked forward to spending time with the raven. He could use this time not only to help
Harry, but also to charm him and gain his trust. Looking down at the sleeping teen, he smiled.

“Soon you will be mine, my little Raven.”

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think about this? How do you think the following days will go? Will
Tom be able to gain Harry's trust so easily or will Harry keep being stubborn? And will
the other people interfere in the boys' 'private' time? :)


The Days preceding the Hearing

The next day, Harry woke up feeling refreshed after a strangely peaceful sleep. That night had been the first one in a long time not plagued by nightmares, and, as a result, his mood was greatly improved. The anger and irritation he had constantly felt during the summer had abated, and he even felt more positive about the good outcome of the hearing.

Still...he must admit that was really odd. In recent years, he couldn’t remember ever having even one night who hadn’t been filled with horrible dreams. Horrifying memories, of all his near-death experiences and of the victims he had seen fall at Voldemort’s hand, had replayed themselves during his slumber, night after night. And nothing he ever did had seemed to be able to stop them, so he couldn’t understand how this night could have been so different. Especially considering that he had spent the night in the company of a younger version of his worst enemy.

And this hadn’t been the only strange occurrence of that night. He could faintly remember being surrounded by a strange, soothing presence, and a nice feeling of fingers cradling thorough his air. But he wasn’t able to understand from where these feelings could have possibly come from.

A velvety, rich voice soon interrupted his musings. “Good morning Harry.”

The raven turned around and found Tom Riddle sitting comfortably on his bed, back leaning against the headboard and a book in his hands. The teen was smiling at him. “Have you slept well?”

“I...yes.” Answered Harry, wrong-footed by the soothing aura the other teen was excluding; it reminded him of the presence he had felt in his sleep. Mentally berating himself for lowering his guard, he resumed his wary stance, his voice becoming sharp. “How come you are still here? From your attire, I assume you have been awake for quite some time. Why didn’t you go down to
breakfast?”

“I was waiting for you, naturally.” Responded Tom, without stopping smiling. Harry’s eyes narrowed. “Oh, don’t look so suspicious, Harry, I am simply trying to be nice. I told you that I wanted to become your friend. Can’t you give me a chance?” Asked the dark brunet getting out from the bed.

Harry glared at him without answering, but he had to admit that the young Dark Lord’s request seemed reasonable. After all, Riddle had done nothing but trying to have a conversation with and help him, even if his methods had been a bit too forceful (but, really, he shouldn’t have expected anything different from a young version of Voldemort); maybe he should try to make an effort to, at least, be civil with him. “Well, I suppose that, since now I’m stuck in spending time with you, I’ll have to give you a chance.” Sighed the raven in resignation. “This doesn’t mean that I trust you, though.” Advised him. he wasn’t so naïve to believe that this helpful side of Riddle didn’t have any hidden purpose.

“Fair enough I suppose.” The older teen shrugged, unbothered. “I will make you change your mind about me, Harry. I have a lot of time to do that now. I’ll show you that I’m very different from Voldemort.” He directed the raven a small smile and headed towards the door. “I’ll wait for you outside.” And with this he left the room.

The raven observed the point where Tom had lingered before leaving the room, thinking carefully about his last words. Then he got up and started to change, still musing on the dark brunet’s behaviour. It seemed that he needed to be careful: Riddle was being too nice and he couldn’t understand if the boy was truthful or if it was all an act. The real problem was that, even if the correct option was the second one, he could easily see himself fall for it. Despite how much he hated admitting it, he had to concede that the other boy was really charming.

Suddenly an idea formed in his mind, making him froze in the middle of putting on his jeans. Maybe he could use this to his advantage. Riddle seemed set to establish some sort of friendship between them and looked ready to do anything to accomplish this. So, if he played his cards right, maybe he could take advantage of the situation and use it to try and change him. He was already stuck in spending time with the teen, after all.

Having made up his mind, the raven finished to change and left the room with new determination. He found Tom waiting for him outside, leaning casually against the opposite wall. His stance was a little slouched and relaxed, and yet the teen was projecting a natural sort of grace and elegance; Harry seriously doubted that someone else except the young Dark Lord could be able to achieve the same result, in a similar effortless way. Now that he saw this Riddle, he could understand why so many had flocked to him and fallen for his allure, but fortunately the raven knew better. He had seen the monster lurking under the surface, hiding behind charming smiles and sweet words. And now, the only thing that could see was a predator waiting for the right occasion to pounce on his prey and devour it. And he had every intention of not becoming that prey.

Despite the uneasiness Tom’s presence caused him, he forced himself to smile. “I’m ready, shall we go, then?”

From the slight upturn of the other’s lips and the amusement dancing in the deep blue eyes, he was sure the dark brunet knew exactly what he was trying to do and had even a feeling that he was aware of his line of thoughts, but it didn’t matter. He stared back defiantly: this was going to be a battle of wills and he had every intention to win.

Riddle smile grew. “We shall.”
That morning, breakfast was a subdued affair. The only people in the room were the teens, Mrs Weasley and Sirius. All the other adults were either at work or doing something for the Order.

Harry, wanting to keep his mind from wandering to what would happen after breakfast and hoping to gauge some ulterior information about the mysterious weapon Sirius mentioned two nights ago from his godfather, kept himself busy conversing with the man, who, after reassuring himself that Harry was unarmed (the raven could see Tom discretely rolling his eyes in the background at Sirius antics), was more than happy to talk with his godson, obviously wanting to keep the teen’s attention away from the boy sitting beside him. With great surprise of everyone, in fact, the sitting arrangements mimicked those of the previous day. Harry was still set on ignoring his two best friends and had refused to sit anywhere else except beside his godfather; Tom, despite his obvious dislike for the man, was adamant about spending time with him and, recognizing that the raven wouldn’t sit anywhere else, had opted for putting aside his desire to be as distant as possible from Sirius Black, and had sat beside the younger boy. He didn’t spoke with anyone, seeming perfectly fine with eating in silence and observing Harry talking and laughing with Sirius, but when Mrs Weasley started to list the rooms she hoped to clean that day, the dark brunet spoke up.

“Mrs Weasley, I apologize for interrupting.” The teen started in a smooth, apologetic tone; a perfect smile lightening his features, as enchanting and dangerous as a siren’s song. “But today me and Harry won’t join your cleaning sessions. I truly regret leaving you to clean with two less people, but more important things came out that require our attention.”

"And who gave you the right to speak for Harry?!” Exploded Ginny. She had tried to ignore Riddle, but the slimy viper presence in the house and his closeness to Harry, irked her to no end, and now he was even deciding things for him! She had enough. “I’m sure that he prefers our company to yours.”

Tom turned calmly towards the young girl with a hard, close off expression; his body emanating a cold, oppressing aura. He looked at her like she wasn’t deserving of his attention, nor the effort necessary to explain the situation. At this, Ginny anger flared up, her cheeks becoming a blotchy red. Sensing the situation quickly degenerating, the raven spoke before she could open her mouth and going on with her screaming session.

“I did, Ginny.” Everyone bar Riddle turned to look at him doubtfounded. Ron and Hermione were shocked and confused; Mrs Weasley speechless; Sirius, Fred and George looked like they were trying to figure out his reasons and Ginny’s face showed just too clearly that she couldn’t believe what he was saying. He looked at the mother of his best friend and explained. “I’m sorry Mrs Weasley, I know that cleaning this house is hard work and you need all the help possible, but Riddle here – “

“Call me Tom, Harry.” Said teen interrupted. The raven glared at him (This was simply worsening the situation!), but the dark brunet only smiled back. The cold and oppressing feeling produced by Riddle’s magic had evaporated when he had spoken out against Ginny, replaced by a soft purring of appreciation. Harry exhaled slowly, ignored the teen, and continued stubbornly. He didn’t want to ponder on the meaning of the other’s magic behaviour, nor on why, by the unchanged expression of the others in the room, he was the only one currently sensing it.

“Riddle” Stressed the emerald-eyed boy. He could feel Tom frown beside him and the boy’s magic seemed to pout. Harry just ignore both of them. He knew that this would probably help him getting close to Riddle, but he wouldn’t call the boy with his first name, not yet. First names denoted a
certain kind of closeness that the two still didn’t have (besides the others would surely misunderstand and think that the dark brunet had put a spell on him or something similar). “Offered me his help with the hearing and, for me, this is the most pressing matter at the moment.”

“But dear.” Mrs Weasley’s voice sounded confused. “What kind of help would you possibly need? You didn’t do anything wrong. The hearing is going to be a simple formality: a brief interview with the head of the DMLE.”

Tom frown deepened, and he interjected in a cold, clipped tone. “With all the due respect Mrs Weasley, you can’t possibly believe what you just said. You are aware of the kind of stories the Prophet printed about Harry, so you can’t seriously think that they will give him a fair trial.”

Mrs Weasley opened her mouth to retort, apparently firmly convinced that Tom was wrong, but the teen was backed, surprisingly, by Sirius. “I hate to admit this, Molly, but the boy is right.” Commented the man bitterly, his face darkening. “Harry’s hearing isn’t going to be fair and the Minister, especially, will do everything in his power to make sure that he ends up expelled.”

Thinking about it, Harry told himself that he shouldn’t have been surprised by his godfather support. The man, after all, had experienced first-hand the unfairness of the government. He had spent twelve years in Azkaban because of it.

“But…” Mrs Weasley tried to object again, apparently still unconvinced.

“No buts Molly. Despite the wrongness of it, you know that this is the reality. They would do everything in their power to make him look guilty, so Harry needs all the help he can have to pass the hearing.” The dog animagus pressed in a strong, grave voice.

“However, since I don’t trust you,” he continued looking pointedly at the dark brunet, “and I can guess what kind of information my godson will need for the hearing, I’ll help you.”

The pleased and smug smile present until that moment on Tom’s face melted away and was replaced by a very crossed look. “That won’t be necessary. I’m more than enough to teach Harry everything he needs.”

“Be as it may, the fact remains that I don’t trust you. There’s no chance I’ll let you be alone with my godson.” Countered the dark-haired man.

The dark brunet’s eyes darkened, a sinister light shining through. The dark and oppressive aura returned. Sensing that the situation was about to go out of hand for the second time that morning, Harry, a part of him wondering why he was even bothering, decided that was best to intervene again and stop the imminent storm from falling on them.

“Sirius, there’s no need, really. I can take care of myself. You don’t have to worry, I’ll be alright, even if I’ll be alone with Riddle.” He rushed out. He had already decided to take advantage of the time he was being forced to spend with the older teen to help the boy become a better person and he knew he wouldn’t have the chance to accomplish this with Sirius present. It didn’t matter how much he desired the support of his godfather in these ‘lessons’ Riddle had planned, if he wanted to make some progress, he needed to do this without the man presence.

Sirius looked intensely at his godson, who looked back at him with big imploring eyes, hoping the man would understand his need to do this alone. His godfather didn’t look remotely happy about his decision, but he understood he must have a good reason to ask this of him, and so in the end gave his acquiescence. “Ok, Harry, if you are really sure. But remember that you can always come and ask for my help, if you need it.”
“Of course.” The raven beamed at the man, who responded with his own grin.

“He won’t need to.” Commented coolly Tom, earning a glare from the dog animagus. Harry watched this with a mix of apprehension and exasperation. Fortunately, Tom’s magic had tuned down again, meaning the situation has returned under control.

“What? Harry, you can’t be serious. Accepting his help, trusting him enough to remain alone with him!” Interjected Ron, who till that moment had remained silent, following the exchange with worry and fear.

“Ron is right. You can’t trust him! Even if he offered you help with the hearing. He has certainly ulterior motives, you can’t remain with him by yourself!” Agreed Hermione. Ok, he spoke too early, the dark brunet’s magic flared again. This time he could understand him, though.

Tom levelled them with a disdainful look, but it was Harry’s gaze who actually shut up both, freezing them in place. Twin iridescent green pool, glowing with power, shimmering with anger, burned relentlessly through them. In contrast with his vibrant eyes, where storming emotions where swirling relentlessly, his tone became lifeless and cold, words cutting through like shards of glass, ice covering them like frost. “At least he offered me help. This is more than I can say about you and the rest of the Order.”

He couldn’t believe them. Did they really thought him so naïve to not know that Riddle wasn’t offering his aid out of the goodness of his heart? Did they truly trust him so little? It was obvious that the boy had a hidden goal, he knew this, he wasn’t stupid. And until he could keep this in mind, he was sure he wouldn’t fall for any of his manipulations. He was perfectly capable to take care of himself. He didn’t need anybody’s help, especially not from two people who betrayed his trust and continued to do so by showing to not have faith in his ability to get through things on his own, something that he had done for all his life.

“I'll wait for you in the bedroom, Riddle.” And without adding further he departed from the kitchen, the feeling of Tom’s magic purring in satisfaction following him.

**Tom’s Pov**

He watched his Raven leave the kitchen with a deep sense of satisfaction, and a great deal of smugness, swelling inside him. The teen seemed to still not have forgiven his friends, which was good, and they were continuing to distance him with their actions. Weren’t they noticing their behaviour was only making it easier for him to steal Harry away from them? He glanced briefly their way. Probably not. From what he saw, it didn’t seem like the two really understood their best friend. And the rest of the Order insisted treating him like a child, even if, from what he found out, it looked like Harry had stop being one years ago. Well, he certainly wasn’t going to complain. All this was going to turn out in his favour, after all. Now, more than ever, was confident in his ability to gain the emerald eyed-boy’s trust and in the end, he would show Harry that he was the only one the boy can lean on. This days preceding the hearing will be essential in reaching his goal, so he needed to make sure there weren’t any interferences.

He had been furious when Harry’s godfather expressed his desire to intrude in what he had planned to be his alone time with the raven. Black was one of the few people that could ruin his plans, since he was one of the few individuals the raven had forgiven, making him one of the few Harry would listen to. With the man presence, his chances to gain points with the young wizard would have been completely destroyed. And this was something he couldn’t let happen. The relationship between them, and especially the raven’s trust in him, was still in its earlier stages, it hasn’t even completely formed itself. It was so fragile that everything could easily broke it and he was aware that, if this
happened, he wouldn’t have another chance: he would never be able to regain the trust he lost.

Thinking about this possibility had made him extremely furious and its magic had acted out, ready to confront the perceived threat. He had been pleasantly surprised, however, when Harry himself confronted the man, refusing his help. Oh, he knew why he did so: his little Raven wanted to change him. It was something he had foreseen and was even hoping for. That was the main reason that spurred him to say that he wanted to change and be different from Voldemort, after all. He had hoped it would help the raven decide to give him a chance. And it worked. Not only Harry was making an effort to at least act civilly towards him, but he had also refused Black presence, knowing that, with the man there, he wouldn’t be able to befriend and change him.

Naturally, he didn’t have a chance anyway, but Harry didn’t need to know this. It was true that he didn’t plan to become like Voldemort, but this didn’t mean that he would become one of them either. He still wanted immortality, he still wanted to reign over the entire wizarding world, and he was still willing to do everything to reach his objective. The only true thing that differentiated him from Voldemort was the fact that he planned to maintain his sanity and reduce future deaths to a minimum. Like he said, though, Harry didn’t need to know all that, yet. In future, maybe. For now, he would let him think that he could be changed.

He had to admit that the boy’s determination and naivety regarding the situation was quite endearing. And pretty amusing, too. He was sure he was going to have a lot of fun with their battle of wills.

Smirking, he got up and headed towards the door, turning around just before walking out to mess with the people around the table a little more. “You know, all of you preach to care about Harry, but none of you, maybe with the exception of Black, is truly making any attempt to understand him and how he is feeling. It seems that you don’t really care about him so much, after all.”

He looked at the pained expression of the people in the room and his smirk widened. His words reached the target, like he had planned. Perfect. Even with this, he was sure that they wouldn’t change their behaviour. Not that he wished for them to, this situation suited him perfectly; he simply desired for all those people to remember his words when Harry would end up choosing him over them. That day they would know it had been their fault Harry abandoned them, that it had been their actions and behaviour, who pushed Harry away, causing his choice. It would destroy them. He really couldn’t wait.

Seeing that nobody was going to say anything anytime soon, he resumed walking towards his bedroom. He could have said more, but he had better things to do than spending time with them: his little Raven was waiting for him.

Opening the door, Tom found his little Raven sitting on the bed, brooding. Apparently, the bad mood gained from the conversation was still affecting him.

“Don’t think about them, Harry, they simply can’t understand.” Tom said in a soothing voice.

“But they are my best friends, they should. Understand me, I mean.” Commented the teen, muttering under his breath.

“They don’t seem really good friend to me.” Offered in a casual way the dark brunet, sitting on the bed in front of Harry.
“I thought they were. They followed me in life threatening situations without me asking them to and without complaint.” The raven whispered. “And they had been the first friends I ever had, too.” The boy added so softly that Tom nearly didn’t hear him.

“Pardon?” Demanded the dark brunet, blinking, confusion in his voice. His first friends? He didn’t know this. He stored the information away, maybe he could use it. And even if he couldn’t, it was always something regarding Harry, so it was important regardless his future utility.

“Nothing.” The raven was quick to answer. Too quick. “ Didn’t we have to talk about my hearing?” He added without looking at the older teen.

Tom’s eyes narrowed a little. He knew that Harry was changing argument on purpose, but he was also aware of his current inability to do something about it. He needed to gain the raven’s trust first; he could always inquire about that at a later date, if he so wished.

“Yes,” he sighed, conceding the point; “we have to; we don’t have many days to prepare. First things, first: how much do you know about wizarding laws and trials?”

Harry’s brows furrowed in thought. “Not much. I know nearly nothing about the laws. But I saw a couple of trials.”

The raven’s last words surprised Tom: Harry was only fifteen, when did he has the chance to see them? “You did?”

“Yes, I saw a couple of memories in a Pensieve. They were Death Eater’s trials.” Explained the young wizard. “I suppose you know what Death Eaters are.”

“Yes, I do.” Confirmed the dark brunet. He had found out about them during the research he had performed soon after reaching this time period. It was such a ridiculous name; he really didn’t understand what his other self had been thinking when he chose it.

“So that’s the only knowledge you have on this topic.” Tom asked as a way to bring the discussion back on the matter at hand. Looking at the raven he saw him nodding. “Well, I suppose it’s something; it’s more than I expected, in truth.” But it wasn’t nearly enough to ensure a smooth victory. Harry will need to know so much more and they didn’t have a lot of time, unfortunately. There was only a solution: he had to teach the teen the fundamentals of the wizarding culture and then try to decide a course of action for the actual hearing. The time at their disposition to do so will depend on how quickly the raven would assimilate the notions he planned to teach him.

“Ok, taking into account the short amount of time at our disposal, I think it’s best if I prepare you to withstand a full criminal trial. Your hearing should be a little different, a lot less complicated, but it’s better be prepared for everything.” He said in a business-like tone. He couldn’t exclude the possibility Harry might be subjected to the sort of questioning reserved for the likes of Death Eaters and murderers.

“It’s better be prepared for everything? Just what do you expect it will happen at the hearing?” Harry appeared confused, but his eyes showed a small amount of wariness and understanding. He seemed to know the reason between his suggestion, even if he didn’t want to acknowledge it. And his eyes showed it all: they were such a whirlwind of emotions. Countess shades of green swirling and meshing together. Tom didn’t think he would ever tire to look at them.

“Do you really think you’ll have a normal hearing, even if this it’s a simple case of underage magic?” He asked, lifting an eyebrow. He knew the raven didn’t think so and suspected the process will be more complicated, like he did; contrary to him, though, Harry seemed to be hoping his were simply
unfounded fears.

“Especially, after learning about what they are writing in the Prophet about you.” He asked this calmly, but inside a flame of annoyance sparkled at remembering how that stupid paper was treating his Raven.

The emerald eyed boy sighed tiredly. “No, I never thought so, but after seeing I was the only one worried about this, and that everyone, even Order’s member seemed to think this case will resolve itself quickly and easily, I simply assumed my concerns were unfounded.”

“You were right to worry.” Tom informed him, wearing a dark expression. “The others don’t consider the situation problematic because they are a bunch of fools.” He spat with disgust. These people may be a step over the sheep of the wizarding world, since they seemed ready to fight against this world’s version of him, but in the end they were just as gullible; so Light oriented that they believed the people in charge, being Light oriented, too, would have the same kind of boundaries they, themselves, posses.

He knew better. Most human beings were weak willed and ready to lower themselves to any level to obtain what they wished. The current Minister was a prime example of that: he was a spineless coward willing to do anything to maintain the position he so adore. He had seen this reading the paper and he was sure the man would cling to anything that would help him expel his Raven: the man feared Harry and the truth he represented too much. “Don’t look at me like that,” he said, catching the glare directed his way from the younger teen, “I know you think the same about most, if not all, of them.”

The raven didn’t confirm his statement, but didn’t denied it either and stopped glaring. And that was confirmation enough, for him. He knew the boy didn’t verbally agree with his statement because he still distrusted him, but the fact that he mentally did, proved the teen could be swayed and that he was a step closer to his goal. Tom had a feeling that Harry had been able to see the potential problems the hearing could pone because, like him, the younger wizard had experienced the worst part of the human nature. If this was truly the case, then mining the trust the raven had left towards the Order shouldn’t be too difficult. Showing him more of the faults of the people around him in this following days should be enough.

“Returning to my hearing, how were you thinking to help me?” Inquired Harry, refusing to acknowledge Tom’s last words.

Catching on the fact it was best to limit himself with speaking about that for now, the dark brunet explained his plan. “The Ministry, like the judicial body, called Wizengamot, is full of traditionalistic pureblood, who cared a lot about appearances and traditions. Presenting yourself as Harry Potter, a half-blood who grew up with muggles will only be detrimental. Instead you should aim to be seen as the Heir of the House Potter, still a half-blood, but one with political power and someone aware of the traditions of this world.”

Harry looked shocked. “Heir of the House Potter?”

Tom blinked. “Do you mean to tell me that you don’t know? Nobody told you anything about this?” The raven shook his head. “The Potters are an old pureblood family and, as such, not only are they extremely rich, but possess quite a bit of influential political power and even a seat in the Wizengamot.”

At this, the raven assumed an expression of complete disbelief. “What? Are you serious?”

“Yes, he is.” A deep voice answered. He and the raven both turned towards the source and saw
Sirius Black leaning against the doorframe of the entrance of the room.

Tom internally bristled. What was the man doing here? Didn’t he said that he would leave them alone, after Harry assured him he didn’t need his presence?

“Sirius, what are you doing here?” Asked the raven, surprised.

The man smiled in response and entered in the room. “I know that I said I wouldn’t intrude, but I wanted to see how you were doing.” The smile vanished, replaced by a worried expression. “And then I heard Riddle telling you about your position. I’m really surprised you don’t know anything about it. Since you are the last Potter, they should have explained you everything when you became eleven, even if you can’t take up the mantle of Lord until you became of age.”

“Sirius.” Began the teen, exasperation flowing out of him. “Nobody tells me anything. You are the only one who does, apparently.” A grim smile took place on his face.

“So, I suppose you don’t even know about the Potter’s Family vault.” Inquired the man. The raven confirmed and Black slumped a bit. “They really don’t tell you anything.” He said dejected, before putting himself together and starting to rectify the situation, informing Harry about what he should have known since his entrance in the wizarding world. He explained how the vault from which he was withdrawing money was his trust vault and that, when he reached seventeen, he would be able to enter in the Potter’s Family one, an old vault holding not only money, but ancient books and artefacts belonging to the Potter’s family.

In the meantime, Tom was fuming. Everything had been going so well. Sure, their conversation had been awkward at moments, but it was flowing pretty smoothly considering the situation. Then Black had come, ruining everything, taking Harry’s attention away from him. And now Harry was ignoring him, completely focused on his godfather. It really grated at him: Harry was his, he shouldn’t ignore him in favour of somebody else! Fed up with the situation, he stood up and put himself between the raven and Black, looking like a furious dragon protecting his hoard.

“Thank you for the information, but we really didn’t need it. I could have told him the same.” He was smiling, but it wasn’t one of his beautiful and charming ones. The smile was sharp and dangerous, his tone hard and frigid. His magic started to awaken: he could feel it rearing his head and growling at Black.

Sirius looked at him, not intimidated in the slightest, and wasted no time in retorting, voice dripping with contempt. “Oh, I have no doubt you could have.”

Dismissing him soon after, he turned to look at Harry, eyes softening and voice warming up. “Since I’m here I think it’s better informing you: I named you my heir when you were born, so you are not only the Potter Heir, but the Black one, too.”

Tom’s anger mounted up at the casual dismissal. Who did Black think he was to treat him like this? He so longed to curse the man, but he knew he couldn’t. Hating the fact that he had to restrict himself, he refrained from doing anything. Despite how much he wanted to hurt that irritating mutt, he desired Harry more and attacking his godfather would surely lost him this chance he had gained with the teen. However, after reaching his objective, he thought, eyes ablaze with anger, when his little Raven would be only his, he would enact his revenge. Black would come to regret his behaviour towards him.

“Well, I suppose that I should go, now.” The mutt sighed, looking unsure towards the door. Tom berated himself a little, it seemed like he had lost a part of the conversation, too caught up in his dark thoughts of revenge. At the same time, though, his mind started to growl: yes, leave! “Molly is going
to need my help with the cleaning. I need to tell her what kind of things she could throw away.” He started to head towards the exit, but, just as he reached the threshold, he stopped and turned around, a conflicted look on his face. “Harry…”

“Yes?” The raven asked, curious.

Black seemed on the verge of saying something, but after a moment he changed idea. “It’s nothing. I’ll see you at lunch.” And then he was gone.

Tom remained where he stood, face impassive and magic exulting, looking suspiciously at the door from which Black has just left, wondering about what the man had wanted to say and why in the end had changed his mind and left without saying anything. A confused whisper from the teen behind him, teared him apart from his thoughts. “What was that?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Commented Tom, turning towards the raven and stopping him from continuing to think about his godfather. The man had left the room, there were no more reasons for Harry to give attention to the mutt. Now that they were alone again, and his magic had settle down, they should return to discuss about the preparations for the trial. He was sure that whatever the man had wanted to say could wait. “Turning to what we were talking about before Black came, you need to learn how to behave like the heir of an old pureblood family and how to use the power you possess.”

Harry looked at him with an unreadable expression. “Will this really help me with the hearing?”

“Yes, I’m sure. And the fact that you are the heir to not only one Noble and Most Ancient House, but two, will be a great help, too: they would have to hear you because an heir can’t be condemned without actual proof and without letting him defend himself.” The dark brunet explained, resuming his position in front of the younger teen. The raven was still looking at him with a strange mixture of emotions shining in his vivid green eyes.

“But Sirius was convicted without a trial and he is the Lord of his House.” Pointed out Harry.

“That’s true, but from what I gathered listening to various conversations, at the time his mother was still alive and she was the one who managed the House. From what I understand, she stopped him from using his status as an Heir and future Lord to request a trial. And then, after he was carter to Azkaban, they simply didn’t bother to rectify their actions because they believed him guilty.” Explained Tom.

“Or better, they didn’t bother to give him a trial on the on off possibility that he was innocent. From what you said, if they found out they condemned an innocent man, who was also the Heir of an ancient House, the backlash would have been terrible.” Gritted out the teen, emerald eyes glowing with anger.

Tom internally smirked. This was good: the mistakes those fools at the Ministry made with Black was showing Harry just how flawed the Light side was. “Yes, that’s probably the true reason behind their actions.” He confirmed in his usual controlled and confident tone. “I know it’s really pathetic, but unfortunately most of the people residing in the positions with power are corrupt cowards too attached to their comfortable status. I know that you think it will work against you, but in truth, in this case, this will end up being in your favour: they wouldn’t dare make a hasty decision in you hearing. You only have to play your cards right.”

Harry looked at him, determination shining in his eyes. “Ok, explain to me what I have to do.”

Tom smiled, this conversation was proving itself more fruitful than expected: his Raven was already starting to trust him, even if just a little. Probably he wasn’t still aware of this and if asked he would
surely denied it, but those enticing Avada green eyes betrayed him. It was little, only a tiny flame of trust, but it was present and that was what mattered. He had a lot of time to fuel and make it grew. “First, we should talk about what happened the evening of the attack, so we can decide the best course of action for your defence. Then we’ll have to cure your appearance: first impression, in this case are everything, meaning you’ll have to appear like the Heir you are. And the first thing you need are a pair of formal robes.”

The raven looked sceptic at that. “And how do you plan to procure them? They will never grant us permission to leave the house.”

Tom’s smile turned into a smirk and his eyes shined whit a light that promised trouble. “That won’t be a problem, trust me. We’ll be able to go and buy them without anyone noticing it. We simply need a glamour and the help of your godfather; he needs to cover for us. You will be able to convince him, right?”

“Yes, I suppose. Especially if I mention how important this is going to be.” Mused the younger teen. “But what about the gla...
Harry’s Pov

Harry could hardly believe how quickly time had passed. He had expected the days spent with Tom to be difficult to bear, tense, filled with strained conversations and awkward silences. Instead he remained surprised at how easy it became interacting with the other teen. The first day had been a little awkward, sure, but the following ones had been really enjoyable, despite the topic of their conversations.

True to his words Tom had done everything he could to help Harry with the upcoming hearing: he taught him the laws he would find useful and how use to his advantage his Heir status. Then he had to learn how to speak and act more like a pureblood. He hadn’t been very tempted by this idea, when the dark brunet proposed it, and would have very much preferred to avoid this kind of training, but Tom had insisted, explaining that it would help him maintain his calm during the questioning, and control the direction in which this would go, allowing him to get out without problems. Needless to say, in the end Harry had accepted to endure these sorts of lessons, too, and Tom, aiming to help him appreciate this type of knowledge, transformed the otherwise long, boring lessons in truly enjoyable experiences. So much so, that Harry had even found himself laughing together with the older teen more than once.

If he had to be truthful, it scared him a little how comfortable he found the other’s company. He could honestly say that he had often found himself comparing his time spent with Tom with the days passed in Ron and Hermione’s company, reaching the conclusion that they would have been a lot easier with Tom in place of his two best friends. Speaking of them, he was still ignoring both, even if he had started to miss them a little. For this reason, despite the fact that he was still angry, he had entertained the thought of forgiving them and let their rapport return to what once was, but every time he seemed to make up his mind to go and speak with the two teens, Tom would involve him in some other discussion regarding the hearing, and he would forget about his two friends.

Even more troubling than this, was the fact that he had come to consider the dark brunet a sort of friend, even beginning to use his first name. Sure, he still couldn’t forget that Tom was a young version of Voldemort, and he didn’t trust him completely, but he couldn’t deny that he had started to trust him enough to consider their relationship a friendship. As a result, their conversations, in the last days, had begun to divert from the topic of the hearing, changing and expanding to include information and little facts regarding their personal lives, like their preferences and hobbies.

And now here they were. It was the morning of the day before the hearing and the date in which they had decided to sneak out of Grimmauld and go to Diagon. A couple of days before Harry had spoken with Sirius and his godfather had accepted to cover for them while they were out, on the conditions they had a fool-proof glamour in place and the visit would be rather brief. Tom had assured the man that nobody would recognize them and that the visit wouldn’t require a lot of time, definitely convincing him to help them.

They were preparing themselves in their bedroom (the bedroom he had shared the first night with Ron had been repaired, but he had opted to keep sharing it with Tom, since the situation between him and his two best friends hadn’t still been resolved), when Harry decided to broach the subject of the glamour and how they were going to reach Diagon.

Tom looked at him, amused. “We talked about this trip quite a lot, and you asked me these things only now?”

The raven blushed. “I planned to ask this sooner, but it always happened something that made me forget to.” He grumbled, embarrassed.

“I see.” The dark brunet’s tone was as smooth and controlled as always, but his face showed quite
clearly that he was trying to stop himself from laughing: the dark blue eyes were sparkling. The raven scowled at him, his blush darkening.

“We’ll Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and then we’ll go to the clothing store. I think it’s best if we make a quick visit to Gringott’s, too.” Tom mused aloud, straightening his clothes. Despite his aversion towards everything muggle, the boy had decided to follow Harry example and adopted a muggle attire for the trip. It was simple, but perfectly in line with the time period; it consisted in black jeans and a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. Harry found himself staring at him: the teen looked really good in that clothes. Green eyes widened. Where had that thought come from?

“Are you listening to me, Harry?” Tom’s voice cut through him and Avada coloured eyes snapped immediately into focus, locking with deep blue. Apparently, Tom had been speaking, but Harry, too distracted by the dark brunet’s attire – and how good he looked in it – hadn’t heard him. Pink blossomed on the raven’s cheeks.

“Sorry, I was distracted. What were you saying?” Riddle’s gaze bored into him, seeming to see his very soul. Then, inexplicably, he smirked and, for a reason Harry couldn’t fathom, his reaction was to blush more.

The dark brunet’s smirk widened for a second, and a flash of something appeared in the dark eyes, too quick for Harry to discern what it was; the next moment the teen returned to his cool and aloof demeanour. “I was talking about the glamours. We are going to use a particular type that requires the incantation to be speak in Parseltongue. In this way, only another Parselmounth will be able to break the spell.”

“Wait, it’s possible to cast spells in Parseltongue?” Asked the raven, surprised.

“Of course. You can cast spells in whatever language you wish, the only reason we learned only Latin-based ones is because most spells are based on that language.” Explained the older teen. “There’s obviously a reason for this, and if you are interested in this topic we can discuss it later, but I think that now it’s best if we concentrate on our trip to Diagon Alley. We don’t have much time.”

Harry bit back the questions that were surfacing in his mind, storing them in his mind, determined to ask them later. “Right.”

“Good. Come here so I can cast the spell.” Seeing the raven’s reluctance, he added. “You have to trust me for this, Harry. I won’t hurt you.”

Still wary, Harry approached Tom. He felt the boy whisper something in Prseltongue, too low for him to catch the exact words. Then a soft tingling sensation washed over him and a flock of hair obscured his vision: Tom had made his hair, fringe included, grew. He had always kept his hair short, but now they were long enough to reach his shoulders.

“Sorry.” The older teen said in a slightly apologetic tone. “I know that this length is annoying to manage, but unfortunately the glamour doesn’t work on your scar, so the only solution is to cover it.”

“Don’t worry.” Answered Harry, resigned. “I already knew that a glamour able to cover my scar didn’t existed. If covering it would have been a possibility I would already have found the spell to do so and used it years ago.” He tried, he really did, but he wasn’t quite able to succeed in keeping the bitterness out of his voice. He truly hated his fame.

Tom smiled, understandingly and proceeded to use the spell onto himself. The, raven, meanwhile, approached a full body mirror who was standing in a corner of the room. When he reached it, he noticed that his aspect hadn’t change a lot, but he was still different enough to be sure to pass
unnoticed. His hair had lengthened and lightened up, assuming a light chestnut tint. His eyes’ colour had been changed too, his usual vibrant green transformed into a stormy grey, very much like the one of Sirius’ eyes. *The glasses can be a problem, though.*

“Ah, yes, I was nearly forgetting.” Commented Tom, from behind him. He looked back to see a boy with blonde hair, very light azure eyes, and slightly tanned skin, approaching him. *He doesn’t look bad, thought Harry, but I prefer his normal appearance. Ah, what am I thinking!?* Demanded himself the raven, while the taller boy removed delicately his glasses and whispered something, directing his wand towards his eyes. “Better like this?” Inquired the now blond boy. Harry looked at him confusedly, before blinking once, twice. He could see without his glasses!

“Yes, thank you.” Answered the raven, feeling incredibly puzzled by his thoughts regarding the dark brunet. The fact that Tom’s magic had restarted purring was making everything worse.

“You are welcome.” Tom smiled softly. “Unfortunately, this is only a temporary solution, but you can have your eyes permanently fixed if you wish. There is a potion for it.”

“Really?” Asked the raven, eagerly. Fixing his eyes sounded like a good idea. He had always disliked wearing glasses, especially since his cousin had made a habit to break them often. Not to mention all the times he broke them since he entered in the wizarding world.

“Sure. If you wish today we can go to buy that too, we should have enough time. I think it would be a very good idea: after all you won’t only remove an obvious weak point, but your eyes are also too beautiful to be covered by glasses.”

Harry blushed at Tom’s comment and the boy smirked. Great, now it was his magic the one who was acting strange. It wasn’t purring, like the older teen’s one, but it was pulsating with happiness. Ignoring this, the younger teen tried to recompose himself and calm his seemingly excited magic.

“Well, then, if it’s possible, I would really like to go buy that potion.” He said, avoiding the dark brunet’s eyes.

Tom’s lips twitched and he looked like he was trying hard not to laugh. “Good, then, after we finish with the clothes, we’ll go to the potion’s shop.” Then he added. “Now, we really have to hurry, thought, or we won’t be able to buy anything.”

“Ok, let’s go.” Replied the raven, still not looking at the other.

The two crept downstairs to use the Floo. Harry had proposed to use his invisibility cloak to make sure they weren’t spotted, but the idea had been rejected. The cloak, while useful in most circumstances, wouldn’t be so in this situation. It was unable to cover them completely and they weren’t coordinated enough to move quickly while wearing it: it would only end up hindering their movements. Fortunately, all the other inhabitants were busy cleaning upstairs and Sirius was making sure to keep them from coming down, so that they wouldn’t catch him and Tom sneaking out.

When they reached the fireplace (in the room where they usually eat), they hurried to floo to the Leaky Cauldron and from there they reached Diagon Alley.

“I think we should first head to Gringotts. Formal robes like you need aren’t cheap. You need to make a withdrawal. And formally claim your status as an Heir, too.” Explained Tom.

Harry nodded. “Okay then, Gringotts it is.”

While they walked towards the bank, the raven noticed that Tom didn’t actually tell him where they were going to buy the robes. “Tom?”
“Hmh?” The boy turned his head a little to look at his companion, showing that he was listening.

“Where are we going to get these robes? I don’t remember Madam Malkin’s having anything of the sort.” Questioned the younger teen.

“Oh, we won’t go to Madam Malkin’s. There is a particular shop in Seiryu Alley, an elite version of Diagon, who specialized in formal robes for witches and wizards belonging to Ancient and Noble Houses.” Responded the older teen.

“Seiryu Alley?” Repeated the raven confused. “I didn’t know that there was another shopping centre in London, other than Diagon and Knockturn.”

“Well, it’s not surprising.” Commented lightly Tom. “It’s not very well known and it’s frequented only by purebloods. Rich purebloods.”

“I understand. It makes sense that I never heard of it, then. But how come you know it, though?”

The dark brunet saw the puzzlement on the raven’s face and smirked. “I had many rich purebloods as ‘friends’” Harry looked at him with a deadpanned expression and Tom laughed. “Anyway, we have arrived.”

They were in front of the imposing white marble staircase of Gringotts. Tom’s expression changed, a blank mask easily falling in place. “Now, let me speak with the Goblin Teller.”

The raven nodded and the two entered the bank, approaching one of the goblins. The dark brunet tapped smartly on the counter, a polite smile blooming on his features. “Excuse me.” The goblin lifted slowly his eyes from the accounting book in which was writing to watch them. Despite the indifferent and slightly irritated expression of the creature, Tom’s smile didn’t waver. “We are here to make a withdrawal and to reclaim an heirship.”

“Very well.” Said the goblin in a monotonous voice. “Wait here, I’ll call someone to escort you.” And he shouted something in Gobbledegook.

After a moment, another goblin, who Harry remembered was named Griphook from his first time in Gringotts, came and led them through one of the long marble corridors until they reached a set of high, golden doors. Griphook knocked and entered. He remained in the room for a couple of minutes before coming out and informing them that they could now go inside. Tom nodded and quickly passed the threshold, moving fast past the door and the goblin who was keeping it open. Harry hurried to follow him and found himself in a sort of study. The style was simple and practical, but the furnishings looked expensive. On the wall in front of him there were a series of wood drawers in a warm oak colour. A matching desk was in the centre of the room, surrounded by three oak chairs with blue cushions. On a side of the desk there was a goblin and, in front of him, the other two empty chairs. On the desk there were quills, inkpots, and various parchments, all positioned in a careful order. Their guide made to close the door, but before he could do it, the raven called him.

“Thank you, Griphook.” Said politely the raven.

Both Griphook and the goblin seated at the desk looked at him stunned, confusing the young wizard.

Seeing both the surprised looks of the goblins and the expression of the raven, who clearly showed that the boy didn’t understand the reason behind the strong reactions of the creatures, Tom decided to intervene. “How do you know the goblin’s name, Harry?”

The younger teen turned towards his companion, still perplexed, and explained. “He was the one who brought me to my vault the first time I came here.”
“You remember?” Asked Griphook from the door, an expression of great surprise marring his features.

“Yes.” Answered simply the raven, confusion steadily growing more prominent.

A heavy and awkward silence descended then in the room and stretched on. Both goblins kept staring at him like he was something they had never seen before and he was just starting to feel uncomfortable, when Tom broke it, clearing his throat, and referring to the seated goblin. “I apologize for my rudeness, but we are quite in a hurry, so if we can please move on…”

“Of course.” Responded the goblin at the desk gruffly, and after saying something in Gobbledygook to the other, Griphook went away, closing the door behind himself, shooting a last glance towards the still perplexed raven.

After the door was closed, the goblin gestured for the two wizards to sit and they complied. Immediately Tom removed the spells placed upon Harry and himself and addressed the worker, who didn’t give any sign of surprise at the removal of the glamours. “I’m Tom Riddle and this is Harry Potter. We are here so that Harry can reclaim his heirships rings. And maybe do an inheritance test, if possible.” The teen spoke in a firm and polite tone, the command behind his words concealed, but still perceivable.

“Very well.” The goblin looked a bit irritated by the way the dark brunet had addressed him, but didn’t seem surprised by it. Probably, Harry thought, that is the way every wizard talked to all of them. The goblin stood up and went to retrieve something from one of the many drawers.

Harry caught the chance to speak with Tom. “Why an inheritance test, too?”

The dark brunet looked at him, explaining his reasons in the same collected voice he always used. “You need to prove your identity to have your Heirships formally recognized, doing something similar at the inheritance test. The only difference between the two is that this test will also show all the Heirships and/or Lordships you hold and, since you never did one, I thought it would be best to do it.”

The raven simply nodded, signalling that he understood and then turned towards the goblin who, in the meantime had returned, putting on the desk a blank piece of parchment and a silver, finely ornate dagger.

“If you are ready, Mr Potter, cut your right palm with the dagger and then let three drops of blood fall on the parchment.” Told him the goblin.

Harry reached for the short weapon and then sliced open his palm. The cut wasn’t very deep, but the blood started to flow immediately out of the wound. He put his hand over the parchment, careful to let only three drops fall on it, and then retreated it. Tom caught his wrist before he could completely withdraw his arm and then proceeded to heal the cut. Meanwhile the goblin had snatched the parchment up and was intently scanning it.

“Very well, Mr Potter, it seems that everything is in order and you are who you claimed to be. Do you wish to read the results?” Inquired the goblin.

“If it’s possible, yes.” He replied politely.

The goblin passed him the roll and he started to read it, feeling Tom leaning towards him to read the sheet, too. He expected to be unsurprised by the results, instead they caught him off guard.
Inheritance test of Harry James Potter

Complete Name: Harry James Potter

Date of Birth: 31st July 1981

Biological Father: James Fleamont Potter

Biological Mother: Lily Evelyn Potter ne Evans

Adopted Father: Sirius Orion Black (blood adoption of the 1st August 1981)

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of:

- Potter
- Black
- Peverell
- Gryffindor

Harry blinked once, then blinked twice: four Heirships? And Sirius was his blood adopted father?

“Mmh…that’s unexpected.” A deep, velvety voice observed from beside him. Harry jumped, he had forgotten Tom was there with him.

“I have four Heirships…” Said the raven, stunned.

“It appears so.” Commented the dark brunet, completely unaffected by the news. “This is really good news: your chances to get off unscathed from the hearing are rising.” He smiled, but then he noticed the perturbed expression of the younger teen and a touch of concern entered in his eyes. “It’s something wrong?”

Harry was startled out of his thoughts and quickly shook his head, directing him a small smile. “No, it’s nothing.” He could see that Tom didn’t believe him and he was grateful when the other decided to not pursue the issue further. “So,” he went on, looking at the goblin, who had looked at their exchange in silence, “how do I exactly reclaim my Heirships?”

“You just need to wear the Heir rings and see if they accept you.” The goblin answered curtly. “I can summon them now, if you want.”

“Yes, please.” Requested Harry in the same polite tone he used before.

“Very well.” The goblin chanted something in Gobbledegook and a long box with four rings inside appeared in front of him. “The first is the Potter’s heir ring, the second the Black’s one, the third the Peverell’s and the last the Gryffindor’s.” The goblin explained. “You can put all of them in your ring finger: if they accept you, the rings will merge.”

Harry nodded and started to put them on, starting with the Potter’s ring and then going in order. When he put on the first one, the ring emanated a strong light for a second before returning normal. When nothing more happened, he proceeded with the others: at every addiction, the rings shone and
then fused together, until a single ring remained, with the four crests graved into it.

“Good, if you will feel the need to show one particular ring, just think about it and it will appear.” Concluded the goblin in a business-like tone. “Now, if there isn’t anything else…”

“Actually” spoke up Tom “We would like to make a withdrawal from Harry’s trust vault. And…” There he looked at the raven. “Would you like an account of your possession?”

The emerald-eyed boy thought about it, but shook his head. “Not now, we can always ask for it at another time. After all, you told me that I can’t manage anything except my trust account until I turn 17.”

“Then I will call a goblin to guide you.” The worker said, and he shook a little silver bell that was on his desk. After a moment, Griphook appeared again, informing them that he would be the one to lead them to the vault.

Tom recast the glamours and then rose swiftly from the chair, leaving the room after a quick and curt nod at the seated goblin. Before following him, the raven stopped a moment.

“Can I ask for your name?” He demanded, referring to the goblin in the room.

“My name is Bloodfang, young wizard.” He responded, a strange look in his eyes.

“Then I thank you, Bloodfang, for your help.” And he bowed slightly his head.

The goblin observed him for a moment and then nodded, accepting his thanks. Before he could leave the room, Bloodfang added: “You are a strange wizard, young Heir.” And with these last words he dismissed him.

Tom was outside, waiting for him with Griphook. “Is everything okay?” He asked, looking slightly concerned.

Harry smiled, assuring him that he was fine and that he had only stopped to thank Bloodfang. This seemed to placate the dark brunet and together they followed Griphook to vault 687. There they put a great sum of galleon (more than he had ever took out) in an extendable pouch that Tom had previously enchanted. Seeing the worried look in the now grey eyes, he quickly reassured him.

“Don’t worry. The trust vaults are designed to always hold 50,000 galleons and every year the coins missing to reach that amount because of withdrawals, are supplied by the Family vault.”

After this, they left Gringotts. Harry made sure to say goodbye to Griphook, gaining more odd looks from the goblin and this time even one from Tom. Ignoring this, he kept walking. Now, there were only the robes to buy. And maybe the eyesight correcting potion.

**Tom’s Pov**

Tom walked beside Harry, watching his companion. The visit at Gringotts had gone incredibly well: the four Heirships Harry ended up owning would help the boy a lot with the hearing and the results from the interactions with the goblins would be greatly useful in the future. He doubted the raven had noticed, but in this short visit, the younger wizard had managed to gain a bit of respects from the creatures, something that he, himself had never been able to do. From the conversations he heard, he supposed that it was the fact that the teen remembered (and asked for) their names, that gained him it. This was something that he, himself, never did because, despite his desire for allies, he thought the goblins too inferior to bother trying to gain their favour. Even in this time he had planned to obtain the race’s help by offering in return something they would be interested in, and not by trying to gain their respect. If Harry was able to do this, however, they would be more willing to join his cause,
provided the raven would support him. And he had every intention to make this happen.

There was a thing that worried him, though. Something that bothered him since the reading of the inheritance test: Harry troubled expression. He knew the raven had lied to him when he said it was nothing, but not wanting to pressure him, he had let it go. Now, though, he couldn’t ignore it anymore. The teen was trying to cover it, but he could see that there was something that greatly weighted on him and this was making him feel concerned. It was a little unsettling, if he had to be truthful with himself. He had never cared about anyone and yet, seeing Harry looking troubled not only worried him, but also made him want to do something to make the teen feel better. He had never felt like this and didn’t understand why he was starting to experience these emotions now. The better explanations he was able to come up with was that they depended from his desire to have the boy. After all, Harry’s problem could reveal itself to be a hindrance to his plans. And yet, this seemed to not cut it completely. Well, no matter the reason why he needed to know what caused Harry’s troubled mood, he had to find it and for this he needed the raven to confide in him.

Determined to find out the problem, he decided to probe the green-eyed teen for information. However, he had to be subtle about it. He knew Harry still didn’t completely trust him and being blunt with his questions would lead him nowhere. “Harry, are you all right?” Fortunately, he didn’t have to feign the concern in his eyes, nor in his voice, the emotion was even too genuine.

The boy looked at him, grey eyes widening a little. Tom felt the need to frown, but refrained himself. He didn’t like the grey-spelled eyes; the raven’s natural emerald colour was so beautiful. Unfortunately, they needed to pass unnoticed and he couldn’t let the eyes unglamoured: Harry’s eyes colour was so unique that the boy would have been uncovered immediately if Tom hadn’t changed it.

Harry quickly shook his head and smiled at him. “It’s nothing.”

This time Tom really frowned. The smile wasn’t fake, but it looked forced, like the raven had put it on with the only purpose to not make him worry. He knew that the raven was hiding something and this something was certainly important seeing how much it was troubling him. Concern still lacing his voice, he decided to upgrade his game, adopting a warm and cajoling tone. “I know that you are lying.” The raven opened his mouth to counter this, but he stopped him. “Don’t try to deny it Harry. I know that something is bothering you and it has done it since we read your inheritance test.” The slightly guilty look in his companion spurred him on. He could convince him to open up: the boy needed only another light push. He sighed and smiled softly at the raven. “I won’t pressure you to tell me what the problem is, but I want you to know that, if you need someone to talk to, I will always listen.”

The grey eyes swirled with emotions: worry, wariness, and a touch of happiness. The raven looked away for a moment, but then breathed deeply to steel himself and turned to look at him. “It’s about the first part of the inheritance test. Where it says that Sirius is my blood adopted father.”

Oh, now he was starting to understand what the problem was. He feigned confusion nonetheless. “And…?”

Sadness and confusion became prominent in the stormy grey eyes. “Why didn’t he tell me? I mean the blood adoption makes him essentially my father, so why – ?”

“Harry” he started “I understand why it bothers you, but my advice is to not think about it too much for now.” He kept going in a soothing voice. “I don’t know why he didn’t tell you, but, even if I don’t like him much, it’s clear to me that he cares a lot about you. I’m sure he had a good reason for not saying anything.” Yes, a good reason. Well, whatever it was, he should have told Harry regardless. Blood adoptions were a serious business and had always great repercussions on the two
involved parties. “Anyway, you can question him when we return to Grimmauld. I’m sure the two of you will be able to settle the situation.” He finished, giving him a comforting smile. Internally, though, he was grinning. This was perfect. Black was his most dangerous opponent in gaining Harry’s affection because, after the slip made by the teen’s best friends during the summer, the man was the only one the raven still trusted unconditionally, and this hindered his attempts at strengthening his relationship with the boy. He had always known he would have to eventually distance Harry from his godfather in some way, but until that moment he hadn’t been able to find a workable option: their bond looked pretty strong, despite the incredibly short time it had at his disposition to form. This visit at Gringotts, though, had given him the perfect solution to the problem. And he didn’t even have to do anything. The fact that Black had hidden such important information from him has already created a rift between the raven and the man and he was sure that the conversation the two would have later wouldn’t repair it. And if the situation started to look like it was improving, he would simply have to make sure that wouldn’t happen.

“You are right.” Harry voice broke him from his musings. “Thank you, Tom.” This time the smile Harry gave him was genuine and it was a beautiful thing, even on the boy’s glamoured face.

“You are welcome.” He replied with warm voice and soft eyes. Oh, yes, soon Black wouldn’t be a problem anymore and Harry would understand that he was the only person he could actually trust and lean on.

Soon they reached the entrance to Seiryu Alley. It looked like a normal wall, similar to the entrance to Diagon Alley, but the difference was that this wall could only be opened by an Heir or Lord of an Ancient House. This alley housed a very elite shopping centre and so, the only way to enter was to press an Heir or Lord’s ring on the wall for identification. Other people could come here, but only if accompanied by this sort of witches and wizards. He still remembered coming here with some of his ‘friends’ and he couldn’t wait for the day he would be able to pass the barrier on his own. Unfortunately, he needed to wait for Voldemort’s death, since the man was Lord Slytherin in this time. He couldn’t even reclaim the Heir ring because there was a risk of the man learning about his presence, and he wanted to avoid this for as long as possible.

Turning towards Harry, he explained how to open the passage. A bit sceptic, the raven neared his Heir ring at the wall. Immediately the stone started to glow and then an archway opened revealing a bright street. Tom observed the teen reaction and smirked at the look of wonder on his face. He knew what kind of emotions were going through the shorter boy’s body, he had felt the same way the first time he came here. Seiryu Alley was more modern than Diagon. The first looked like it came out from the Victorian era, while the second’s style neared very much the one of the Middle ages. The street was less crowded, too and the people who were doing shopping were clearly recognizable as high standing and wealthy member of the society.

Another obvious difference was the predominant colour of the alley. While Diagon favoured neutral colours such as wooden tones, the street, and the walls of the shops in Seiryu were white and sprinkled with stones in various shades of blue, looking like gleaming dragon’s scales (from here the name of the centre).

“From your reaction, I take you like the place.” Commented Tom amused.

“Yes.” Exhaled Harry in a sort of breathless awe. The dark brunet had to stop himself from chuckling.
“Well, then, I think we should hurry to buy the robes for your trial. Then, if you still wish, we can go to the Apothecary and buy the eyes correcting potion?”

“Yes, I would like it.” Answered Harry, smiling brightly. Every trace of his previous worry now absents.

The two stopped only for a moment before entering in Seiryu Alley, just enough time for Tom to transfigure their clothes in robes. They were about to enter in a centre frequented by purebloods and their muggles attire would stand out too much. Then they began to trail down the street, Harry looking curiously around and Tom amusedly watching the various emotions playing through the raven’s eyes.

“It’s like a more refined version of Diagon.” Commented the younger teen, shooting a look at a book’s shop who seemed to sell really old and expensive books, a Quidditch’s shop, various other shops, a restaurant and a cafe.

“Yes, it is.” Agreed Tom. “Today we don’t have much time, but if you wish, we can return there in future to simply have a look around. I know that you like Quidditch very much and I think you may find even the bookstore interesting: it has a lot of tomes that other shops didn’t sell, and I’m not speaking about Dark Arts’ books.”

“Mmh…I don’t know. Books are more Hermione’s kind of hobby.” The raven looked hesitant.

“That’s not completely true. I saw you looking with interest at the books I took from the Black’s library.” He remembered especially that one time, when Harry thought to be alone, the boy had picked up and browsed one of his books. And from his expression, he had seemed to want to read it.

Pink blossomed on Harry’s cheeks and he muttered something unintelligible. Tom chuckled: that day Harry was really blushing a lot. The dark brunet had to admit that he liked this: the raven looked really adorable with that red tinge colouring his cheeks. He looked that way even in that moment, despite the glamour. He blinked. Wait, where had that thought come from? He mentally shook himself: lately his mind was conjuring up really strange thoughts. Well, no matter, he was sure it was nothing important.

“We have arrived.” He informed his companion, stopping in front a shop with a blue ensign, who said “Vestibus Nobilium – The best robes for every Lord and Lady”.

The raven repeated the shop’s name under his breath, then looked at him, an eyebrow raised. “Really?”

Tom smirked. “I know the name sound a bit pompous, but it’s a shop for people from Ancient and Nobles Houses, can you really expect it to be different?”

Harry sighed. “No, I suppose not.”

“I thought so.” He said, a knowing expression on his face. “Come on, let’s go inside.”

As they crossed the threshold, a plump old witch with a kind face approached them, asking what they were searching for. Noticing Harry’ discomfort, Tom decided to take the situation in his hands, explaining to the witch the reason for their visit and what they needed. After a quick exchange, the woman directed them to one of the private fitting rooms, promising to return with some robes for Harry to try.

“This private fitting rooms are a lot more comfortable than Madam Malking’s, don’t you think?” Commented Tom’s casually. This was one of the things he liked more about the shop: the privacy he
gave to the customers to try on the clothes they wished to buy.

“Yes, it’s quite nice.” Confirmed the raven.

In that moment the witch returned, bringing with her a collection of different coloured robes, shirts, and pants. The dark brunet smoothly thanked her, a beautiful, perfect, fake smile shining on his face. The woman blushed and left with a warm “you’re welcome, dear”, utterly charmed by him, like countless others. Oh, how he hated those pathetic peoples. He looked at the assortment of clothes she had brought. At least she was able to do her work well: she had brought him exactly what he had asked for and she didn’t even take too much time to do so. He took out his wand and locked the door with a strong locking spell.

“Tom, what are you doing?” The confused voice of Harry reached him. The dark brunet turned to look at him.

“I told you, didn’t I, that first impressions are incredibly important for purebloods?” And without waiting for an answer, he approached the younger teen and cancelled the spell, stormy grey eyes returning to glow a rich emerald green. “You need to choose the robe that best suit you and to do this you need to be able to see how they’ll look on you without a glamour.” Then, he cancelled the spell on himself, too, feeling better with his true appearance. “And I need to see you try them without a glamour, too, to be able to judge.” He smirked.

“What?” He cried the raven, looking incredibly embarrassed and uncomfortable at the prospect. “I don’t think it’ll be necessary.”

“Oh, I disagree. It’s always better to have a second opinion.” His smirk widened, amusement clearly evident. “Come on, choose something and go on.”

Reluctantly, mumbling about how it really wasn’t necessary, the raven picked up a pair of trouser, a shirt and a robe and started to change. Tom watched him, an incomprehensible emotion swirling inside him at seeing the raven half-naked. The young wizard tried various combinations, all of them meeting disapproval from the dark brunet, until he decided to suggest the next set to try. The teen was already wearing a pair of black pants; the older teen chose a light emerald shirt and a deep green, nearly black, robe with silver embroiders around the edges and passed them over. The emerald-eyed boy looked uncertainly at the choice of colours, but at his insistence he put them on anyway. Tom watched amusedly as Harry clad himself in what were, essentially, Slytherin’s colours. When he finished and turned towards the older teen to ask for his opinion, Tom froze for a moment, a strange heat rising inside him. Harry looked very good in those clothes, even better than he had thought. The dark colours where contrasting perfectly with his pale skin tone, and the emerald of the shirt was accentuating his beautiful Avada eyes. And wasn’t it ironic? A Gryffindor, Godric’s heir at that, looked stunning in Slytherin’s colours.

“I think you should buy those.” Said Tom in an aloof voice, ignoring the strange feelings rising inside him.

“Are you sure? Well, if you said so…” The raven changed again, he re-put the glamour spell on Harry and himself, and they went to pay, leaving the boutique, and heading to the nearest Apothecary soon after. They stopped there for just enough time to buy the eyes correcting potion and then left.

When they were passing in front of the cafe, Tom looked at his watch. Mmh…they still had a bit of time. He looked sideways to Harry; this day together had gone really well, but there was still something he could do to gain more points with the teen.
“Harry, I had to stop one moment in a place, do you mind?” He asked, looking sideways at the café.

“No, go ahead.” Responded calmly the raven.

“Wonderful.” He smiled. “Wait here a moment.” And he went towards the café.

He came out a couple of minutes later, holding two paper’s cups. “Here.” He offered one to Harry, who took it cautiously.

“What’s this?” He asked, still watching the cup with distrust.

“Try it.” He encouraged. He was sure Harry would like it.

Still unsure, Harry took a sip from it and his eyes brightened. “Hot chocolate?”

“To be precise it’s white, strawberry flavoured hot chocolate. Do you like it?” He was still smiling, and strangely it wasn’t fake, like his usual smiles. But, then again, thinking about it, he hadn’t felt the need to fake his smiles with the raven: they had come naturally. Strange…

“Yes, thank you.” The short boy smiled brightly at him and he found himself whishing, for the second time, that day, to see emerald eyes, and not grey ones, brightening up in joy.

“You are welcome. I thought you would like it, I noticed you like sweet things.” He said, banishing the strange thoughts.

“And you don’t, right?” The teen sent him back, amused. “What are you drinking?”

“No, I don’t.” His lips twitched. “And I’m drinking dark and spicy hot chocolate, do you want to try it?” He offered the raven his cup.

The young wizard looked at it for a moment before trying it. Then he started to laugh and Tom watched him confused. Seeing his expression, the raven tried, unsuccessfully, to reign himself. “Sorry, it’s just that –” He chuckled. “It’s exactly how I imagined it would taste like: bitter and spicy. It represents you perfectly.”

“Mmh…I suppose you are right.” Tom mused. Then he leaned a bit towards him and whispered. “Your drink matched you, too.” He watched, with growing smugness – and a bit of fascination – Harry’s cheek darkening as comprehension drawn on him. Laughing, he kept walking.

A few feet later, he looked back towards the still immobile wizard, a smirk adorning his face, and called. “Well, are you coming?”

Harry jumped, and then he quickly reached him. Watching his embarrassed face, while they headed towards the Leaky Cauldron to return at Grimmauld, Tom couldn’t stop chuckling. And he never noticed the return of his inner voice commenting about how adorable his little Raven looked blushing.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the shopping trip and the evolution of the boys’ relationship. I know that the changes looked a bit sudden, but the boys spent more than a week together, even if the chapter didn’t described all the days in detail.
Next chapter will be the hearing and we are going to see the results of Tom's lessons and maybe some snippets of the days that weren't described in this chapter. :) 

Seiryu: azure dragon belonging to the Japan's culture
The Hearing

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: as always I don't own Harry Potter. Him and everything that sounded familiar belong to J.K. Rowling.

Hi, I finally was able to update! *cheers* I'm really sorry. I know, I said I would update around mid July, but the exams took more of my time than I had anticipated and so I was able to write only after they ended (meaning after the 21st). The good news is that they had finally ended and so, the updates will be faster for the next month. ^ . ^

Here is the next chapter. The day of the hearing has arrived and I hope you like it. :)

Thanks to all those who left comments and kudos and even to those who had patiently waited for this chapter to come out. ^ - ^

I still don't have a beta, so all mistakes are my own.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Hearing

A ray of light filtered through the green tinted curtains, shining over Harry’s sleeping face. Disturbed by the brightness, the raven groggily woke up. Uneasiness nestled deep into his heart, he wondered where that feeling was coming from; and then, in a split moment of sudden clarity that made him bolt in his bed, he remembered what day it was. The 12th of August: the hearing! The day of the trial at the Ministry had finally arrived. This was the day in which it would be decided his future and if he would be able to return at Hogwarts.

To distract himself from the sudden dread that threatened to completely overcome him, he started to look around the room, until his gaze settled on the bed beside his. Tom was still sleeping, face turned in his direction. The older teen looked completely relaxed and undisturbed by the light filtering from the open window. The raven observed amazed the other’s asleep features, so different from when the boy was awake. During the day, Tom’s expression was always a little closed off, like there was a wall erected between him and other people. Now, that barrier was nowhere to be seen, his slumbering face peaceful and open.

It was incredible how innocent the other boy looked; seeing him like this nobody would ever suspect what kind of cruel and horrible things he was capable of doing – and had done. And yet…

The events of the day before surfaced on the raven’s mind. Their conversations, the dark brunet’s comments, his laugh; had it really all been an act? Harry was still doubtful about the sincerity of the other, but he found himself reluctant to believing that the previous day and the side that Tom had shown him had all been the result of some careful crafted plan, like Sirius had told him once they returned, when he had confronted his godfather about the results of his inheritance test.
Him and Tom had been able to return without problems. Their absence went largely unnoticed, thanks to Sirius’ help. After putting down their purchases in their bedroom, Harry went to speak with his godfather, as Tom had previously suggested during their trip. The raven had expected the dark brunet to follow him, but the other had opted to remain in the room reading a book, correctly guessing the younger teen’s desire for the conversation to be private.

A little anxious, Harry had searched for Sirius, in the end finding him inside one of the rooms situated on the second floor, cleaning the place with Mrs Weasley and the others. The discussion that had followed had not been easy, both parties finding the topic hard to breach.

Despite this, Harry, desiring answers, steeled himself, and questioned his godfather about his reasons for withholding from him this kind of information. The man, looking decidedly at unease, explained how he feared the reaction the raven would have at learning he still had a parent, a father – even if through blood adoption – who, instead of taking care of him, had left him alone for twelve years. Or more, considering Sirius hadn’t been able to look after him even this last two years, despite having evaded from Azkaban.

Harry had been shocked at the man explanation. He had never entertained the thought that his godfather could regard their situation like this. The young wizards had never hold against him the years in which the man hadn’t been able to be there for him. And for the last ones… knowing he existed, and he could turn to him for help if necessary, had been enough. For someone who had never had anyone to take care of him and had needed to do so himself, what Sirius had done had been source of comfort and happiness. After all, he knew just how much limitations the man had and how he wished he could do more for him. it wasn’t his godfather’s fault he was unable to.

At his affirmation Sirius smiled in that way that made Harry feel warm inside, because it was the same smile parents directed towards their children, and at the same time remember the man his godfather was at his parents’ wedding; the one who looked so young and didn’t have twelve years worth of prison on his shoulder. After this admittedly very awkward moment, the conversation between them flowed more easily and the raven found himself recounting his trip to a grinning Sirius, who added little funny titbits about his own adventures in Diagon and Siryu Alley with Harry’s father.

It followed this pattern until the raven reached the part about the fitting of the robes and the end of the trip. In that moment the man’s eyes darkened, confusing the young wizard. At his enquiring, the dog animagus explained how he was worried about Riddle. Not only didn’t the man trust him, but he also didn’t like how the boy looked at Harry. Sirius warned his godson to stay on his guard while in the other boy’s presence and insisted he shouldn’t believe the façade the boy was putting through because he was sure there was some sort of hidden scheme behind Riddle’s nice and helpful behaviour, and he had a feeling that this plan’s objective had something to do with Harry.

At this, the young wizard hadn’t known how to respond and had ended up returning to his room in the same condition he had left it, Sirius’ warning ringing in his head.

Now, looking at Tom, his godfather’s warnings resounded inside him stronger than ever. He knew that the man was right: he couldn’t really trust Tom. But he wanted to. After the days spent in the company of the boy, the raven was sure that the teen could change; he just needed someone to help him do it, and he had decided to be that person. He had chosen to do this during his first morning spent together and his talk with Sirius had only cemented his decision further. Like his godfather advised him, he would continue to be cautious, but he would also have faith in the authenticity of the emotions displayed the day before by the dark brunet. He would believe they were a sign that there was a good side inside Tom Riddle, even if it was hidden deep down.
Well, truthfully, it wasn’t like he had many other choices: Dumbledore had asked him to keep an eye on the young Dark Lord, so he’ll have to spend time with the teen regardless…provided everything went well and he would return to school. Harry passed nervously a hand through his hair. Oh Merlin, he hoped the plan he and Tom had come up with would work.

“Don’t worry, it will.” A rich, velvety voice spoke up, startling him.

Turning sideways he saw that Tom had awoken. He was still in bed, but he was sitting up with his back against the headboard, looking at him.

“How…?” How did Tom know what he was thinking? The way he phrased his words. It was like he had said his last thought out loud. But he didn’t…did he?

“You were thinking about the hearing.” It was a statement, not a question. “And hoping that our plan will work. Don’t worry, it will.” Assured him the dark brunet.

Harry looked inside those deep blue eyes and, hiding his doubts deep inside him, nodded stiffly.

The other teen smiled at him in reassurance and rose from the bed. “Come on, we should head down. You need to eat something.”

Harry got out of bed, changed into the formal robes they bought the day before and followed Tom, who had already changed in a pair of formal robes himself, down into the kitchen. Sitting around the table were Sirius, Lupin, Tonks, Mr and Mrs Weasley. All of them looked up when the boys entered and Mrs Weasley hurried to fuss over him, asking what he desired for breakfast.

Sitting at the table, forcing himself to eat a piece of toast that tasted like ashes due to his nerves, he was brought out of dark thoughts about the hearing by the motherly voice of Mrs Weasley.

“You are wearing very nice robes, dear, but didn’t you find the clothes I put out for you?”

He had, of course. It was quite difficult not to notice a pair of jeans and a shirt folded so neatly if they were positioned at the end of his own bed, after all. He had been warmed by the kind gesture of the woman, but he had already decided with Tom that wearing wizard clothes was the best option and, despite the little shard of guilt penetrating through the haze of his annoyance directed at every adult who wasn’t Sirius, had ignored his best friend’s mother effort and worn the formal robes.

“I did, Mrs Weasley, but I decided what to wear with Tom and we both thought that robes were the best option.” He tried to smile, but the tightening of the Weasley matriarch’s lips (sign that she thought he should have gone with her choice because she believed to know what was best for him), made his effort quite difficult.

“Well, I think it was a good idea.” Interjected Sirius, hostility towards the woman clear in his voice. “I wanted to accompany you as Padfoot,” he continued, directed towards Harry, “for moral support, you know.” Here he grimaced. “But Dumbledore rejected the idea, something about it being too dangerous, and – ”

“He is right.” Interrupted Mrs Weasley in a forceful tone, hands on her hips. “You are a wanted man, Sirius. It’s too dangerous for you to go to the Ministry.”

Sirius glared in her direction, but didn’t say anything. It seemed like an argument about this particular topic had already taken place and from the looks of things, Sirius had lost. Well, thought Harry, this at least explains the open hostility. Sirius and Molly relationship had never been great, from what Harry had been able to observe since his arrival at Grimmauld, and it had only worsened in the last days. Usually, though, it wasn’t so openly displayed, at least not when he was in the room. They
never made a show of hiding it, but they didn’t act upon it either.

For his part, he felt like his godfather had every reason to feel annoyed with Mrs Weasley: she was always subtly making jabs towards him. He knew she meant well, but she was truly being too overbearing. From how she spoke it was clear that she didn’t approve the way Sirius related with him and, even if she was entitled to have her own opinions, the raven thought that acting upon them in this instance was too much. After all, Sirius was his godfather and the way they acted towards each other was no concern of hers. And, even if he was happy Sirius wouldn’t put himself in unnecessary danger accompanying him to the Ministry, a part of him lamented the fact he wouldn’t have his godfather’s support in this difficult occasion.

“Don’t worry, Harry, I will gladly take your godfather’s place and come with you.” From beside him Tom offered him a comforting smile and Harry found himself giving him one in return, his anxiousness abating a little.

But Mrs Weasley, it seemed, wasn’t happy with this solution either. “You can’t.” She strongly affirmed, moving her disapproving gaze from Sirius to Tom. “Dumbledore said – “

“Dumbledore isn’t my guardian and doesn’t have any say in what I decide to do.” Countered the dark brunet, levelling the Weasley matriarch with a cold look.

Mrs Weasley looked taken aback by the teen’s attitude; probably because that was the first time he had spoken to her without his customary charming tone. The woman turned towards his husband. “Arthur, please, say something.”

The raven turned towards him, too, biting his lip. Mr Weasley was the one who would accompany him to the Ministry – they had told him so the previous evening – and if he refused to take Tom along there was nothing they would be able to do.

The man rubbed tiredly at his eyes and exchange a look with Lupin. Then, very calmly, said “I think that Harry should be the one to decide, since he is the one who’ll need support. And if Sirius give his permission, I have no right to refuse. He is Harry’s godfather and the only one who can veto a decision of this type.”

The dark-haired man looked into his godson pleading eyes and sighed. “If Harry wish for Riddle’s company, I will not oppose him, even if I don’t like it.”

The raven smiled gratefully at his godfather and, addressing Mr Weasley stated “I want Tom to come.”

Said teen’s eyes brightened and a smirk formed on his face. “Here, Mrs Weasley. I’m sorry, but now you can’t stop me from going since Harry wish for me to accompany him.”

Mrs Weasley huffed and, in a last attempt to stop Tom, she asked “and what about You-Know-Who? Didn’t you said it would be bad if he learned about you, dear? And in the current climate…”

“I did,” confirmed Tom, turning suddenly serious, “but upon further consideration, I decided to not bother with this. Coming this September, He would know about me anyway, since I will be attending Hogwarts.”

The Weasley matriarch pursued her lips, still displeased, but didn’t commented anymore, clearly defeated. Her husband, having finished breakfast, rose. “Well, then, if you are ready boys, I think it will be better get going. It’s better arrive a bit early so you can get through the formalities without having to worry about the time.”
Nodding, both boys followed Mr Weasley out of the room, encouraging words for Harry following them.

The journey to the Ministry was a long one. Mr Weasley insisted in going the Muggle’s way, despite Tom resolve that reaching their destination more quickly, and so using the wizarding way, would have been better. Apparently, the man thought that Harry arriving at the Ministry without the aid of magic would paint him in a better light, considering the charges moved towards him. Harry wasn’t so sure; his and Tom’s plan based his success on showing Harry as someone as knowledgeable as a pureblood heir and this would certainly complicate things. After all, a pureblood would never use Muggle transportations.

Both boys tried to convince Mr Weasley to follow their plan, especially the dark brunet, who had started to argue their point calmly and had slowly become more forceful as time passed, but the man remained immovable.

“I told you that these Order people are a bunch of deluded idiots.” Tom whispered to him, clearly annoyed; and Harry found himself unwittingly agreeing with him, despite the deep affection he felt for some of them.

And so, they had to let Mr Weasley transfigure their formal robes in suitable Muggle outfits before leaving Grimmauld Place and heading into Muggle London.

Once they arrived at the Ministry, after using the visitor entrance – for some strange reason it was an old red telephone box – Harry remained stunned by the picture the Ministry of Magic presented. The high peacock blue ceilings, the dark wood floors, the people in robes bustling around and the big circular fountain formed by different large than life-size statue in solid gold – two wizards, a centaur, a goblin, and a house elf 0 towering in the centre of the Atrium. Passing beside it, Harry could see that it was called the fountain of “Magical Brethren” and that the bottom glittered with coins who the sign stated would be devolved to the St Mungos’s Hospital. While they walked towards the location where his and Tom’s wands would be checked, the raven, his mind heavy with worry, vowed that he would donate at least ten galleons if he won the hearing.

They quickly headed towards the security post where a bored wizard sat, reading a copy of the Daily Prophet. The process was tedious, but fast enough, and then Mr Weasley guided them in his office, where they would wait for the start of the trial.

Harry tried to contain his amusement, but the expression the dark brunet showed while they entered the small and cramped office was making this incredibly difficult: he looked so unimpressed and disgusted by the workplace. When the teen turned towards him and schooled his features into a blank look, cool and aloof, the raven finally lost his control and his lips started to twitch: that was so Tom.

“Well, boys, feel free to sit wherever you wish. I apologize for the mess, but since we have so little space, all our work ends up spreading over every available surface.” Said Mr Weasley, cheerfully.

Tom looked at the man, face blank, obviously not thinking much about his enthusiasm, and then came towards the raven, took his arm, and proceeded to pull him towards a chair, wandlessely transfiguring one for himself while Mr Weasley wasn’t looking.

“Since we have to wait, I propose to review our plan. It may help to chase some of your anxiety
away.” Offered the dark brunet, seeing the worry present in the young wizard’s eyes.

The raven nodded. This seemed like a good idea. Reassuring himself he would be prepared for what was going to happen would help him calm his nerves, and was grateful Tom proposed it.

They started to go over their plan and revised it until Mr Weasley colleague barged in, extremely worried and out of breath. In an urgent tone, he began to explain how Harry’s hearing had been anticipated and the location changed, making him already five minutes late.

Immediately the trio got out of the office and headed towards the lift. While they descended towards Courtroom Ten, the place where his hearing would apparently take place now, Harry and Tom exchanged a look. This was exactly what they had supposed would happen: the Minister was using his power to damage Harry’s image. The fact that he would arrive later was sure to play against him during the trial and Fudge would surely take advantage of the bad light this would shed on the raven.

The two teens followed Mr Weasley out of the lift, down a long corridor with bare walls and a lonely door at the end, turned left towards a flight of steps and down again, until they reached a floor that bore great resemblance with the Hogwarts’ dungeons. The walls were filled with rows of heavy wooden doors equipped with iron bolts – he saw Tom expression darkened as they proceeded – and they stopped in front of a particularly sturdy and foreboding one. It was the darkest one among the doors they passed, blackened by age and dirt. The big iron lock and the ominous aura it was excluding only helped to increase Harry’s uneasiness.

Leaning heavily on the wall, Mr Weasley urged him to go on, explaining how him and Tom weren’t allowed to follow him inside, but the dark brunet, probably sensing his distress, stopped him before he was able to reach the door.

Grabbing both his arms in a strong grip, he locked their eyes together. He spoke in a calm, emotionless tone, but his gaze was fierce and intense. “Remember that we prepared for this. He’ll try to intimidate you, so that you’ll be unable to defend yourself. Keep your calm: you have the power to contrast him and win this.” The raven nodded, Tom was right, he could and would win this. “I’ll wait for you there.” He added before releasing him.

Harry turned towards the door, steeled himself, willed his features into a cool and confident mask, and walked forward.

The room in which entered was dark, cold, and upsettingly familiar. It was the same room he had visited last year, using Dumbledore’s Pensieve; it was the one in which the Death Eater’s trials he saw had taken place. The only difference was that, this time, only the benches in front of him, the highest ones, were occupied. The others were empty, accentuating his feel of loneliness.

At least fifty wizards were sat on the benches, wearing bright, plum-coloured robes with an elaborated silver ‘W’ engraved on the front: the Wizengamot. At the very centre of the first row sat Fudge, flanked by a stern looking woman – with very short grey hair and a monocle – and a shorter figure sitting so far back that she was covered in shadow.

A cold male voice rang trough the court room. “You are late.”

Hiding his nervousness, the raven approached the chair in the centre of the room; the chair he remembered being covered in chains. “I apologize, but I wasn’t informed about the change of time.”
“This is not the Wizengamot’s fault.” Responded the same voice. “An owl was sent to you this morning.”

“This is true.” Acknowledge the teen, taking his place on the chain-covered chair. His heart was racing, pounding furiously in his ribcage, but his voice betrayed none of his, remaining cool and collected. “But, as the Law passed in the 1865 stated, in case of change of hour and/or location, the communication should be sent to the accused at least 24 prior to the start of the trial.”

“May I remember you” continued the teen “that this law was implemented after the great scandal of the trial of Lord Bamford. The at the time Minister and the accused Lord were at odds, and when the day for the Lord to be judged came, the Minister changed the time to make sure the man wouldn’t present himself. Despite being innocent, Lord Bamford was declared guilty by the Wizengamot and imprisoned. Fortunately, the Bamford family had enough power to oppose the Ministry and demand another trial, in which the Lord was found innocent. After that, the law I talked about was implemented to make sure something like that wouldn’t happen again.”

Here Harry set his gaze on Fudge, who had started to look uncomfortable during his speech. “Minister, with how you ignored such a known procedure, I may think that you tried to do to me the same thing that Minister did to Lord Bamford.”

Fudge coloured slightly and the people behind him started to whisper between them. The witch with the monocle shot a dark look at Fudge and then spoke. “You are right, Mr Potter. Your lateness won’t count against you. The Wizengamot extend you his apologies.”

Harry internally exhaled a relieved sigh. He had overcome the first obstacle: not only the Minister looked nervous, the people in the Wizengamot were looking at him in a new light. What Tom said to him during one of the first days came to his mind.

“Remember, Harry, the Wizengamot is formed by Lords and Ladies and, as such, it’s extremely attached to wizarding tradition and history. Showing that you, not only know the laws, but also why they had been made, will gain you points and their respect. And if you obtain their respect, you have won.”

Tom had been right. Now they seemed more willing to hear what he had to say.

Fudge shuffled a little and then, awkwardly clearing his voice, began. “Okay…well, let’s start the hearing. Are you ready?” He called down the row.

An eager and excited voice responded. “Yes, sir.” Following it, Harry saw Percy Weasley seated at the very end of the front row. He had a quill in hand and his eyes were fixed on the parchment in front of him, carefully ignoring the raven presence. The teen tried to not let this affect him; he had no time to ponder over Percy’s attitude, he needed to concentrate on the proceedings.

“Disciplinary hearing of the twelfth of August, into offences committed under the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery and the International Statute of Secrecy by Harry James Potter, resident at number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.” Harry could see Fudge regaining more and more of his confidence as he carried on. “Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister for Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. Court Scribe, Percy Ignatius Weasley – “

A quiet voice from behind Harry interrupted the Minister. “Witness for the defence, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.”
The raven turned his head and saw the Headmaster striding calmly towards him, attention focused on Fudge. What was Dumbledore doing there? In their last meeting the Professor hadn’t mentioned anything about his own presence at the hearing. The teen’s annoyance flared up. As always, the man kept him in the dark about the most important details and now, this unplanned intervention had the potential of costing him the victory. Having Dumbledore defending him could go in two ways: it could either aid or damage him. And the raven feared the actualization of the second scenario. He – they – hadn’t planned for this… No! He needed to maintain his calm. He could do this. He simply needed to make sure that his headmaster actions didn’t interfere with his owns.

Carefully planning his next move, Harry distractedly followed the interaction between Fudge and Dumbledore. It seemed the Minister had failed to communicate the change of time and location to the headmaster, too – probably to deprive him of any possible help – and now was facing his second consecutive embarrassing situation of that day. The witch on his right, who was apparently Madam Bones, was watching him with a hard and dark look in her eyes, and the other witches and wizards had restarted to whisper among themselves. Well, at least this was playing in his favour; things were certainly not looking well for Fudge.

After Dumbledore had sat himself on a squashy chintz armchair he himself conjured, the Minister tried to get back to the trial, all previous gained confidence now evaporated.

“Yes, well, the charges. Where – ” Fudge shuffled around his notes in a nervous way, searching for the right paper and trying to regain his composure. Finally, he seemed to find it and, after taking a deep breath, he resumed. “Here, yes. So, the charges are as follows: that he did knowingly, deliberately and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Minister of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on the second of August at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under Paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks’ Statute of Secrecy.”

“That’s partially incorrect.” Intervened coolly Harry.

The minister raised his gaze from the notes and spluttered. “Excuse me?”

“What you just said is not completely correct.” Repeated the raven. Everyone turned to watch him surprised, even Dumbledore.

“What do you mean Mr Potter?” Inquired Madam Bones.

“First – Lady Bones, right?” Asked politely Harry. When the woman confirmed, confused but curious, as the teen had used her formal title, he continued. “I apologize if I’m being a little rude, but since this has all the aspects of a formal trial, I would like to ask you to call me Heir Potter.”

“Heir?” Shouted Fudge. Whatever bit of control he could have still possessed seemed to have just fled out of the room.

The raven levelled him with a cold look. “Yes, Heir Potter. Heir to four Most Ancient and Noble Houses, actually.”

“Four?” Now the man looked decidedly pale. The weight of the repercussions this hearing could have on his reputation making him sweat profusely. Murmurs resumed in the Wizengamot; the witches and wizards now looking at him with a calculating gaze and seeming as uncomfortable as Fudge with the situation. Harry could understand them. They had been practically ready to aid the Minister in condemning him without a proper process and doing so to an Heir of four Houses was
one of the greatest offences in Pureblood culture. The purebloods liked not only traditions, but their privileges, too, and were ready to do anything to keep them, even support a supposedly mad, attention-seeking child against the Ministry. He was an Heir, after all, one of them; and if he could be sentenced without the possibility to defend himself, so could them.

“Yes, Minister.” Harry must admit that, despite the anxiousness he still felt, it made him feel better seeing Fudge gaping like a fish, at a loss for words.

Madam Bones watched the man with contempt, clearly disappointed by his lack of decorum, and decided to continue the inquiry in his stead, leaving him the time to collect himself. *If he’ll be able to.* Mused amused the raven.

“You had some complaints to make regarding the charges, Heir Potter?” Madam Bones tone was formal, but clearly curious. She seemed genuinely interested in what he had to say, something that made the raven really appreciate her. Now that he thought about it, since the beginning she had been the one more willing to follow the Law and letting him have a fair trial.

“Yes, Lady Bones.” He spoke clearly, with confidence. “It’s about the offence against the Statute of Secrecy.”

“You deny the fact that you were in the presence of a Muggle, is that it?” Shouted Fudge, apparently regaining the use of his voice, face red – for rage or embarrassment in regards of his previous comportment, he couldn’t tell.

“Not at all, Minister.” Responded the raven, without losing his composure. This was important; he had waited for this moment since the start of the hearing, replaying Tom’s words inside his head during all this time. *Whatever happens, remember to never lose your calm. If you panic or get annoyed, it will be easier for them to take the upper hand and manipulate the interrogation in their favour.* They had helped him maintaining a cool head and now, the moment to start dismantling the charges against him had come. “It is indeed true that, when I casted that spell, I was in the presence of a Muggle, but the person in question was my cousin.”

“So?” Demanded Fudge, annoyed. “I don’t see the relevance of this information and how it can nullify your break of the Statute of Secrecy.”

“Oh, there is where you are wrong, Minister. The fact that the person who saw me cast the charm was my cousin is very important because it show that I didn’t break the Statute, considering that my cousin is aware of our world. And I wish to specify that he would know about it even if we didn’t live in the same house, since his mother is my mother’s sister and she had known of our world since my mother turned eleven and started Hogwarts.” His words had the result to make Fudge return in the state that was quickly becoming the norm for him that day: shock. The hearing wasn’t going like the man had planned and, with every sentence his situation seemed to look worse, instead of becoming better.

Contrary to him, Harry was beginning to truly feel the confidence he was portraying. The questioning was going well; he may truly be able to win this.

Suddenly he remembered Dumbledore and turned towards him. The man, though, wasn’t looking at him, his attention was instead fixed on the front benches, but at least he was smiling and seemed content with letting him manage everything.

“Very well, Heir Potter.” The booming voice of Madame Bones cut through him, reverting his focus on the people in the front row. “Taking in consideration the previous knowledge of your cousin of our world, the charges about your break of the Statute of Secrecy are being dropped. I believed all
the Wizengamot is in agreement about this.”

Murmurs of assent rang through the courtroom.

And one, thought Harry. Now he had simply to dispute the charge about the break of the Restriction of Underage Sorcery.

“This done, I believe there is still a charge against you.” And turning towards Fudge, she continued, “You may go on, Minister.”

Like waking up from a trance, the man blinked and hurried to read his notes. “Yes, another charge… right… Here, the offence against the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery.”

“You admit to have cast a Patronus on the day of the second August, despite knowing you were not permitted to, having received a warning from the Ministry in regards to the same instance three years ago?” The man inquired, every trace of his initial hostility gone, replaced again by nervousness.

“I do.” Confirmed shortly the raven.

“You produced a fully-fledged Patronus?” Interjected again Madam Bones in her booming voice. Harry looked at her puzzled. “I apologize, Lady Bones, but I don’t seem to know quite how to answer.”

The woman didn’t seem perturbed by his confusion and reworded her question. “You conjured a corporeal Patronus? I mean to say, it had a clearly definite form and was more than mere vapour or smoke?”

“Oh, yes.” The raven responded, understanding what the woman was inquiring about. “It’s a stag, it’s always a stag.”

Madam Bones seemed impressed by this information. “Always? Do you mean you have produced a Patronus before now?”

“Yes,” confirmed the teen, “Professor Lupin taught me the charm in my third year because of the Dementors.”

“Truly impressive… a true Patronus at his age. Truly impressive indeed.” Stated Madam Bones, and she looked extremely impressed. Harry could see some of the people in the Wizangamot whispering between them and looking at him in the same way the Head of the DMLE was doing.

Sensing he was losing even more ground, Fudge tried to salvage the situation commenting about how this made the situation only worse, Percy being the only one agreeing with him, nodding constantly through the man’s speech.

All the others, though, were either frowning or shaking their head at the man and Harry felt a little sorry for the pitiful attempt of the Minister at maintaining his dignity. On the other hand, the man was trying to expel him, even though it was by then obvious that the trial was turning in his favour. It was the time for the last push.

Clearing his throat, the teen turned the attention of the assembly towards himself. “I did it because of the Dementors.”

And then, silence fell. All muttering stopped and everyone froze. The stillness silence that encompassed the room was worse than any other reaction he could have expected. It weighted
heavily on him and made the atmosphere dense and a little claustrophobic. In that moment Harry was sure that, if he hadn’t seen sign of the people who were supposed to judge him to be on his side, he would have thought this battle lost and would have found impossible to continue.

Instead, when Madam Bones inquired about the meaning of his words, he found no problem in explaining how there had been two Dementors that night and how they attacked him and his cousin. And when Fudge gave sign of wanting to contradict his words, he confidently stated that he could prove this.

“I can give you my memory of the night as a proof and, since this is a hearing, some impartial party could extract it. In this way, you’ll be sure it hasn’t been tampered with.”

The Minister tried to refuse his proposition, but Harry had to simply bring to his notice how the hearing had been since the beginning more along the lines of a criminal trial than the simple proceedings the Laws dictated for such instances, and how this could end being a strong blow to the man’s credibility – because ‘how can normal citizens feel comfortable with a Minister that refused to allow an accused to defend himself? If he did something like this to an Heir and future Lord, someone who should be nearly untouchable, who can say that he won’t do this to a normal person? Someone who wouldn’t have any defence and would be forced to bow to the whims of the one in charge” - for Fudge to allow the use of his memory.

The teen asked Madam Bones to make the extraction, offering as explanation the extreme fairness and moral soundness of the woman. And Fudge, like the idiotic man he was, tried to complain and nearly accused the witch of using this as a chance to tamper the memories herself and help him. Really, some of the actions the Minister did during this trial made the raven wonder why he was even trying so hard to make a good impression: the man was practically digging his own grave!

Anyhow, after this little delay the memory was extracted and put into a Pensieve. Madam Bones, the Minister and the Wizengamot entered in the basin to watch the memory, leaving only Harry, Dumbledore, Percy, and the witch in the shadow in the courtroom.

Nobody made any move to speak with the young wizard, so the teen was left free to let his mind roaming. His gaze remained fixed on the basin in which the judicial body was watching his memory, mind wandering back on the day he had chosen to use it at the hearing.

**Flashback**

“*My memory?”*

*It was a couple of days into his preparation for the hearing and Tom had decided to discuss about the strategy they had to adopt during the actual trial, specifically what to use as proof.*

*The dark brunet had explained that, in a hearing about the use of underage magic, usually as proof was brought some witness. In Harry case, though, it was more complicated. Not only his only witnesses were his cousin and Mrs Figg – a Muggle and a Squib whose words would have counted next to nothing – but they were pretty sure the hearing itself would be more complicated. That left the other two methods: Veritaserum or a memory. And since Veritaserum was a too risky of a gamble, considered that they would be able to ask anything to Harry and he would be obligated to answer honestly, this leaved the memory.*

“Yes, the memory of the night you and your cousin were attacked.” Said Tom, sitting on the bed in front of Harry in their shared room. “Like I said, in a formal trial the view of a memory is one of the methods used to establish the innocence or guiltiness of an accused. And I think this is your best shot.”
“Because they wouldn’t be able to disprove it?” Asked the raven, a bit doubtful.

The older teen paused for a moment before answering. “In truth, there are ways to tamper with memories, so they can be found false, but since you don’t know how to extract a memory and will need someone else to do this for you, then this won’t be a problem.”

“But will it be accepted?” The raven was sure that Fudge would do everything in his power to stop him from winning the hearing, even going as far as prohibiting him from using his memory as a proof.

Correctly guessing his thoughts, Tom calmly reassured him. “It will. And if someone tries to refuse it” a vicious smirk grew on his face “you simply need to ‘remind’ them about how it’s in your right to bring proof and what blow to their reputations will be refusing this to an Heir.”

“Okay, I understand.” The younger teen relented. He didn’t quite feel comfortable in using his titles and power to threaten – because Tom could call this persuasion if he so wished, but in the end it was a plain threat – someone, even if this someone was the one who was trying to have him expelled. He supposed that, in this instance, he should make an exception, though. This would very well be the only way in which he could hope to win.

Reassured that the raven was convinced, the dark brunet proceeded with his other request. “You should let me see it.”


“You should let me see it.” Repeated the other. “I don’t know what happened that night, but it’s best if I verify that there won’t be any details that can be used against you.”

“And how do you plan to do this? We don’t have a Pensieve.”

“It isn’t necessary. I can simply enter your mind and see the memory by myself. It’s called Legilimency.”

The raven pondered this. The thought of having Tom in his mind didn’t appeal to him at all. Could he really trust the boy to not wander around and see other memories?

Probably sensing his reluctance, the dark brunet sighed and smiled softly. “Would assuage you if I made a vow to only watch the memory regarding the attack?”

Harry, who had tensed after the dark brunet smile, relaxed a bit. It may have seemed strange to tense for a smile, especially the kind the other teens sometimes sent him, but every time Tom features softened he had the feeling he was being manipulated. And yet, despite knowing this, he could feel himself slowly falling for it nevertheless. And he knew that allowing the young Dark Lord in his mind would only speed up the process. The raven grit his teeth. He could refuse to let the boy see the memory, he could, but…what if it contained some details that would end up costing him the hearing? If there was something he learned in the last two days was that every detail was important and that purebloods often gave importance to things that other people won’t look twice at. And he still didn’t know enough to judge if his memory contained something of this nature. He gazed at Tom who was watching him, patiently waiting for his decision. “How will you know what is the memory you need to see?”

Harry, who had tensed after the dark brunet smile, relaxed a bit. It may have seemed strange to tense for a smile, especially the kind the other teens sometimes sent him, but every time Tom features softened he had the feeling he was being manipulated. And yet, despite knowing this, he could feel himself slowly falling for it nevertheless. And he knew that allowing the young Dark Lord in his mind would only speed up the process. The raven grit his teeth. He could refuse to let the boy see the memory, he could, but…what if it contained some details that would end up costing him the hearing? If there was something he learned in the last two days was that every detail was important and that purebloods often gave importance to things that other people won’t look twice at. And he still didn’t know enough to judge if his memory contained something of this nature. He gazed at Tom who was watching him, patiently waiting for his decision. “How will you know what is the memory you need to see?”

The dark brunet blinked, apparently expecting some other argument and not this question. “Simple, you’ll show me. If you think about it, the memory I need to see I mean, then it will be on the forefront of your mind and the first thing I’ll find.”
“And you’ll vow to only see that?” Inquired Harry, just to be sure. In truth he had already decided to let Tom in his mind before making his last question, but he still wanted the reassurance the boy wouldn’t wander undisturbed around his memories; and since he wouldn’t be able to stop him, once he entered in his mind, the vow was his only safe option.

“Of course. I swear on my magic to only watch the memory you’ll show me.” A soft light encompassed the dark brunet after he finished speaking, showing the vow had took hold. “Do you feel better now?”

“Yes.” And he did. He still didn’t like the fact that the other would be in his mind, but at least the vow reassured him about the safety of his other memories.

“Good. Then think about the memory and look into my eyes. Eye contact is essential for Legilimency.” Requested Tom in a commanding voice.

Harry frowned at the tone, but acquiesced, gazing into those deep blue orbs. Then he fell prey to the strangest sensation: it was like being sucked in and at the same time falling into a bottomless pit. Harry felt himself falling for what seemed hours, until he found himself inside one of his memories, specifically the one he chose to show Tom. He revived it all, from the moment he reached Duddley, after the boy had said goodbye to his friends, till the discovery that Mrs Figg was a Squib. The only sign that showed the dark brunet was watching the same thing as himself were the sparks of foreign emotions he felt himself experiencing; emotions he recalled to not have experienced at the time.

When the memory ended, his vision darkened for a little while until he found himself in the bedroom of Grimmauld Place, looking at Tom, who was sporting an unreadable expression. His eyes, usually so inexpressive, were swirling with a myriad of emotions, but each one flashed over so quickly that the raven wasn’t able to interpret it, only acknowledge the fact that it had been there.

The silence stretched, with the dark brunet simply watching Harry with the same expression, without saying anything. Finally, just when the absence of words became oppressing enough to make the younger teen squirm uncomfortably, Tom spoke out.

“…The memory is a good one. There aren’t many details that can hinder you, but you need to change the beginning and the ending. That argument with your cousin will paint you in a bad light and the arrival of that Squib will raise too many questions. So, at the hearing, make it start with the darkening of the alley and end with you crouching over the boy.”

“…Okay.”

The raven debated inquiring about the other boy’s strange behaviour. From how he was acting, Harry knew the teen didn’t want to speak about it, but the curiosity was too great and so he ended up asking anyway.

He saw something flickered inside Tom’s eyes and knew that he was pondering if answer or simply ignore him. After a few tense moments, the dark brunet sighed, and in a strange voice, different from his usual charming and velvety one, he commented. “You didn’t have a nice childhood, did you?”

Harry was struck dumb by the teen’s words, and his first reaction was instinctual denial. “I don’t know what you are – ”

“Please Harry, don’t lie to me. Seeing memories through Legilimency is different from viewing them in a Pensieve: this method makes me experience not only your emotions, but your thoughts, too. So don’t bother with useless lies.” The tone was hard, and there was some hidden emotion that he couldn’t quite decipher.
This wasn’t exactly what he expected they would end up talking about. No, worse: this was the last thing he wanted to talk about. He never spoke about his childhood with anyone; not with Sirius, not with Ron and Hermione. He wasn’t about to discuss it with Tom, now!

He avoided the other boy’s gaze, displaying clearly how much he didn’t want to talk about this. He thought Tom would drop the subject like he had done on some other similar instances, so he was surprised when the boy didn’t do so and said something that made him turn quickly to look at him shocked.

“My own childhood wasn’t nice either. I was bullied by the kids at the orphanage and the adults treated me like I was the devil’s child.” He confessed with an emotionless voice.

Oh, that…was something he hadn’t know. He sounded a lot similar to his own childhood and that made something unpleasant stir inside of him. Something early similar at the rage he had felt that night towards Duddley, only this time was directed towards the ones who had ruined Tom’s childhood, not his cousin. And, at the same time, he felt like he could understand Tom better.

And maybe it was this that spurred him to do something he had never done before: talk about his life with the Dursley. In exchange Tom talked about his time in the orphanage. Both of them withheld some information, and they both were aware of this, but it was still more than what they ever talked about with anyone.

End of Flashback

The sound of people emerging from the Pensieve torn Harry away from his reminiscence. He recalled that day so well: it had been the turning point in his and Tom’s relationship. After that they had both been more open with each other and their talks had changed from simply hearing-related discussion to the sort he had with Ron and Hermione. They still hadn’t shared their most ‘sensitive’ childhood experiences – Harry hadn’t done this and he knew Tom hadn’t done that either – because their relationship hadn’t still reached that kind of trust, but they were on that way.

When even the last people came out of the basin, the raven started to discretely observe them. Most of them looked grave and troubled and Fudge, well, he looked like he was seconds from passing out. Each of them resumed their post, and then Amelia Bones’ booming voice rang through the courtroom. “We have watched the memory and reached a conclusion.” Here her hard gaze set on the Minister.

The man, still seeming on the verge of passing out, opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He tried a couple of times more, but when it began clear that nothing would happen, with a long-suffered sigh, Madam Bones took the matter in her hands. “For an unanimity decision of the Wizengamot, the accused is cleared of all charges.”

Sweet, warm relief flooded inside of Harry. He had done it, he had won! He was returning to Hogwarts! He wanted nothing more than rush out and talk to Tom – their plan had worked and he could already see the smug smirk on the other boy’s face and hear him say, in that his superior tone of his, that ‘of course it worked. It was my plan, after all.’ – but knew that he had to contain himself since he hadn’t been dismissed yet.

An elderly man rose swiftly from one of the far benches. Despite his age, he still looked intimidating and possessed a stern, practical air about him. From the elegance of his movements and the dignified way he stood up, it was obvious it was a Lord and, if the contempt with which regarded Fudge was any indication, he seemed to be one with quite a bit of power. “In the name of the Ministry, we of the Wizengamot wished to extend our apologies to Heir Potter for the unfairness of his trial. We were led
to believe a more grievous offence was made, instead of a simple case of underage magic’s use and we wish to commend you for your swiftness to react not only in defence of yourself, but also of the Muggle present during that attack.”

At that Fudge seemed to finally find his voice. “But how it’s possible that there were Dementors in that street?!” He screamed. “Dementors that attacked a young wizard and a Muggle at that?!!”

Nobody was able to respond to that. This was something Harry himself had wondered. At first he had thought they had been sent by Voldemort, but the more he mused about it, the more the idea seemed ludicrous; the Dark Lord wanted to kill him himself, sending Dementors after him made no sense.

Dumbledore, who had remained silent for the entire duration of the hearing, letting Harry deal with the proceedings as he wished, got up and addressed the audience. The raven had a sudden, terrible feeling that what the Headmaster was going to say would make the situation plummet down, and thanked Merlin the professor chose that moment, after he had been cleared, to speak – he had a feeling that his victory wouldn’t have been so easy otherwise.

“I think to have a good explanation for that.” Everyone in the room turned to watch him and Dumbledore continued in a clear, grave voice. “They must have been ordered to go there. I already gave you my views on this matter, Cornelius.”

“Yes, you have.” Said Fudge forcefully, but with a hint of uncertainty. “But I have no reason to believe that your views are anything other than bilge, Dumbledore. The Dementors have given no sign of deflections, other than this instance. All of them still follow the Ministry’s orders.”

“Then, we must enquire why somebody within the Ministry had ordered a pair of Dementors into that alleyway on the second of August.” Countered Dumbledore calmly.

At this, the witch who had remained in the shadows till then, leaned forward and Harry was finally able to see her. She looked like a flaccid, pale amphibian. Her entire demeanour and physical traits made her resemble a large toad and the black velvet bow perched atop her short, curly hair brought to mind a large fly on the verge of being caught by a long, sticky tongue. This similarity was so uncanny that Harry was took aback when she opened her mouth and, instead of the croak he expected, a fluttery, ridiculous girlish voice flowed out. “I’m sure I must have misunderstood you, Professor Dumbledore.” Her voice was sweet, honeyed even, but her eyes were as cold as ice. “So silly of me, but it sounded for a teensy moment as thought you were suggesting the Ministry of Magic had ordered the attack on this boy.” (Merlin, she sounded like she was talking to a toddler, thought Harry). The silvery laugh she then gave made all the hairs on the back of Harry’s head stand up and a dreary, foreboding feeling insinuated himself into his mind. He was sure that this wouldn’t be the last time he would see her and that thought, for some reason he wasn’t quite able to grasp, set him on edge.

“Considering the attack happened and posed that the Dementors are under Ministry’s control – ”

Was this really possible, thought Harry. It certainly made a lot more sense than a planned attack from Voldemort, but would the Minister truly be so desperate to be rid of him to condemn him to the Kiss? He looked over Fudge and shook his head. No, the man was too cowardly and weak willed to actually attempt something this extreme. Someone else, however…

He filled this information in his head for later. He would discuss the possibility with Tom once they returned to Grimmauld.

Meanwhile, the argument had escalated and, noticing the way it was protracting, he summarized they
would be at it for a while. Not desiring to remain there for more time than strictly necessary and since he had already been cleared, he got up, and catching the attention of the assembly, politely asked to be excused. Fudge gave him the permission to leave, albeit grudgingly, and then resumed to discuss with Dumbledore.

Feeling light and elated in lieu of his victory, Harry barely kept himself from running towards the door, and instead approached it at a more sedated pace. Opening it, he found Tom waiting for him alone on the other side.

Seeing him approach, the dark brunet commented lightly, “considering you are here and not being catered to Azkaban, I assume the hearing went well?” The tone was calm and collected, but there was a light in his eyes, that betrayed his concern. For some strange reason, the thought that Tom had been so worried that it showed in his eyes, warmed Harry, and gave life to all an array of emotions that the boy wasn’t yet ready to analyse. “It went perfectly, even better than we planned.”

He smiled then, and the smile he received in response stirred a pleasant, fluttering feeling in the deep of his stomach. “Good.”

“How come you are alone, anyway?” Questioned the raven, while they started to head towards the entrance.

“Weasley’s father had some business to attend to.” Answered the dark brunet in a dismissive manner. “I arranged to meet him in the Atrium.”

Nodding at the explanation, Harry began to recount how his trial went. The older teen listened to him without interrupting, even if he assumed a thoughtful expression on a couple of times during the story. “You were right, you know.” Said Harry once he concluded his narration. “I was subjected to full criminal trial; the entire Wizengamot was there.”

“Unfortunately.” The teen turned towards his shorter companion. “I know what that man did enraged you – and I assure you it had the same effect on me – but look at the bright side,” and here he smirked, “at least you made Fudge make a fool out of himself in front of the entire Wizengamot.”

They looked at each other and burst out laughing. Even Harry couldn’t help it; despite the problems the trial created him, watching the man dig his own grave had been extremely satisfying and completely worth it. And the fact that this made the dark brunet laugh was only a bonus in his opinion: Tom had a very nice laugh, he thought, a fond smile on his face.

…What? The raven shook his head. Again with those strange thoughts. What was happening to him?

While the younger wizard mused about it, the pair reached the floor above. Before he could leave the stairs, though, Tom stopped him. He was about to open his mouth to ask what was going on, when the dark brunet put a hand on his mouth and silenced him. When the raven looked at him confused, the boy simply pointed towards the opening of the stairs. Harry watched and saw something that made him immediately suspicious: Lucius Malfoy was prowling about on that floor, observing his surroundings as if assuring himself nobody else was coming. He exchanged a look with Tom and, when the boy took away his hand, asked. “What is Lucius Malfoy doing here?”

“I don’t know.” Whispered back Tom. “He’s a Death Eater, though, right? He’s probably here on Voldemort’s orders.”

The two teens continued to observe the man for a couple of minutes. They saw him head towards the end of the corridor, where they knew there was only a door, and then came back after some time had
passed. Harry remembered the voice announcing they had reached the Department of Mysteries, when they stopped on that floor. So Voldemort’s was interested in something that was there; he wondered what it was.

“Good, he’s gone. Let’s go.” Whispered Tom. They hurried towards the lift, fortunately not meeting Malfoy on their path, and reached the Atrium. They search for Mr Weasley didn’t produce results, showing that the man hadn’t yet arrived. Catching this opportunity, the raven informed the dark brunet of his intentions and headed towards the gold fountain, the other right behind him.

Up close he noticed just how misleading it looked from afar. The wizard’s smile appeared rather weak and foolish and the witch was very similar to a vapid contestant of some beauty contest. But the worst was the reproduction of the creatures’ behaviour towards humans: only the attitude of absolute servility of the elf was authentic; the goblin and centaur, on the other hand, were as far away as a reproduction of reality as they could be. Harry knew that none of the two races would ever look at wizards in that adoring way and a fleeting thought of how those races viewed that fountain – maybe that was one of the reason any relationship with them was so strained; it was no wonder if wizards thought of them in those terms – passed through his mind.

Something about his thoughts must have showed on his face because Tom followed his gaze and then said. “This is the perfect representation of the wizarding society, Harry. It’s formed by brainless wizards and vapid witches who believed their distort interpretation of the reality is the truth.”

Harry looked towards him and, when their eyes met, he knew he couldn’t do anything except agree with him. Tom was right, after all. The fountain was only one of the examples of this truth – the more obvious one, maybe – but there were many others.

A voice calling them diverted their attention: Mr Weasley had arrived. Tom moved in the man direction. “Well, Harry, are you coming?”

The raven smiled at him. “Yes.”

He followed Tom, but not before having turned back a last time to look at the fountain and throwing ten galleons into the pool; all the way thinking about how things needed to be different.

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think about the hearing? Was it good enough? I hope to have given it justice.
I'm sorry for the absence of a Tom's Pov, but he hadn't much to say in this chapter. But he will return to make his point know in the next one. And about this... Next one is Hogwarts! We'll get to see new characters (you know who I mean, I think), the reactions of the student population to Tom's presence and his sorting. Or at least this is what I'm planning now, but my chapters like to evolve on their own, so...
Well, anyway, the next chapter will be out sooner than this, I promise. :)

Winning the hearing put Harry in such a good mood that he decided to do something he had postponed for quite a lot of time: mending his relationship with Ron and Hermione. He had reached this conclusion after thinking about the oncoming year at Hogwarts and acknowledging the fact that it would be nearly impossible to spend the rest of it ignoring them. Yes, their betrayal still stung a bit, but he also knew that they deeply cared about him. He had seen them anxiously whispering between each other in the kitchen, upon his return, hunched over countless of old laws’ books; thing that said a lot about their true feelings, especially since one of them was Ron, who could be considered to have a sort of aversion for old, heavy books. If this wasn’t enough to convince him of their affection for him, the coveted guilty and concerned looks they had sent his way constantly during the last week, certainly did. So, seizing his chance before he could change idea or something else happened to distract him from acting on his decision, he approached his two best friends and proposed them to go and speak somewhere else, in a place where they wouldn’t be disturbed.

Ron offered his bedroom and so, the raven and Hermione followed the red-head on the room on the first floor. There Harry turned towards the two, truly observing them for the first time in more than a week. Both looked nervous, uneasily fidgeting and doing their best to avoid his gaze, probably worried he would start yelling or accusing them like the last time they spoke. Sensing that he needed to broach the subject if he wanted to accomplish something, he decided to do so cutting directly to the point. “I won’t apologize for what I said to you because your actions really hurt me, and I won’t easily forget the fact that you chose Dumbledore over me, but I’m ready to forgive you at least.”

Surprised, both Ron and Hermione looked at him not daring to hope that what the raven was saying...
was true, and he sent them a reassuring smile. His friends responded with a shaking smile of their own. Then, suddenly, Hermione broke down in tears. “Harry, we are really, really sorry. We wanted to write to you, truly. If only there had been the possibility to – ”

“But, this is the problem Hermione.” Interrupted flatly the raven. “It’s not the fact you didn’t write that angers me, but the fact that you didn’t even try to.” He exhaled slowly, trying to keep his now rising temper in check. He wanted to speak with his friends, resewn together their rapport, not shout at them again and further destroying it, but the way they were facing the problem was making this difficult. “If you had tried to write to me, like Sirius did, and your letter had been intercepted, then I would have understood. But you didn’t. You listened to Dumbledore and simply followed what he told you to do.”

“We are sorry – ” Began the read-head.

“You already said this.” Huffed the raven.

“And you are right.” Continued unperturbed Ron. “We should have, but we didn’t. We failed as best friends and we truly regret it, mate.”

Hermione nodded fervently beside him, continuing to cry silently.

Harry sighed tiredly. “Well, what’s done it’s done, I already said that I forgive you. Just… don’t do it again, please?”

“We won’t. It’s a promise.” They chorused. There was an awkward moment in which Harry looked at Ron and Hermione in silence, evaluating their sincerity, but then the three of them smiled at each other, the tense air clearing like a wisp of wind had suddenly dispersed it. After a little more than a week of not speaking to each other, their rapport had finally returned to what once was, or, well, was on the right path to return to normal. Both Ron and Hermione knew that, as the raven had said, even if he had forgiven them, he hadn’t forgotten what they did and that it would pass some time before their friend would start to trust them as much as before. Despite this, they were happy to finally have him back and were determined to show him that he could trust them; they wouldn’t mindlessly follow Dumbledore’s words again and risk losing Harry forever.

“Anyway,” grinned the read-head, talking animatedly, “it’s great that you had won. We were sure you would, though: you always get away with this kind of stuff.”

“Yes,” agreed Hermione, who seemed incredibly relieved for someone that shared the same conviction as the read-head, “they were bound to clear you: the laws were on your side, after all.”

“It’s thanks to Tom that I was able to win, though.” Confessed the raven. “If he hadn’t helped me preparing for it, I would have probably been expelled.”

The smile on Ron’s and Hermione’s faces vanished, as did their cheerfulness. They had never even entertained the idea that Harry could have been expelled. They had been worried, sure, but they had always believed their friend would have won. And yet, here he was, telling them that, if it hadn’t been for the help of Tom Riddle, he wouldn’t have been able to return to school with them. It was a scary thought.

Bravely, Ron tried to smile and move the topic onto more cheerful matters. “Well, at least now that you have won, you won’t have to spend as much time as before with him.” He commented in a positive tone of voice, injecting the ‘him’ with as much venom as he could muster.

“And why wouldn’t I want to?” Questioned stiffly Harry. He knew that his friends distrusted – and
also feared to a certain degree – Tom, but he had never had any intention to stop spending time with the dark brunet, even if he had finally made pace with Ron and Hermione; and the fact that they just supposed he would, greatly annoyed him.

Both looked at him, taken aback, and then Hermione, clearly confused by his statement, said, with the air of one trying to bring back a bit of sense in a discussion who felt completely devoid of it, “But, it’s Riddle.” Like this explained everything. And maybe it would have. A week ago.

“So?” Asked Harry, face blank.

“You can’t seriously be thinking to continue spending time with him!” Exclaimed the read-head flabbergasted.

“I know what you think about him and I don’t expect you to suddenly change your mind or treat him differently, but I want to point out that I consider him a friend, so I wish you would at least accept this fact.” Responded the raven with conviction. Frankly, he felt a little protective of his friendship with Tom, and maybe even of the boy himself. Just because he was the younger version of Voldemort, didn’t make him like the Dark Lord. Tom could be ruthless and cruel, sure, he wasn’t so naïve as not to know that, but he had also a good side hidden deep inside of him and Harry was sure that this version of Riddle could become a better person than his counterpart. The dark brunet just needed some guidance and the fact that nobody was willing to even give him a chance, just putting him on the same level as Voldemort, really upset him.

“Ok, Harry, we don’t like this, but we’ll try to accept your decision. Just… be careful.” Pleaded the bushy brunette.

“Don’t worry, Hermione, I will.” Reassured the raven.

“Well, then, I suppose we’ll need to get used to have that git around.” Mumbled dourly Ron.

“He’s not so bad, you know.” Defended Harry. “He’s not Voldemort.”

Ron and Hermione flinched at the name, and looked at him with eyes full of scepticism, but reluctantly accepted to try to see over their prejudice of him.

Pleased by how the conversation with his two friends went, Harry left the room promising to catch up with them later and headed towards his bedroom to change. There he found Tom; he was sitting on his bed reading a book, but something felt off. Harry couldn’t see very well the expression the other boy had, but from his posture, he could tell that he was irritated. And the fact that Tom hadn’t looked up at him when he heard him entering only contributed to confirm his suspicion.

Worried, the raven tried to catch the other teen attention. “Tom.” The dark brunet ignored him. He tried again. “Tom, are you alright?”

At this, the dark brunet lifted his eyes from the book to look at him and Harry felt a strange pang in his heart: Tom’s eyes were incredibly cold and emotionless, very much like the ones of his counterpart. It was the first time the other had ever directed that kind of gaze towards him; until now his deep blue eyes had always been much warmer when set on him.

“I’m feeling perfectly well, thank you.” Answered scathingly the teen, his tone as sharp and frigid as his eyes. “I imagine you are happy now that you won’t have to spend time with me anymore.”

“What?” Exclaimed Harry, shocked.

“You won the trial, so you don’t need me anymore. On top of that, you made peace with Weasley
and Granger. I suppose you are glad to be finally able to stop sharing the room with me and pretending to be my friend.” Continued the boy in a venomous tone. And Harry finally understood what the problem was.

Smiling in relief, surprising the other with his reaction, he locked his gaze with the deep ocean blue, turned nearly black, eyes of the other. Then, as a calmly as he could, he spoke. “You completely misunderstood the situation, you idiot.”

“Oh, really?” Questioned mockingly Tom, lifting an eyebrow, face again a blank mask; obviously he didn’t believe him.

“I choose to mend my rapport with Ron and Hermione because I know that, now that I’m sure I’ll return to Hogwarts, I won’t be able to spend the entire year avoiding them, since we are in the same House. But I never planned to stop spending time with you – or move back to Ron’s room, for that matter. And I never pretended to be your friend, I truly consider you one.” He strongly stated, sincerity showing in his bright, green eyes.

The other boy looked into them, apparently evaluating his grade of truthfulness. The raven held his breath, waiting for the other’s verdict. After a time that felt too long, the dark brunet seemed to accept his words as genuine; his features softened and an amused glint entered his deep, blue orbs. “So you never pretended to be my friend, did you?”

Relieved that there was no more trace of coldness in the other wizard’s voice, only deep amusement, showing that he was only teasing, Harry blushed. “Well, okay, I did.” He admitted, embarrassed. “But only at the beginning.”

“And you can’t blame me for this.” He added in a defensive tone when he saw the dark brunet’s smirk broadening. “I only knew you as the younger version of Voldemort at that time!” Pointed out the raven.

“Fair enough.” Conceded Tom, without erasing the smirk from his face.

“Anyway, Harry,” called the teen, catching the attention of the younger boy, who frozen mid-way while changing to look at him. “Would you mind showing me the memory of your hearing?”

“No.” Answered immediately the raven, despite being a bit surprised by the request. “But why do you want to see it?”

“I just wish to see for myself how much of a fool Fudge made out of himself.” Explained Tom. “Your tale made me curious. I’m sure his actions had been deeply amusing.” Commented, dark eyes glinting.

Grinning in remembrance, the raven agreed to show him the memory and so they spent the rest of the morning laughing about Fudge and exchanging impression about the hearing, the disagreement being quickly forgotten.

They were just heading down for lunch, discussing the toad-woman and the speech made by Dumbledore, when Harry remembered what he had meant to discuss with Tom. He told him about the theory that the Dementors had been sent by someone working for the Ministry, explaining his reasoning, and asked for his opinion. The dark brunet contemplated this for a long moment and then shared his thoughts. “I think it’s possible.” He said, a pensive look still fixed on his features. “Fudge is the classic spineless politician who only cares about himself and his career. He doesn’t possess the courage necessary to devise something like this – much less to act upon it – but someone else might.”
Then, turning towards the raven, “have you discussed this with anybody else?”

“No, only with you. I very much doubt that I will be taken seriously, if I were to discuss this with anyone else.” Muttered bitterly the raven.

“Mmh, that’s unfortunately true.” Agreed the older teen. “Well, as for now we can do nothing except be careful. Since we’re going to stay in Hogwarts for the rest of the year this shouldn’t be a problem, though.” He reassured him. “The Ministry can’t interfere there.”

The raven silently nodded, but couldn’t help the feeling of deep uneasiness that settle itself inside of him at Tom’s words.

The rest of the summer days passed incredibly fast. The cleaning session were still in full activity, with great annoyance of every teen bar Fred and George, who kept nicking a lot of things with various grades of danger to use for their inventions.

With great chagrin of everyone, and relief on Harry’s part, Tom skipped nearly all the sessions and often took the raven with him. During those times the boys continued to exchange little titbits about their childhood, and even something about their Hogwarts years. This had the result of bringing them even more close, with great displeasure of the Order’s members. As a result, the wariness and distrust showed towards the dark brunet increased; Sirius, Ron and Hermione became especially vocal about their discontentment. To assuage their worry, the raven tried to spend a great amount of time with them, too. Unfortunately this ended up not working very well, because Tom always insisted to be present, claiming that, since they were people who were of great importance to Harry, he might as well learn to tolerate them. The raven was glad for the effort the other boy was willing to put forth, but since the others weren’t reserving him the same courtesy, it all ended up being for nothing; with Harry trying to have a normal conversation in a room whose atmosphere was so heavy with tension to border on suffocating, and where the exchanges of dark and distrustful glares were the norm.

Dumbledore hadn’t show himself since the end of the hearing and the raven’s annoyance with the Headmaster kept increasing with every passing day. If this wasn’t enough, his scar started to give sporadic burst of hot pain and the nightmares began to re-show themselves in the form of visions of the long mysterious dark corridor.

It was in this kind of atmosphere that the Hogwarts’ letters came, bringing a mixture of good and bad news.

That morning, Harry was in his bedroom with Tom and both were peacefully reading books. Despite not possessing the kind of obsessive love for knowledge the dark brunet or Hermione had, there were a number of subjects the raven was interested reading about and it so happened that this specific book’s topics were part of this category. The tome was an old one the dark brunet had found in the Black’s library early in his stay at Grimmauld and had recently recommended it to him, after the raven had shared his interest in Defence Against the Dark Arts. In the beginning Harry had decided to try and read it just out of pure curiosity, but then had found himself really taken by the read: the book covered a lot of offensive and defensive spells that the young wizard had never even heard about, probably because of their extremely advanced level, and explained in great detail how to perform, and the effects of, the various spells. The raven had already stored in his memory many of them to try once he returned to school.
While they were so immersed, a knock sounded from the door and when Harry went to see who it was, found Ron holding two Hogwarts’ envelopes. He accepted them and waved Goodbye to his friend, closing the door beside him.

“Are the letters from Hogwarts?” Asked Tom from the bed, closing his book and depositing it on the bedside table.

“Yes,” confirmed the raven, “I forgot they were bound to come soon.” He passed Tom his and opened his own, noticing that there were only two new addictions in term of books that year.

“Mmh, I see that not much had changed in fifty years.” Commented the dark brunet.

Watching the teen scan his letter made Harry remember that him and Tom would share classes coming September, independently from the House the older teen would end up in – and considering it was Tom, he was practically certain that the boy would end up in Slytherin again. “Say, Tom.” Began Harry, catching the other boy attention, who lifted his eyes from the parchment to look at him. “Wouldn’t you bore yourself at Hogwarts? You had already frequented your fifth year, did you not?”

“Well, yes, I suppose.” He answered indifferently, putting the letter aside. “But not more than usual.” He sighed. “In truth, I had always been pretty advanced for my year and classes had always bored me. For this reason, I usually tended to occupy my time doing research and study other topics that particularly piqued my interest. This year would probably be the same.”

“Though…” And there he glanced at the letter. “I must say that it may not be quite so bad, after all. I saw you chose Divination as an elective and this is a subject I never studied or had any interest in, so maybe I will finally find a class that won’t bore me.”

The raven scoffed. “I seriously doubt it. Divination is a joke: the only thing our professor is interested in is predicting my death.”

“I see.” His eyes seemed to harden for a moment, then shrugged. “Then, I suppose I should simply find something else to occupy my time with.”

“What kind of electives did you chose in your time?” Questioned Harry, curious.

“Arithmancy, Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. I had always been interested in the first two: the first because it’s useful for creating your own spells and the second for the various method in which runes can be applied. The last one I chose only because I thought knowledge of creatures could have been useful if I ever chose to travel.”

“You seem to really like the first two.” Commented Harry, noticing the undertones of passion in the teen’s voice when he spoke of that two subjects.

“Well, I was always attracted by the idea of creating my own spells. And for Runes…they have so many uses. You can create barriers, powerful wards and everlasting spells, just to mention some.” Explained the dark brunet, dark eyes alight with a passion that Harry had seen other times, when the older wizard talked about a topic that really interested him.

“I’m sorry that you wouldn’t be able to continue those classes.” Said the raven, feeling a bit guilty. From the other speech, it was obvious that the other teen really loved those two subjects.

The taller boy blinked. “Oh, don’t worry, Harry, I intend to take the O.W.L.s for them anyway. I’m sure that next year Dumbledore would let me follow those lessons. And if not, I’ll simply self-study again and then take the N.E.W.T exams.” Assured him the dark brunet, waving away his apology.
“Wait.” Exclaimed the raven surprised. “You can take the exam for a subject even if you didn’t follow the class?”

“Of course. You only need your Heads of House’s permission.” Explained Tom.

“Well, I’m glad. At least you won’t miss something you really like because of me.” He sighed and mumbled to himself. “I wish I had picked Ancient Runes, too. They seemed really interesting and would have certainly been better that Divination.”

He thought to have spoken low enough, but apparently Tom had heard him anyway, because asked “and why didn’t you?”


“Why didn’t you choose Ancient Runes as an elective?” Repeated the dark brunet.

Harry blushed a little. “Well, when we had to pick our electives I didn’t know what the classes would entertain and I didn’t have anyone to advise me, so I ended up choosing the same electives as Ron.” Confessed. “And the year after, when the new courses started, from how Hermione explained them, they didn’t seem so interesting.”

“I image Granger described Ancient Runes as a subject where you had simply to learn how to read runes.” He deduced, contempt dripping from every word, showing what he thought about Hermione’s way to view things.

“Pretty much.” Admitted the raven. Hermione had always been one to like more the theoretical part of things and that was why she trusted so much books.

A long-suffered sigh escaped Ton’s lips. “Of course.” He mocked. Then he smiled at Harry. “If you like I can teach them to you.”

“Really?” Asked Harry, hopeful.

“Certainly.” Grinned the dark brunet. “I already told you that I would need to find something to occupy my time and teaching you Runes will surely accomplish this.”

“Oh, so I am only a mean to alleviate your boredom, am I?” Teased the raven.

“But obviously.” Responded the other teen, in kind. “And maybe I’m doing this so we could share one more class the next year.” Continued, Tom, amused.

Harry laughed. “Tom, I don’t think I will be good enough to take the O.W.L. exam and pass it: I have three years’ worth of program to catch up to.”

“Trust me, Harry.” Said the dark brunet, suddenly serious again. “If you apply yourself and with me as your teacher you’ll be able to pass the exam with no problems.”

“If you say so…” It was obvious, by his expression, that he didn’t agree with the older wizard’s statement.

Leaving convincing the raven up as a lost cause, the young Dark Lord, decided to adopt another approach. “Promise me you’ll at least try it.”

Harry smiled. “Ok, I promise to try.”

“Good.”
Tom’s Pov

“Good.”

Tom was glad to have convinced Harry to try taking the exam of Ancient Runes the coming June. The raven always downplayed his own abilities – something that the dark brunet was planning to make him grow out of – but Tom knew the teen was smart and he was sure that, with his help, he would be able to pass the exam. Sure, he needed to catch up on three years’ worth of study, but he believed Harry could do it if he applied himself enough. Then, the next year, they would be both able to follow the course; Dumbledore was bound to give him the permission with the raven also taking the class.

He had been admittedly surprised when the boy had shared his interest in Runes, since he had never made mention of it before. Considering his only source of information had been Granger, though, it was no wonder the young wizard had never showed any trace of appeal in the subject whatsoever before now. The girl was a too theoretical oriented person: she could hardly see further than the information held in the books. And he was sure that her explanations had reflected this; probably some passionate speech about how Runes were fascinating as they represented a language all of their own. A speech that could have never interested his Raven, being the teen a more practical type of guy.

Nevertheless, he should probably be grateful for this situation: it gave him the perfect excuse to spend time with Harry, after all. And now that the boy was again on speaking terms with his friends, distancing him again from them would be considerably harder, so every excuse that let him pass as much time as possible alone with the raven was beneficial. And…well, he could pretend that this desire came only from wanting to have the teen on his side, fighting for him; but if he had to be honest with himself, he had a feeling that this wasn’t the complete truth. He still wanted the raven, that hasn’t changed from the first time he saw the boy, but although in the beginning he had desired him as a follower, now he was sure he wanted him in a different way, he just didn’t know in which one!

It had been the teen’s reconciliation with Weasley and Granger that made him see that.

That day, when he had seen Harry talking with the two and asking to go speak in a different, more private, location, he had known that after that discussion the three would have returned to be friends. It was then the idea of Harry wanting nothing more to do with him had started to insinuate itself into his mind. The hearing had stopped looming over the raven since the teen had won, and so the boy didn’t need him anymore. There was nothing left to force the younger wizard to spend time with him. It hadn’t seemed like the teen minded his company as of later and had always acted like he considered him a friend. Even so, despite this and the self-assurance he possessed in being able to always understand when one was lying, in that moment he doubted Harry’s feeling and actions were genuine. And so, inexplicably, hurt flooded inside his soul, pain filling him completely; then anger flared up. Feeling more at ease with the latest, he had let it grow until he had lashed out at Harry. Then, when the raven had assured him of the sincerity of his actions and his intention to remain his friend – and, using Legillimency, he had saw this to be the truth – overwhelming relief had washed over him.

At the time he hadn’t questioned the reason behind what he was feeling, he was just so happy to know that he still had Harry – even if he had to share him with two other people. It was only later, in
the darkness of their shared bedroom that he took notice of his unusual behaviour. He had felt hurt, when previously he would have felt only annoyance, and lashed out in anger at Harry, when before he would have simply recollected himself and redoubled his efforts to manipulate him to his side. He had acted so unlike himself and this worried him. It wasn’t like him becoming so emotionally invested: he didn’t care about other people; and yet, that was exactly what had happened. He had become to care about Harry. This sudden realization brought him an incredibly clarity of mind: Harry belonged to him and nobody would stop him from taking the boy.

He would need to restart nearly from the beginning, but at least this time he had the raven trust and friendship, so taking – and keeping – him all to himself should be easier. He decided to also change his tactic, this time around. The renewed friendship between the three teens had brought new players into his game and his plan had to change in consequence. Knowing how much his Raven cared about those people made him decide to charm them. If they started to trust him, then it would be simpler to take his boy away. And so, here he was, willingly spending time with them, in his Raven company, trying to tolerate the idiots. It was tremendously annoying, but it also had its perks: since he was being perfectly polite with them, they couldn’t openly attack him, having to content themselves with throwing him angry and distrustful glares. Their problem – and his major gain out of those tedious chats – was that, for how much they tried, they weren’t discrete enough and Harry was always perfectly aware of what they were doing. And since his behaviour was irreproachable, the ones who ended up being in the fault were them. Such a pity, wasn’t it?

A loud, excited scream tore him apart from his musings. Curious, his Raven had approached the door and he was able to open it just in time for Granger to burst in, brandishing her Hogwarts’ envelope. “Harry, did you receive it?” She squealed, excitement clear in her voice and demeanour, rendering her even more annoying.

“Received what?” The raven seemed as confused as him. He distractedly wondered what could have made Granger so enthusiastic, and then it hit him: the Prefect badge. He had forgotten that in fifth year would be appointed new Prefects and, since it didn’t concern him – not only Dumbledore would never assign him the position, he was also a transfer student who still didn’t possess a House – he hadn’t bothered thinking much about it. Now that Granger brought it up, though, he found himself wondering. Following logic, by what he had gathered from Harry and the other people when they spoke about about the teen’s Hogwarts years, the male Prefect position should have gone to his Raven, and yet there was no badge in his envelope. Why?

“The Prefect badge, Harry!”

Harry’s confusion morphed into comprehension and then a flicker of something – was it delusion? – that Granger wasn’t observant enough to catch, passed through his eyes. “Oh. No.” Yes, it was obviously delusion. The slight flatness of his voice was sign enough.

“No?” Now it was the girl’s turn to be confused. “But I thought – ” And then she stopped. “But if not you, then who – ?”

Another shout, a shocked one, this time coming from down the hallway, diverted their attention. Harry and the girl hurried towards it – the first only sparing him a questioning glance – and he, not having anything better to do, decided to follow them, as his Raven had wordlessly asked him to do.

The shout brought them to the read-head’s bedroom and the apparent new appointed prefect: Ronald Weasley. Inside there were even his two twin brothers and the shout had apparently come from one of them, since the younger boy seemed frozen on the spot, incapable of producing any coherent thought, never mind anything resembling even vaguely a word.
“How is this possible?” Screamed one of the twins – he hadn’t bothered with learning to tell them apart, so he couldn’t tell which one was speaking.

Then, noticing their presence, they rounded on Harry. “We were sure you would have received it.” Exclaimed the other twin.

“We were certain Dumbledore would have chosen you!” Echoed the first.

“Ron is Prefect?” Asked the girl, stunned.

Mmh… mused Tom, so Dumbledore had chosen Weasley. Why? Comparing Harry and that boy, it was apparent that his Raven was the better choice for the Prefect position – and he wasn’t even the only one to think this – and yet, the old man had chosen the red-head. What could have been his reason?

An argument broke out between the twins, Granger, and the new appointed Prefect – about the red-head supposed ability to fill that role – but he wasn’t listening, too absorbed watching the expression on Harry’s face. It seemed like being passed over on the Prefect position by his best friend had hit him pretty hard and he couldn’t decipher the motive: there was something in his eyes that suggested it wasn’t the position in itself his Raven was interested in. Meanwhile the pointless quarrel had escalated – with the twins mocking relentlessly their brother, Granger making pathetic attempts to assure Weasley she believed him capable of doing a good job, and this one becoming more and more offended as the time went on, understanding that she wasn’t being truthful – and it went on until Mrs Weasley entered with a fresh laundered pile of clothes, talking about how they should give her their letter so she could go to Diagon that afternoon to buy their things. When the ‘great news’ was conveyed to her, she became ecstatic with joy and started to blab about how proud she was, how everyone in the family had also been a Prefect (at which the twins made their outrage known – “What are Fred and I, next-door neighbours?”) and asking what he wished as a reward. After having received her answer, she bustled out of the room, tears of joy still fresh in her eyes. Weasley followed her soon after so he could tell her what broom model he wished to receive as a gift, leaving him and Harry with the twins and Granger. The two red-heads mocked their brother and the girl after she told them that, as Prefects, she and the youngest male Weasley could put them in detention, if they didn’t behave, showing just how much of an ill-thought appointing Weasley as Prefect had been. He had heard about the rowdiness of the Weasley twins and, though they made clear with their behaviour they would have followed, and respected, Harry’s authority, it was equally as obvious they had no intention to do the same thing with their younger brother’s one, or Granger’s.

The twins Disapparated soon after and he returned to his bedroom, followed by Harry. As soon as the raven closed the door, he turned towards him.

“Are you all right, Harry?” He knew he wasn’t, but starting with this question would show the teen that he, contrary to his friends, had noticed there was something wrong and would listen to his problems.

“What?” The raven looked up at him, startled. “Oh, yes.”

Tom gazed into the younger’s eyes and saw the hidden disappointment lurking behind them. “Harry…” He began, in a warning voice.

The raven sighed, understanding that he knew was lying. “It’s about the Prefect position… I’m just disappointed to not have gotten it, I guess.”

“I had suspected it was about that. But I don’t understand why; you didn’t seem to care much about being Prefect before now.”
“And I don’t.” Agreed Harry. “It’s just…” He avoided his gaze for a second, softly biting his lip, seeming to struggle with something – probably the decision of telling him the truth or not – and then locked again their eyes together. “My father was Head Boy.”

Tom looked confused. That wasn’t the answer he was expecting and didn’t understand what that had to do with Harry’s reaction. “I don’t – ”

“I just feel like he would undoubtedly be disappointed to know that I didn’t receive the badge.” The raven sent him a small sad smile.

Oh, now he understood. He had never cared about his family – the woman who died for her weakness, only because the man she loved left her; and the father who had never wanted him – but he knew that for his Raven it was different: his parents had died for him, so it was obvious the teen would care about them and wished to make them proud, despite not remembering them.

The sad smile on Harry’s face made a strange feeling stir inside of him and he found himself advancing forward, cradling a hand through the wild, black hair. “I’m sure they would have been proud of you, regardless of you becoming a Prefect or not.” He said, voice warm, soft.

The raven’s eyes widened. Luminous green and impossibly bright, they bored into him and he felt the same subtle warm and powerful sensation he always experienced standing beside the younger teen increase and fill him. And this time, he was sure that he wasn’t the only one experiencing this; Harry’s eyes had widened more and his pupils had dilated. Suddenly an intense, burning need rose inside of him and he lowered his face towards his Raven – to do what he wasn’t really sure about – when a loud knock coming from the door broke them apart and out of the trance they had fallen in.

There was an awkward silence and then… “I’ll go open the door.”

He nodded, watching the younger wizard approaching the entrance of their bedroom and opening it, revealing Weasley and Granger. A surge of hate of an intensity he had rarely felt before burst inside of him and his eyes flashed red. How dare they! They had just stopped him from… from doing what exactly? He didn’t know. He just felt that they had interrupted a truly important moment. And for what? Apparently just to say that Mrs Weasley wanted them to pack everything that night, so that the next day they could leave early; like they wouldn’t have done so anyway! Mentally seething, Tom put on a cordial smile, and acting like his usual composed and polite self, approached Weasley and Granger. “Then it’s better to start pack immediately, isn’t it?” He stated in a poised tone, hiding his anger. “We wouldn’t want Mrs Weasley mad with us, would we?”

“He’s right.” Added the Harry. “You know she won’t be happy if she doesn’t see us packed when she comes back.”

The idea of the Weasley matriarch being crossed with them didn’t appeal to anyone and so they hurriedly get to work, Granger and Weasley quickly saying their goodbyes and heading towards their respective rooms. The packing distracted him a little from his anger, but what had nearly happened with the raven before continued to occupy his mind for the rest of the day.

Mrs Weasley returned around six, carrying with her the needed supplies of every teen. She quickly distributed them to their respective owners and then went down to prepare for the party of the two new appointed Prefects.
When he and Harry came down, they saw the basement decorated with a huge banner proclaiming the achievement of Weasley and Granger. Many of the Order where there and, while his Raven mingled with the others, he took advantage of this opportunity to eavesdrop and gain more information about the Order’s plans. He stayed in the room, gaining little to no information, until he saw Lupin and Black quickly leaving the room and noticed Harry was nowhere in sight. Thinking the teen had preceded him to the bedroom, and aware of the fact he wouldn’t learn anything more than what he had gathered till now remaining where he was, he headed that way, only to stumble upon the scene of Lupin trying to calm down a nearly hysterical Mrs Weasley, Black looking vacantly at a point in the floor of the drawing room and Harry standing awkwardly in the doorway. Approaching him, he whispered “what happened?”

Not diverting his eyes from the scene in the room, the boy answered. “Mrs Weasley tried to get rid of the Boggart by herself and… it didn’t go well.” He stopped for a moment and then went on. “It took the semblance of the corpses of everyone she cares about. Mine, too.” He added the two last words with a strange inflection in his voice, like he wasn’t completely sure of what to feel about this. Tom, mind lingering on the idea of Harry’s corpse didn’t say anything. He didn’t know why, but the idea of the raven dying didn’t sit well with him and gave birth to a strange sense of uneasiness that took root deep inside of him. Putting it down to desire of not losing the wonderful sensation of the teen’s magic merging with his own, he continued towards the bedroom, the raven following him after a couple of seconds.

That night, lying in bed, he kept pondering on the strange reactions and feelings he always experienced in Harry’s presence, falling into a restless sleep a great deal later than the subject of his musings.

That night’s dream brought with him awareness and answers to his questions, leaving behind as proof his sweating skin and a too noticeable dampness in his south regions. The dream hadn’t been rich of detail, but the form of his Raven and the act they were engaged in had been even too clear. Everything had felt so real: he could still feel the sweetness of his boy’s taste, the addicting quality of his fragrance and the softness of his skin. And it was then that another question surfaced: his unusual reactions to Harry, the strange emotions he felt for the first time in his life… was all of this Lust?

The morning after was an absolute nightmare. Grimmauld was shrouded in chaos. Despite having presumably packed their trunk the evening before, everyone was running around the house to make last time preparations. He had woken early as usual and, after waking Harry, too, the two of them had gone down to eat breakfast. The other teens, though, had all woken up so late that, for the time everyone’s trunks had been gathered in the hall, they were in serious danger to lose the train.

They reached King’s Cross on foot, many people of the Order accompanying them – Black in his Animagus form included – to work as Harry’s guard and his escort – meaning they were there to assuring themselves that nothing would happen to the raven and that he behaved himself.

As he had predicted, they arrived on the platform just in time for the adults to give the teens a quick goodbye and for them to climb the train. Granger and Weasley were obviously going to head to the Prefect’s carriage for the meeting, so he found himself in the company of his Raven and the Weasley girl in search for an empty compartment; the two Prefects promising to re-join them later as they headed towards the head of the train. The idea of spending the entire ride in the company of the raven’s annoying friends didn’t appeal to him at all, but he knew that, if he wanted to spend time with the younger wizard some sacrifices on his part were necessary. Speaking of Harry… now that
he had realized it was lust he felt for the boy, every time his gaze lingered on the raven, he couldn’t help to notice all the little things that made him appealing: his short, but lithe frame; his bright Avada eyes; his midnight black hair, so in contrast with his pale skin…

He mentally shook himself out of this line of thoughts. he couldn’t let himself getting lost in this kind of musings, least he risked losing control of himself and end up doing something he would surely regret later, like pinning Harry against the nearer available wall and kissing him. Well, he wouldn’t regret the kiss, of this was sure, but certainly the consequences of it. He knew his Raven felt attracted to him, at least a little – all the blushing he was prone to was proof enough – but he didn’t know if the teen would be favourable to a rapport of that kind, so he had to slowly ease him into it, least he risked losing not only the chances to bed him, but also his friendship and trust.

Trying to distract himself from these dangerous thoughts, he started to analyse his surroundings. The train, and the type of students, hadn’t changed a lot from his time. The train was as beautiful as he remembered and the students the same mindless sheep. As they passed, he noticed that nearly everyone was pointing at Harry and whispering with their neighbour. Lowering down to whisper in the teen’s ear he asked. “It’s always like this when you are concerned?”

The raven turned towards him and, with a grim smile answered. “Always.”

He hummed. “Then I can understand why it bothers you so.”

They treaded down the corridor until the very last carriage. There a blond boy with a round face was standing still in the middle of the passageway, a hand on his trunk and the other around a struggling toad, looking uneasily around.

“Neville.” Called the read-head girl.

“Oh… hi Harry, hi Ginny and…” The boy looked confused at the dark brunet standing beside the raven.

Tom turned towards Harry and lifted an eyebrow. “A friend?”

“Yes. He’s in Gryffindor, in the same year as Ron, Hermione and I.” He answered. Then turning towards the boy. “Hi, Neville, this is Tom.”

The dark brunet offered his hand and with a polite smile introduced himself. “Tom Gaunt. I’m a new transfer student. I’ll be in fifth year, too.”

The blond boy shook nervously his hand. “Oh, I’m Neville. Neville Longbottom.”

“A pleasure.” Said, hiding his contempt.

The Weasley girl shot him a dark look, but then turned to speak with Longbottom. “So, Neville, what are you doing here?”

“Well, I was searching for a seat, but I couldn’t find one…” He explained, seeming a lot more at ease talking with the girl.

The young witch peered into the compartment behind him and commented. “Here there’s space. There’s only Loony Lovegood inside…”

He saw Harry frown a little at the name the Weasley girl gave them and the round-faced teen mumbled something about not wanting to disturb anyone. Laughing a little, the read head assured him that the person inside was all right. She then opened the door to ask if they could sit there.
Inside there was a strange girl of probably the same age as the youngest Weasley, with long pale hair and big, blue eyes. She was giving out an aura of distinct dottiness and looked to not be completely there. The girl nodded mutely and they entered. He took the seat near the window; Harry sat beside him, with Longbottom on his other side, and the youngest Weasley took place beside the strange girl.

Taking out a book from his trunk, he began to read, letting the idle chatter wash over him. He didn’t take notice of what the others were doing or saying, until the blonde boy took out a small grey cactus covered in boils. The teen started to passionately explain what the plant was and its proprieties, when he decided to give a demonstration of its defence mechanism. Sensing danger, the dark brunet put an arm around the small raven, who had been dumped with the other boy’s toad, and pulled him towards himself, raising a shield charm just as Longbottom prodded one of the small cactus pus. The plant immediately showed his rumoured great defence mechanism, spurting a thick, green, stinking liquid from every boil on his surface and hitting everything and everyone except him and Harry. Lowering his shield, but still keeping Harry safely tucked against him, he levelled the idiot boy with a cold look. “Maybe next time, you should inform yourself of the extension of the defence mechanism of the subject in question, before inducing it.”

Longbottom blushed and started to blab out apologies. He reluctantly released the raven in his arms, waving away his thanks. In that moment the door of the compartment opened and a black, long haired Ravenclaw girl peered inside.

“Oh… hello, Harry.” She spoke nervously. And then, looking at the mess in the compartment, added. “Bad time?”

The raven seemed surprised to see the girl, but greeted her anyway, and she left soon after. Tom kept looking in the direction she had left for a few seconds longer. That girl… he didn’t know who she was, but he had seen the way she had looked at his Raven: she clearly liked him. The good news was that Harry didn’t seem to reciprocate her feelings; but he would have to limit the contacts between them anyway. He was unfortunately unaware of the other sexual preferences – despite the attraction the teen displayed towards himself, the raven hadn’t show any indication of noticing other boys – so, it was best to kept the Ravenclaw girl away from him, just to be on the safe side.

The Weasley girl used a ‘Scourgify’ to clean the compartment and the conversation resumed, Tom reburying himself in his book. Granger and Weasley came back around lunch, bringing news of the other Prefects’ identities with them. He disinterestedly listened to the teens commenting the other Houses’ choices and lamenting the Slytherin’s one. Granger started to reprimand Weasley for his desire to ‘abuse’ of his position – like the petty things the read-head wanted to do could cause any real harm – when the door opened for the third time that day. The new arrival was a boy who greatly resembled Abraxas Malfoy, flanked by two goons, who were clearly a Crabbe and a Goyle. Tom kept to himself as an argument began to form, sure that his intervention would not be necessary; but, when this Malfoy, who clearly showed himself as a spoiled and not particularly talented wizard as soon as he opened his mouth, taunted his Raven, insinuating Harry’s inability to fulfil the Prefect position, he spoke up. “It’s amusing that someone like yourself, who clearly hides himself behind his father reputation, is feeling entitled to mock a person so obviously above him in every aspect.”

Malfoy flushed and rounded on him. “And who should you be?”

“Tom Gaunt, a new transfer student.” He stated in a cool and collected voice. “And I’m not someone you would like to cross, Malfoy.” He added, a vicious shark smirk forming on his face. The boy’s eyes widened as in realization and then he went pale, before swiftly leaving the compartment, bringing his two goons with him. “I’ll see you later in Slytherin, Malfoy.” Said the dark brunet to the platinum haired boy as a farewell.
The raven sighed beside him, looking at him with worry in his brilliant green eyes. “Tom…”

“Oh, don’t worry, Harry. Even if news of my presence reaches Him, it won’t be a problem. I doubt he would even believe Malfoy’s words.” Tom assured the younger wizard, nonchalantly.

Harry didn’t look convinced. “Okay, but promise me you’ll be careful anyway. Don’t give yourself away so easily.”

He smiled warmly. “I promise.”

“So... you think you’ll end up in Slytherin after the sorting, Tom?” Asked tentatively Longbottom.

“Yes, he’s a dirty snake, Neville; didn’t you noticed?” Spat venomously Weasley. The blond boy was taken aback by the glares – laced with a touch of fear – directed in the dark brunet’s direction by the three teens sitting in front of him.

“Don’t listen to them, Neville. They just don’t like him.” Said Harry, sending a warning glance towards his friends.

“Harry, how could you defend him!?” Shouted the Weasley girl, looking betrayed.

“We already discussed this, Ginny. I trust Tom and I don’t care if you despise him or don’t want to spend any amount of time in his company. I won’t stop being his friend, it doesn’t matter what reason you’ll bring up for me being best to do so.” He stated with determination.

Granger swiftly intervened in defence of their stance and the dark brunet decided that it was time to put an end to this. “Do you really want to start an argument about this, now? In front of them?” Tom questioned, indicating Longbottom and Lovegood.

The three dropped the topic, but without stopping sending hateful glares in his direction. Alternating his confused stare between the raven and the dark brunet, and the other three, the bond boy was surprised when Tom addressed him, answering his question. “About what you asked me, Longbottom, yes, there is a great possibility that I would end in Slytherin. Though, I suppose Ravenclaw could be a possibility, too.” He mused.

He doubted the other Houses would ever even be taken into consideration, but, he must admit that, given the possibility to choose, he would ask to be put in Gryffindor. He never thought he would say something like this, but since Gryffindor was his Raven’s House, that made it a desirable option. In these last weeks he had gotten used to wake up with Harry on the bed beside his – it always filled him with a deep sense of happiness seeing the peaceful sleeping face of the younger teen – and he would certainly feel the loss of it, should he end up in another House. Moreover, being a Gryffindor, like his Raven, would have the added bonus of making Dumbledore less suspicious of him. He doubted would obtain his wish to wear a red and gold tie this coming year, though: not only he didn’t possess the qualities necessary to be a lion, he also despised many of them. He was brave, sure, but didn’t possess any selflessness or chivalry; he just portrayed it when it was beneficial to him. Instead, he was cunning, sly, and ambitious. He was a Slytherin through and through, and he knew it. Even so, a part of him kept hoping he would be able to convince the Hat to put him in Gryffindor.

“Mmh, I don’t think you could really be a Ravenclaw.” The dreamy voice of the blonde girl reached him through the swirling storm of his thoughts; blue eyes were watching him unblinking. “You valued power just as much as wisdom.”

Feeling inexplicably transparent in front of the clear gaze of the young girl, Tom uneasily adverted
his gaze. “Yes, I suppose you are right in your assumption.”

An awkward silence fell in the compartment, as Lovegood just hummed at him and returned to her magazine. Deciding to ignore the odd and unsettling girl in front of him, he resumed to read, too. Some time had passed, when he felt a weight settle on his shoulder. Lifting his eyes from the page he was currently on and looking sideways, he noticed that Harry had fallen asleep against him. A sudden burst of warmth spread through him at the sight, making him smile softly, and, ignoring the glares Granger and the two Weasley were sending towards him again, he resettled himself so that the raven would be more comfortable. From the orange light filtering through the window, there was still quite a bit of time before they reached the castle; there was no harm in letting the younger teen sleep for a bit.

Harry slept for the rest of the ride and woke up only when Tom gently shook him up, to advise they were pulling into the Hogsmeade’s station. They changed, got off the train and headed towards the stagecoaches that would carry them to the castle. Reaching them, Tom tilted lightly his head to the side, starring at the skeletal horses positioned between the shafts. Thestrals. He had red about them, but had never seen a living exemplar until now. Back in his time they didn’t have them, so he was intrigued by the fact that fifty years later Hogwarts possessed quite a number of this creatures, enough to pull every single carriage that had to head towards the castle. So engrossed in his contemplation he didn’t notice the raven freezing beside him, until the teen caught his attention. “What are those things?” He asked softly.

Looking sideways, he saw Harry’s gazed locked on the glossy white pupil of the winged horse, confusion clear in the bright emerald eyes. “Do you mean the thestrals?”

“The what?”

“The thestrals. It’s the name of the creatures pulling the carriages.” He explained plainly. “I suppose this is the first time you see them?”

The raven nodded. “But I don’t understand. Why use these strange horses if the coaches are perfectly able to pull themselves?”

The dark brunet chuckled and the other turned to look at him strangely. “The carriages never pulled themselves, Harry. Those thestrals had always been the ones to do it.”

“But – ”

“There is a reason you never saw them before: they can only be seen by someone who had seen death.” Then he added gently. “You saw that boy die at the end of last year, didn’t you?”

Pain and guilt flashed through the raven eyes as he nodded. “…”

“Well, then, let’s get up. There is no use in waiting there.” The dark brunet smiled warmly and was glad when the other returned it, catching his deliberate change of topic.

They soon were joined by the same people they had shared the compartment with and then departed.

When the silhouette of the castle came into view, Tom was overwhelmed by the deep sensation of joy and belonging Hogwarts invoked upon him. Turning his gaze sideways, he could see the same emotions reflected in Avada green eyes. He smiled up at the castle: he was home.
Tom followed the teens till the high oak doors leading to the Great Hall. There McGonagall approached him to explain he needed to wait outside because he would be sorted after the first years. Nodding in acknowledgement, he turned towards Harry. “I’ll see you later, then.”

Watching him go, he couldn’t help the disappointment that settled deep inside of him at the certainty that he wouldn’t see his Raven until the next morning.

**Harry’s Pov**

Entering in the Great Hall and sitting at the Gryffindor table, the first thing he noticed were the two great differences at the Head Table: first Hagrid wasn’t there; and second, in the seat reserved at the DADA teacher, was the pink wearing woman that resembled a toad he saw at his hearing. As always, Hermione, who was more observant than Ron, lost no time in spotting the pink woman sat at the teacher table.

“Who is that?” She asked sharply. Harry couldn’t blame her for the tone: the toad-like woman wasn’t one who inspired a great deal of faith.

“She name is Umbridge.” Answered Harry, brows furrowing; her presence here wasn’t a good omen. “She was at my hearing; works for Fudge.”

“She seems promising, doesn’t she?” Said a smirking Ron, sarcastically.

Harry didn’t share his opinion. Yes, Umbridge didn’t look like someone who would be a good teacher – nor someone who could be dangerous, for that matter – but the sense of foreboding he felt the first time he saw her was stronger than ever. She had given him a bad feeling just as soon as he had seen her, but now her presence at Hogwarts was making him nearly nauseous with uneasiness. Fortunately, even if Ron didn’t seem to be wary of Umbridge, Hermione looked like she was, and he was sure Tom would feel the same, once he saw her.

He passed the time of the sorting with a sharp gaze locked on the woman, barely acknowledging the new song concocted by the Hat, full of advices and warnings, and the sorting of the first years. His focus was diverted only when Dumbledore rose from his chair to announce Tom’s presence to the entire Hall.

“And now, before we can finally start on our delicious banquet, there’s yet another addiction to our school I ask you to welcome. His name is Tom Gaunt and he will join the fifth years.”

McGonagall, who had left soon after having finished with the first years to collect Tom, returned with the dark brunet following closely after her. The young Dark Lord was striding through the Great Hall with his head held high, making graceful and confident strides with his long legs. He was excluding an air of superiority and elegance that drew the attention of every single student in the room. Many girls were whispering and giggling between themselves, surely attracted by the teen’s handsomeness, something that greatly annoyed the raven for some strange reason. Shaking his head and looking around the room, his gaze fell on the Slytherin’s table. There Malfoy, surrounded by the usual cluster of Slytherins, was frantically discussing something in a hushed voice and, from the worried, leaning on terrified, expression of the other teens, Harry had no doubt about what the topic was or who it regarded.

Tom sat on the stool and let the Transfiguration professor put the Sorting Hat on his head. Unlike with the first years, the hat wasn’t so big to cover his eyes; instead, he rested comfortably on
perfectly styled dark curls. This should have allowed the people watching avidly the sorting to see the expression of the dark brunet, but the teen was wearing a perfect blank mask, making his expression completely indecipherable. Harry had expected Tom to be sorted quickly, the Hat declaring him a Slytherin as soon as it was put on, instead it seemed to be taking his time. The minutes tickled by, the Hall growing more and more restless, mutterings flowing with increasing intensity.

Finally, after a period that seemed close to an eternity to Harry, the Sorting Hat opened his mouth and announced the House Tom would be in. Immediately, a deep shadow of dread slithered inside the souls of the majority of those who knew the real identity of the dark brunet. Dark eyes glinting, Tom smirked.

Chapter End Notes

So, how was the chapter? Did you like it? I really hope so. The next one will feature the sorting in Tom's Pov and the Hogwarts year will really start. In which House do you think Tom has ended up? :) 

As you've seen, there has been a little progression on Tom's part (Harry is still completely oblivious, the poor boy XD), and this, or better, his dream is the reason for the new M rating. I didn't know if my description of the dream had been vague enough, that was why, to be safe, I increased the rating to M.

And about this, I have a question. Would you prefer the presence of smut or not, in this story? Meaning, would you like detailed scenes of it or simply hints that they took place? Since I never wrote something like this, I would like your suggestion (keep in mind that the scenes in question will be a long time coming, since their relationship has not even started yet).
Tom’s Pov

_Tom Marvolo Riddle_. A shocked murmur, at the same time ancient and youthful, resounded inside his head.

The dark brunet smirked inside his mind, while his outer facial expression remained unchanged; a blank mask that was even better than those of the Purebloods was set firmly in place, preventing everyone from gauging his emotions. In front of him he could see the sea of students with their eyes firmly locked on him, avidly drinking in his every action; they were observing, assessing him. He had known that would have been the student populace’s reaction. Things hadn’t changed much from his time and people were always the same. He was a new student, after all. A new, _transfer_ student, something that hadn’t happened at Hogwarts for more than five centuries. A fact that made him a mystery, and nothing was able to hold someone attention as much as a mysterious individual. Especially someone as eye catching as him.

Every single person of every single House had his eyes firmly set on him, and was whispering with his neighbour, probably trying to guess where he would be put. The girls were especially excited at the prospect of him ending up in one of their Houses, no doubt attracted by his handsome features. Something amused him, though; it was the fearful looks some of the Slytherins were throwing him. Mmh, it seemed that Malfoy had blabbered, after all, spreading around his suspicions. Oh, it would be so amusing interacting with the snakes, if he ended up in his old House.

The professors, too were gazing at him. The ones who knew about his true identity with apprehension, the other with curiosity. No one gaze was more intense than Dumbledore, though. He could feel the old man’s azure eyes boring penetratingly in his back.

_Surprised to see me again?_ Asked Tom, amusement thick in his tone.

_In this form, without a doubt._ Admitted the Hat. _And so different, too._
I suppose you are referring to my decision to take a different path than my counterpart; to go about reaching my objectives in a different way than him. Responded the young teen, eyes hardening and traces of irritation present in his mind voice. Thinking about Voldemort and the thing his counterpart has become was a very touchy subject and was always able to upset him. How he could have become so lost in his quest for immortality to degrade himself to become that shadow of his former self, a simple shell of utterly insanity, he would never understand. Yes, he has planned to create six Horcruxes, and yes, there hadn’t been books reporting about the possibility of such disastrous consequences – not even in the Black’s library, who was widely known in all dark’s circles for its extensive collection of old and rare tomes – coming from the splitting of one soul in so many parts. But he was a genius! He should have noticed the danger signs as soon as they had started to present themselves; and from his research he suspected they had started to appear just after the creation of his third Horcrux. How could he have failed to see them and take the necessary measures?

Funny that you can’t find the answer to your question, commented idly the Hat, considering that it’s so blatantly obvious. Your thoughts practically advertise it.

Annoyed by the Hat’s condescending tone, the dark brunet bit out. And what would it be?

Arrogance. Answered delighted the Sorting Hat. Tom’s eye twitched. Laughing at his reaction, the irritating magical object continued. I wasn’t talking about that, anyway. Not completely at least.

The teen frowned, confusion joining his annoyance. No? And what were you talking about, then?

Tis time the reply wasn’t given immediately. Instead there was a beat of silence; the magical artefact pondered on how to respond. Then: mmh… no, I don’t think it would be wise for me to answer your question. I believe it will be better if you reach the right conclusion on your own. Who knows what the knowledge would spur you to do. And, to be completely frank, I doubt you would even believe me.

Irritated by the information being negated, Tom ground out. What do you mean? What are you refusing to tell me?

Oh, I think I’ll let you figure this out by yourself. Said the Hat, cheerfully. Your subconscious already knows the answer you desire, you should only acknowledge it. I believe the introspection you’ll need to undergo in order to find the answer you seek will be a positive experience for you.

The dark brunet ground his teeth together, his rage boiling hot through his veins. He was about to threaten the Hat, when this one interrupted him. Oh, don’t be like this. I see that for certain things you are still the same. Commented amused. Trust me, you’ll thank me in the future. Then sighed, and his tone changed, bordering on exasperation. Though considering who you are, leaving you completely to your own devices won’t be the best course of actions. I’m not sure you’ll be able to figure this without at least some form of advice, so I’ll give you a hint. It has something to do with a certain green-eyed teen.

Tom blinked, surprised. Could this possibly have something to do with the strange emotions he kept feeling around Harry? But he had already reached the conclusion that they were the product of simple lust. Yes, he had never felt so strongly about another person, but he was sure that this unusual situation could be explained away as a result of the way their magic react with each other. And he had also noticed how alike he and the raven were sometimes, another factor in favour of this hypothesis. There was no deeper meaning to this.

Are you sure?

Yes, what other meaning could there ever be? Questioned coldly Tom.
Well if you are really so sure of this, then I believe it’s time to proceed with the sorting. Said the Hat in a dismissal tone.

Irritation beginning to rise again, the dark brunet reposed the same question. *What other meaning do you think there is?*

The Hat didn’t answer.

*Answer my question, dammit!* Shouted the now fuming teen.

The Hat ignored him, again. When the dark brunet made sign to want to continue arguing, though, the old magical object stated: *do you seriously want to keep arguing with me, pulling more of the Headmaster attention on yourself? Don’t you think it’s in your best interest proceeding with the sorting?*

That stopped him from arguing. He couldn’t afford to make Dumbledore more suspicious of him than he already was. Not until Harry was firmly in his grasp, at least. Displeased, grumbling darkly inside his mind, the dark brunet acquiesced to drop the topic, recognizing defeat, for now. *This won’t end here.*

*Of course.* Commented the Hat laughing, unsurprised by the teen statement. *Now, about your sorting… I could certainly send you to Slythering again. Taking into consideration your personality and the characteristic of all the Houses, that one is definitely the one best suited for you.*

*But?* Interrupted the teen. *From the way you said it, you don’t seem very keen to do it.*

*No, I’m not. Confirmed the Hat. There’s no doubt that House suit you, but I don’t believe it’s the one that will serve you better this time around. If I send you there, the likelihood of you ending up like your counterpart is pretty high. And this is not something you wish, is it?*

*No, it certainly isn’t.* Admitted Tom. The simply idea that was possible – and that that thing could have been him if he had remained in the past – for him to become like Voldemort was enough to repulse him. Becoming a mindless monster was the last thing he desired.

*Then we have left three Houses to consider.* Commented the Hat. *You obviously are no Hufflepuff. You work hard to reach your ends, but the only kind of loyalty you possess is towards yourself – though this is something I hope it would change in the future.*

*You are delusional.* Sneered the dark brunet. *Do you really think I will ever give my loyalty to another person? He asked mockingly.*

*Well, there is someone who already gained, albeit partially, your trust, isn’t there?* Pointed out the Hat.

Tom’s stiffened imperceptibly for a fraction of second and his gaze shifted quickly towards the raven seated at the Gryffindor table. Luminous, green eyes were looking at him, so beautifully bright and… was there a touch of concern he could see? It was because his sorting was taking so much? The dark brunet unconsciously smiled inside his mind: Harry was so adorable at times. Then he stiffened. Where has that come from? Recomposing himself, he pretended that thought never crossed his mind and said coolly to the Hat. *It’s only a way to gain his trust in return.*

*Is it? if you say so.* It commented amused the thing. He knew it had seen what had just drifted through his mind, but he stubbornly decided to ignore this fact. He won’t acknowledge the strange things that kept popping up inside his mind about the raven. He won’t. *I saw some interesting things*
regarding young Harry flickering around your brain. Even some interesting fantasies that led me to believe otherwise.

They have absolutely nothing to do with whatever you are thinking. Hissed mentally the dark brunet. And if he had been a lesser person, his face would have surely flushed red, completely obliterating his mask. Get on with the Sorting.

I will, don’t worry. There’s no need to be so hostile. Trying to maintain a controlled and blank expression, the teen mentally bristled. The damned thing was laughing at him, he could feel it. If only it hadn’t been an historical item that had belonged to the Hogwarts’ Founder, he would have surely burned it.

Such viciousness, snickered the Hat, you definitely haven’t change in that aspect.

The teen started to formulate gruesome threats in his mind.

Fine, fine, no need to resort to such violence. Let's continue. (It’s about time. Muttered the dark brunet.) So, we have excluded Slytherin and Hufflepuff, meaning we’re left with only Ravenclaw and Gryffindor.

There was a beat of silence. Then, I see that you desire to be put in Gryffindor. I didn’t expect to ever see you wishing for something like this; especially considering how much you despise that particular House qualities.

I do, but you know why I want to be put there. It has nothing to do with the clear lack of brain typical of the majority of its members and their stupid moral beliefs. Spat Tom.

Oh, yes, I know. And I’m not completely against this idea, in truth. There are surely benefits that could be gained by your placement with the lions. Mused the Hat.

The dark brunet was taken aback by this affirmation: he had never thought the Hat would seriously consider Gryffindor a possibility.

Mmh, yes, I think in the end this would be the best choice. Continued the ancient sewed piece of fabric. Yes, it will be a gamble, no doubt about this, but I believe it could work.

Are you hoping, like Dumbledore, that Harry would be able to change me? Laughed mockingly Tom. Now that he was sure he will be in the same House as his Raven, all of his previous irritation had evaporated.

I won’t be so ready to dismiss this thought. Advised him the Hat. The magic connection works both ways, after all.

“Gryffindor!” The shout of the Sorting Hat reverberated through the entire Hall.

Despite the admittedly troubling last words of the magical object, Tom smirked, dark blue eyes glinting. That old piece of fabric was right, but it was deluding itself. Nobody, not even his beautiful Raven could change him so much.

He rose gracefully from the stool and, when he turned to pass the Hat to McGonagall, his smirk grew. The old Transfiguration professor had a deep expression of horror etched on her features, expression that he was happy to notice was mirrored by nearly all the other professors, Dumbledore’s included. His smirk became vicious, freezing the Deputy Headmistress in her place. Leaving his new Head of House to wrestle with her inner turmoil, he coolly headed towards the red and gold table, whispers and murmurs following in his wake. There, too, there were looks of horrors sent in his
direction, by the Weasleys and Granger, but he was pleased to see that Harry was smiling at him. He returned the smile and quickened his pace, wasting no time in joining the teen, placing himself between him and the Longbottom boy he met on the train. On Harry’s other side, Weasley and Granger seemed too shocked by his presence to speak up. Good.

“So, Harry, it seems like we’ll spend the next three years together.” Tom commented casually, still smiling.

“So it seems.” Replied Harry in the same tone. From that distance, the dark brunet could see how the light illuminating his green eyes – brighter than ever now that they weren’t anymore covered by glasses – was making them sparkle like little gems. They really were beautiful, thought fleetingly the older teen. “I thought you would surely end up in Slytherin, but I’m glad you are in Gryffindor.”

“Me too.” He answered; and was surprised by how true this was. It didn’t matter that he would be surrounded by pathetic brainless apes for the future three years; being able to spend time with Harry was definitely worth it.

“Tom, have you seen the professors’ table?” Harry whispered to him during the banquet.

Despite many minutes having passed from the Sorting, the shock of Tom’s House placement hadn’t completely abated yet, and many of the professors, as well as the raven’s best friends, were still completely stunned. On the contrary, Dumbledore had unfortunately recovered rather quickly and was now watching the dark brunet with a sharp and calculating gaze. It was subtle – and something he had expected – but it still irritated him to no end.

At Harry’s demand, Tom turned to discreetly watch the High Table and immediately noticed the pink witch seated here. His brows furrowed. “Isn’t she the one who was at your trial? Fudge’s senior Undersecretary?” What was a Ministry’s witch doing at Hogwarts? The Senior Undersecretary of the Minister, at that.

“Yes, and she gave me the feeling of not appreciating much my victory.”

The dark blue eyes narrowed. “Yes, I remember, now. She was the only one in attendance looking displeased by the result. The only one wanting you condemned despite your status.” He murmured, more to himself than Harry. He had a bad feeling about this. The presence of a Ministry’s representative – one so clearly against Harry at that – wasn’t a good sign. He would need to watch her closely.

“I have a bad feeling about her.” Confessed the younger Gryffindor, worry – and something that resembled very much loathing – shining in his bright green eyes. “And what’s more, I feel this inexplicable… hatred every time I look at her.”

The dark brunet eyebrows knitted together, while he contemplated the other teen’s word. He could understand the bad feeling, he didn’t like the witch’s presence either, but the loathing? It could make sense if one considered the pink toad-like woman had tried to expel him, but he had seen the raven’s memory and so knew Harry’s hate towards the woman had already taken root the first time the boy had seen Umbridge. And this meant that it wasn’t caused by the woman actions, but by something intrinsically connected to her character. If so, then it must have been the raven’s instinct that triggered this reaction, probably to warn him about something. He had also experienced similar instances in the
past and, if there was something those experiences taught him, was to listen to his gut feelings, especially when they were causing such a strong reaction. It appeared that Umbridge was more dangerous than he first thought.

“Er…Tom?” The dark brunet blinked, turning towards the raven, who was looking at him with concern. “Are you okay? You just spaced out.”

“Yes, Harry, don’t worry. I was just thinking about what you said. I think we’ll have to be careful around Umbridge: if your instinct makes you despise her so much, it means that she’s dangerous.” He stated, deep blue eyes, hard as steel, fixated on the unaware witch.

He remained like this for a couple of seconds and then sighed, diverting his gaze towards the teen seated at his side. “Not now, though. We can’t do anything until we know more about her and the reason she’s here for. We should enjoy the feast.”

Noticing that Harry’s attention was still firmly set on the woman at the Head table, he decided to distract the boy engaging him in a discussion about the other professors, asking more information about their personalities and teaching methods. Fortunately, Granger and Weasley, upon recovering from their shock, decided to simply ignore him. He knew this situation wouldn’t last and was aware of their plan to distance him from the raven. He seriously doubted it would work, especially considering they were foolish enough to discuss some of the details at the table. Harry might be too distracted by Umbridge to notice their schemes, but he was near enough to hear part of what they were saying; simply because he was speaking to the raven and seemed to not care about them, didn’t mean he hadn’t noticed what they were doing. They were seriously underestimating him and this would be their downfall.

Not counting the three foolish plotting teens, the rest of the dinner passed relatively quietly. Soon it came the time for the Headmaster’s start of term speech and he listened with little interest as Dumbledore prattled on, only sending an amused smile in his Raven’s direction – and receiving a sheepish one in return – when he noticed the looks he and his friends exchanged at the old man’s comment about the Forbidden Forest and how some of the older students should know, by then, that it was, in fact, forbidden.

Then the Headmaster moved to talk about the Quidditch try-outs, and something happened that he had never seen before, not even in his time: the Umbridge woman interrupted him. He saw many students smirk – even as the old man left the witch his place – but he could also notice the darkening expression of the other professors and the troubled one on Harry’s face. His own eyes had narrowed in suspicion as soon as the witch had interrupted the speech. It didn’t matter how much he disliked Dumbledore, Umbridge’s action made alarms’ bells ring in his head with the same insistence of an air raid siren.

As the toad woman began her monologue full of nonsense and hidden bigoted views, Tom’s eyes hardened and darkened, ocean blue becoming a starless night black. Even excluding the way the woman addressed them, like they were toddlers, her words were a clear sign of the danger lurking ahead. She talked about discouraging progress, prohibiting specific practices; and yet preached about a new era of openness and advancement. It was the perfect example of the Ministry’s hypocrisy.

Hogwarts had always been a self-governing institution, rightfully separate from the Ministry, who would otherwise try to interfere with the curriculum – lowering the standards to make sure students didn’t learn spells and practices considered too dangerous by the government – and the grading of students – favouring the children of those working for, or aiding, the Ministry. Every Headmaster, following the Founders’ wishes, had tirelessly worked to assure every single pupil in their care would receive the best education possible, maintaining, at the same time, Hogwarts’ independency.
No Minister had ever tried to change this and take control of the school… until now. The woman represented a threat to everything the great castle stood for.

Finally, the amphibian’s speech came to an end and, as the Headmaster commented about how ‘enlightening’ Umbridge’s words had been – and continued from where he had stopped – he felt someone at his table voice the same sentiment. Turning around, he noticed the voice belonged to Granger. Obviously. He wasn’t surprised the girl had caught the important information carefully concealed in that endless flow of meaningless words – as he wasn’t surprised that Weasley had been completely unable to even comprehend that there were important things hidden in the woman’s prattle – but, as he had observed in the weeks spent in Grimmauld Place, she was unable to see beyond the obvious and grasp the true implications of the woman presence. She noticed the true intentions of the witch, but didn’t understand just how dangerous she was.

Granger and Weasley kept on discussing about Umbridge in low voices, ignoring everything else around them; this left Tom to be the only one to notice that there was one particular person who was not participating in the conversation: Harry. The raven was sitting quietly beside him, a troubled expression marring his face, and hadn’t spoken a single word since the woman had started her monologue. Worried by the teen’s silence, Tom leaned forward to whisper. “Harry, what’s wrong?”

The raven slowly turned towards him. “I don’t like it.” He murmured, mouth twisting downwards. “I admit to not have followed everything – it was dreadfully dull – but I’m pretty sure to have caught the gist of what she was saying. And…” He hesitated for a moment. “Not only what I heard seemed foreboding, I also fear that the reality is a lot worse than what Hermione is portraying.”

“It is.” Confirmed the dark brunet, a grim look in his own eyes.

The raven sighed and, in a resigned tone, asked “What should we do?”

“Nothing, for now.” Stated the dark brunet. “At least nothing to antagonize her directly, but I think it would be wise to watch her. I think that limiting ourselves to keep an eye on the woman it’s the best course of actions for now.”

Although not looking completely convinced, the raven nodded, understanding why Tom had decided to adopt that stance. The dark brunet was happy Harry accepted to follow his plan, despite not completely agreeing with it. He could understand the raven’s wish to do something to stop the witch before she could do anything, but unfortunately they couldn’t actively go against Umbridge so early on in the year. They didn’t know enough about her, nor about her methods. They needed information before they could act. The most favourable outcome would be to find that the woman could be influenced. If this was possible he would be able to make so her actions only damaged Dumbledore; if not…well, he would need to get rid of her.

A sudden clamour clued them on the fact that Dumbledore had just dismissed everyone in the Hall. The sea of students was standing up, heading towards their respective Common Rooms, and Granger was coaxing the first years to come in her direction, Weasley standing uselessly at her side. Him and Harry rose too, the raven smiling at a passing first year, who paled, huddled closer to his friend – who also appeared fearful – and both scurried forward. The dark brunet regarded coldly the tiny first years, then took his Raven arm – who looked decidedly hurt by the little whelps’ reaction – and dragged him forward. He knew why those kids had reacted that way – it was the Prophet’s, or better, the Ministry’s, fault – and, despite how much he appreciated the fact that they were showing Harry how fickle the people in the wizarding world were – thus demonstrating he was right in wanting to rule over them, as they were mindless sheep who needed someone to control them – the fact that their actions were hurting his raven made his blood boil. He quickened his pace. He knew that Harry was probably bewildered by his reaction, but he needed to vent his annoyance, least he did
something the younger teen would surely resent him for doing, like curse those stupid first years.

As they strode out of the Great Hall and down the corridor, Tom still dragging Harry, he felt the raven calling his name. He ignored him for a while, heading at a fast pace towards he stairs and climbing one staircase; but when the call became too insistent, he stopped, exhaled a long breath, and turned, silently rising a brow in enquiry. The raven looked at him in confusion, but his eyes were also sparkling with amusement. “Tom, do you know where you are going? I mean do you know the path to reach Gryffindor’s Tower?”

The dark brunet blinked and then felt a traitorous heat rising in his cheeks. With great difficulty he was able to suppress the red spreading on his face, but, from the brightening of those luminous green eyes, he was aware that the raven had caught a glimpse of it anyway. It was so embarrassing! Not only because he had acted so unlike himself, striding out of the Hall in an admittedly random direction and dragging the other teen with him, but also because he wasn’t aware of the location of the Gryffindor Common Room. And now he will have to confess it; then ask the boy for directions.

Correctly interpreting his silence, Harry watched him like he was about to comment and tease him, but in the end seemed to think better of it and simply changed direction, manoeuvring his hand so that now he was the one gripping Tom’s wrist, instead of the other way around. “It’s better if we take some shortcuts.” The raven stated simply. “It will be faster and we’ll avoid most of the crowd.”

“Meaning, the people who stare at and whisper about you.” Commented flatly the dark brunet. The raven didn’t respond, nor turned to look at him, gazing unwavering forward, despite his walk indicating he didn’t need to see the path to know where he was going.

He stopped, making the other boy pause in his tracks, too. He reached forward to grasp one of the raven’s shoulder and spun him around. “Their opinion doesn’t matter. They don’t matter.” Said seriously. “Don’t let their actions hurt you; they aren’t worth it.”

The raven directed him a small grateful smile and nodded. “Yes, thank you.”

He simply smiled softly in return and then they walked forward.

Tom prided himself on his great knowledge of Hogwarts – of her every secret passage and shortcut – but the path he was walking down with Harry was at him unknown. The raven was walking through the various corridors with confidence, revealing hidden passages that the dark brunet was unaware of, and, in a much shorter time than expected, they found themselves in front what he supposed was the entrance of the Gryffindor’s Common Room. Instead of a blank wall, like it was for Slytherin, the red and gold’s House had a painting guarding its entrance. The painting was life-sized and represented a prosperous woman in a ridiculous pink and frilly dress. As soon as she saw them approaching, she asked evenly. “Password?”

Harry simply stared, seeming quite embarrassed. Apparently, the raven had forgotten to ask his two friends for the password. Tom sighed and said “Mimbulus Mimbletonia.” The portrait smiled kindly at him and opened, revealing the gaudy red and gold Common Room.

It was cosy, he supposed. A lot warmer and welcoming than the Slytherin’s one with his dark and austere Victorian style, but too bright for his taste. Squishy red armchairs and soft-looking cushions, lined with gold, were disseminated around the circular room. A lively fire was burning in the hearth. Small circular mahogany tables, with matching chairs decorated the room. Big windows that showed the starry sky completed the picture. Admittedly, it wasn’t as bad as he had imagined, still… red and gold were assaulting him from everywhere. If only it would have been a deep blood-tinted red, but no, it was an obnoxious, bright red. He heaved a sigh; he dearly hoped that the dormitories wouldn’t be quite as bad.
“When did you asked for the password?” Questioned surprised the raven.

“It was during the banquet, when you were too busy staring at Umbridge to notice.” He answered nonchalantly. Then smirked. “And you were sat beside your best friends, who are both Prefects, for the entire duration of the feast and never thought to ask for it?”

“It slipped my mind.” Muttered the younger wizard, cheeks flushing pink.

Tom smirked. He truly loved to make Harry blush. His raven was lovely with deep red marring his cheeks. Not to mention how amusing it was to elicit this kind of reaction from the boy.

Quietly, they ignored the whispering people milling in the Common Room and headed towards the dormitory, where, to his great delight, discovered that he would occupy the bed beside his Raven. The evening was revealing itself to be far better than he expected: having to spend the next three years in Gryffindor had just become a lot sweeter.

Looking around at the circular room, he noticed that there would be other four boys with them: two were already there, while the other two – Weasley and Longbottom – had yet to reach the dormitory. The two boys introduced themselves as Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan and he noticed that, although Thomas was behaving normally, Finnigan was doing his best to avoid Harry. The raven, oblivious to this, asked the dark-skinned teen – Thomas – about his summer and how it went.

“Not bad.” Answered the teen. “Better than Seamus’, anyway. He was just telling me.”

In that moment, the conversation was interrupted by Longbottom, who entered cradling gently the Mimbulus Mimbletonia in his arms, like it was a newly born puppy. The chubby boy greeted cheerfully him and Harry, and then turned towards the dusty-haired boy, clearly having heard the last part of the discussion. “Why? What happened?”

Finnegan fidgeted with his things, keeping his back turned towards them, obsessively trying to straighten a Quidditch Team’s poster. He didn’t say anything for quite some time; in the end mumbled something about his mother not wanting to send him back. Stunned silence followed this affirmation; the three boys were shocked that Mrs Finnigan, a witch, would stop his son from attending Hogwarts. For his part, Tom maintained his distance, arranging his possession around his bed, but a fickle of suspicion was already settling inside his mind. He hoped to be wrong, but he had an inkling about what the woman reason to not let the boy return were, and if what was thinking was true, he was sure to not like them. As he suspected, Finnigan explained how her mother feared for her son’s safety, since he would have to share his dormitory with a “mad, attention seeking liar”. So, she was another one of those who took the newspaper’s words as gospel; figures. It was so predictable. And…it seemed like the son was quite prone to the same beliefs, too. He scoffed internally: they were all so easily manipulated; so pathetic, really. Well, not like he was complaining, in truth. This would make easier to take over the wizarding word, after all. And yet… he sent a glance in Harry’s direction, catching the distress so clearly displayed on his face. He could feel anger bubbling just under the layer of his skin, flowing freely through his veins, bursting with the desire to be released. But he simply strengthened his control on his stormy emotions. He couldn’t let himself fall prey to them because, despite how appealing maim whomsoever hurt his Raven was, he doubted Harry would appreciate it. They would pay, though. Once he has reached his objective, all of them would regret the pain they had brought on his beautiful Raven. Especially those who, like Finnigan, should have been his friends and had, instead turned their backs on him at the faintest sign of danger.

A growing pressure, made him reset his gaze on Harry, and he could practically feel his distress quickly mutating into anger; the raven’s magic was slowing seeping from his body, saturating the air with his heady scent of power and sweetness: it was such a heading feeling.
“I see.” Oh, such a frigid tone his Raven could muster. It was a pity he couldn’t see well his eyes from his position: he was sure they were a sight to see; so bright that even the beautiful hues of the killing curse would be put to shame in comparison. “And you? Do you also believe the Prophet?”

“Well, you see.” The boy looked in equal parts awkward and eager. “If you could just tell us what had really happened that day…”

“Why should I?” Spat out the raven. “You can just read the Prophet. After all,” he mocked, sarcastic “that had just all the kind of answers that you want. Just the kind of answer your mother wants.”

He had to admit that it was kind of arousing seeing Harry tear down so viciously his friends – probably due to the thick magic cloaking the teen’s lithe form.

At Harry’s word, Finnigan, the fool, began to get riled up, too. “Are you having a go at my mother?” Really? That was what he got from the raven’s words? He was correct, obviously, but he had thought the boy would concentrate more on the fact his Raven was ridiculing the answer the Prophet offered. Or the fact that he was mocking him.

“I’m simply stating the truth.” Retorted Harry. “I mean, what change would make re-explaining what happened during the third task now, when Dumbledore recounted what I said to him months ago?”

The boy mumbled something that resembled a ‘he hadn’t been really clear’, adopting a clearly defensive tone.

“Not very clear.” Mocked Tom in an unmistakably derisive voice. Everyone turned to look at him, while he advanced to position himself beside Harry. “Do you really wish to be privy to the goriest details?” He inquired with disdain, his eyes blue pools that resembles the frigid dark waters of the deepest Oceans. “Or hear about what Harry had gone through, like it was some sort of exciting tale and not an awfully traumatic experience?”

Finnigan’s offended gaze faltered at this, but then the boy steeled himself and kept going. “I just want to know the truth.”

“The truth?” Exclaimed the raven in disbelief. “The truth is that Voldemort is back. What else do you want to know?”

The dark brunet put a comforting hand on the younger wizard shoulder, and then directed his cold glaze on the other boy again. “No, you don’t want the truth. You just want a confirmation of your mother’s worries.” And with disgust added. “And you should be his friend.”

“You don’t know me, Gaunt. You’re new here.” Shouted heatedly the boy. Then, indicating Harry, “and you don’t know what had happened in Hogwarts ever since he came here. Or what it has come out in the papers about him since last year.”

“I admit that’s true. But I know and trust Harry enough to believe him.” Stated coolly Tom. “Something that you should be able to do, too, having spent the last four years in the same House as him.”

The other boy seemed about to say something, when Weasley entered, interrupting him. The red head took in the scene in front of him: Harry, Tom and Finnigan’s confrontative stance, and Longbottom and Thomas’ awkward ones. Confusion became apparent on his visage. “What’s happening?”

“Seamus believes the Prophet.” Spat venomously the raven.
Comprehension dawned across the new Prefect’s face. “Oh…”

“Well, you know what?” Said Finnigan heatedly, looking at Harry and Tom with loathing. “The Prophet is right. He’s mad; and Gaunt must be crazy, too, to believe him. I don’t want to share the dormitory with them."

“Now, you’re exaggerating, Seamus!” Stated Weasley, beginning to get worked up, too.

“Oh, exaggerating, am I?” Rounded on him the other boy. “Don’t tell me that you, too, believe Potter.”

“Of course, I do.” Affirmed the red head, angrily.

“You, too. I can’t believe it.” Commented Finnigan with disgust.

“I, too, believe Harry,” Butted in Longbottom from his place on the bed. “and my gran also does. She always thought You-Know-Who would have come back sooner or later.” He blinked owlishly at them from over the covers. “And if Harry and Dumbledore say that he’s back, then he is.”

The Irish boy stubbornly kept arguing. “But what proof there is of this?”

“Is Cedric’s death not enough?” Demanded Harry, incredulously, seeming ready to lash out.

Before the situation could degenerate further, Tom decided to put an end to it. With his hand still on the raven shoulder, he squeezed lightly trying to convey some form of comfort – and placate – the younger teen. “The proof you so desired would led you to your death.” Commented the dark brunet. “Since it would entail you seeing Voldemort in person.”

Then he added. “I would pity you and all the others who mock Harry’s words, but I believe this would be a great lesson for every single one of you sceptics. I only hope that your idiocy won’t cause your death, once Voldemort decide to finally show himself.”

Sneering, Finnigan turned his back to them and climbed into his bed, closing tightly the hangings around him. Thomas sent an apologetic look at Harry and he, too, climbed in his bed, leaving only him, the raven and Weasley standing. Ignoring the read head, Tom turned towards his Raven. “Well, I suppose we should head to bed, too.”

The younger teen nodded, dark expression still present. “Yes, bed sounds good.”

Seeing this, Tom leaned down and whispered. “Ignore what Finnigan said. If he can doubt your word after having known you for nearly five years, then he’s not worthy of your time.”

The boy looked at him, eyes alight with anger, and Tom felt warmth spreading in the pit of his stomach; the eerie glow of those enticing emerald eyes only fuelling the deep lust the boy’s magic had ignited in him. “I can’t believe Seamus trust the Prophet more than me. He has been my friend for four years.”

“Not a good friend, obviously.” Drawled the dark brunet.

“Apparently.” Harry muttered. “Well, at least I have you.” He said, making Tom smirk. “And Ron and Neville.”

“Of course.” Said the older teen, masking his irritation. His Raven didn’t need the two other pathetic boys, nor anybody else; he was more than enough. Maybe Harry still didn’t understand this, but soon, soon he would. He would make sure of this.
Finding reassurance in this belief, Tom climbed into his bed, wishing good night to the raven and closing the hangings of the four-posted bed, casting a powerful silencing charm on them for good measure. Soon he fell into a deep slumber filled with dreams of soft, raven hair and luminous green eyes.

Sirius' Pov

A weary, dark haired man was sitting in a barely lit, ill kept kitchen, nursing a strong glass of Firewhiskey.

Sirius Black gazed into the burning amber liquid with unfocused eyes, thinking about his godson. His godson, who could as well be his son thanks to the blood adoption; the boy who meant more to him than anything else and that was now at Hogwarts. Mixed emotions were furiously battling each other inside the dark-haired man. On one hand, he knew how much Harry loved Hogwarts, and knew that was the place where the raven belonged; on the other... the time he could spend with the teen was always too short, making the separation more painful. There was a huge, selfish part of Sirius that wished nothing more than for the teen to be stuck there with him, so that they could spend the time making up for the twelve years they had lost. He knew this was only wishful thinking. Those twelve years were lost now and all the things he had missed – Harry’s bouts of accidental magic, the coming of his Hogwarts’ letter, his look of wonder after seeing Diagon Alley for the first time, the teen’s entire childhood – could never be gained back. Still, something was better than nothing, and spending time with his fifteen years old godson was better that not spending time with him at all; but everyone seemed set to not let him do it. Dumbledore had refused to let Harry came to Grimmauld until the accident with the Dementors happened, and then the boy had been both elated and incredibly disappointed when the result of the hearing turned out in Harry’s favour. Happiness at the thought that his godson hadn’t been expelled – or arrested, like some part of him had feared – had clashed notoriously with the knowledge of the teen’s, at that time, imminent return to school. It had been incredibly difficult to hide the glumness the idea of the boy going back to Hogwarts birthed in him, but fortunately, something stopped him from being foolish enough to let his dark thoughts show. He was sure that expressing his depression would have tarnished the rapport he had with the teen, and that was the last thing he wanted, especially since he still hoped to be able to keep the promise he had made to Harry during the boy’s third year about letting the raven come to live with him.

That was why he had been both elated and incredibly disappointed when the result of the hearing turned out in Harry’s favour. Happiness at the thought that his godson hadn’t been expelled – or arrested, like some part of him had feared – had clashed horribly with the knowledge of the teen’s, at that time, imminent return to school. It had been incredibly difficult to hide the glumness the idea of the boy going back to Hogwarts birthed in him, but fortunately, something stopped him from being foolish enough to let his dark thoughts show. He was sure that expressing his depression would have tarnished the rapport he had with the teen, and that was the last thing he wanted, especially since he still hoped to be able to keep the promise he had made to Harry during the boy’s third year about letting the raven come to live with him.

Unfortunately, that certain something was the same reason that spurred him to now drink Firewhiskey until he could become so drunk he would be unable to think anymore. Someone could argue that it was the loneliness the reason behind his reprehensive behaviour, but, although this could prove to be part of the cause – every single member was so busy that had hardly any time to stop by, let alone spend any significant amount of time inside the house – it wasn’t the true reason. No, that motive has a name: Tom Marvolo Riddle. The young Dark Lord was at Hogwarts with Harry and he, he was trapped in this damned house, unable to do anything to protect his godson from that demon.

He still remembered with astounding clarity the first time he had seen the young Dark Lord to be. Even before knowing it was a young Voldemort they had in front of them, the teen Dumbledore had brought with him had made him uncomfortable. He couldn’t quite pinpoint what had given him that
sensation – it could have been the dark emotions hidden in those fathomless blue eyes, or the sheer dark power his magic excluded – but he had been sure the boy was dangerous. Then his old Headmaster had explained just who exactly the teen was, and how he came to be there. It was then that true hate had flared inside of him: that teen would grow up to be the person who had murdered James and Lily, and who was still trying to kill Harry. He was the younger version of the one who had destroyed not only his life, but his godson’s one too. And Dumbledore expected them to cooperate with that boy to beat Voldemort? Still…he could objectively see how advantageous having the dark brunet’s help was, even if he didn’t trust Riddle, and so he had accepted to work together with the boy. Who would have thought things would have ended like this?

He had suspected, yes, that the teen would have proved to be a threat for Harry, but not in this way. And yet, he had seen the signs: the obsession and hunger with which Riddle had watched the raven since the first time the two had met. It had been bad when it was only that, but now, now it was even worse – even if he doubted someone else had noticed, except him. Nobody had noticed the first signs, either, after all. The obsession Riddle harbored towards the raven had evolved in an even darker desire, and this was truly a big problem, because, if it was true that the dark brunet had wanted Harry on his side since the beginning – at least from what he had gathered about his observation of the teen’s behaviour towards his godson – now the young Dark Lord wouldn’t be happy with only this: the teen wanted the raven’s heart, too. And since nobody expected this, nobody would be able to protect Harry from Riddle’s advances.

Sirius Black sighed, before chugging down the Firewhiskey and pouring himself another glass. If only Harry didn’t trust Riddle so much. He had thought the strong bond the two had formed during the preparation for the hearing would break once the process ended. Or that his warnings would have come through the boy, convincing him to stop being so friendly with the younger Dark Lord. Admittedly, he didn’t have too much success, but he thought the raven’s best friends might have: Harry deciding to forgive them certainly seemed to have done the trick. The expression of intense betrayal and anger that had flickered through dark blue eyes had him smiling like a fool that day, so sure he had been that would have been the end of Riddle and Harry’s friendship. Instead, just the opposite happened: when the two boys had come down from their shared bedroom their bond had been stronger than before. And then, he didn’t know what had happened. The day after the teens had come to breakfast and the dark brunet had sported that look full of dark desire that had made Sirius shudder. That was why he had chosen to follow them to King’s Cross: to make sure Riddle wouldn’t do anything. Not that he believed he would, surrounded by Order’s members, but he had still feared the young Dark Lord’s approach would have been subtle enough that Harry’s guard wouldn’t have noticed, not knowing what to look for, nor being aware of the need to do so.

Sighing again, Sirius was about to drink another glass, when a sudden idea came to him: there was a way for him to do something. He had forgotten about it, but there was a way that would make him able to be in contact with Harry. He didn’t know where exactly he had put them, but he was sure they should be somewhere in his room. Hurrying up the stairs, staggering a couple of times, he reached his destination out of breath, but decidedly euphoric. He started to rummage in the various boxes who littered the room, not caring enough to treat the things he was throwing out with care, until he extracted two worn out pocket mirrors richly decorated. Smiling, he cleaned them. These, these were the solution to his problem. Now he simply needed to find a way to send one to Harry.

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think about the chapter? :)  
I hope you liked the decision to put Tom in Gryffindor and the reason why the Hat
decided to do so.
Next chapter the lessons will begin and there will be the first meeting with Umbridge. :)
Harry’s Pov

Harry slowly opened his eyes, gazing unfocusedly at the red canopy above him, eyes still blurry from sleep. Flashes of his recurring, unsettling dream were still lingering in his tired mind. The same long, shadowed corridor, the same closed door, and the same feeling of familiarity, with the spark of recognition that accompanied it. He was sure to have already seen that place, and not only in his dreams, but despite how much he strained his memory, he couldn’t remember when or where that could have happened.

He was so confused. The dreams had stopped for a period, after he had moved to Grimmauld Place, but had soon returned with a vengeance after the hearing. He supposed that he should at least be grateful that it was always only the same dream. Having his sleeping hours occupied by the sight of that long corridor meant that, at least, he wouldn’t have to replay Cedric’s death or the duel in the Graveyard time and time again, like it had been the norm while he was at the Dursley’s.

The raven sighed. He shouldn’t be thinking about this; the entire school seemed set on making him remember the events of June – what with every single student whispering and sending him fearful or distrustful glances – he shouldn’t linger on them even when he was alone.

Picking up his wand from the bedside table, the teen lazily casted a Tempus. Immediately magical strings formed in the air, morphing into numbers. It was still pretty early, barely half past five, but the raven decided to get up anyway: he knew he wouldn’t be able to return to sleep, the glumness of his thoughts looming like a heavy cloud on his mind.
Harry slowly sat up in his bed and opened the hangings surrounding it – planning to follow his morning routine while everyone else was still asleep and then go down to wait for Tom, Ron and Hermione in the Common Room – when his gaze fell on the bed at his right-side. The hangings were open, and he could make out Tom, leaning against the headboard reading a book, a small ball of light floating in the air, illuminating the tome’s pages. A warm feeling suddenly spread through him, chasing out all the negative thoughts that were hanging heavily on his mind. It was such a familiar sight waking up with the dark brunet reading some kind of book on the next bed; he had lost count of the many times he had woken up to a similar scene during the last month. He didn’t exactly understand why, but it felt nice to still be able to retain some kind of familiarity in the form of something as simple as the sight of the older teen being so close.

He had been worried, the evening before, when Tom had walked up to the stool to be sorted; worried that the teen would end up in Slytherin. And not only because he feared for the dark brunet’s safety – he seriously doubted anybody in that House could represent a serious threat for the dark brunet, but most of their parents were in close contact with Voldemort, meaning that the news of Tom presence and actions could more easily reach the insane Dark Lord – but also because the idea of the other teen ending in a separate House deeply unsettled a part of him. Thinking about it, he supposed that it was probably due of how close they had become and how at ease he felt in the company of the other. Not even Ron and Hermione had such an effect on him. He knew that Dumbledore wanted him to keep an eye on the boy who could very well become a dangerous Dark Lord, meaning they wouldn’t have spent a great amount of time together – all of their lessons and most of their free time – but Ron and Hermione would have been there, too. Having those little moments with only the two of them would have been impossible. But then, Tom had been sorted in Gryffindor and he had felt his worries dissolve into dust. He knew that his friends had been shocked and horrified by this turn of events, but he had been too elated to care.

The overwhelming joy at Tom being sorted into his House had, unfortunately, lasted only until Umbridge’s speech. Umbridge, the toad-looking witch that came from the Ministry, the woman who had a hidden agenda that screamed trouble. The dark brunet had agreed with him, about the danger the witch represented, and yet had told him they wouldn’t do anything. He understood the reasons behind his decision: they didn’t have enough information to antagonize and counter whatever plan Umbridge had. He understood this, he really did, but that didn’t mean he was happy about it. Yet, he had still accepted to only observe the situation, for the moment. He trusted Tom, and if the teen thought at the current time this was the best course of actions, then he was pretty confident that the teen was right – despite how many reservations he had about this decision.

And then, the feast had ended, and he had seen just what the result of the Prophet’s propaganda was. And he wasn’t talking only about the two first years that had looked at him like he was about to attack them, but everyone else, too. It didn’t matter where he looked, vicious whispers had followed him ever since he had left the Great Hall, and it was only the fact he had took unknown secret passages to reach Gryffindor’s Tower, that allowed him to escape the distrustful gazes and malicious mutters. But not for long. The effects of the smear campaign had followed him even into his dorms. Seamus, a boy he had known for four years, someone who he had considered a friend, had been just as convinced of the truthfulness of the Prophet articles as everyone else. He wondered just how many more attacks from people who he considered friend, like Seamus, would need to bear in the following days.

A soft voice broke through the flow of his thoughts. “It looks like a night of sleep didn’t do you much good.” Blinking his eyes to focus his gaze, he noticed that Tom had took notice of his wakeful state and was now looking at him with his piercing cobalt eyes, book lying forgotten at his side.

Giving the teen a wry, tired smile, he whispered back, careful to not disturb the other sleeping boys: “Not at all.”
The dark brunet frowned and got up from his bed to join him on his one. He was watching his face with a strange intensity hidden in his dark eyes and a clear upset gaze. “You look incredibly tired. Have you even slept?”

The clear concern coating the other voice made something flutter inside of his stomach and cancelled the urge to lie and affirm he was fine. “Not much.” He admitted, before stopping for a moment. However, glancing at Tom and seeing his unchanged expression, he decided to elaborate. “I keep having this dream… I’m walking down a long, dark corridor, who had only a single locked door at the end. I reached it and then I linger in front of it, not doing anything, simply watching.” He sighed. “I’m also sure to have already seen the place – in real life, I mean – but I can’t seem to remember where. And my scar is always hurting when I woke after that dream.”

“Your scar?” The older teen lifted his hand towards the raven forehead, looking confused, but stopped a few inches from touching it. “May I?”

Harry nodded and explained. “Usually it hurts when I’m near Voldemort… or he is angry.”

“Really?” Commented the dark brunet. “Strange.” He touched gently the scar and a spark of intense pleasure shot down the raven spine. Tom’s eyes widened, and he suddenly retracted his hand, intrigue replacing the confusion in his eyes. “Strange, indeed.” He murmured softly, as if he was speaking to himself. “That’s the scar you gained from Voldemort’s failed curse, isn’t it?”

“Yes. The scar obtained from his failed Killing curse.” Whispered bitterly back Harry, thinking about how many problems that cursed scar always brought him. “Do you have any idea why it has this reaction? Since it’s connected to a version of you and everything.”

“Unfortunately, no.” Responded Tom, looking contemplative. “Despite it being caused by my counterpart, I cannot explain why it brings you pain when Voldemort is concerned. Neither why…” he stopped and grazed lightly the still sensitive tissue, sending another jolt of intense pleasure through both of their bodies, “it reacted like this to me.”

“I’ll need to do a bit of research.” The teen mused out loudly, in the end. “Well, between this and teaching you runes, it seems I won’t risk being bored, after all.” He then concluded, smirking playfully at the other.

Harry smiled, feeling slightly better after talking with Tom. “Do you want to go down?” He proposed. “It’s a bit early for breakfast to be already in the Great Hall, but we could go and have it in the kitchens, if you wish.”

The dark brunet’s smirk softened into a smile. “I think it’s a good idea. I’ve never really been to the kitchens, I’m pretty curious to see the place.”

“Great.” The raven smiled brightly. “I’m sure you’ll like them. I’ll just go to prepare myself and then we’ll go.”

“Sure, I’ll wait for you there.” Said back the older teen.

With a last look back at the other, Harry gathered everything he needed – his toiletries and the clothes for the day – and hurried towards the bathroom to have a shower and change himself, completely missing the penetrating hungry gaze that Tom threw him.

Tom’s Pov

Tom watched Harry heading towards the bathroom, burning gaze set on the back of the shorter figure. He was glad the raven’s trust seemed to grow every day – as how much the teen had told him
appear to indicate – and he was very pleased by the fact that the boy had shared with him his problems with the dreams; his concern hadn’t been completely fake, after all. Though, the bit about the scar had been unexpected.

He had never heard of a curse scar reacting that way, it wasn’t normal, and yet he was a bit irked about the fact he found himself short on information about such phenomenon. Despite this, he could already feel the sparks of an obsession trying to ignite his mind: he had always loved to learn new and obscure bits of magic, and this promised to be one of them. Or, considering the case in question, and the spell that had caused the scar, it was something new; he couldn’t wait to try and unravel the mystery.

It was truly fascinating the effects that simple cut had on him and Harry. The raven had said that he only gained pain from Voldemort’s presence and emotions – though how it was possible for his boy to feel the fluctuations of the Dark Lord’s moods he didn’t know – and he had admitted being confused about how it was possible that a scar connected them. Interesting, though, was the way it seemed to have the exact opposite reaction to him. And he knew that Harry had felt nothing remotely resembling pain when he had touched the teen’s scar because, despite the intense shot of blinding pleasure that cursed through him, he had been able to spot, even if just for a moment, the blissed look on the other’s face. Analysing the situation, he could compare it to the reaction they had when their magic mingled together, and yet it was different. There was definitely something strange about that cut, something he couldn’t quite pinpoint. But whatever it was, it only made him want his little Raven more.

It was a pity the boy had opted to change in the bathroom – with his newfound lust, seeing him changing would have been quite the nice sight – but he could at least console himself with the knowledge that they would pass the next couple of hours together. Sure, they were headed to the kitchens, where they would be surrounded by House Elves, but the little creatures wouldn’t bother them, and there wouldn’t be any irritating friends to interrupt them, either. He wondered if they could make a habit out of it. He would certainly prefer to have breakfast every day in the kitchens, only him and Harry, than spending that time at the Gryffindor’s table, surrounded by brainless apes.

His thoughts were interrupted by Harry’s return, and after the raven had put away his things, they headed towards the Common Room; then straight out of the Gryffindor’s Tower, being careful not to wake up the other boys, who were still sleeping soundly, used to not wake up until breakfast was halfway through. It was a very good thing because he had no doubt that if Weasley had woken up – though he found this quite unlikely since he doubted anything less than some very forceful measures would be able to take away the read head from his sleep – his plan to spend a couple of quiets hours with Harry would have been disrupted. The read head would have probably insisted to follow them, bringing Granger along, too.

They left the tower without problems and headed down. He was lead through a long, stone corridor, barely a level above the dungeons, decorated with a lot of portraits, all representing some kind of food-related subject. At the end of it, there was a massive painting showing a bowl full of various kind of fruits. He watched confused, and a bit intrigued, as the raven tickled the pear. After a couple of seconds, the fruit started to laugh, and then the paint shifted to reveal an entrance. He should admit that it was quite the ingenious mechanism; very few people would try to tickle a painted fruit, despite how sentient the Hogwarts’ portrays were.

The kitchens were a very large room, full to the brim with bustling House Elves. The little creatures were quickly running around preparing the breakfast that would need to be served in a couple of hours. Four large tables, resembling the ones that could be find in the Great Hall were taking up a great portion of the visible space. For the moment they were bare, but he supposed that they would soon be filled with the fabulous dishes that would be sent up on those four tables’ counterparts.
As they advanced further, one of the little creatures broke from the others and raced excitedly towards them. With a shout of “Harry Potter, sir”, the elf launched himself at the raven, hugging him.

“What – ?” He began, baffled by the situation. Then he noticed that his Harry was sporting a soft look while looking at the little thing.

“Hello, Dobby. How are you?” Even his voice was soft, kind, so unlike the tone wizards and witches usually used to address House Elves.

“Very good.” The elf exclaimed enthusiastically. He was about to say something else, when Tom decided to interrupt him, to request some kind of explanation.

“Do you know him?” He asked, addressing the raven. Both the teen and the elf turned towards him and then, the creature did something unexpected: he placed himself in front of Harry and lifted a hand in a threatening sort of way.

“What is yous doing here?” The little thing had the audacity to shout at him.

He simply lifted an eyebrow and watched him dispassionately. Usually he wouldn’t permit this sort of disrespect – especially not from someone as lowly as a House Elf – but considering the way his raven had greeted the creature, he doubted his usual way to treat those sort of things, would be received positively. “I’m a student here. And I have no idea why you are being so hostile to me.”

“You is the Dark Lord.” Proclaimed boldly the elf. “And you hurt Harry Potter. Dobby won’t let you hurt him again.”

“I didn’t do anything.” Stated coldly the dark brunet, irritated by the elf’s accusations. “And I have no intention to hurt Harry.”

The elf showed no sign to want to back down and he was about to do something quite drastic – it wasn’t enough to have Granger and Weasley to bother him, no, now there was also a bloody House Elf – but Harry, probably sensing the situation was quickly escalating, decided to take the matter in his hands.

He put himself in front of the little thing, and crouching down at its level, tried to calm him in a soft and soothing voice. “Calm down, Dobby, Tom is not the same one who tried to kill me three years ago.”

Kill him? The dark brunet’s eyes darkened. He had heard the Order talking about Harry’s encounter with Voldemort, but he was sure they had been referring to the one that took place in June. It has happened before? If so, how many times had the raven actually risked his life? Also, how did the elf know who he was? He would need to convince the raven to tell him about it.

“He is not, sir?” The little creature looked at the younger teen with large, confused eyes.

“No, he’s not.” Confirmed the teen, smiling. “It’s difficult to explain – and a bit of a long story – but this Tom has nothing to do with Voldemort and is my friend. So, everything is fine, ok?”

The elf nodded, sending a last suspicious glance in the direction of the older boy. “Then can Dobby do something for you, sir?” He ended up asking, apparently deciding to trust Harry’s word.

“Well, Tom and I came here to have breakfast. Can you bring us something, please?” Requested politely the raven.

“Of course, sir.” The elf bobbed enthusiastically his head in affirmation and then scurried off.
Harry rose from his crouched position and turned towards Tom, smiling. “Should we sit, then?”

“Yes, it seems our breakfast will come soon.” He agreed, sitting down on the bench of one of the tables. Soon the raven joined him, looking at the busy little creatures with a happy smile on his face. “You seem pretty close with that elf – Dobby, is it?” Commented casually the dark brunet, wanting to gauge some information from his companion’s responses.

“Harry Potter is Dobby’s best friend.” Exclaimed confidently the elf in question, having returned with a mountain of full plates floating beside him. He put them down, along with two empty ones. “It is thanks to him that Dobby is a free elf, now.”

“Is it so?” Inquired the older teen, glancing at the raven.

“Oh, yes.” The elf bobbed vigorously his head, his long ears flapping up and down. “He tricked Dobby’s ex-master and made him free Dobby.”

“I see.” Blatantly looking at the teen beside him, he continued, “I would very much like to hear the entire story.” He smirked. “It seems quite interesting.”

The raven watched him, clearly feeling uneasy at the idea of sharing this particular event. Fortunately, he was saved from thinking about a way to evade this, by Dobby.

“Dobby can tell you about it, if you wish, sir.” Offered, cautiously the little creature.

Tom turned towards the elf and, putting on a kind smile – internally disgusted by the fact he was forced to be nice with a House Elf, of all things – and said “oh, I’m sure you can, but I would like to hear it from Harry. I’ve a feeling he’s the only one who knows the complete story.” And here he sent a pointed glance to the teen seated at his side.

“Ok, then.” Said the elf, unfazed. “Oh, what would sirs like to drink?”

After fulfilling their request – tea for Tom, and pumpkin juice for Harry – the little creature left them, going to help the others with the breakfast’s preparation. Finally left alone with Harry, he turned towards him. “So, what was your elf friend talking about? It has something to do with what happened three years ago, didn’t it?”

The raven hesitated. “I…”

“Why don’t you want to tell me? Don’t you trust me?” He asked, making a flicker of hurt showing in his eyes. When he noticed Harry eyes widened, he knew the other teen had picked up on it. Good.

“No, it’s not that.” The teen hurried to assure him. “It’s just… not something I like to remember.” He explained. “Furthermore, I don’t think it’s something you’ll like to hear.”

“Why not?” He probed carefully, confused by the other boy’s words.

The raven sighed. “Because in that occasion I fought against ‘you’, or the Tom Riddle He was before becoming Voldemort.”

The dark brunet blinked. “You mean you fought against his younger self?” How was that possible? The raven nodded. “Yes, his younger self who was trapped in a diary.”

The dark brunet felt himself freeze inside and had to use every ounce of his self-control to not
outwardly show any reaction. His Horcrux. Harry had fought against his Horcrux. Did the raven know what it was? Better yet, did Dumbledore know? Was the man aware of the fact that he had already created it?

“And do you know what it was?” He inquired, feigning only curiosity, and suppressing the sudden wave of overwhelming panic who threatened to swallow him.

“He, I mean that Tom Riddle, presented himself as a memory.”

He felt himself relax a little. A memory. Harry thought it was a memory. So, he didn’t know about the Horcruxes. Still, since he had come into contact with it, it was possible he could recognize one of the same kind, if seeing it. Furthermore, something told him that Dumbledore knew about the them. He had been right to leave them in the Chamber, after reaching this time. He was the only alive Parselmouth – Voldemort didn’t count, since he doubted his counterpart would still be interested in the Chamber – so that was the safest place for them.

“Now that I think about it, the memory was around your age. Did you already create it?”

Tom stiffened. The conversation was taking a dangerous path. He looked into those trusting Avada green eyes and felt something inside himself strongly rebel at what he was going to do. He viciously repressed the unexplainable voice who was raising his disagreement, and lied. “No. I planned to, actually.” He added – something told him that Harry wouldn’t believe him if he pleaded complete innocence – “But then I’ve been caught up by the research to reach this time period, and never went around to do it. Good thing I didn’t, it seems.” He smirked, but saw that a dark cloud had fallen on his raven.

“So you already opened the Chamber and killed Myrtle.” Commented the boy darkly.

Taken aback by this, for the first time, he found himself at loss for words. “I… how do you know about this?” A sinking suspicion formed inside of him. “Where exactly did you fought the memory?” He asked, forcing his now dry mouth, and his voice, to work normally.

“The Chamber.” Answered Harry, confirming his suspicion.

“But how is this possible? You should be unable to enter it.” He stated, stunned.

“I can speak Parseltongue.” Confessed the raven, squirming uncomfortably in his seat.

He could? How? That was not only unexpected, but also very strange. Only the descendants of Salazar Slytherin possessed the ability, and when he searched his Family Tree he never saw a link with the Potter Family. So, how was it possible for Harry to possess the ability? It shouldn’t be possible.

He mentally shook himself. That wasn’t important now. Making sure to not lose his raven’s trust had the precedence. He couldn’t let something like this nullify all his hard work to form a relationship with Harry; not now that their bond had started to become so strong. He sighed, resigned, and decided to confess something he never thought he would have been forced to: one of his mistakes. “Myrtle was an accident.”

Harry looked at him, startled. “What?”

“It was an unfortunate casualty.” Repeated flatly the older teen. “I didn’t know she was there. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Not that he really cared, of course. On the contrary, her death had been a lucky coincidence that had allowed him to create his first Horcrux. Still, he made sure to look rightly upset by this to his even.
“I see.” Harry was watching him with a kind of soft understanding shining in his eyes and Tom internally smirked ferally. Now he simply had to find a way to make his raven recount the rest of the story. “You wanted to know how I found out, right?” Asked the younger teen. “It’s a bit of a long story.”

He casted a Tempus and saw that was still pretty early. Breakfast in the Great Hall had just barely begun. “We have time. After all, we need to be at Gryffindor’s table only for the distribution of the timetables and these are usually handed at the end of the meal.”

“Though, we can always head up anyway, if you are worried to miss it.” He mused. “And speak about it here. I doubt someone would interrupt us, since breakfast has barely even started. The Hall is probably still empty for the most part.”

He saw the raven consider this, but was glad when, in the end, the boy shook his head in denial. “No, it’s best if we speak about this here. Ron and Hermione will surely be in the Hall waiting for me.”

And so, Harry started to talk. He told him all about his second year: how the Chamber had been opened, how he and the other two had investigated the matter – and it was kind of irritating that they were able to discover the entrance in one year, when he himself, had needed five to do so – and how the raven had fought against his Horcrux-self and the Basilisk, and won. A twelve-year-old. His Horcrux and the Basilisk had been beaten by a twelve-year-old. One who was disarmed at that. Harry had won simply using a sword and one of the fangs of the Basilisk who had tried to kill him.

In the end he didn’t quite know what to say. Except… “You fought a sixty-foot-long Basilisk with a sword.” He deadpanned.

“It was the only weapon I had at my disposal.” The younger teen defended himself.

“You shouldn’t have flung away your wand in the first place.” Chastised him the dark brunet. Even if it would have been useless against both the beast and the Diary-Riddle. Still, Harry had really been lucky to survive. And to have the intuition to stab the Diary with the fang, containing Basilisk’s venom, one of the few things that could destroy a Horcrux.

… Wait. How come the raven had a fang conveniently beside him when he needed it? “Harry, when did you took a fang out of the Basilisk’s mouth? You didn’t explain that part.”

Tom watched the boy tense and he narrowed his eyes; he had a bad feeling about the answer to this particular question. “Harry?”

The raven avoided his eyes and tried to divert his attention. “Well, it’s not really important, right?”

He moved to stand up, but Tom caught his arm, blocking him. “Why don’t you want to tell me? Weasley and Granger –”

“They also don’t know anything.” He nearly shouted. “I never told anyone.” Muttered the teen.

This reassured him a little, but he still pressed on. “Tell me.” Deep blue locked with bright green; concern and a hint of plea were meet with uncertainty and uneasiness. Tom didn’t look away, patiently waiting for Harry to speak up. Sometimes the teen was just like him, keeping everything to himself and fighting all on his own. But exactly because they were so alike, he needed to know.

“Please, Harry, don’t lie to me. Tell me what happened.” He hated to plead, but he would use any method to convince the raven to tell him the truth.

“I…” The young Gryffindor looked torn, about to give up. He needed just a little push.
“Harry, please.” He pleaded again, a hint of (faked) desperation barely shining through.

“The wound.” The raven whispered, avoiding his eyes. “When I stabbed the Basilisk in the mouth a fang pierced my right arm. And when the snake fell, it broke, remaining there.”

Blue eyes widened, and Tom leaned forward, lifting the raven right sleeve to see for himself. There, faint, but clearly visible on the pale skin was a tiny, circular scar.

The raven smiled faintly. “Fortunately, Fawkes was here and healed me.”

The dark brunet didn’t react. His eyes were still fixated on his raven’s arm, because there was another scar, near the circular one. It was a long, straight one, who started from his forearm and nearly reached his wrist. “And this?” He asked, tone dead cold.

The raven followed his gaze to the scar in question. The smile faded immediately. “Last June. Voldemort took my blood to resurrect himself.”

Rage exploded inside Tom. Red, hot, boiling rage; more powerful than anything he had ever felt before. How dared he? How dared he hurting his Harry? He would make him pay. And he would also need to examine his Diary. From Harry’s tale it seemed that thing was a problematic Horcrux; he needed to find a way to stop him from acting up, like Voldemort’s one did.

“Err… Tom?” At the tentative tone, the dark brunet lifted his eyes to look at the other teen. Concern. The raven was watching at him with worry. Why was he…? He returned his gaze on the arm he was grasping, noticing how tight his grip had become. He immediately let go.

“I’m sorry.” He swiftly apologized, trying to regain control over his turbulent emotions. He couldn’t understand why, but Harry always made him feel unbalanced: when he was with the boy his emotions seemed to have a mind of their own and he wasn’t able to control them as well as he always did. “Anyway, I’ll make sure that nothing like this will happen again, and I’ll make Voldemort regret to have hurt you.” He vowed, deep Ocean pools holding a powerful intensity. You belong to me.

“Thank you, Tom.” Said the raven softly.

“You don’t have to tank me.” Stated the dark brunet. After all, I always take care of my things, especially the most precious ones. “Should we go up, now?” He asked, changing completely the topic.

“What time is it?”

Tom casted a quick Tempus. “Mmh, breakfast should be just halfway through.”

“Then it’s better go. McGonagall always come around this time to give out the timetables.” Informed him Harry.

“Ok, let’s.” The older teen acquiesced, getting up.

The two boys swiftly left the kitchens – after the raven had thanked and given his farewell to his little elf friend – and headed towards the Great Hall.

Thanks to the hour, they didn’t meet any student during their walk, and Tom was pleased to notice that his raven’s mood had greatly improved from that morning. Not only that, he had also gained important information about the teen. And it was something that neither Weasley, nor Granger knew about, he thought, smugly. This clearly showed just how much Harry was starting to lean on him.
Soon the boy would realise just how useless his friends were and would leave them, looking only to him for everything: reassurance, friendship, comfort. And then, then the raven would be completely his.

**Harry’s Pov**

The Great Hall was in the middle of breakfast. All four tables were busting with energy, the students enjoying their first morning meal of the new year, exchanging words with their friends. In the midst of all this confusion, there were two particular people, seated at the Gryffindor table, who didn’t seem to share in the good mood the Hall appeared to be filled with. Ron and Hermione were constantly looking around, apparently searching for someone, concern evident in every line of their features. Aware of being the cause of such worry made a little part of him felt guilty for his decision to eat in the kitchens with Tom without informing them of his whereabouts. He was aware of how much they distrusted the dark brunet and that they didn’t feel comfortable with him spending so much time with the teen, especially if alone; still, he truly believed that this Tom Riddle was different from Voldemort and that his more violent tendencies could be, if not disposed of, at least curbed enough to not represent a danger.

He approached them slowly, Tom at his side, blank faced. His companion displeasure was well hidden, but so great that he could taste it like a faint lingering flavour stuck on his skin. Oh, he was aware the dark brunet disliked his friends just as much as they did him. He was under no illusion that the young Dark Lord felt anything except contempt for by every single being that lived on the planet. He thought them weak, undeserving of his time and attention. Harry was probably one, if not the only one, of the few exceptions – the obsession Voldemort had with his death was a clear sign, as was the fact that Tom had decided to become his friend. And he was truly trying. He was making an effort to tolerate his friends, even if just for the raven’s benefit, for his happiness, than for any true desire to install himself into their little group. Understanding that enduring his friends’ presence was necessary if he wanted to be Harry’s friend. The fact remained, though; he was trying, contrary to Ron and Hermione. And this mean a lot to the young teen. It filled him with an overwhelming sort of warmth that made him feel incredibly elated. And that was probably why he was opening up so much to him, confessing things about his past that not even his two best friends were aware of. Because, despite his knowledge of how manipulative the dark brunet could be, he felt like his desire to form a bond with him was genuine.

He slid soundlessly on the seat beside Hermione; the girl not noticing him, too busy speaking with Ron in hushed tones.

“Good morning, Hermione. Ron.” Called the raven cheerfully. His mood had been greatly improved thanks to his talk with the dark brunet, the dark thoughts that had circled his mind that morning dissipating like smoke.

The two teens whirled around. “Harry!” Exclaimed Hermione, worry and relief mixing together in her voice. “Were have you been? We were so worried!” Then she spotted Tom and her tone became stiff. “Oh. Hello, Gaunt.”

“Good morning, Granger.” Answered Tom amiably. “Weasley.” He added, nodding at Ron.

Ron didn’t reciprocate, simply watching the other with clear hate and distrust.

“I was in the kitchens, Hermione. I’m sorry for worrying you two.” Put in the raven, trying to disperse the tension that was quickly rising at the Gryffindor table. “I woke too early and I didn’t feel in the mood to eat in the Great Hall.”

“Oh, I understand, Harry.” Said bracingly the bushy brunet. “But why didn’t you wait for us in the
“Yeah, mate.” Continued Ron. “We could have come with you.”

“Well, I – ” Started Harry, not knowing exactly what to say. He had never felt very comfortable with sharing his troubles. And even though he was able to do this with the dark brunet – in some capacity – he found himself incapable to do the same thing with his two best friends. Why, though? Shouldn’t it be the exact opposite? It should, and yet, it wasn’t.

“Maybe he didn’t feel comfortable enough around you.” Suggested slyly Tom, his tone carrying a barely perceptible tint of smugness, saving the raven from having to find a good enough excuse to give to the two waiting teens.

“We are his best friends!” Argued Hermione with outrage. “Harry is always comfortable with us.” She was lying, and everyone knew it. Harry could name more than one occasion in which he had opted to spend time alone because he couldn’t bear the company of his two friends. And they were well aware of this. He supposed that her objective was to convince the new Gryffindor that they were more important – to him – than Tom could ever be. Since the teen in question could detect her lie, though, she was simply wasting her breath trying stubbornly to fight a lost cause.

Sensing this, Ron hurried to turn the situation in their favour – or, well, he thought he was going to do so – by shifting the attention to Tom’s whereabouts. The red head sneered at the young Dark Lord and spat. “And where were you, Gaunt? You weren’t at breakfast, either. Around doing something evil, I bet.”

“I was with Harry.” Responded the teen, unimpressed, without missing a beat.

“What?!” Shouted Ron and Hermione, shocked.

The betrayed look on their face reawakened his guilt, even if he knew it was stupid. He couldn’t help feeling more relaxed around Tom than them, after all. It wasn’t their fault, but there were things about him that they couldn’t understand, simply because they had never lived through them. Tom could, though, and there were times in which he needed this kind of understanding, and not the overbearing fussing and worry Ron and Hermione were prone to.

In that moment McGonagall started her annual start of term round at the Gryffindor table, delivering the timetables. When she reached them, the Professor passed one sheet to the dark brunet with a suspicious look in her eyes, but luckily continued on without saying anything. Thanks to this, the discussion shifted to the topic of the classes. He knew both Ron and Hermione were still reeling on the fact that he had preferred Tom’s company over their own, but, true to her nature, the bushy brunette was unable to resist discussing about school-related things, once she was given the opportunity to do so. The read head, knowing it was useless trying to derail the girl once she started, defeated, simply went along. As soon as Ron saw the classes they were going to have that day, he started to complain loudly about the Professors, going as far as to wish for some of Fred and George’s Skiving Snack boxes. As if the mention of their names had summoned them, the two twins in question popped out from nowhere, bringing about a discussion about the O.W.L.s year.

Knowing that Tom had already gone through the experience, Harry turned towards him. “Is it really as bad as Fred and George are picturing it?”

The dark brunet pondered on the question for a couple of seconds. “For some people it is. Those who are in possess of a too weak character fall easily prey to nerves.” He explained. “However, the exams themselves are not overtly difficult. On the contrary, they are very similar to the normal end of year’s tests.”
“Says the genius.” Commented the raven, amused.

The older teen turned towards him with a blank expression. “It had nothing to do with this. Those exams are designed to be passed by whatever student put enough effort in his studies. Though, obviously, some will find them easier than others.”

“Anyway.” The dark brunet continued. “What can you tell me about the classes we have today? Not counting Defence, obviously.”

The raven looked at the timetable and sighed: that day didn’t look promising, not in the slightest. “Well, today we have Binns, Trelawney and Snape. I suppose you know how Binns is.”

“I do.” Confirmed Tom. “He was teaching in my time, too. And he was already a ghost by then.”

“Trelawney is… horrible, actually. She is not a complete fraud – she made two real Prophecies – but she still loves bad omens. Like I already told you, she particularly enjoys predicting my death.”

“I see.” The older wizard said, dark eyes cold as ice.

“Snape… Snape, if possible, is even worse.” Complained Harry. “He favours the Slytherin absurdly and always shot down and belittled people who belongs to the other Houses.”

“Mmh, it looks like this day will be pretty dreadful.” Mused the dark brunet.

“Oh yes, I have no doubt about this.” Agreed easily the raven. “Should we head to the dormitory to collect our school things?”

“Why not? The lesson is going to start soon, after all.”

The raven turned towards his friends, noticing that, while he and Tom were having their conversation, the twins had left and the two had started to bicker with each other. As always. “Ron, Hermione, are you coming?”

The two stopped to argue and looked at him, confused.

“Tom and I are going to head to the dormitory to collect our things. Will you come, too?” Asked the green-eyed boy.

Both nodded very quickly, and followed them, deciding to drag him in a discussion about possible careers. Ron excitedly talked about becoming an Auror and Hermione commented about how she wished to do something really ‘worthwhile’ as a job, like expanding SPEW.

Arching an eyebrow, the dark brunet entered the conversation. “SPEW?”

“It’s an association I created. Its objective is to give rights to House Elves.” Huffed the girl, clearly irritated by the other presence, and obviously determined to keep up with her antagonistic behaviour. Tom simply hummed noncommittally.

The raven decided to take advantage of the topic, to ask something that had weighted on his mind for quite some time. “And you, Tom? What are you planning to do after Hogwarts?”

“I’m considering running for Minister.” Stated confidently the teen.

Hermione and Ron looked at him, horrified. It was obvious they considered Tom becoming Minister the worst thing it could ever happen to the wizarding world. For his part, Harry didn’t quite know what to think. The idea of the dark brunet wanting to obtain such a powerful position reminded him
too much of Voldemort to be comfortable, but at the same time, he was aware of the fact that the other teen wouldn’t be satisfied with a common, modest job. In the end he decided to make a rather neutral comment. “It would certainly suit you.” And he was being honest: he could clearly picture the boy as Minister, like it has already happened. For some reason, though, he couldn’t quite decide if it would be a good or bad thing.

The dark brunet smirked smugly, and the raven looked at him fondly. Really, the expression that seemed to scream ‘Of course it would’, showed an astounding level of arrogance, but it was so Tom.

“And you?” inquired the dark brunet. “What do you wish to do finished school?”

“I haven’t given much thought to this.” Confessed rather embarrassedly Harry. “The only career I ever took into account was an Auror. Since, you know…” He trailed off.

His two best friends looked at him confused, but the older teen nodded at him, understandingly. “I think you would be a great Auror.” Commented the boy, encouragingly. He heard Ron muttering darkly about Tom behind him, but decided to ignore him, in the same way he was ignoring the dark looks Hermione was sending the older teen. He knew it would be difficult, but he really hoped that, in time, things would improve between the three of them.

**Tom’s Pov**

The young Dark Lord internally groaned in annoyance. He had suspected this – and Harry had also warned him – but still he couldn’t comprehend how it was possible for things to be so bad even after fifty years. Binns had been a terrible Professor for at least a century, probably even longer, and still no Headmaster had ever felt the need to get rid of him? He had thought that at least Dumbledore, so praised for his great wisdom, would have done something about the ghost; instead the old man had simply let things run their course, like all of the previous Headmasters had done before him. It was no wonder the Hogwarts’ students were completely clueless about Magic’s history.

His gaze fell on the seat beside his: Harry was playing hangman with Weasley, while Granger watched them disapprovingly. He scoffed, returning to his reading. Like Binns was worth listening to; not even he was making any effort to pay attention to the lesson. It was frankly a waste of time, time he preferred to spend learning about something else. That’s why he had always elected to bring along a book to read, so that he could spend the time doing at least something productive. He sighed. Well, he doubted that the ‘self-righteous’ Granger would be ever able to understand something like that.

He tried to return his focus on the reading, but it was no use: his mind kept drifting, like it had done since the beginning of the lesson. The information he had gathered that morning demanding all of his attention. He was especially fixed on the strange connection he and his raven seemed to be sharing – connection that seemed to exist between Harry and his counterpart, too. It was just as powerful as the connection between their magic, but his nature was completely different, and he was unable to comprehend what its origin was. He really needed to do some research. The problem was that the information he was searching for was most likely in the Restricted Section and no Professor would ever give him a pass. It would be more difficult than what he was used to, but there still was a positive aspect to this situation: this research was at least bound to give him a bit of challenge and help with the terrible boredom the curriculum was subjecting him to. And it shouldn’t be exceedingly difficult to obtain the right books. A night excursion in the library – he knew the books were enchanted so that they could be taken only by students in possess of the permission form, but he was powerful enough that override the spell wouldn’t be a problem – should accomplish that. He would need to plan carefully when to go, as to render the possibilities of being found out as closer to null as possible. In the meantime, he could always work on the Professors of this time period. Sure, they
knew who he was, but he was extremely confident in his ability to charm people. It didn’t matter if they were aware of his true nature, he was sure he would still be able to fool them, convincing them that he was reformed. And it would be so easy, too. They were expecting this to happen, after all: it was the main reason that had pushed them to ‘force’ him and Harry to spend all this time together.

The bell signalling the end of the lesson tore him out of his thoughts. Finally, they were free from Binns’ soporific voice and teachings. Next was Potions, if he wasn’t mistaken, in the company of the sour Professor that hated so much his raven. He must confess he was quite curious about how that lesson would unfold. From what he had gathered, Snape was the Order’s spy in his counterpart’s ranks, meaning he must be quite the capable wizard, and yet, Harry had told him the man’s teaching skills left a lot to be desired. He also wondered how the dour Potion Master would act towards him. Considering his status as a spy, Snape was against his counterpart, meaning he certainly despised him; at the same time, being a Death Eater, the man certainly knew how dangerous he was, and he could bet that he feared him, at least a little. He really wondered what emotion would prevail: hate or fear? Would the man attack him – like Harry had told him Snape was prone to do with him – or would try to stay as far away from him as possible? He looked forward to finding this out.

Having a little free time between the two lessons, the quartet decided to go out to take a breath of fresh air. Being September, the air possessed a sharp chilling quality, and the soft, cold breeze that was blowing only worsened the matter. Yet, it helped them clear their mind from the numbing History lesson. As Granger and Weasley discussed about what the Potion’s professor first topic could be – unsuccessfully trying to bring the raven into the discussion – he occupied Harry’s attention by talking about their future lesson of Ancient Runes. While they were discussing the books Harry would need to pick up in the Library to study the subject, the Ravenclaw girl who had approached them during the train ride, the one who had showed interest in his raven, walked towards them.

“Hi, Harry.” Called the girl, cheerfully. From behind the smaller boy, Tom glared at her. He knew what she was doing, and he was not happy about it. Harry belonged to him, how dared that stupid girl try to steal him?

Confused and surprised, the raven turned toward the Ravenclaw. “Oh, hi Cho.”

Tom’s anger deflated a bit: at least the other boy didn’t seem taken by her. Still, not understanding this, the girl stubbornly went on. “How was your summer?”

The dark brunet noticed the younger teen stiffening and grimacing a little, before giving a clipped answer. “Eventful.” Then, looking as he was physically forcing himself to continue the conversation, “and yours?”

The girl’s smile dimmed. The dark brunet watched, interested. Mmh, strange reaction. He mused.

“Oh, it was good enough, you know…”

An awkward silence descended on the group. The young Dark Lord decided that was the right time to stop this. “Harry, we have to go, the bell is about to ring.”

The raven turned around and looked at him, relieved. “You are right, we better go. Bye, Cho.”

Tom smirked smugly inside his head, while the two left, leaving two confused teenagers and a very disappointed girl behind.

While they were walking toward the dungeons, Harry turned to him. “Thank you, Tom. You saved me; I really didn’t know what to say.”
The teen smirked. “I noticed.” Then, more seriously, he added “I wonder why she reacted in that way, though; it was strange.”

Smiling sadly, the raven explained “Cho was Cedric’s girlfriend. I think his death still haunts her.”

Tom nodded, now understanding the strange behaviour, and then voiced his doubts about the rest of the phrase. “I don’t think the boy’s death bother her too much, though.”

Harry looked at him, confused. “Why do you think so?”

“Because of the way she acted towards you.”

The raven looked at him, lost. He was absurdly cute. “She likes you, Harry. She’s being very obvious about it.”

“Really?” The boy asked, shocked. “That explains why she approached me two times without any of her giggling friends – and she has always at least one of them with her, you know?”

Trying to act nonchalant, he asked. “And you, do you like her?” It didn’t look like he did, but it was best to check, just to be sure she didn’t represent a threat and didn’t need to be ‘disposed of’.

The raven didn’t respond for a moment, gaze locked steadily forward. “Not anymore.” That wasn’t exactly what Tom wanted to hear. It seemed like he would need to be careful of that girl, after all. The raven, though, hadn’t finished to speak. A frown made his way on the boy’s face. “I used to, you know.” He continued, unconsciously souring his companion mood. “Every time I saw her, I used to feel that excited flutter in the pit of my stomach. And a strange warmth always crept inside of me. Now, though, when I see her, I feel nothing. And those feelings –” The younger teen stopped to speak abruptly and the dark brunet turned to look at him more fully. Harry’s eyes were wide, as he had suddenly realized something; his face was flushed, too.

“Harry?” He called, confused. The raven, jumped and faced him, with something resembling very much fear, shining in those vivid green eyes. This only help to confound him even more; not to mention the fact that the way Harry looked was really testing his self-control. “What were you going to say?” Yes, that was good. Asking about this stopped his thoughts from wandering in a too dangerous territory.

The raven only blushed more, and avoided his eyes. “Nothing.” He muttered. “Better hurry towards Potions.” And he sprinted on. Tom, still bewildered, followed, wondering what had prompted the boy to act like this.

Despite how early they had started to make their way towards the classroom, when they arrived most of the class – well, only the Slytherins, in truth – was already there.

He and Harry took a table at the back of the room, waiting for Snape, with Harry still refusing to meet his eyes. A couple of minutes later, they were joined by Weasley and Granger, who slid on the seats in front of them, and then, by the rest of the Gryffindors. As the last student took his place, Snape entered the room, dark robes billowing behind him. The dark brunet nearly rolled his eyes: such unnecessary dramatics!

“So settle down.” The cold tone of the man echoed in the silent classroom. Pointless: everyone, even the Slytherins, had gone quiet after the man’s entrance.

Sweeping to stand in front of the class, he continued. “Now, before we start the lesson, I think it’s appropriate to remind you all about the examination you will be sitting through the next June. In it you will be requested to show how much you have learned about Potions in these five years. Despite
the low level of intellect with which many of you have been bestowed with, I expect you to scrape at least an ‘Acceptable’ in your OWL, or you will incur in my… displeasure.” Here his malicious glare settled on Longbottom, who gulped nervously.

“After this year, of course, many of you will cease studying with me. I accept only the very best in my NEWT course, after all, so we’ll have to depart with many of you.” Before continuing, he shifted his gaze on Harry, pinning him down with a look of pure loathing. For his part, the raven just stared back with the same intensity, and Tom could practically feel the barely hidden satisfaction rolling out in waves from the teen at his side. “However, we still have a year before that pleasant moment of farewell, so I advise you to try and maintaining the high passing level I expect from my OWL’s students, independently from your wish to pursue the NEWT’s course.”

“On this topic, the potion you will attempt to brew today is one who is often requested at the OWLs: the Draught of Peace. If brewed correctly, it can help to soothe anxiety and agitation. However, if you are too heavy-handed with the ingredients, your result will put the drinker into a deep and sometimes irreversible sleep, so I recommend extreme caution.”

At those words, Granger sat up straighter, looking eager to prove herself. The dark brunet nearly failed from stopping himself to sneer in disgust: like her showy display was necessary! The dour professor, apparently thinking along the same lines – and probably used to the girl’s behaviour – spared her just a disdainful glance before refocusing his attention on the rest of the class. Taking his wand out, he flicked it, making instructions appear on the previous bare blackboard. “The instructions and methods are on the board.” Another flick and the store cupboard opened. “The ingredients necessary are in the cupboard. You have an hour and half. Begin.”

Every single student stood up and went to retrieve the ingredients. Once he and the raven had both returned at their workstation, he decided to inquire about the feeling he had felt coming from Harry during the speech. “You seemed pleased at the idea of ditching potions, next year.” Commented casually Tom, controlling, in the meanwhile to follow every step perfectly.

At his side, the raven, with an expression of deep concentration, was trying to do the same. “I was. I am.”

The dark brunet hummed, executing the first stir clockwise. “You are aware of the fact that, to become an Auror, like you wish, a NEWT in Potions is required, aren’t you?”

The raven stopped, bottle of Syrup of Hellebore in hand. “What?!?”

Checking the simmering potion for the moment in which it will turn purple, the older teen kept speaking. “Add the Hellebore, Harry, or you risk ruining it.”

The young Gryffindor, added the Syrup, being careful with the dosage. “You are serious about that? The need to continue Potions, I mean.”

Adding the Porcupine Quills, the dark brunet nodded. “If you want to become an Auror, then you’ll have to.”

The other boy groaned. “I can’t believe it.” Then a sort of dejected look entered in the teen’s eyes. “I have no chance then. It seems like I would need to choose another career.”

Puzzled, the dark brunet turned slightly towards his companion. “I don’t think you will need to.”

The raven turned sharply towards the other. “Are you kidding?” He asked, bewildered. “Didn’t you hear what Snape said? I will never be able to obtain an O in this exam.”
“Maybe not at your current level.” Acknowledge Tom, looking satisfied at his potion, a perfect, vivid purple. Only a couple of passages left. “But you have to take into consideration the fact that there would be no Snape to grade you. And, if you want, I can tutor you.”

The teen watched him for a moment, apparently not knowing what to say. Then smiled. “Thank you.”

The young Dark Lord returned it. “You are welcome. I’ll always help you, Harry, if you require it.”

The other’s smile brightened, and then they both returned to concentrate on their potions. Looking critically at his own, the dark brunet noticed that it was near perfect; there was just something missing. He added just a grain more of Moonstone, and watched the liquid reach the exact shade described by the procedure.

With only then minutes left to go, Snape spoke up from the front of the class. “A light silver vapour should now be rising from your potion.”

Tom watched around. His potion was, obviously, perfect, but he noticed that very few others had obtained a good enough result. Granger was one of them, as was the Malfoy kid, their potion emitting a mist of silver vapour, just a couple of shades darker than his. Harry’s one, also, wasn’t so bad; the vapour was a bit on the darker side, but still light enough to be considered silver. Many of the Slytherins were on the same level of his raven, with the exception of some hopeless cases, like Crabbe and Goyle. The Gryffindor’s side, in opposition, was an array of disastrous results. Fumes of various shades, the more diverse consistencies and… were those green sparks shooting out from Weasley’s cauldron? How in Merlin’s name was that kind of result even possible?

Snape started to prowl between the desks, awarding points to the Slytherins and making derogatory comments towards the Gryffindors, subtly avoiding their section, confliction clear in his stance. From the gazes he caught the man sending in their direction, he summarized that his desire of humiliating Harry was battling with the subconscious fear of his own presence. In the end, thought, the hate the man felt towards his raven seemed to prevail, and the professor headed towards them. Making no comments about Granger’s potion, and completely ignoring Weasley’s one, he bent down to observe Harry’s result. He watched the concoction with distaste and his lips curled with loathing. Then, he leaned forward, hands flat on the desk, his body an overbearing presence, poise intimidating; he flicked his wand and vanished the potion, shocking both him and the younger boy. “Twenty points from Gryffindor, Potter!”


The sour man pinned him with a cold look and hissed. “I don’t tolerate cheating in my class.”

“I didn’t cheat!” Objected furiously the teen.

Still quite shocked by the blatant attack – Dumbledore, despite despising him, has never tried to purposefully sabotage his good marks – but starting to feel indignation in his raven behalf, he cut off whatever Snape was going to say. “With all the due respect, sir,” he said silky, “Harry had not cheated. I can attest it.”

The Potion Master stilled and then reluctantly shifted the dark black orbs from the raven to him. Conflicting emotions could be seen swirling inside that pools of black void – hate; wariness; the determination to whip away all emotions, to become a blank, inscrutable wall of a man; and the uncontainable, delicious fear – and Tom smirked. White, perfect teeth just barely visible between plush lips. A bloodthirsty, predatory smile.
The man straightened himself, then, taking a step back from the desk; like wanting to put as much
distance as possible between himself and the terrifying teen who was in truth a blooming young Dark
Lord, without giving away the oppressive presence of his fear. Hard, yet perturbed eyes; posture stiff
and uneasy; lips stretched in a straight line, corners downturned. “And you expect me to believe that
Potter, with his abysmal skill in Potions, was able to brew nearly perfectly this quite difficult potion,
Gaunt?” The cold voice was wavering. The tremor too faint to be perceived by anyone but Tom.

Scenting weakness, he pounced like a shark smelling blood, smile as sharp as a blade, and eyes like
the icy depths of a cold inferno, blood red flames hiding just barely out of view. “I expect a Professor
to be professional, and not let his judgement be clouded by unfounded prejudices.” Smooth, honeyed
voice washed over from his mouth.

The man appeared to freeze and then recover, bracing himself, in a quick succession. He bent down,
menacingly – and yet still so amusedly terrified – and hissed. “You know nothing, Gaunt, and your
opinion doesn’t matter inside this class; only mine.”

Then he sauntered away. “Another twenty points from Gryffindor, for the disrespect shown to a
teacher.” He barked. “And whoever had managed to brew his potions without help, can bring it here
for testing. Homework: twelve inches of parchment on the proprieties of moonstone and its uses in
potion-making, to be handed in on Thursday.”

He watched his raven fall down on his chair, a morose expression marring his features. Not knowing
what to say, he resolved to hand over his potion and talk with the raven later. He filled a vial,
labelled it, and put it on Snape’s desk. In the short time required to complete this task, though, the
desk had been vacated. Worried about the raven, he quickly packed his things and hurried down the
corridor, hoping the teen hadn’t gone too far in the meantime. Despite his fast pace, the dark brunet
reached the other just when the boy was already on top of the stairs that connected the dungeon to
the upper floor. Well, it seemed that his little Raven was quite the runner.

“Harry.” He called.

The teen seemed to waver, uncertain, between keep going and wait for him, but in the end decided to
stop. The older boy, noticing this, quickened his pace even more, until he reached the other.

“I would ask you how are you feeling, but it would be a very stupid question.” Commented Tom
idly.

A somewhat strained smile found place on the young Gryffindor’s features. “Angered would be to
put it mildly.” Confirmed Harry.

“As you should.” Agreed the dark brunet. “His disdain is no reason to treat you like he does. Not
even Dumbledore acted like this, and he really despised me.”

“It’s the first time for Snape, too.” Muttered the raven. “He had never tried to sabotage me so
blatantly before.”

“If he worsened, then this is a serious problem. We must do something.”

“Like what?” The raven sounded really defeated.

“Like complain to McGonagall.” Suggested Tom.

“She will do nothing.” Complained Harry.

“You don’t know this.” Pointed out the dark brunet. “She is the Deputy Headmistress, so she
possesses the power to stop Snape, and she is your Head of House, so she had the duty to do so.”

“I understand your reticence to ask for help.” Added the young Dark Lord, noticing the other’s expression. “I also dislike requesting assistance, but you can think about it like this: you are simply using all the weapons at your disposal to win against Snape, like you did at the trial. McGonagall is just an asset you can use, exactly like your status as Heir was.”

The raven sighed. “I will try.”

“Good.” Approved Tom. “Now, let’s go to lunch. Maybe, after a nice meal, you’ll forget about this horrible lesson.”

Tom was conflicted. He really didn’t know what to think about the current situation. The underhanded move Snape had pulled on Harry, that had sent the raven in a fit of boiling rage, had fortunately been easy to smoother, since talking with the young Gryffindor had been enough to lift his dark mood. While they were heading to lunch he had also been able to make Harry smile happily again, but then, Granger and Weasley had come and had ruined everything. Sure, the fact that they kept upsetting his little Gryffindor worked in his favour, since it made the boy distancing himself from those two, yet it was also a problem, considering that an angry Harry was less willing to speak to anyone.

And now he had to run after the raven; again. Not that he could really blame him: Granger and Weasley’s bickering was getting on his nerves, too. Seriously, arguing seemed all that those two did. Harry should be commended for putting up with this for four years, he would have disposed of them after the first week, if not sooner.

Cursing the raven’s speed, he hurried through the stairs that lead to the North Tower. He found the teen at the top, seated under a trapdoor that probably leaded to the classroom. The young Gryffindor was staring moodily at the wall in front of himself, so he slid silently beside him. The teen didn’t acknowledge him for a couple of minutes, then muttered.

“They deserved it; their constant bickering was driving me mad.” He stated in a defensive way.

“I’m not here to tell you otherwise, you know.” Said Tom. “I think nobody would begrudge you for snapping at them. You are obviously under a lot of stress, and their stupid arguments would get on everyone nerves.” Assure him the dark brunet, smirking.

Harry laughed. “Without a doubt. Especially considering the topics of their arguments: in third year they didn’t spoke for various weeks because we thought Hermione’s cat had eaten Ron’s rat.”

Tom looked at his companion with obvious disbelief. “Oh, yes.” Said the raven, still snickering. Then his expression darkened. “Pity it didn’t happened, though.”

“You seemed particularly invested in this rat’s avoided demise.” Pointed out the dark brunet.

“We found out at the end of the year that the rat was, in truth Peter Pettigrew, also called Wormtail, the man who sold my parents to Voldemort.” The green eyes flashed, and Tom’s breath hitched. He had never seen so much hate in those lovely Avada eyes before: they were so bright and intense; it was breath-taking.
“I see.” Whispered the older teen, nearly forcing the words to come out. Wormtail. It was no wonder the raven hated that man so much; Pettigrew helped to ruin his life, after all. Mmh… maybe, once he had Harry firmly in his grasp, he could use the man to show his raven the beauty of the Dark Arts. He was sure he would at least provide them with some afternoon’s fun.

Suddenly a bell rang in the distance and the trapdoor above them opened, a thin, silver ladder, descending on the corridor. They both ascended, the older of the two wondering how that class would be. As soon as he put foot inside the room he froze: the place was a nightmare. He couldn’t comprehend how someone could possibly be able to teach in such environment. The room was hot and stuffy, and the dizzying perfumes coated the air like an oppressing miasma that confused and muddled the mind. There were only two possible outcomes he could foresee as the end result of this lesson: he would either fall asleep or develop a terrible headache. All in all, it seemed like this Professor could succeed in the impossible – at least that was what he had thought until that moment – quest to be a worse teacher than Binns.

Harry, noticing his status of shock, took his arm and gently guided him towards one of the cushions in the backs, in the direction of one of those seats that were covered in shadows. He lifted an eyebrow, and, at his silent prompting, the raven whispered.

“I don’t want her to notice us.” He inclined his head in the direction of the front of the class. “And this place will also hopefully discourage her from interrupting us too often.”

He nodded, and his gaze flickered in the direction in which the professor was. He immediately started to assess the woman, cataloguing her aspect and mannerism. She wasn’t an attractive woman by any stretch of imagination, and looked to be in her mid-forties. She was dressed like some sort of gypsy, tinkling bracelets and necklaces covering her arms and neck. The big, thick spectacles magnified her already big eyes, making them look like they were bulging out. Overall, she gave the distinct impression of a great, glittering insect, like a dragonfly for example.

Soon the class started to fill with other students. Tom noticed that there weren’t many taking that class: all the fifth year Gryffindor’s, bar Granger; a hand-full of Hufflepuff; a couple of Slytherins and only one Ravenclaw. This meant that, unfortunately, Weasley was with them, too. If this wasn’t enough, the boy in question made a beeline for their little table as soon as he spotted them. He had thought that Harry’s outburst would have saved him from having to bear Weasley for this hour, but it seemed like he wasn’t so lucky.

The red head reached them and started to spin around a tale about how he and Granger had stopped bickering, and how they were on Harry’s side, so he shouldn’t pour his frustration on them. At this, he scoffed. Really, they had brought that upon themselves: it wasn’t his raven’s fault, but theirs. How many people did they thought would be able to stand them arguing with each other every single minute of the day? No one. He was actually surprised it took Harry five years, and an insane dose of stress, to snap at them.

Before he could voce some of those thoughts, however, a misty voice broke the dazed silence of the room. “Good day, and welcome back to Divination.” Began the Professor. I have observed most carefully your fortunes during this holiday, and I’m glad to see that you have all returned in good health. Like I knew you would, of course.” Her magnified eyes set upon him. “And I’m happy to welcome our new addition to this class: Tom Gaunt.” Then she turned to speak directly to him. “Mmh, you must be careful, dear. I can see a great shadow looming over you.”

The dark brunet internally scoffed. A shadow looming over him, sure. He noticed many looking at him, at the woman statement; the two Gryffindor girls were watching him with worried and horrified expression. Divination’s fanatics, then. How pathetic. The Professor, ignoring the reaction her words
produced, continued her speech like nothing had happened. “On the tables before you there are copies of ‘The Dream Oracle’ by Inigo Imago. Dream Interpretation is a very important branch of Divination and it’s very probable that will be one in which you will be tested in your OWL. Obviously, I don’t believe that exams’ scores are important in the sacred art of Divination. If you truly possess the Inner Eye, good marks mean nothing. However, The Headmaster insist for you to sit the examination, so…”

She sniffed contemptuously: it was clear that she considered her subject above such mundane things as exams. It was true, however, and Tom hated to admit this, that a true Seer would have no trouble in gaining good grades in the examination.

“Oh, go to the first page of the book and read the introduction. Then, please divide into pairs and use the Oracle to help you interpret each other dreams.”

The dark brunet opened his book with mild curiosity and started to read. Surprisingly, he found himself somewhat interested by the book’s contents: while it was true that only a true Seer could correctly interpret all the hidden meanings of a person’s dream, it wasn’t strictly necessary for one to possess the gift to pick up the surfaced meaning of a dream. His interpretation wouldn’t be as complete as one made by a real Seer, but he would still be able to gather something. He quickly finished the introduction and then moved on to the true dream’s symbolism, waiting for Harry to finish his reading. When the raven finished, only ten minutes were left to the lesson. Seeing Weasley ready to pair with his Raven, and not wanting to do the assignment with one of the other people in the room, he quickly snatched Harry.

“What do you think about pairing with me, Harry?” He asked with a charming smile.

The raven sent a somewhat apologizing glance in the read head direction and quickly nodded. The freckled teen, huffed, shot him a look full of loathing and went to sit with Longbottom, watching his friend with betrayal in his eyes.

There was a conflicted look, now, in those vivid emerald orbs. “Do you prefer to pair with your friend?” Questioned the dark brunet, hiding his annoyance at he thought.

“No.” Replied quickly the younger teen. “It’s just… I’m still a bit peeved with him and Hermione about their incessant bickering, but at the same time I feel bad for forcing him to search another partner. We both chose Divination, so we could work together, after all.”

“Still,” he added “something tells me that you wouldn’t be so thrilled to pair with someone else, would you?”

“You are right. I could work with someone else, obviously, but I feel more comfortable in your company.”Acknowledged the dark brunet. It was useless to deny it, and if it helped him to have Harry as his partner for all the other classes too, then it was only beneficial for him to admit so.

“Well,” began the raven, apparently took aback by his sincerity, “I suppose that Ron could always pair with someone else, and there is always Hermione in the other classes.”

Internally, the young Dark Lord smirked victorious, but externally he simply returned the raven’s smile. “Thank you, Harry. Should I begin, then?” He offered, knowing the other teen would feel uncomfortable recounting his dreams in the class.

Harry nodded, obviously relieved, like he had expected. Now, about the dream. He couldn’t certainly recount a true one – not only it offered very little margin for interpretation, it also had the teen sitting in front of him as a subject and he doubted Harry would like to hear the things he wished
to do to him – so he had to find a suitable fake one that would create no problems. Maybe something innocent like realizing his ‘wish’ to become ‘Minister’, and successfully made the changes he wished to do, would work. This would also have the added bonus of making the raven aware of his less drastic views.

**Harry’s Pov**

Harry watched Tom think. His brows were furrowed and had a deep contemplative look in his eyes. The raven imagined the dark brunet wasn’t finding this exercise easier than him; dreams were a very private aspect of one self, after all, so it made sense the other would need time to come out with one he felt comfortable enough to share in the class, where others would be able to hear it, too. This made Harry appreciate his offer to go first even more. It really warmed the smaller teen up to know that, despite his reluctance to disclose any personal information in a public place, the other teen was willing to do so just to spare him the trouble to share one of his dreams. It was truly incredible how much the dark brunet knew and understood him, despite the very short time they had actually spent together. Maybe it was foolish of him to grow so attached to the other so soon – he knew that Tom, despite not wanting to be Voldemort was far from innocent and wasn’t classifiable as a good guy; he was still dark, he still despised everyone, except Harry, apparently, and had already opened the Chamber – but he couldn’t help it. There was a level of understanding and honesty between them that he wasn’t able to achieve with anyone else, not even Ron and Hermione.

He felt himself smile as he continued to watch Tom. He didn’t expect the boy to be so sincere about his feelings when he commented about him not wanting to pair with anyone else. When the dark brunet had shared that he didn’t felt comfortable enough to work with anyone else, he had looked so open and vulnerable. And Harry knew, in that moment, that Tom wasn’t only speaking about classwork, but also meant that he felt comfortable enough to open up with him and talking truthfully about his personal matters. It had made the raven feel warm inside. He mentally groaned: if only warmth was the only thing he could feel around Tom. He could still feel his chest fluttering, his heart beating a bit faster than normal and the same feeling he felt the previous year every time he saw Cho, only stronger. He nearly wished to Obliviate himself of the knowledge and their discussion about what he thought about the Ravenclaw girl. It had been that talk that had opened his eyes, cluing him on the fact that he liked Tom, no, worse, that he was falling in love with him. Now, he didn’t know what to do. Befriending the teen, even becoming best friend with him, was good. But falling in love? That had never been in his plans. It hadn’t even occurred to him that something like this could happened. He had never had much time to ponder on his sexuality or other things regarding this matter, as busy as he was with having Voldemort after his life, but he knew he wasn’t gay. He had never been attracted to guys. He could objectively take notice of the handsomeness of some individuals, of course, but it had never affected him in the same way pretty girls did. Until Tom.

If the implications weren’t so problematic, he would maybe find his situation funny: his life revolved around Voldemort so much that he was even falling in love with a younger version of the man. He groaned. He must be so messed up.

“…Harry?”

He jumped, blinking rapidly and focused his gaze on the concerned expression of the dark brunet seated in front of him.

“Are you all right, Harry?” Asked the teen, worry swirling in deep blue eyes. “I was calling you for the last minute and you weren’t answering.”

The raven felt himself flush. “I-I’m fine. I was just thinking about something.”

The other looked at him with an expression that clearly stated he didn’t believe him, but due to the
fact they were in class, he thankfully didn’t push the issue. “Have… have you decided on a dream, then?” Asked Harry, blatantly trying to redirect the boy’s attention on the coursework.

Cobalt eyes watched him sharply, much like he knew Hermione would have looked at him if she had been in the other boy’s place. However, Tom, didn’t sent him a look that clearly meant ‘we’ll talk later’, nor made any sign of wanting to peruse the topic at a later date. Instead, the softness in his gaze indicated that the other would be perfectly okay to listen to him when, and if, Harry felt comfortable enough to share what he was thinking about. So, it was no surprise for the raven, when the boy started to calmly recount a dream in which the older wizard had become the Ministry of Magic and had started to change the things he felt the current administration was doing wrong, descending into a particular detailed description on how he would go on about this and what new laws he would implement.

“That was a really detailed dream.” Commented the young Gryffindor, blinking rapidly, after the other finished.

Tom smirked, and a strange, undecipherable glint shone for a moment in his eyes. “Oh, yes. My dreams tend to be pretty realistic and full of details.” Placing his elbow on the table and leaning his head on his hand, he kept watching the raven, smirk still in place. “So, what do you think it means?”

“Apart from the obvious fact that you wish to become Minister and revolutionize the Wizarding World?”

The dark brunet laughed softly. “Yes, apart from this.”

Harry hummed and answered. “Mmh, probably that you’ll die of an early death, attacked by a gigantic pile of paperwork.”

Blue orbs sparkled with amusement. “Is that so?”

“Papers won’t be a problem, but your death isn’t as improbable as you think, dear.” A misty voice spoke from behind them. Both the boys turned, startled, and found themselves faced with their Divination’s Professor. Usually the woman would comment on Harry’s sure premature demise, but this time she seemed more interested in Tom. Was because he was new? “The darkness encompassing you is quite oppressing. It pains me to warn you that your dream is trying to warn you that you will die without being able to accomplish your objective, dear.” After this, she slithered away to comment on the dreams of the other students. Tom watched her go, smirk vanishing completely in favour of a sour look, and whispered. “I can’t believe how useless this class is. I didn’t believe that a Professor worse than Binns could exist, but she proved me wrong.”

“I warned you, didn’t I?” Said the raven, exasperated by the woman attitude.

“You did.” Acquiesced the other. “But I didn’t think the situation was quite so bad. Especially after reading the introduction.”

“What do you mean?” Asked Harry, confused.

“The introduction clearly hinted that even someone who isn’t a Seer can correctly interpret someone dream and have a slight peek on the future.” Explained flatly the dark brunet. “It would be blurry, and shady at best, but it would still be something.” There he glanced at Trelawney. “The problem is that, just like Binns, she fails to stimulate interest in her subject, making so that the students either found it a joke or,” and here his gaze set pointedly on Parvati and Lavander, who were whispering excitedly to the professor, “they learn to only see death in everything.”
He sighed. “In the end, this is just like History: a subject that could be worth pursuing, but only if studied independently.”

“I can see what you mean.” Murmured Harry. “But I am not interested enough in Divination to self-study it. Now, I really regret not choosing Ancient Runes when I had the chance.”

“Don’t worry,” reassured Tom, “I’m sure that next year you’ll be able to leave Divination and switch to Runes. I’ll make sure of it.”

“Meaning you’ll load me with so much work that I will hardly be able to do something else, just to make sure I will be able to obtain the required OWL score?” Asked the raven, a bit apprehensive.

“Pretty much.” Answered Tom with a sort of feral smirk.

Harry watched it with something akin dread washing over him: he had a feeling this would be an insanely hard year.

---

Tom’s Pov

Tom seethed on his way to McGonagall’s office, the events of the last two hours still fresh in his mind.

Flashback

The sound of the bell had never been as welcomed as it has been there, in that stifling and hot classroom in the North Tower. The lesson had left both him and Harry in quite a dark mood, because, after a round of the other tables, the Professor had returned to them just to predict his Raven demise caused by a rather gruesome death. Now, Harry had warned him that the woman was quite free with her death predictions and that she, for some strange reason, particularly enjoyed predicting the younger teen’s death. Still, the fact irked him to no end. Especially considering she had done the same thing to him not even five minutes prior. He had always hated the idea of dying and even if he didn’t intend to become like Voldemort, by no means this meant that he was agreeable to discuss about his, or his raven, possible demise. And it was even worse because, while he felt quite safe with the knowledge of having two Horcruxes hidden in the Chamber, he was well aware that Harry didn’t possess the same kind of protection he had. And taking into account the kind of troubles he was prone to find himself into, of which what happened in the boy’s second year was a too clear example – to be fair it wasn’t as much Harry’s fault as it was his counterpart’s, but still – it was obvious that the raven had an elevate chance of dying. And this didn’t sit well with him. It really didn’t.

Tom had been silent during all the way from the Tower to the Defence’s classroom, barely taking notice of when Granger joined them, or of Wesley’s complaints about the mole of homework, or the fact that Harry was just as quiet as him. Dark thoughts circled in his mind and the more prominent one was his Raven’s vulnerability. He would need to keep the boy very close until he found a way to fix this.

While busy with his troubled thoughts, the quartet had reached the Defence classroom. As they entered, the dark brunet’s eyes narrowed: he had forgotten about Umbridge. The toad-like woman was already seated at the teacher’s desk in front of the class and, as by mutual agreement, all four
slid in tables in the back of the room, trying to put as much distance as possible between them and the Ministry’s official.

While the rest of the class slipped inside the room, Tom quietly studied the woman. She had a smug look on her face and the way she was watching them brought to mind the image of a large toad who was looking at a particular bunch of especially tasty flies. Turning to his right, he noticed that Harry wasn’t fearing well; his posture was very stiff and his shoulders were incredibly tense. At his inquiring glance, the raven explained “I’ve a bad feeling about this lesson.”

He nodded understandingly. He, too, had the sensation something bad was going to happen, something that would involve Harry.

When everyone had took their place, Umbridge, smiling broadly, opened her large mouth to greet them with that sickly girlish voice of her. “Good afternoon, class.”

Some people mumbled a reply, while others kept looking warily at her. “Tut, tut.” She reprimanded in a disapproving voice. “This won’t do. I would like you will reply when I greet you. Let’s try another time, okay? Good afternoon class.”

“Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge.” They chanted back at her. The majority of the students were sporting the same stunned expression Tom himself was trying hard to suppress: like at the welcoming feast, the woman was treating them like they were toddlers.

“Good, that wasn’t so hard, wasn’t it?” Merlin, that voice was so irritating and nauseating. And the way she was treating them was simply insulting. He centred himself, trying to keep in mind he couldn’t stage a mortal incident, since she had done nothing for now. He needed to behave in order to make Harry his.

“Wands away and quills out, please.” Said the woman.

A theoretical lesson, then. This wasn’t good: as fifth years they had passed the stage where theoretic lessons were enough. The professor took out her own wand and tapped the blackboard with it. Soon, the words ‘Defence against the Dark Arts, A Return to Basic Principles’ appeared on it. And it kept getting worse, thought Tom.

“So, from the reports the Ministry had gathered, your study of this subject had been rather disrupted and fragmented, hasn’t it?” Began the woman in her more business-like and monotonous voice. “Having so many different Professors, many of whom didn’t even follow a Ministry-approved curriculum, made so that you are unfortunately far below the level we expect you to reach in your OWLs.” And you will only help to bring them further below, woman. Stated the dark brunet bitterly in the privacy of his mind.

“You will be pleased to hear, however, that the Ministry has decided to take the matter in his hands and make sure that you will follow a carefully constructed, theory-based, Ministry-approved programme that will bring all of you on par with the level we expected you to reach.” A Ministry-approved course? Theory-based? Merlin, this woman was going to ruin them.

“Please, copy down the following.” She requested, pointing her wand to the blackboard, tapping it again. And so, when he thought that the situation couldn’t get worse, his reality was shattered by the appearance of the Course Aims. He watched the words, a blank look firmly locked on his features. Those were the aims? They were inadequate even for first years, so a major reason fifth years shouldn’t have to abide to them.

When it appeared that everyone had copied down the three points, Umbridge asked if they were all
in possession of the book required for the year. An undecipherable murmur was the answer she received, and the young Dark Lord already knew what was coming. And sure enough… “Tut, tut. It seems we should try again. When I ask a question, I expect you to answer with ‘Yes, Professor Umbridge’ or ‘No, Professor Umbridge. So, class, do you all have a copy of ‘Defence Magical Theory’ by Wilbert Slinkhard?’”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge.”

“Good.” Her toad-like mouth stretched; trying to imitate a sweet smile, he supposed. “Then I would like you to turn to page five and read ‘Chapter One: Basics for Beginners’.”

... Basics for Beginners. Was this woman serious? How was possible that every time he thought the level of the lesson couldn’t descend more, it plummeted further down in the pit of idiocy? Really, this couldn’t become worse: there should be a bottom to this devastating display of incompetence! Obviously, he was wrong. Ten seconds in the reading of the book, he came to the conclusion that Slinkhard was a complete idiot. How the man had even been able to publish a book was beyond him. Considering the first ten or so phrases of the book, he could image the ending this was leading to: no curses or jinxes, no counter-curses, or counter-jinxes; practically only very mild form of defence would be approved by this book. The Minister was clearly scared of Dumbledore and wanted to gain control on the students, but what this woman was teaching was, essentially, how to get killed.

He exhaled briefly, mourning the decadence of the standards of his beloved Hogwarts. No wonder only Dumbledore and his secret Organization represented a true threat to Voldemort, if this was what the Ministry wanted to teach to young wizards.

“I see not even you can stomach to read this dreadfully dull book.” Came a whisper from his right. He glanced sideways at the raven, without divert his attention from the book, and murmured back. “Considering how useless it is, it shouldn’t surprise you that I decided to not waste my time with it.”

He noticed the other boy’s lips turning up into an amused smile, and his own curled into a smirk. Suddenly, though, his attention was pulled towards the row in front of him, where Granger and Weasley resided. The girl had his hand up, the ginger watching her with an expression of open-mouthed shock. Harry, too was looking at her, and, from his now bemused expression, he surmised she must have been in that position for quite some time, probably since when Umbridge requested they started to read the book. The woman, for her part was resolutely looking in another direction, ignoring the stubborn girl. Unfortunately for Umbridge, more and more people were starting to notice Granger silent ‘protest’.

When ignoring the situation became impossible, the professor slowly turned towards Granger, and widened a little her bulging eyes, putting on a show of having just noticed her. “There is something you find confusing in the chapter, dear?” She asked, sickly sweet. Such a poor act, he mused.

“No, it’s not about the chapter.” Denied the brunette.

“Well, then, it can wait.” Said the toad, with a truly ugly smile. “We are reading, now, dear.”

“It’s about the Course Aims.” Pressed the girl.

The woman blinked. “I think those are perfectly understandable. I don’t see where the problem lies.”

“Well, I do.” Stated Granger bluntly. “There is no mention about casting defensive spells there.”
The woman laughed; a high-pitched, girlish sound. “Casting defensive spells? Why, I don’t see why you would need to.” She went on with fake sweetness. “You won’t be attacked in class, so there will be no need to use defensive spells.”

“What?” Erupted Weasley. “We won’t practice magic?” He seemed flabbergasted.

Idiot, thought Tom. Of course, they wouldn’t use magic, that was the reason that woman was there after all, to stop them from doing so.

“Students must lift their hand if they wish to speak in my class, Mr – “

“Weasley.” The red head lifted his hand, soon followed by Granger and Harry. The protruding, mud-coloured eyes of the woman sparked with malicious glee as they set themselves on the raven, even as she addressed the bushy haired brunette. The young Dark Lord’s eyes narrowed. He didn’t like the way Umbridge was looking at his raven, like the boy was a prey she couldn’t wait to swallow.

“Harry,” he whispered, leaning towards him to lower his hand. “Don’t participate in this nonsensical battle, that’s what she wants.”

“But I can’t do nothing.” Shot back the raven.

“You must.” Hissed Tom. “She’s planning something, something related to you.”

He saw the boy falter in his resolve, and he was sure he was about to agree, when the woman voice, who had kept on arguing with Granger about the course, filtered to them. “… Individuals unsuited for society, like that dangerous half-bread who taught you in your third year. I mean, that man was practically a beast.”

Harry’s attention snapped towards Umbridge, and his eyes filled with rage. “Remus Lupin isn’t a beast. And was the best Defence Professor we ever had.” Spat the raven. Tom cursed under his breath.

“Your hand is not up, Mr Potter.” Reprimanded him Umbridge, delighted. “And, as I was saying, you have been taught too complex spells by dangerous individuals, who had also lead you to believe you could be attacked in any moment.”

“That’s not –” Tried to protest Granger.

“Why, I heard that my predecessor not only showed you illegal curses, but also performed them on you.” The woman went on, as if the girl hadn’t spoken.

“Well, it turned out he was a psychopath, did it not?” Piped up Thomas. “We still learned lots, though, mind you.”

“Your hand is not up, Mr –?”

“Thomas.”

“Next time, raise your hand if you want to speak.” Trilled Umbridge. “Now, the Ministry believes that a theoretical knowledge will be more than enough to get you through your OWL. And that’s the purpose of school, in the end.”

One Gryffindor girl, one of the two Divination fanatics, lifted her hand. The toad-like woman set her eyes on her. “And you are?”
“Parvati Patil, Professor.” Answered the girl. “Isn’t there a practical part in the exams?”

“Yes,” acquiesced the woman, “but as long as you study the theory hard enough, I don’t see why you should have trouble in performing the spells required.”

“So, the first time we’ll cast the spells will be during the exams?” Questioned, shocked, a random student.

“Like I said,” said Umbridge, now sounding as she was slowly losing her calm composure, “as long as you study the theory hard enough –”

“And what use will the theory be in the real world?” Demanded angrily Harry, his hand in the air.

“This is school, Mr Potter, not the real world.” Emphasized the woman, in a flat and unimpressed voice.

“But aren’t we supposed to be prepared for what is waiting for us outside, then?”

“There is nothing dangerous out of here, Mr Potter.”

The dark brunet sighed, exasperated; he couldn’t believe someone actually believed that. He understood the Ministry preferred to bury their head in the sands than acknowledge the return of his counterpart, but really, blind themselves to other dangers too was simply ridiculous. Aware of the direction this discussion was bound to go, he decided to intervene, hoping to save his raven from the clutch of the evil scheming toad. He raised his hand. The unblinking eyes of the Professor shifted towards him. “Yes, Mr –?”

“Gaunt.” He answered with his usual collected tone. “And I was wondering if you truly believe what you said.”

Umbridge smiled sweetly. “And why would I not? I understand that you kids are quite uneducated about the ways of the world. And that’s why I, as an adult, need to guide and show you the right way to do things.” She said, condescendingly.

The dark brunet lifted an eyebrow, looking coolly at the woman. “And yet it’s incredible how you, who should be the knowledgeable adult, are so ignorant of how wrong your previous statement is.”

The smile vanished swiftly from the pudgy face. “What could you possibly mean by this, Mr Gaunt?”

“I mean to say that the outside world is full of dangers we need to know how to defend ourselves against.”

“There is no danger outside, Mr Gaunt.” Exclaimed, irritated, the woman. “Who do you think will wish to attack kids such as you are?”

Sensing Harry’s desire to shout out the answer to such question – and rightly interpreting it would be Voldemort’s name – he put a hand on his raven’s arm, silently telling him to calm down and let him speak. It would do no good for the boy to work himself up and walk right into the trap the woman had weaved around him. “Are you truly ignoring the presence of criminals? Low-lives who would gladly prey on defenceless and uneducated students.”

“That’s why Aurors exist, Mr Gaunt.” Grit out the woman.

“And yet, if we don’t study correctly Defence, we will find ourselves unable to defend ourselves
against this kind of people and the risk is that the only thing the Aurors will be able to do is collect our cold corpses from the ground.” He pointed out, admittedly quite coldly. He felt the rest of the class shudder in fear, but they needed to hear this. They were all so sheltered and none of them was aware of the dangers that lurked behind every corner. When arguing about the lack of practical lesson in Defence, they were only thinking about their grades and chances of pass the exam; none of them, except Harry, saw being able to cast curses and counter-courses as a mean to survive in the outside world.

Umbridge, for her part, wished to keep all of them ignorant about the harshness of real life, so they would be easier manipulated by the authority figures. And yet, she couldn’t deny the truthfulness of his words, so was left gracelessly gaping at him, unable to form a proper counter-argument. He remained calmly seated in his place, showing an outside façade of indifference, whilst he was internally basking in the pleasure brought by the humiliation of the woman who he knew desired to hurt his raven.

A handful of minutes passed before the woman gathered her bearing enough to attempt to recompose herself. “Be as it may,” Her voice was quivering in uncontrolled anger and outrage, “You are basing your statements on mere conjectures and there is no proof or reason there will be someone set to attack you just after you left school. It is my belief that, if you follow the right path, there will be no need for you to use such dangerous spells as the ones my predecessors seemed set on teaching you.”

So, words and logic would be of no use against this woman, he mused. It appeared like he would indeed need to resort to other means to change her behaviour.

“You way of doing things will only make us easier targets for Voldemort.” Shouted Harry, frustrated. He felt the sudden urge to groan, and dread blossomed inside him: the malicious gleam in those pinprick eyes had returned, and was now accompanied by something akin to smugness.

The odious girlish laugh returned. “And how, pray tell Mr Potter, could a deceased man present a danger to you?”

“Maybe by not being dead and having now returned?” Stated the raven in a mock thoughtful tone.

“Twenty points from Gryffindor Mr Potter.” Called Umbridge, face dark, with a subtle victorious tone. “Now, let me make some things plain: you were told that a certain Dark wizard had recently returned from the dead. Well, this is a LIE.”

“It is not.” Protested strongly the raven.

“Mr Potter, you have already lost your house twenty points, don’t make your situation worse.” Reprimanded sternly the woman without looking at him. “Like I said, no Dark wizard had returned from the dead. If someone says the contrary, then he’s lying.”

“Why must you refuse to see the truth?” Exclaimed the raven. “Voldemort is back and your decision to turn a blind eye to this is only aiding him!”

“Detention, Mr Potter!” The lines of triumph etched in that flabby face were horrible to see. “Five o’clock, this evening, in my office.”

“The Ministry can assure you that you are in no danger from any Dark wizards. If you are still worried, though, by all means you can come to me and voice your worries. I’m your friend, and I’m here to help you.” She tried to impress them with her speech, even if it was plain that, independently from their own beliefs, no one would ever go to speak with her.
He saw the torrent of anger bubbling under his raven’s skin, straining to burst, and he desperately tried to soothe him, to stop antagonizing Umbridge. For the moment the woman had simply given him a detention, but he had an inkling that she was in possession of a malicious streak that could even rival his own: testing her would only result in further punishment at the least and... probably expulsion at the worst. “Listen, Harry,” he hissed lowly, “we’ll find a way to dispose of her, to send her back to the Ministry, so don’t retort for now. Arguing further would only endanger you.”

“I’m sorry, Tom, but someone needs to stand up to her.” His eyes were hard set, a determined light shining in them. And yet, he really sounded apologetic; for worrying him, probably. Such a selfless, kind-hearted fool. That was a trait he would need to curb once he succeeded in possessing him, because, for all that it was endearing, it was also incredibly foolish and dangerous.

The raven stood up and he had to admit that it was amazing how much his little form demanded attention. His raven unconsciously excluded the same power he, himself, did. Harry had the potential to be a wonderful leader, if he so wished; it was clear in the way he was able to capture the attention of everyone, even if unaware of this. And he was beautiful, whilst he was doing so. Everything about him was delicious, from the tantalising feel of his magic – lightly fluctuating around him – to his strong posture and the hard determination in his glowing green eyes. “So, according to you, Cedric Diggory died from his own accord, did he?”

“Cedric Diggory died because of a tragic incident.” Stated Umbridge coldly.

“It was a murder.” The raven countered, voice slow, tone soft, deadly. “He was murdered by Voldemort and you know it.”

The beat of silence that followed was to be expected, and Tom knew it was only the prelude to the catastrophe to come. And then, the large mouth of the toad-like woman broke into a delighted smile, her grating, girlish voice doing nothing to distract the attention from the smugness glowing in her squat form. “Come here, Mr Potter, dear.”

She took a pink roll of parchment, scribbled something, and then handed it to the teen. “Take this to Professor McGonagall, dear.”

The raven strode out of the classroom with his head held high, his stiff movements the only sign of his burning anger. The boy was reckless and brash, and so open with his emotions, and yet Tom felt a sort of pride to see that his lesson on pureblood etiquette shone through in some instances, like this one. No door was slammed, and no sign of his dark mood was heard coming from the outside in the now silent classroom.

Umbridge watched the raven’s exit with shrewd eyes and, after he was gone, she stood up; then she moved to stand in front of her desk. “Well, now that the disturbance has left, I think it’s my duty to make things clear: no Dark wizard had returned from the dead. You have nothing to fear. This is simply the story of a lying, attention-seeking boy at best, and a product of a very disturbed mind at worst. The Ministry can assure that none of you is in any danger.”

“If someone tell you otherwise,” she went on in the same dry voice, “feel free to come to me with your worries. I’ll put your mind at ease and then proceed to punish the one responsible accordingly, so that he will no more spread his troubling lies.”

“Now, please, return to read the chapter.” And with this, she returned to sit at his desk, watching them reading their books with a pleased smile on her face, looking like the large toad she truly was.

At his desk, Tom, with his head bent down pretending to read the chapter, was trying to contain his violent simmering anger. It had been clear, for all the ones who were in possess of a modicum of
intelligence, that the object of her slander was Harry, and that she wished nothing more to have an excuse to furthering punish him. And he had a feeling that her idea of detention won’t be dull and unpleasant, but something actually damaging. Well, he hoped for her he was wrong, because nobody hurt what belonged to Tom Riddle and came out unscathed. And Harry, for all that he wasn’t yet aware of this, was his.

End of Flashback

Tom kept walking down the corridor that leaded to McGonagall’s office. It was quite fortunate he had a vague idea of where the office in question was located. In his own time, he had been on good term with all of his Professors – with the obvious exception of Dumbledore – and had made sure to learn where all of their offices where situated, as to assure himself the possibility of knowing where to find them in case he was in need of something – or to know what places to avoid in case of Dumbledore. Thanks to this, and the knowledge that new Professors tended to occupy the office of their predecessor, he was quite aware of the direction he needed to go.

As he came in the vicinity of his destination, he saw Harry exit from a room, and quickened his pace. “Harry.” He called.

The raven turned towards him, looking surprised. “Tom, what are you doing here?”

The dark brunet came to a stop in front of the younger teen, and smiled. “I brought you your backpack.” He explained. Then he greeted McGonagall, who had come out behind the young Gryffindor.

“Mr Riddle.” She replied, stony-faced, clearly displeased to see him.

Ignoring, the woman, he turned towards his raven. “Harry, had you already spoken to Professor McGonagall about Ancient Runes?”

The teen shook his head and the old woman raised an eyebrow in an inquiring way. “I’m sure that Mr Potter isn’t following the course about Ancient Runes, so why would he need to speak to me about it?”

“Yes, about this, Professor,” began Harry, catching the attention of his Head of House, “I would like to ask you if it will be possible, for me, to sit through the Ancient Runes’ exam even though I didn’t take the course.”

“Well, there is nothing against it in the School Rules, Mr Potter.” Admitted McGonagall, quite surprised by the request. “But one must have studied the subject independently, and I don’t believe you did so.”

“That won’t be a problem.” Intervened Tom. “I can teach Harry all he needs to know to pass the exam. We already discussed about this.”

The woman watched him with suspicion, contemplating his words. “Do you really wish to take that exam, Mr Potter?” she asked, in the end.

“Yes,” confirmed the teen, looking with determination at their Professor, “I understood – too late, I must admit – that Divination had been a poor choice of an elective and I wish to remedy to it.”

“Very well, then, I will speak with Professor Dumbledore and add you to the list of those partaking in the Ancient Runes OWL. I advise you that it will be quite difficult, and you will need to work very hard to cover everything your classmates has covered in the past two years and will cover in this
“Thank you, Professor, I’ll do my best.” Promised the raven.

“Don’t worry, Harry, I’ll make sure you pass it.” Assured him the dark brunet. “And about OWLs,” continued towards McGonagall, “I would like to ask you permission, as my Head of House, to sit through the Ancient Runes and Arithmancy exams, myself.”

“You are aware, you being who you are, that you won’t be permitted to follow those courses, Mr Riddle, right?”

“I am.” Confirmed the young Dark Lord. “But I don’t plan to, except for Ancient Runes, if Harry passes his own exam; I just only wish to undergo the examination to obtain those two OWLs. To have more possibilities in the choice of my future career.”

McGonagall sighed, sounding weary. “Very well, Mr Riddle, I will also talk to the Headmaster about your request. Now, do you need anything else?”

Both assured the old woman that they needed nothing else and, after being dismissed, left the corridor.

Chapter End Notes

So, how did you liked this chapter? Was it good enough?

So, Harry now is aware of his developing feelings and is confused on what to do about them, so things will get interesting. Umbridge had practically signed her death sentence, even if she is unaware of it, and Ron and Hermione kept losing to Tom, who is learning more things about Harry. And is obsession is growing with every new little detail he learns about. Who knows for how much time he will still be able to keep his urges under control?

For all those who are confused about why Tom was unaware of Harry having being in the Chamber, let's say that the place has only one entry, but more than one exit, so he never saw the Basilisk’s corpse.
So, uhm... hi. I'm back with a new chapter. I know it had been a long time since I last posted something and I really, really, feel bad about it, but in these past months I had so much things to do that I literally had no time to even sit down and write something. I had a bit of break around the end of March, and I had hoped to be able to post something then, but unfortunately, work, studies and other things had piled up, giving me again no time to work on the chapter. I would love to say that things has calm down a little and that I will have more time to write from now on, but unfortunately I can not do such promises. What I can say, though, is that I will at least have some time to work on the story and that I will do my best to not let so much time pass again between two updates.

As a sort of apology, I'm posting a long chapter with a little surprise: a kiss between our two main characters! :)

I hope you'll like it, despite it being un-betaed and having passed only through one revision. (I usually control my chapters more than once, but this time I didn't do it because I wanted to put something before the end of May, but I hope it will be good enough and worthy of the long wait.)

As a last thing, a great thank you to all those left kudos and comments and to all that are still here to read despite how much time has passed. It really means so much to me and it makes me extremely happy. ^_^
ceiling window casting a ray of golden light on the parchment set on the table in front of him. Elegant, artfully written black words covered the neat page, giving life to an essay the teen was sure was going to gain full marks.

The two boys were seated at a table in an especially quiet corner of the Library, where students usually never passed, working on their daily assignments. It had been a mutual agreement to go there as soon as McGonagall had dismissed them, the room being the only place in which they were sure to go undisturbed. It had been Tom to put forth the idea, being the one who felt more comfortable doing homework in that kind of environment, since the Library was the place in which he had spent most of his time in his old timeline, either doing assignments or some obscure kind of research. Harry had agreed mainly because he didn’t feel like being hold under interrogation by his two best friends, and the Library would be the last place Ron and Hermione would ever think to look for him.

They had passed at least a quarter of an hour in companionable silence, each focusing on their respective assignments, before the dark brunet felt it was safe to breach the topic of Umbridge and decided to enquire about the pink note the woman had sent his raven away with.

The response he received from Harry was one he had expected, and yet, despite finding the punishment the woman had dished out quite mild as opposed to what she was surely capable of, he had an inkling that the week of detentions would be worse than what he was imagining.

“And McGonagall? What did she say?” He kept inquiring. He didn’t trust that Ministry-loving toad and seeing the expression of the Professors at the start of term Feast, he was positive they shared the same sentiment. For this reason, he quite hoped that McGonagall, as Head of House and Depute Headmistress had decided to intervene in his raven defence, by making sure the boy wouldn’t be left alone with the pink witch. He had a bad feeling about what could happen to Harry if left alone with Umbridge. He hoped McGonagall had been affected by the same foreboding feeling and that this would prompt her to act. He doubted the stern Professor would be able – or even willing – to play favourites and cancel the detentions, but she could have the raven serve them with another teacher, thus eliminating the threat Umbridge could pose to Harry. Unfortunately, the next words his raven spoke made clear that he Gryffindor’s Head of House, despite sharing his distrust and contempt for the pink toad, didn’t believe the woman could do anything to actually hurt the young lion. “She reprimanded me and requested that ‘I keep my head down’.”

He sighed in frustration. She wouldn’t support Harry, then. It seemed that the boy concerns about the woman possibly not doing anything about the Potion Professor’s treatment of him weren’t unfounded, after all. Though, maybe McGonagall’s decision to don’t cross Umbridge could be due to the fact the pink witch was sent by the Ministry, certainly on order of the Minister himself, who could have given the toad an unusual amount of power and just as many liberties. If that was really the case, and he truly hoped it was so, for the Deputy Headmistress’ sake – she wouldn’t get out unscathed otherwise, because he would make her pay if something happened to his raven while she was in the position to prevent it – then she would surely at least try to do something about Snape. Hopefully. He hated to see his raven so unfairly mistreated and if the Head of the lion House didn’t do anything, then he would take the matter in his hands. He would surely benefit from the situation, in any case, using it to show Harry how, in the end, he was the only person the boy could really count on, the only one who would truly help him. He could even start to do something about getting rid of Umbridge; he refused to suffer the woman and her joke of lessons for the entire year.

Before this, though, at least for the time being, he had best to make sure the other teen would be more careful around the new Defence’s professor, and to do this he needed to partially support McGonagall’s words, as loathed as he was to do so.

“Well,” began the older teen, choosing his words carefully, needing the raven to understand his point
of view and not being antagonistic like he had surely been with his professor, “you had to admit that you reacted too rashly, Harry.”

“No, listen to me.” He pressed on, noticing the raven was about to argue. “She’s still an unknow factor. The only thing we know about her is that she works for the Ministry and that she doesn’t want us to learn Defence. We don’t know how much power she had been given by the Minister, nor what she is capable of doing with it. She could have been able to expel you. What you did was quite foolish.”

The shorter male stilled. “Expel me?” He spluttered in disbelief. “Just for talking back? She can’t!”

“Normally, she wouldn’t be able to.” Agreed Tom. “But we don’t know how much power the Ministry granted her. In the current climate, she could very well have the authority to do so. So, we need to exercise caution, especially you.”

Bright green eyes looked at him in understanding, but flames of stubbornness were still dancing in them. Tom knew that, deep down, Harry knew he was right, despite this the teen still found a reason to argue with him. “But she was badmouthing Remus. I couldn’t just stand back and do nothing!”

Tom sighed; as expected, the other boy brought up that. He really wished that his raven would lose this kind of mentality in the future; the boy truly thought too much with his heart, sometimes. “And that’s exactly why I said, ‘especially you’.”

The young Gryffindor froze, then scowled, understanding hitting him. “She did that on purpose, didn’t she?”

“Yes.” Confirmed bluntly Tom, finding no reason to lie or sugar-coat the truth. Harry needed to know he must be careful of that woman, since he suspected she would keep trying to rile up. Fortunately, the teen was perceptive, he only hoped his heart wouldn’t get too much in the way.

“She wanted you to give her a reason to dish out a detention. I believe this had been her purpose since the beginning and I’m sure that, if you hadn’t rose to the bait, she would have simply found another excuse to punish you.”

“Then my behaviour doesn’t matter.” Pointed out Harry. “I could be as careful as I want, but she’ll find a way to give me detention, anyway.”

That was true, but it was no reason to make her work easier. “Still, is better not to give her unnecessary ammunition.” He cautioned. “Remember our lessons; keep your calm and your emotions under control, and you’ll be able to push her to ruin herself with her own hands.”

“Like you did.” Mused the raven out loud.

A vicious smirk formed on the brunet’s face. “Exactly.” Oh, it had been so easy to make her look like a fool, that woman has such a low level of intelligence that it was nearly ridiculous.

Emerald coloured eyes sparkled. “I’ll try. Seeing her flounder in search of an answer had been beautiful.”

“Well,” said Tom, smiling with faux innocence, “she brought that on herself. After all, I only pointed out the obvious faults in her speech.”

“And I’m sure that you didn’t felt any satisfaction in doing so.”

“Of course not.”
The raven laughed softly, and the dark brunet smiled a rare true smile; he didn’t know why but hearing the other boy’s laugh made a warm feeling spread inside of him. It was puzzling because it wasn’t anything he had ever experienced before. It wasn’t the burning heat distinctive of insatiable lust for which he would have some kind of explanation, but a gentle warmth that filled him with happiness; something he had never felt before meeting Harry.

Tom set this thought aside; it wasn’t significant, after all. This feeling was quite pleasant, so there was no reason to analyse it too much, especially since he had other pressing things that needed his attention more than a strange emotion he couldn’t quite decipher. To distract himself, he asked: “At what point is that essay?”

“I’m nearly finished.” Answered the raven teen, a bit thrown aback by the sudden change of topic. “Why?”

“I promised to help you with Potions, did I not?” Said the dark brunet. “And we spoke about starting with Runes, so I thought we could start now, if you wish. I can help you with your Potion’s essay and then we can begin the first lesson on Runes.”

Harry nodded, excited at the prospect. Tom knew that, despite his belief he would not be able to learn enough to pass the O.W.L. exam, the raven was quite eager to learn about runes since he had explained the various uses that subject had. “It would be great; I just need to write the conclusion.”

This gave Tom an idea. “Perfect. In the meantime, I can get the books we’ll be needing.” It was the perfect occasion to take a look at the Restricted Section’s wards; when Dippet had been Headmaster, they hadn’t been very complex, but he was sure that Dumbledore had added – or at least strengthened – the protections around the that part of the Library, if not before, then after he had come to this time. So, if he really wanted a chance to enter that section and search for information about the strange connection between himself and Harry – the one that seemed linked to the curse scar on the boy’s forehead – studying the wards to find an exploitable weakness was the best course of action, and doing it while he was in the Library, with Harry, would permit him to do so without interruption. After all, he was doing what Dumbledore had asked him to: staying close to his raven.

The young Gryffindor easily agreed, and he swiftly left the table in the direction of the potion’s section. Navigating through the shelves, he picked up a couple of books useful for later, both about potion and runes, and then he headed towards the border where the Restricted Section began, careful to stay out of sight of both the librarian and the occasional student who was wandering the Library.

Conveniently, it just happened that he was aware of a secluded corner, situated at the end of the Alchemy section, never frequented by students or professors for the outlandish theories that populated the books that here resides, where the normal Library transitioned in the Restricted one. Here, calling forth his magic, he cast a wandless spell that would let him see the wards surrounding the place. Immediately an array of different colours – varying shades of blues, reds, greens, and purples – bloomed in front of his eyes, some more vivid than others. The pastel ones, more ancient, identified wards he was well acquainted with: they were the standard ones that had been active in his time, too. There were others, though, bright and pulsating with power, that had been clearly added after; they didn’t stop people from entering the place, they only monitored every single person who passed the threshold, be they in possess of the permission or not.

All in all, they weren’t as complex or powerful as he expected, and this tickled him as incredibly suspicious. Did Dumbledore really underestimated him so much that he believed that simply assigning him Harry as a babysitter of sort would stop him from pursuing the knowledge that could further his own objectives? Did he truly believe Harry would be sufficient to render him harmless? Or that he wouldn’t take the first opportunity he could find to scour the shelves that hold his favourite
selections of books in search for information about many of the things this time period requested him to know – the strange scar of his raven and weapons he could use to get rid of his counterpart being only a couple of those. This wasn’t like the old man, he was too much careful to put faith in such basic protections. He stood there, immobile, eyes keenly set on the coloured string of magic, and there! A little spark caught his attention, so brief and weak in its intensity that he wouldn’t have caught it if he hadn’t been searching for it. What was this? He didn’t remember reading about anything of that nature regarding wards and the likes, nor in the Library books, nor in the private Salazar’s collection that lied in the Chamber, so it must be something quite obscure in nature. He debated about sending a tendril of his magic to subtly prod the flickering light, but he decided to not risk it. Knowing Dumbledore, even the weakest of magical inquiry could activate an alarm that would advise the old man of his interest, and then his plans would end up being crushed even before they could start. Leaving quickly the place, cancelling the spell, he returned to the table he had left Harry to. It appeared that he would need to pay a visit to Salazar’s study and peruse the few tomes he had never found the time to inspect, hoping to find something that would shine some light on what kind of invisible barrier Dumbledore had put in place.

Reaching the table he left Harry at, he saw the boy pouring into a potion book with a troubled expression on his face.

“Is something wrong?” He asked, posing the books on the table.

The raven lifted his eyes and gazed at him, forcing a smile on his face. “No, it’s nothing.” Tried to reassure him the boy.

Tom frowned. “It’s not nothing if it’s clearly bothering you. Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

The raven shifted a little in his seat, gazing thoughtfully at him. For his part, Tom tried to wait patiently for the other teen to speak, without pressurizing him into confiding in him. In the end, Harry sighed, defeated, and started to speak. “Well, you were gone for quite a bit, so while I waited for you, I decided to start reading about the assignment Snape gave us, and that made me think…” He drifted off for a bit, then grimaced. “You see, Snape had always graded my essay lowly, no matter how much effort I put into them. I don’t know if it was because of his grudge or they were really terrible, but what if this will give the same result?”

“I see.” Heaved Tom understandingly. Merlin, he hoped that the problem was Harry’s work and not the professor – even if, by what he had seen in the classroom earlier he had little hope this was the case – because, really, purposefully damaging a student grade? What kind of professor did that? At least this year there were O.W.L.s. “Don’t worry,” he hurried to tranquilize his raven, “that grades don’t have the same weight of the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s, and those are evaluated by outside examiners, so Snape’s antagonism will not influence your probabilities to become an Auror.”

“That’s good.” Exhaled the young Gryffindor in relief. “In his case I will at least have a chance.”

“Especially with my help.” Smirked Tom. At the arrogant tone, the raven watched him with amused fondness and another unexplainable tidal wave of warmth washed through him. Really, what was happening to him?

“Tom are you ok?” Asked him Harry, looking concerned at his sudden faraway look.

“Yes, I’m perfectly fine.” Said him the dark brunet with conviction. “I was just thinking about something unimportant.” He smiled. “Don’t worry. Let’s just focus on Potions, ok?”

The raven didn’t look convinced but nodded anyway, letting him change the topic, just like he
himself let the raven do.

And so, they started. Most of the afternoon was spent working on Harry Potion’s knowledge. With great chagrin and exasperation, Tom found out that the greatest problem the raven had with the subject was that the boy lacked completely a solid base. Most believed that, to obtain a good potion, following the recipe would be enough; in truth, it was useless if one was incapable of grasping the reason behind each step. There were reasons behind the use of specific ingredients for every individual potion, and there was a difference in adding chopped, pulverized, or sliced parts of a determinate component. And, sure, there were people unable to grasp this concept, despite having it plainly explained, but here the problem wasn’t that. Harry’s difficulty wasn’t linked to an inability to understand the concept, but to the complete absence of it. And this was because Snape had apparently decided that spending even a couple of minutes, five at most, of his time on the basic of potion’s making was unnecessary.

He sighed. Really, for how much he despised Slughorn with his flamboyant – and at times frankly overbearing – attitude, he quite preferred him to the sour potion Master that, for his vast knowledge and talent in the field, was clearly unsuited for being a teacher.

It was with those dark thoughts, that Tom began to explain something that every student from second year and over should know. He would never understand what, in Snape’s mind, made the man believe that this kind of information would not be necessary; especially considering the fact there wasn’t anything written about it in the pamphlet that was given to Muggleborns. No muggle-raised child would ever know about it if nobody taught them, since they would never even know that they needed to search for this kind of knowledge. Even Slughorn, who to his standards was less than a stellar professor – good, yes, and useful to obtain things, with how easily could be manipulated, but not exceptionally respect-inducing or inspiring – had spent part of his first lesson going over those basic information, just to be sure everyone was aware of them.

Well, focusing too much on Snape’s deficiencies as an instructor would certainly not help his raven to improve his potion’s skill, it was better to start with the explanation. So, he began to bring Harry up to date with the basic notions he should already have been aware of: he explained about how the different ways of preparing an ingredient influenced the ways it would interact with the potion; the motive behind the use of determinate ingredients for specific concoctions and what instruments were better suited for every different kind of preparation. Then, he proceeded to use the moonstone, the focus of their assigned essay, as an example. The Moonstone was a mineral whose proprieties aided with maintaining a clear mind, purifying the body from negative emotions, and discovering the innermost truths hidden in one’s soul. For this reason, the stone was a key ingredient in potions like Veritaserum, whose purpose was to extract the truth from the person whom it was administered, and the Draught of Peace, that had the ability of soothe anxiety.

The study session run exceptionally smoothly, with Harry being very receptive to everything Tom told him, and the dark brunet considered it a success despite the fact they ended up having no time to going over the programme he had prepared for their first Runes lesson. It set his schedule a bit back, but, on the bright side, he gained some more arguments against Snape and more time to spend alone with the raven. Furthermore, he felt that this had strengthened their rapport and the trust the raven placed on him.

It was nearly dinner time, when the two boys left the Library, both pleased with how the afternoon had carried on, even if for different reason, when whispers made them stop in their tracks, and interrupted the comfortable inane conversation that was taking place between them.

“… duelled You-Know-Who …”
“Ridiculous!”
“… obviously mad …”
“… attention-seeking, glory-hound …”

Harsh words, full of contempt and derision were spewing out from a gaggle of Ravenclaws standing in the shadows of an alcove. The words Harry had spoken in Defence had clearly already travelled through the school and already there were little cluster of pupils spouting opinions about the veracity of the facts described by his raven.

“And those should be representing the House of wit and intelligence.” Stated disdainfully Tom. “Don’t listen to them.” He added to Harry, noticing the young boy’s hands were starting to shake from his anger. “They are simply another bunch of mindless sheep who let the Prophet and the Ministry think for them.” He finished with contempt.

“Still,” ground out the raven, “how can they think I’m making all of this up!”

“What do you expect from people that lack a brain?” Pointed out the young Dark Lord, looking at the Ravenclaws as though they were insignificant little bugs. “Hogwarts really hasn’t changed much in the last fifty years, hasn’t it?”

“Not at all.” Confirmed the raven darkly. “They had the same reaction in my second year.”

“It was the year that it came out you were a Parselmouth, right?” It was a statement, not a question. He still needed to find out how that was possible. He hoped he would have the chance to do so soon, the possibilities intrigued him.

The younger Gryffindor nodded in response, despite knowing that an answer wasn’t needed. “For me it was the same.” Confessed the dark brunet.

“Really?” Said the raven, surprised.

“Oh, yes.” Responded Tom. “The Slytherins were awed, of course, and started to treat me with reverence. But the others? The others became weary, if not downright terrified. And the more biased ones, like Dumbledore, started to look at me like I was the embodiment of evil.” He spat, bitter disgust coating his words, disguising the deep flowing pleased feeling woven between the words. Their fear had been delicious, just as much as the reverence. Nothing had been quite as heady until he had felt his beautiful Raven’s magic. It was the only thing able to compare, and even surpass, the rush of power that the outing of his ability had brought him. It was the reason he often found himself spreading his magic forward, prodding his raven’s one to respond just so he could bask in the high the other teen’s magic induced in him.

“I imagine your situation was worse, being in a House who is known for condemning everything connected to Dark Magic, even a natural ability like Parseltongue.” He went on, showing the appropriate understanding and empathy it was expected from him.

“It was.” Admitted Harry. “Fortunately, I had Ron and Hermione.” Emerald eyes sparkled, and the boy started to laugh, seeming to remember something. “And Fred and George, too.”

“That’s nice.” He forced himself to smile, despite his dislike for the fondness his Harry was showing towards people that were not him. “Apparently Granger and Weasley could be decent friends sometimes.” He commented casually.

“They are.” Said the raven, defending them. “Or, at least I think so.” He muttered softly. Tom had to
stop himself from smirking at the doubt that coated his raven’s words. They had been whispered so quietly that he was sure that Harry didn’t mean for him to hear, but fortunately the small distance had let him catch the soft whisper. “I’m sure that last summer was just…”

“A fluke? A one-time thing?” Finished Tom. “Do you truly believe it? Like you said, they abandoned you. They know how you feel about your relatives, and yet they chose to follow Dumbledore’s instruction, disregarding how this would make you feel.”

“I know, and I’m annoyed that they put him before me, but after all the things we have done together, they deserve to be given another chance.”

“If you are sure.” Said Tom. “I just don’t want you to be hurt again, Harry.” He continued, showing concern and anger on his behalf. “And, trust me, they will let you down again.”

The raven smiled. “I’m glad you are so worried about me, Tom, but it’s not necessary, really. I’m sure it wouldn’t happen anymore; they promised it.”

“If you are sure.” He said, doubtful. “In case they betray you again, though, and I know they will, I want you to know that you’ll always have me.” Tom added, stopping, and looking deeply in Harry’s eyes. “I’ll never betray or abandon you. Never. I swear it.” And I will make sure you won’t have anyone else to rely on except me: you are mine and I’m the only one you need.

Patience is the only things he needed now; he had time, and he was sure that soon both Weasley and Granger would slip again, so assured in their belief, as all the people surrounding Harry were, that they knew what it was best for the raven better than the boy itself. And with the current situation being like this – his little Gryffindor being isolated and scorned by most of the world, and the threat of Umbridge’s detentions on the horizon – he could also have the chance to speed things along a little. A malicious smirk blossomed on his features, unnoticed by his companion; for now he would lay low and wait for the right occasion, and then he would strike so fast that nobody would notice until victory was firmly in his grasp.

The two boys entered calmly in the Gryffindor common room, where two particular people were having a very loud and animated discussion. With the surprise of absolutely no one, the two people in question were Weasley and Granger. Really, why those two were even friends was a great mystery to Tom; he heavily suspected that Harry was the only thing that rendered possible for their friendship to last as long as it had, especially considering the two tended to argue nearly all the time, and about the stupidest of things to both. This time they were discussing about whose fault it was that they had lost sight and then had been unable to locate Harry, thus rendering them incapable to watch after him.

Granger and Weasley were so wrapped up in their argument that they failed to notice that the subject of their discussion was in the room, listening to their every word, and becoming more and more annoyed as the time passed. Not surprising since they were talking about him like he was a child incapable of taking care of himself and in need of constant surveillance.

The raven approached the two bickering Gryffindor, and, with a softly and deadly tone of voice, he stated: “Look after me? I wasn’t aware I was in need of a babysitter.”

At this, both teens turned around, relief etched on their every feature. “Harry!”
“Where have you been? We were so worried.” Scolded Granger.

“We searched everywhere.” Added unnecessarily Weasley.

“I’m fine.” Remarked Harry, half annoyed, half exasperated by their behaviour. At his side, Tom was finding pretty hard to hide his glee as his raven’s turbulent emotions washed over him; the irritation the boy felt towards his friends so sweet to feel cursing through his veins. “I was just doing my assignments someplace quiet. I didn’t know I needed to make you aware of my every movement.”

“You were doing school work?” Exclaimed the two Gryffindors, Granger bewildered and Weasley aghast; both absolutely shocked by the fact that Harry, apparently, chose to spend the afternoon studying.

The girl recovered quickly, though, and ignoring the tense atmosphere between them and Harry, proceeded to spew out ulterior foolishness. “If you were doing your assignment then why didn’t you tell us? We could have done it together, like always.” Tried to reason the bushy haired witch.

Maybe because he didn’t want the both of you nagging and irritating him more than you are already doing? Thought sarcastically Tom.

“I needed some time without you nagging me to speak about how I feel or berating me for my behaviour in Defence.” Told them bluntly the raven. And, oh, there was such bitterness in his tone, too.

“Still, “persisted Granger, the foolish girl, “you shouldn’t endanger your marks for this.”

And that was the single most stupid thing she could ever have said, as Harry’s reaction was so kind to show her.

“I am perfectly capable to do my work without your help, Hermione.” Spat coldly the green-eyed boy.

“But how can you be sure they are correct?” Questioned her, condescendingly. “I can – ”

“I don’t need your help!” Snapped his boy, losing his cool. “I am able to do things on my own; I don’t need you or anybody else to babysit me. I am not incompetent. Nor am I an idiot.”

“I never said – ”

“No,” interrupted her the short male, agreeing with her statement, “but you were implying it.”

“We just wanted to help.” Tried Weasley, speaking for the first time after Harry’s ‘revelation’. Really, by his reaction you would think that studying with the objective of elevating one’s marks was something outrageous. Then again, considering his laziness, Tom supposed he shouldn’t be so surprised the red head had this kind of mentality.

“No,” corrected bitterly his raven, “you just wanted to make sure I didn’t do anything you disprove of.”

“Like what?” They adapted an oblivious and offended tone, as if Harry didn’t know them well enough to be aware of the true motivations behind their actions.

“Like spending time alone with Tom!” Burst out the raven.
“You did, didn’t you?” Asked Granger, clear disapproval colouring her voice.

“And if I did?” Countered Harry, provocatively, face blank. “Recently he seems to be better company than both of you combined.”

“How could you say that?” Shouted Weasley, fuming. “He’s evil, and it’s clearly trying to manipulate you. And, by the look of things he’s even being successful.”

“Just because I’m being a better friend than you, didn’t mean I’m planning some evil deed.” Cut in Tom, who till that moment had elected to stand back and watch amusedly the unfolding events.

“You!” The red head rounded on him, face an unflattering blotchy colour, resembling the shade of his hair. “This is all your fault! You are brainwashing Harry, turning him against us!”

“He’s doing nothing.” Scoffed his raven. And he was right, since he really didn’t do anything. Why bother, after all? Their behaviour was doing all his work for him. He just needed to be there for him and not pressure him into anything, like his friends tended to do. “You are doing it by yourselves.”

And with this he stomped to the dormitories, furious, leaving two stunned teens in his wake.

Sending them a smug smirk, the dark brunet followed the younger boy.

He could already feel victory: it tasted so sweet, like the refreshing scent of morning dew and the fresh taste of the air after a purifying rain.

---

**Harry’s Pov**

Harry threw himself on his bed, furious. Why? Why did his friends insist on treating him like an incompetent child? Hadn’t he shown to be able to take care of himself time and time again, even without their help? He knew they were wary of Tom – and with good reason, considering Voldemort, even as a student, wasn’t a sweet and innocent boy – but how could they insinuate that he could be manipulated so easily? And that he didn’t know that this Tom wasn’t as perfect and charming as he portrayed himself to be? Oh, yes, Ron and Hermione – and to some level even Tom – were sure that he was completely oblivious, but they were so wrong. He preferred not to think about it – probably because he has come to accept Tom’s darkest trait to some level – but he was perfectly aware that the dark brunet was as dark, manipulative, and cruel as before. Without a doubt, he still coveted the dream of subjugating the entire Wizarding World, as cliché as this sounded, and, to be fair, he seriously doubted this would ever change – hence why he had been able to accept it – but he was different, too. The teen he had met in the Chamber, and the serpentine man he had fought against in his first and fourth year, had cared nothing about others except for the way they could be used and the intense pain they could be put under. They both revelled in the pain of others and were eager to cause it merely for their own entertainment; they cared for no one except themselves. And, despite their great power, their mind was clearly plagued by a growing streak of insanity, that had the effect to reduce them to tools of mindless destruction.

This teen arrived from another timeline, though, this Tom Riddle, wasn’t like this: he was clever, brilliant, and even more important, *sane*. He was in control of his emotions, he didn’t let them overcome him so that every little bout of irritation sent him into a destructive rampage, nor did he throw a tantrum every time things didn’t proceed according to his plans. On the contrary, he was always controlled, his actions calculated to the last detail, and, what’s more, he was capable of caring about people, even though, his ability was admittedly limited and seemed to be restricted only to
Harry himself.

Was he, Harry, a fool to trust Tom and giving him a chance? Maybe. Did he believe there was a possibility this could lead to the dark brunet becoming a better person? Absolutely yes. After all, in every interaction he had with the other teen, he had taken great care to be on his guard for every sign that the other boy was deceiving him, but there never was any hint of deception in the concern Tom displayed, or the soft smiles he directed towards him. Sure, if he told Ron and Hermione this they would probably argue that the dark brunet was an able manipulator and that he was so good at pretending that it was no wonder his emotions truly looked genuine, despite them being as fake as a glass diamond. They would insist he was being fooled and that the best course of actions was distancing himself from the other and maintain a purely formal relationship, in which he would spend time with him exclusively with the backup presence of his two friends, and only to stop him from doing something evil – as if Tom would really do something of this kind while he was under an oath and constantly watched.

Harry knew Tom better than them, though. He had a lot of interactions with both the young and the old version of Voldemort, something nor Ron nor Hermione could claim to have experienced, and he could remember that, even when he was unaware of the Diary’s true identity, he had felt a subtle feeling of wrongness, of deceit in both his words and the way he portrayed himself in the memory. Sure, he had ignored it at the time, too focused on solving the mystery of the Chamber, but it had still been present. With this Tom his instincts weren’t giving off any signal of danger, so he was willing to take this as a proof of the trustworthiness of the other’s intentions.

“I would ask you if you are fine, but from your expression it would be the height of foolishness to do so.” A smooth, dark voice broke through the silence. Turning towards it, he saw the object of his troubled thoughts standing at the feet of his bed, looking down at him with his fathomless deep eyes. Harry’s lips curled up into a soft smile. Yes, the concern about his wellbeing he could see even then in those dark blue pools was genuine, even if he would prefer if they were devoid of smugness, smugness he was sure was directed towards the fact he and his friends kept having rows and were seemingly slowly drifting apart, something he had warned him about. He knew this was something that pleased Tom greatly, both being right and the situation itself. After all, the dark brunet had never made any show of hiding just how much he despised his friends and considered them unworthy of his attention.

Harry should probably feel indignation on his friends’ behalf, but truthfully, he couldn’t find in himself to be annoyed with Tom; especially since the teen was at least trying to tolerate them just because he knew how much their friendship meant to him. And what’s more, the barely perceptible frown he sported showed the great displeasure he felt as seeing him so hurt.

“I’m fine, Tom.” Assured the raven, trying to maintain a neutral tone of voice. “It’s just a bit painful to know they trust me so little.”

The older boy sat on his bed. “Would me telling you they are idiots make you feel better?”

Harry let out a dejected laugh. “Not really.” He admitted. “Well, maybe just a little.” He amended, seeing the dark brunet’s raised eyebrow.

The raven exhaled, letting out all the frustration and pain, and then gave the older boy a smile, a soft, kind thing. “Thank you, Tom, I feel better, now.”

It was strange, but knowing Tom cared about him and had tried to make him feel better made him feel all fuzzy inside. He knew it was because he liked the other more than as a simple friend, but it was still strange that he had such a strong reaction despite how little time they had actually spent
Tom smiled to him too, his eyes warm. “Well, I’m glad.” The words were spoken with all the sincerity of the world. “Now, do you want to have dinner in the Great Hall, or would you prefer the kitchens?”

“The kitchens.” Responded immediately Harry, without a second thought. “I have a feeling that, despite our argument, Ron and Hermione would pounce on me immediately just as soon as I appear in the Hall, and I don’t think I would be able to interact with them without making the situation worse, something that I would prefer to avoid.”

“I’ll speak with them tomorrow.” Concluded the raven, with resolution. Tomorrow he would be calmer, so more able to explain the reason of his anger without feeling the actual emotion. And hopefully, he would finally make them understand why their actions feel so wrong to him.

“Kitchens it is, then.” Said the dark brunet, offering him his hand to pull him on his feet, smiling charmingly.

The raven looked at it and then at the outstretched hand, the fluttering feeling coming back with vengeance. He tried to stubbornly suppress it, and upon his inability to do so, he simply chose to ignore it and took the hand offered to him anyway. The warmth of Tom’s slightly large hand seeped into him, giving birth to a happy bubble in the middle of his chest, that coupled with the fluttering, made him feel both elated and nervous. The bubble deflated suddenly, though, when the dark brunet let go. Something about his delusion must have been shown on his face because the other was quick to ask, “Is something the matter?”

Feeling a bit like a deer caught in the flashlights, he hurriedly shook his head. “No, no, it’s nothing.” He assured; a bit unconvincingly, if Tom’s scepticism was any indication. Get a grip, Harry. He berated himself. He sent the other a smile that he hoped conveyed a convincing ‘everything is fine’ kind of message and was not screaming ‘please don’t ask me why I’m starting to act strange around you’. He couldn’t let this new, strange feeling get between his and Tom’s friendship: it would only complicate things. He needed to learn to control his emotions better.

“So? Shall we go?” He asked, feeling a bit uncomfortable under Tom’s scrutinizing gaze.

For a bit it looked like the other teen wanted to kept inquiring about his strange behaviour, but fortunately the dark brunet was not one to pry unnecessarily if he looked like he really didn’t want to talk about something. Not that he wouldn’t caught the chance to ask in another occasion, but he did let go. At least for the moment.

Relieved, the raven headed towards the kitchens, Tom following silently behind him.

---

For the time he and Tom has returned to the Common Room – they may or may have not made a detour to one of the towers, an abandoned one which faced south and has a beautiful view of the Black Lake, one of Harry’s favourite places to go when he found himself troubled, and lost track of time – curfew has long since passed. Luck, and Tom’s clever use of the Disillusionment Charm, allowed them to return to Gryffindor Tower without problems, and when they opened the door of their dormitory, they noticed that fortunately everyone else was already asleep; not even Ron was still awake and waiting for Harry, probably thanks to the row they had before dinner.
He and Tom changed in their nightclothes, careful to not make any noise, least they wake someone, and risk being asked awkward question, something that both of them wished to avoid. The raven was about to wish the other boy Goodnight, and close hid bed hangings, when a soft pop caught his attention: Kreacher, the Black’s house elf, had appeared in the narrow space between his and the dark brunet’s bed, muttering mutinously under his breath.

“Kreacher?” He whispered, stunned. “What are you doing here?”

The elf looked at him with gelatinous dull eyes filled with contempt and said: “Master ordered Kreacher to go to Hogwarts to the Potter brat and appear only when the other boys are sleeping.”

“Sirius sent you? Why?” Asked the raven, a mix between surprised and curious.

“Kreacher has been told to give the brat this.” And the house elf handed him a silver mirror, finely decorated.

Puzzled, the young Gryffindor looked at it, trying to decipher his function, but it appeared to be a common mirror, albeit a very nice one. “Oh, ok, thanks.” He said, distractedly. Then, catching on something the elf had said, continued. “Why have you appeared now, though? Sirius told you to appear only when all the other were already asleep, right? Tom is still awake, though.”

“Kreacher knows the brat is friend with the snake speaker and that he wouldn’t have cared.” In short, he had done this just to spite Sirius, and being unable to go completely against his master’s orders, he did the next best thing; he carried out his task, of course, but he did so by appearing in front of the last person his godfather would have ever wanted aware of him sending something to Harry.

“Er… ok. You can go now, then.” Dismissed him the raven, not knowing what else to say.

Kreacher bowed grudgingly, a distasteful look on his face, and popped silently away, muttering bitterly under his breath about disgraceful Masters, and half-blood Heirs. Harry simply shook his head and rolled his eyes at the elf’s behaviour.

After he had gone away, Tom, who till that moment had kept silent, watching the event unfold with cool curiosity, spoke up. “What did your godfather send you?”

“A mirror.” Responded Harry, turning the object in his hands, trying to find out what kinds of powers it had. What reason could have Sirius ever had to send him a mirror of all things? Especially since it didn’t appear to have any other purpose except the customary one: reflect one’s image.

“A mirror.” Deadpanned the dark brunet. The ‘seriously?’ was implied. “And why did Black send you a mirror? I mean, what purpose it has?”

The raven was just about to say that he had no clue, when a familiar voice interrupted him.

“Sirius?” Said the teen, incredulous, looking down. And indeed, there Sirius was, his face smiling at him from the glass of the object still in his hands. “How –?”

His godfather grinned, eyes full of mischief, and said proudly: “It’s something your father and I created when we were at Hogwarts.”

“Like the Map?” He saw Tom raising his eyebrow in question at his words, interest clear in his eyes, but he signalled him he would tell him later. He didn’t think Sirius would be very happy to know that not only their conversation was being overheard, but that Harry was quite free with what he told Tom.
“Yes, it’s a Two-way Mirror. This belonged to James, I have the other one, so from now on, if you feel the need or simply want to talk to me, the only thing you have to do is to pick it up and say my name, and I will immediately appear in it. Your father and I used them to communicate when they put us in separate detentions.”

Harry was touched: not only now he had something else that had belonged to his father, but he was also been given the possibility to speak with Sirius whenever he wished. His godfather had just given him something he had always dreamed about: an adult, a parent, who cared about him and to whom he could go whenever he was troubled.

“Thank you.” He said, voice tight with emotions. Understanding the unspoken words behind that simple expression of gratitude, the man’s impish grin softened into a warm smile, full of affection. “You are welcome, Harry. Now, why don’t you tell me about your first day of school?”

And so, for the first time in his life, the raven shared the happenings of his day with his godfather, slowly losing himself in the quiet conversation, he failed to notice the darkening blue eyes of his companion – who was still awake and watching him closely – flashing crimson with hate as they settled on the face in the mirror.

“So, it was a pretty crappy day, uh?” Commented Sirius, frowning. Harry had told him everything, from Snape’s unfair punishment to Umbridge’s supposed vendetta against him, and the man was clearly worried about it.

“About Snape, I think that going to McGonagall it’s a fair idea.” The raven had also put forth Tom’s suggestion, without mentioning they were coming from the dark brunet of course, just to hear his godfather’s thought of them. “His behaviour is becoming concerning, and I doubt that they won’t continue to ignore it, not now that it has started to directly influence negatively your grades.”

“That’s not to say that how he acted before was good,” he quickly added, reassuring the boy he didn’t condone Snape’s past actions against him, “but at least he wasn’t purposefully sabotaging you.”

“Do you really think McGonagall will do something about it?” He questioned the teen, doubt coating his words. “She didn’t seem to care about Snape’s actions in the past years; and today, when I was sent to her during Defence, I complained about Umbridge, but she simply told me to control my temper and behave.”

“The situation with Umbridge is different.” Explained Sirius, his frown deepening. “The witch is without a doubt a spy sent to Hogwarts by the Minister. She’s Fudge’s weapon sent to weaken Dumbledore and his supporters, so showing open hostility towards her and her decisions would be detrimental for the professors.”

“Snape, though, Snape falls under Dumbledore’s jurisdiction, and so will have to follow the Headmaster’s orders, meaning he must be professional and not let his stupid grudges dictate his behaviour towards the students. If you report him to McGonagall, she would surely do something about it, or, in the worst-case scenario, she’ll bring the problem to Dumbledore. In any case, something will be done.”

“Tom said the same thing.” Murmured to himself Harry, finally remembering the boy. Then he turned to his side and saw that the teen in question was still awake, watching him. For a moment he thought he saw a flash of crimson in those hard, dark eyes, but when the dark brunet lifted his head to look at his face the red was gone; his dark eyes were calm and blue like the night’s sky. Shrugging off he red hue as a trick of his mind, he turned back to face his godfather. “I still doubt it will lead to something, though.”
“Try, Harry. And if indeed it lead to nothing, then I’ll talk with McGonagall or Dumbledore myself.” Encouraged the man. “Now, about Riddle…”

“What about me?” Inquired lightly Tom, getting up from his bed and coming to sit beside Harry, leaning casually a bit too close to the raven for Sirius comfort. From his smug expression, the man deduced the teen had done this on purpose, just to irk him. Unfortunately, Harry seemed completely oblivious to the dark brunet’s true intentions, and, worse still, he looked completely at ease with the other’s extreme closeness.

“Riddle.” Hissed Sirius. “What are you doing here?”

“He was sorted in Gryffindor.” Explained the raven. “And he has the bed beside mine.”

Gryffindor? Thought Sirius. How was it possible that a snake like Riddle had been able to be sorted into the Lion House? And he had casually ended up in the bed beside Harry? This was extremely suspicious and only confirmed Sirius’ hunches about the teen’s intentions towards his godson.

“So, you heard everything.” Said dryly the man, sending the boy a distrustful glare.

“Every word.” Confirmed Tom. It was pretty dark, but Harry could both see the smirk, and feel waves of self-satisfaction ooze off the teen, directed towards the mirror, and was pretty sure that, whatever message Tom was trying to send Sirius, his godfather was receiving it.

He resisted the urge to groan; why did Tom feel the need to goad Sirius? The dark brunet was well aware of the dislike the man harboured towards him, and yet he persisted in making things worse.

“Nothing said was new to me anyway, Harry had already shared everything he told you with me beforehand.” The teen went on, taunting the dog animagus with the knowledge that, not only he was able to be beside Harry while he could not, but also that the young Gryffindor trusted him enough to confide in him.

“Could you please stop it?” Burst out the raven. “I won’t ask you to like each other – I wish you would, but I know it’s a lost cause – but at least try to not provoke each other every other word when I’m present. Do it for me, at least; please?”

Both males shut their mouth and turned towards him. The young Gryffindor knew that both men cared about his happiness, so he hoped that him asking would be enough for them to drop the hostility. As the emerald-eyed boy had hoped, Tom was the first to promise he would stop being so antagonistic towards the animagus – Harry knew that the knowledge of the still growing and fragile rapport of friendship they had formed was what drove him to accept so easily his request – swiftly followed by Sirius, who principally accepted just because he didn’t want to be outshone by the dark brunet.

The three spoke for a little bit more, Tom and Sirius only talking with each other when strictly necessary and exchanging short, clipped words. Their exchanges were stiff and a bit strained, but all the way both maintained a civil tone, so Harry counted this as a victory, knowing he couldn’t ask much more from the two. In the end, with the promise of another call in the very near future, and the remind to use the mirror in case of necessity – and a filthy glare towards the older boy – Sirius left the two teens alone.

Harry kept watching the dark mirror even after his godfather had long since left, a calm sense of contentedness spreading through him, washing away all the dark thoughts the day had brought upon him: he could scarcely believe that now he would be able to talk to Sirius whenever he wished! The idea alone made the prospect of the following days, detention with Umbridge included, look brighter
than what it had been just a couple of hours before.

“I’m glad you are feeling better.” Unexpected words coming from beside him get through his musings; turning towards the source he noticed the soft smile directed at him. It made so that something akin to unease settled inside of him. The smile was not dissimilar to many others Tom had gifted him, and yet, there was something _strange_ about it; Harry couldn’t quite pinpoint what the problem was, just that it felt, somehow, _wrong_. Maybe it was the darkness emanating from the dark blue eyes, or the red sheen that he was sure must be a product of his imagination, but whatever the reason was, there was something dangerous in that smile. And yet, he didn’t feel threatened, his instinct told him that the danger, supposing it was present and wasn’t simply a trick of his mind, wasn’t directed at him. But then who –

“At least Black is useful for something.”

Of course, Sirius. He was the subject of the darkness lurking in Tom’s eyes. Still, the teen seemed to care about him, and was aware of how much his godfather meant to him, so… surely, he wouldn’t do anything… right?

“And speaking of usefulness, when he explained about the mirrors, you mentioned a ‘Map’, can you tell me what it is? I admit being quite curious about it.” Said, Tom, effectively distracting the raven from his worry about a possible danger Sirius could find himself in, because of a plot concocted by the dark brunet.

“Oh, right.” He had admittedly forgotten his kind of promise to explain what the Map was to the other at the end of the call. “It’s a map of Hogwarts. Sirius, Lupin and my dad created it when they were students here: it shows every single secret passage this school holds, and also the position of every person present on the grounds and what they are doing.”

A begrudging impressed look found his way on the teen’s face. “That’s quite the remarkable map.” He praised. “You know, I find myself kind of jealous, I would have thoroughly liked to have been in possession a similar artefact in my old timeline.”

“Are you telling me you wouldn’t be able to create something similar?” Said Harry, downright sceptical. Tom was a genius, probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen – he knew this by hearsay and even Dumbledore had often stated this with great conviction – so he found the comment more than a little bit strange.

“Oh, I have no doubt I would have been able to create a similar map. Of course, mine would have been even better.” And here came the arrogance and self-assurance of someone who believed himself to be better than anyone else that Harry expected from Tom. “But I have to confess that the thoughts never crossed my mind.” He reluctantly admitted, as if he found the idea of not having had a similar idea displeasing. “Not that I ever needed it, especially once I became Prefect.” He said as if trying to justify the lack of this sort of idea occurring to him.

“And yet, now you find yourself wishing for one.” Countered Harry.

“Well, I’m not a Prefect anymore, am I.” Pointed out Tom a bit mischievously. And wasn’t that a strange sight: it was so against the image the teen liked to paint of himself, the mature, serious, and proper pureblood heir.

“True.” Said slowly Harry, mystified by the playfulness in Tom’s eyes, that hinted at a streak of rule-breaking tendencies he would have never thought the other would possess. “Well, I suppose you could borrow it sometimes, if you wish.” They were friends, after all, and he always let Ron and Hermione borrow the Map if they were in need of it, so he thought it was fair to offer the same to
Tom, too. Still, was this really such a good idea? If Ron and Hermione, or anyone else of the Order for that matter, found out about this, they would surely be horrified and disappointed by his decision. They would certainly never leave him alone or let him make more decisions in regard how to act with Tom and would follow his every move as he was a little child. ‘For his own good’, obviously. And… why should he ever care about what they would think? It wasn’t anyone business, except what he did with his things; he could lend them to whomever he wished, and they would have no right to protest using their belief that Tom would use them with ill will as an excuse. Like the dark brunet would be so stupid and careless to do something like this, when he knew that he was constantly monitored – Harry didn’t believe even for a moment that he was the only thing that was used to keep Tom under control, especially since Dumbledore had shown him how much he didn’t trust him, by again refusing him answers and information, not later than this past summer. They would have no right to complain about him disregarding their opinions, since they did this all the time with his own.

“Tomorrow I’ll show you how to use it.” Stated the raven, making up his mind. He would do this both to show his trust in Tom and to spite the Order. Was it petty? Maybe, but he really didn’t care.

“Thank you.” Said Tom. “Good night, then, Harry.” And then the dark brunet did something he had never done before: he lifted his hand and posed his knuckles on Harry’s cheek, looking at him with incredibly tender eyes. The raven’s breath stuttered, but before he could say anything, the other boy had already retreated his hand and climbed back in his bed, closing the hangings around him.

“Good night, Tom.” Whispered softly Harry, under his breath, once he managed to find out his voice.

That night he had a strange dream. At the beginning, it was like one of his normal nightmares, but changed soon enough. It started with him revisiting the Graveyard: he saw Wormtail approach him with the toddler-Voldemort in his arms, the flash of green reaching Cedric, and the boy falling with a soft thud, glassy eyes staring lifelessly at the black sky. He was then bounded to the gravestone of Voldemort’s father, and it was then that the real nightmare began. The Dark Lord rose from the cauldron, and his nightmarish visage broke into a terrifying smile. Suddenly the place began to fill with the corpses of all the people Harry cared most about, and the monster started to revive them, just to tear them down soon after, making Harry suffer even more. And he, bound and gagged, watched helplessly his loved ones being killed again and again, while he could do nothing but let out muffled cries.

Just when he was sure he would be driven mad by the pain and his voice was hoarse by all the screaming, the scene changed, an eerie calmness descending upon his surrounding, and he found himself walking once again down the same long and dark corridor that had haunted him since the beginning of the summer. There was a sense of peace, but also one of urgency as he reached the door and extended his hand towards the doorknob. He was just about to open the door, when a strong arm looped around his waist and brought him back towards a firm and muscular chest. Turning around, he let out a barely audible gasp; it was Tom, but there was a significant difference: his eyes, usually a deep and calm blue, were burning crimson with rage, and were set unwavering in front of him. The sight of those blood red eyes made Harry stiffened in the other’s grasp. Probably sensing his unease, Tom looked down at him, tightening his grip, and it was then that the raven noticed that, despite the fact the crimson orbs were flashing ominously, there was a deep worry hidden beneath the surface. Seeing this, the younger boy started to relax and was about to ask him to
release him, so he could finally see what lied on the other side of that dark door, when the dark brunet spoke, making him tense again.

“Don’t.” It was only a word, spoken in a deadly calm and commanding whisper, but it seemed to have a strange power because, as soon as it was uttered, their surrounding started to fade into nothingness until he and Tom were left standing alone in a bright, blank space. The raven spared just a passing glance to his strange phenomenon, as focused as he was on the other teen. A storm of questions swirled in his mind. What did the other mean with ‘don’t’? Don’t get away from him? Don’t open the door? And if his second guess was the correct one, then why? What would happen to him if he opened it? What was there? He opened his mouth to ask, but Tom stopped him before he could speak even a single word, leaning forward and capturing his lips in a passionate kiss.

Harry’s mind froze, and a blissful warmth started to rise from his stomach and pervaded his entire being. Unable to fight against it, he closed his eyes, letting himself be swept away by the currents of potent emotions flowing through him. Something else was building between them: power was gathering in the air as result of their magic swirling and mixing, sending him a state of ecstasy so deep that he felt himself whimpering at the loss, when Tom drew himself away. The younger boy, emerald gems glazed, looked dazed in the dark orbs of the teen holding him. Tom’s eyes were still crimson, but there was a different kind of fire burning in them, now.

Harry’s had always found Voldemort’s red eyes horrifying, burning coals that could only belong to a demon surged straight from hell, but now, looking deep in the other teen’s smouldering gaze, so intense and full of unexplainable emotions, he couldn’t help but find them mesmerizing.

“Sleep.” Tom exhaled against his still slightly parted lips, and the spoken word, whispered in that velvety tone that tasted of dark chocolate, filled him to the brim with calm and a comforting sense of safety. His eyes slowly drooped shut and then, he knew no more.

Harry slept peacefully and without nightmares for the rest of the night.

Harry was picking morosely at his barely eaten breakfast, casting furtive glances further down at the Gryffindor’s table, where Tom was sitting under the watchful and distrustful gaze of Ginny and the twins, looking extremely displeased by the arrangements. There seemed to be a glaring contest going on between the dark brunet and the three Weasleys, and it was pretty amazing how well the red-heads were bearing the brunt of the dark brunet’s glacial stare, displaying only a bare amount of uneasiness: he was well aware of the fact that many others would have already fled, had they been in the same position.

Every once in a while, Tom kept breaking eyes contact in favour to look in Harry’s direction with the air of someone trying to decipher a very complicate puzzle. Risking a glance to those fathomless blue eyes, he was overwhelmed by a sudden wave of guilt when he spotted something that looked horribly like hurt swarm in those blue orbs. Turning his head swiftly away, he hoped to be wrong: he didn’t want to upset the other just because he was unable to control the images his traitorous mind kept bringing on…

**Flashback**

*Harry opened his eyes, feeling refreshed and quite in high spirit after a night of surprisingly good sleep. He stretched and steal a glance to his right, noticing that Tom’s bed’s hangings were open,*
and the mattress empty; the noises coming from the bathroom informed him that the other boy was in the middle of his morning’s routine. Placing his bare feet on the floor, he kept his gaze traded on the bathroom’s entrance and suddenly memories of last night’s dream surfaced in his mind. He could remember having a particularly horrible nightmare, before it changed to the customary long walk towards that foreboding locked door. And then, when he was finally about to open it and see what lay beyond, Tom had appeared, making his surroundings suddenly disappear, and transporting him into a land of pure blankness. And then…

Harry flushed crimson and groaned into his hands. Oh, Merlin, that kiss. It had been so… so wonderful!

He didn’t have any kind of experience. He was usually too busy to worry about Voldemort’s ploys to think about anything else. Sure, there has been that brief crush on Cho, that had barely lasted two years and had ended before anything concrete could even start, but nothing else. Not that he was completely clueless, he slept with other boys, and even if Ron and Neville were in the same boat as him as far as romantic experiences were concerned, Seamus and Dean had already dated at least a couple of girls and had been quite generous in the description of their conquest. And, well, the older students hadn’t certainly been shy about sharing their experiences either. Many of them, especially those who enjoyed fooling around with lot of girls, liked to brag about how great their snogging session were and compare the various kisses they had experienced. But nothing could have prepared Harry to just how wonderful kissing Tom had felt, the pure bliss he had experienced. The kiss had set his body aflame, made his head spin and his mind blank out. In that few moments nothing had mattered except him and Tom, and what was happening between them. And it had only been a dream! He shuddered to think how the real thing would be like, how much better it could be. And, Morgana, he was now imagining it! How would he be able to act normal around Tom today? His mind didn’t seem to be able to stop replaying that same image over and over again!

“Good morning, Harry.” A soft, smooth voice that could only belong to one person, made him jump. And, indeed, there Tom was, looking more perfect than anyone had the right to look so early in the morning. He was truly beautiful, mused Harry. Of course, he had always been aware of this fact, one must be blind to not notice how handsome the other boy was. And yet, this was the first time that it truly hit him, how true that fact was. Maybe it was a by-product of his fast-developing feelings, or the simple fact that the dark brunet wasn’t his enemy anymore, and so wasn’t trying to kill him. Whatever the reason was, he had never been more aware of that than he was at that moment, here in the Gryffindor’s dormitory looking into the eyes of the younger version of the man who was trying to kill him. Such beautiful eyes they were, of a blue so intense that only the deepest oceans waters could ever hope to measure up to them. So different from the blood-spilled colour of the man that plagued his nightmares. He truly loved Tom’s eyes. And yet, and yet... he couldn’t help but compare them with the crimson eyes of the Tom’s in his dream and find them... lacking, for a lack of a better word. Really what did the fact that he preferred those blazing embers to these calm ocean’s pools said about him?

“Is everything alright?” Asked the dark brunet, confusion clear in his tone.

Harry felt heat blossoming on his cheeks. Really, what was he doing, losing himself so completely in the contemplation of the other that he just kept staring at him without uttering a single thing.

“Sorry, I-I was just… thinking about something.” He stuttered, cursing himself for it.

Tom’s lips quirked up in amusement, and the raven’s already flushed cheeks darkened. He desperately hoped that the shadowy dormitory was covering the proof of his deep embarrassment.

“I see.” Said the dark brunet, still smirking, stalking closer. And, was Harry’s imagination or there
was a certain predatory quality to his strides? “Would you mind telling me what has managed to steal your thoughts so fully? I’m quite curious to know what you were thinking about, watching me so attentively.” He continued slyly. “Especially since it brought such a pretty colour on your face.”

He noticed! Panicked, the raven frozen on his bed. Tom took advantage of that to near even more. And he was suddenly so close, so close…

“Nothing!” Harry nearly shouted, uncaring of the other still sleeping boys in the dormitory, finally finding the strength to unfreeze his limbs. He practically fled to the bathroom and slammed the door shut behind himself. Chest heaving, he slid down on the floor. How would he be able to survive the entire day in Tom’s company?

End Flashback

And that was the reason he was sitting between Ron and Hermione now, avoiding Tom like the plague and unsuccessfully trying to not think about him.

He sighed. Well, he supposed that something good had come out from this situation, at least. He had decided that, in order to return to act normal in front of the dark brunet, he needed to cool down his mind enough for the images of his dream to stop popping out every time he glanced at the other, meaning that keeping his distance for a bit was necessary. For this reason, he had fled the Common Room as soon as he had left the bathroom and gone to the Great Hall, knowing that Tom would look for him in the kitchens, first, and only later there. Consequently, he had time to speak with his two friends, who had reached him before the dark brunet and then had proceeded to send him away, on his request, when he had appeared. They had both apologized profusely – it was already the second time in the space of a mere few weeks. Said a voice in his head – and he had forgiven them – again, this is the second time in a space of what? A couple of weeks? Really, how many times will you need to be let down by them till you understand they aren’t worthy of your trust? How many times till you accept that they will always believe they know better than you what you should do? Continued the voice in his mind. It sounded horribly like Tom and so, he tried to silence it. Shut up! You are wrong! – making them promise to trust him, and repeatedly assuring them that he knew what he was doing.

He was admittedly surprised by how readily they agreed, but thinking about it, he supposed him avoiding the dark brunet worked a part in their easy acquiescence of his wishes; probably they thought he had finally came around and started to see things their way – And isn’t this proof of how much they don’t trust you? Said again Tom’s voice. Harry stubbornly ignored it.

If only they knew the real reason that was pushing him to ignore the other… they would undoubtedly use it as a proof of the righteousness of their judgment and actions. So, he couldn’t let anybody find out. Nor the Order, nor his friends – not even Tom, even if the reason was different – and to do so he needed a way to control his feelings and ignore his traitorous thoughts. For now, though…

“Ron, Hermione, I know I’m about to ask a lot out of you, but can one of you stay with Tom and watch him, today?”

“Do you mean keeping him away from you?” Asked Ron gleefully. Finally, his friend had come back to his senses! He wondered briefly what had happened to make Harry change his mind, but decided it was best not to pry; it wasn’t important, anyway, what really mattered was that his friend wasn’t under Riddle’s influence anymore.

Contrary to Ron, Hermione, being a more logical and analytic kind of person, couldn’t put aside that request so easily. Pinning the raven down with a contemplative stare, hoping to find some clues about his sudden change of behaviour, she resolved to just ask him. Now that she thought about it, it
was quite strange for Harry to request something like that, especially considering the row they had yesterday and how he had essentially chosen Riddle over them. This sudden change of heart was suspicious, to say the least. “Harry,” she began in an inquisitive and coaxing tone, “why are you asking us to keeping Riddle away from you?”

The raven stiffened, confirming Hermione’s suspicions: there was something very fishy behind her friend’s request. “Did he do something to you?” She prodded. It was a legit concern, they were speaking of the baby-Dark Lord, after all.

“No!” Harry denied hurriedly, looking at her with a mix of shock and outrage. “He did nothing! Why are you even suggesting something like this?”

“Then what’s the problem?” She continued, not appeased, her friend too fast denial only making her worry spike further. “Did the two of you argue?”

“No, nothing of the sort.” Said Harry, now starting to get worked up. “I just – ” At the bushy brunette expectant expression, he interrupted himself. Hermione was wrong if she thought that her usual inquiring gaze would make him capitulate. He assumed an obviously defensive stance and began. “It’s not important. Why are you so interested anyway? I thought you would be happy about this.” Even if he didn’t plan on this to be permanent. Well, there was no reason for them to know that.

“Of course, we are glad, mate!” Ron decided to comment in that moment, caught by a rare spark of insightfulness. “Right, Hermione?”

“We are.” Assured the girl, keeping her gaze fixed on the raven. “But you can’t pretend your sudden change of mind isn’t strange, Harry.”

“What in this is strange?” Interrupted the red-head. “Harry simply understood what prat Riddle really is.”

Well, that’s not exactly true, thought Harry, but it’s better let them think what they want.

“The problem is, Ronald,” oh, she was using the boy’s full name, now; bad sign, “that Harry had no complaint about spending all of his day with Riddle yesterday, and now, suddenly, he can’t bear his presence. Clearly, something happened.”

“So?” Asked Ron, clueless.

“So, if Riddle really did something, we need to tell Dumb – ” There she stopped, looking apprehensively at the raven.

Harry, for his part, was sporting an emotionless mask. Dumbledore. Of course, they would bring up Dumbledore. They weren’t asking for his reasons because they were worried, but just so they could go blab to the Headmaster. “Yes, Hermione? What were you saying? Please, continue.”

The girl opened and closed her mouth several times, words failing her for maybe the first time. “I… I-I…”

This Harry, this cold, emotionless Harry, scared her. Even more than the angry one. it was so, so… unlike him! Her friend’s anger used to be like an out-of-control fire, not this calm freezing wind. He had never been like this before the days spent with Riddle, learning how to act like a Pureblood, so that he could have a chance of victory at his trial. She knew they had been necessary, that they had been fundamental to securing Harry the good ending of the process; she had accepted that. And yet, she couldn’t help but hate them at the same time and resent how much them, how much Riddle, had
changed Harry. The different way he sometimes expressed his anger was only one of those changes. She used to be able to have always an inkling of her friend emotions before, but now—now, when Harry put on that blank mask, it was like his every feeling had disappeared. He became someone she didn’t know, nor could she understand. A stranger. It was something that chilled her to the bone.

Ron, too was unsettled by this, but he naively believed that keeping Harry away from Riddle would be enough to make things return as they were before. But Hermione knew. She knew it was a wistful wish: Harry had welcomed those changes and accepted them as a part of himself, they were a part of him, now. So, it didn’t matter if Harry spent time with the other teen or not, their friend would never turn back as he had been before.

And now, they were also risking losing him completely.

How could she have been so stupid to say that? And to think she had discussed about this with Ron, telling him they need to keep hidden eventual talks with the Headmaster, since Harry feelings towards the man had turned pretty sour during the summer. Moreover, that was what Dumbledore himself had told them to do during their last visit, the previous evening.

They had gone to the Headmaster soon after the row they had with Harry, to speak with the man about the worrisome strengthening of Harry’s and Riddle’s friendship. The old professor had looked troubled at the news, but had still offered them assurances and appeasing words, telling them to believe in their friend’s strong spirit and to just make sure to be there for him if necessary. The Headmaster was of the conviction—in truth was more a form of hope than a sureness on the outcome of this gamble—that the bond between the two boys would work out in their favour. He had also asked them not to worry about the sour feelings harboured by the raven because they were an unavoidable evil that would work out in time.

They had gone to dinner only half reassured, Riddle’s smug smirk haunting them for the rest of the night, especially while they fruitlessly waited in the Common Room for their friend’s return. In the end they had gone to bed, knowing that Harry was still out somewhere in the corridors, alone with a teen version of the Dark Lord, who was in the perfect position to manipulate him in cutting all ties with them. They had worried about this possibility for the rest of the night, conscious that this was already the second chance their friend had given them. And it was something that weighted on them even now. But, for the first time since Riddle’s arrival, they had the ability to weaken the strong rapport the two had formed and bring their friend back on their side: they couldn’t miss it!

They had already discussed about it, and had decided that, given the chance, they would take turns in spending time with the raven, showing him that every move done by the dark brunet has the only objective to twist his belief. Exchanging a quick glance, they decided the first hour would be Ron’s turn, to give Harry time to cool down his anger towards Hermione and let the girl regain her bearings.

It took a bit of effort, but the red-head successfully attired Harry’s attention, saving the girl from the cold glaze that still hadn’t wavered, despite the intense minutes of awkward silence. The two boys spoke quietly for a few moments, Ron trying to convince Harry to let what Hermione said go, and then got up to head to the Charm’s classroom for the first lesson. Ron gave her a sort of apologizing glance as a farewell—probably because what he had said to the raven to convince him to drop the issue wasn’t something very flattery about her—and Harry ignored her completely. The bushy brunette followed them with her eyes till they left the room and then sighed in partial relief. She hoped that for the second period the raven’s anger had cooled down, for now, though, she had a teenager Dark Lord to confront.

She got up and headed towards the teen. Half-way, though, she stopped in her tracks. Harry and Ron
had already left the Hall, but Riddle was still turned in the direction of the double doors, a thunderous expression on his face. When he felt her approaching, though, he diverted his attention from the exit on her person, pinning her on the sport with a hard stare. His dark expression became even more stormy, before a terrifying grin, full of teeth, broke out.

Hermione prayed to survive the next hour.

Harry descended the harsh slope that leaded to the Black Lake with long, angry strides. He was alone and in an awfully bad mood. Again. A part of him knew that it was unusual for him to have such a short temper – usually he was much more tolerant of his friends’ irritating behaviour – and he knew he should ask himself where was all that anger coming from, but frankly, he has long since passed the point of caring.

He growled, trying to expel some of his frustration. He really didn’t understand: why were his friends continuing to attack him? If it wasn’t about what he was hiding from them, then it was about the mistakes he was making.

He had spent the past four hours listening to Ron and Hermione berating him about his choice of trusting Tom and keeping secrets from them. Their lecture had been mainly about Tom, though.

“You are giving him too much of your trust, Harry!” Had said Hermione.

“He’s the embodiment of evil, mate.” Had stated Ron without a shed of doubt.

“You can’t trust anything he says to you.”

“Can’t you see he’s only manipulating you?”

“He’s probably planning to keep you as some kind of sick pet.”

“How can you be so blind!!”

“What happened to you? You would have never believed Riddle to be anything except a bloody psychopath before you spent the summer with him!”

Harry scowled, admitting that they had a point. He was well aware he had changed, while his friends had remained mostly the same, and that was the problem. But, really, what did they expect? He saw a friend being killed, had participated unwillingly to the resurrection ritual of his enemy, and had to embrace the ways of the Purebloods.

He glanced at his ring finger, where he could feel his Lordship ring, even if he could not see it, since he was keeping it concealed. When he had accepted it, he had accepted not only the duty that came with it, but also the knowledge of all the work he needed to do in order to become a capable Lord, worthy of his title. it was the reason that had spurred him to put more effort in his grades this year and to learn how to manage an estate and how to behave as a true Heir. And he had Tom to thank for all the progress he had already made and also the one he would made in the future. Tom, who had offered not only to teach him etiquette and traditions, but also to tutor him in Runes and Potions; who had only asked to be given a chance of becoming his friend in exchange, and who he was slowly falling in love with. Harry quickened his pace. The thought of the other teen was enough to brought back the flip flops in his stomach. Apparently, his plan to ignore the dark brunet for a day in
order to gather his thoughts wasn’t working.

He stopped and closed his eyes, inhaling the fresh, crisp air: why was his life so complicated?

He sighed in discomfort and looked towards at the calm waters of the Black Lake. The twinkling dark waters helped to calm his agitated spirit down a bit. It was fortuitous that the weather was so nice and that the next lesson was going to be Care – and that it wasn’t due until the next half hour – it gave him the opportunity to relax a bit, away from everyone.

He headed toward the large beech tree, at the shadow of which he and his friends often sat to do their homework or simply relax. He had nearly reached it, when an unusual sight made him stop in his tracks: in the shadow of the tree, with her back leaned against the trunk of the beech, was a pretty girl with long blond hair. She was reading a book and in general gave off a feeling of detachment and unapproachability. From the colours of her robes he could see that she was a Slytherin, and this brought to mind the image of a blond girl who was in his same year, walking through the castle, always alone or in the company of a curly brunette. If he remembered well, her name should be… Daphne; yes, Daphne Greengrass. She was one of the few people who didn’t belong in Malfoy’s circle and that adopted a disinterested and nearly apathetic attitude towards the Gryffindors; never laughing or picking on them, but simply watching them with occasional disdain from the side-lines.

Harry watched the girl, indecision churning inside him. What should he do? Before coming to Hogwarts he had already decided to make acquaintance with a few Slytherins – both because he wanted to make amends for his prejudiced view of the entire House in his first year and because, being an Heir, most of the people he would need to interact with in the future, especially once he took his place in the Wizengamot, would be ex-students of the Snake House – and Greengrass seemed to be a good choice. She wasn’t connected to Malfoy, was one of the more pleasant Slytherins, and, from what he noticed in class, looked like someone which he could get along with. Making his decision, he approached the girl.

“Excuse me, can I sit here?” Harry asked politely.

The girl looked up from his book, to see who was disturbing her quiet reading, and the raven boy found himself pinned by crystal blue eyes, the colour of which mirrored the sky in a sunny day, so clear that looked nearly white. The shrewd gaze of the Slytherin roamed on his figure, seaming to search for something, and then stopped on his eyes. After a beat, she nodded.

“I suppose.” She answered indifferently, returning to her book.

Harry, feeling like he had just passed a test, sighed quietly in relief, and sat down. Then he turned towards the girl and offered his hand.

“I’m Harry Potter, Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Potter and Black.”

The girl lifted her eyes from the book and watched him with something akin to appreciation in her look. “Daphne Greengrass, Heiress of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass.” And she offered her hand.

Remembering what Tom had taught him about Pureblood custom, he took her hand and kissed the air above it. “It’s a pleasure make your acquaintance, Heiress Greengrass.” He said smiling.

The look of approval in her eyes increased and a small smile broke out. “The pleasure is all mine, Heir Potter.”

After this, both of them sat in silence for a bit, Harry observing the Lake and Greengrass reading her
book. Throwing a casual glance in her direction, the raven vaguely noticed that it was a book on Ancient Runes.

“Why did you approach me, Potter?” Asked suddenly the girl.

“Harry.”

She blinked. “Pardon?”

“Call me Harry.” Offered again the raven.

The girl looked at him with a strange expression, but then acquiesced. “Harry, then.”

The teen smiled. “I’m not completely sure.” He answered truthfully. “I suppose part of the reason resides in my wish to remedy at the prejudiced way I treated your House. You are not part of Malfoy’s cronies, and many other Slytherins are the same, and yet I always treated all of you like you were an extension of him. it was wrong of me, so – ”

“So, to fix this, you decided to try and befriend me?” She inquired.

Harry looked a bit bashful. “Well, yes, that was the idea.”

Greengrass pondered on this for a moment. He knew that the Slytherin was weighting the pros and cons of a possible acquaintance with him, since Tom had told him that Snake House based the start of a rapport on what both parties can gain from it. He hoped that the pros outweighed the cons: something told him that trying to start a friendship with Greengrass would be easier than trying to start it with any other Slytherin. “I suppose we could try with this friendship. You can call me Daphne, then.”

“Thank you, Daphne.” Said Harry, knowing how much that meant coming from a Slytherin.

“I see you are reading a book on Runes.” He went on, trying to make polite conversation and choosing something he considered a sort of safe topic as a start.

“Yes, it’s an interesting subject.” Said the girl. “Strange you are starting a discussion on this, though. I don’t remember you choosing it as an elective.”

Harry passed a hand through his hair, ruffling them up in the process. “You are right, I didn’t. But I recently come to regret it.” He admitted.

“It doesn’t really surprise me, considering you chose Divination.”

The raven looked at the blond Slytherin in surprise. “How do you know I chose Divination?”

Daphne shrugged elegantly. “I never saw you at Arithmancy, and everybody knows you live with Muggles, so you can’t have chosen Muggle studies, either. This leaves out Divination.”

The boy nodded, surprised the girl had paid so much attention to him. Then again, he was Harry Potter, so everyone, who for a reason, who for another, paid an exceptional attention to what he did; it was one of the things that he hated the most about his fame. “Yeah, and I really wish I hadn’t. Runes seems to be a lot better.”

“Then why didn’t you ask to change electives in third year?” Asked the girl, seeming genuinely interested.

“The truth?” He said. “I didn’t know how much useful runes could be until I met Tom. Hermione
didn’t exactly endear me to the subject.”

“It doesn’t really surprise me.” Stated the girl. “Granger is intelligent, I admit it, and book smart, but she’s still a Muggleborn.”

This comment piqued the raven interest. “What do you mean?” He tried to keep his tone neutral, because Daphne’s affirmation didn’t seem to have any malice behind it: it was purely a statement.

The blond Slytherin sighed. “Runes is an art strictly intertwined with wizarding traditions.” She explained. “We use it in rituals to celebrate our Holidays, to create protective wards and curses, and for many other purposes.”

“The problem,” she continued, “consisted in the price of this kind of Practice. Where spells require only magic to work, Runes, being more… ‘primitive’, I suppose we can say, and having an extended period of duration – often being permanent – require some sort of sacrifice, usually the blood of the caster.”

“Muggleborn, not having been raised as we have, find these practices barbaric, and are often unable to accept them.” Daphne said all this with a sort of resigned anger in her voice.

Harry didn’t speak, but he mentally acknowledged that he concorded with the girl. And he could understand why some purebloods despised muggleborns, if this was the reason: they were putting into discussion old practices and were trying to strip wizards of their traditions, just to make this world look more like the muggle one they were used to. He understood that the reason was that they were more comfortable with the world they came from and that they grew up with a set of values different from pureblood wizard and witches, but this was not a reason good enough to condemn their traditions. It was the reason he couldn’t completely support Hermione’s association, S.P.E.W. He knew the girl’s intentions were good, but what right had them to interfere with the way House Elves lived? Dobby was an exception, since he was gravely abused – and he agreed similar cases should be taken care of – but the majority of the Elves who worked for wizards were happy to do so – as showed by those who worked at Hogwarts. He was aware Hermione thought they acted like this because they were brainwashed, considering their situation was very similar to that of slaves, but he believed there was an ulterior reason to the way House Elves decided to live, after all, there must be an explanation to why they reacted so poorly to the idea of being freed, it couldn’t be just brainwashing!

House Elves, and his best friend stance to their situation, was only an example of how muggle raised witches and wizards were trying to change the wizarding world to their idea of world, without trying to adapt to it. Speaking with Tom had showed him just how many traditions had been banned and how many more were at risk to be cancelled. It was quite unfair, he thought, and he agreed that the situation needed to be rectified.

This was one of the many changes Tom wanted to bring once he was Minister – he knew because the teen had told him – and it was one he completely agreed with. But he could admit to be slightly biased in his thinking, since his horrible childhood was the reason he was so accepting of the aspects that most differentiate the wizarding world from the muggle one. After all, everything that would make his relatives shudder in revulsion was something that he was willing to welcome with open arms. And wizarding traditions, being so different from muggle’s ones, were on top of the list. What’s more, his father had been a pureblood, and his godfather was one too, so he considered those things part of his heritage and something his family has left him, so he was willing not only to learn about and accept it, but also protect it with everything he got.

“Yes, I’m beginning to see this is an alarming reality.” Ended up saying Harry.
Daphne looked at him, warily, probably surprised at the fact that he, who was considered the embodiment of the Light side, who advocated the muggleborns’ right to have a say in how their world should be structured, was essentially agreeing with her jabs towards muggleborns. “So, you don’t think we should just abandon our way of living in favour of conform our world to the muggle one to make muggle-raised children more comfortable?”

“Of course not.” He vehemently stated. “Why should I?”

The girl shrugged. “Most of the lights Families do.” She glanced at the lake’s waters, her gaze seeming far away and her tone carrying a note of resigned sadness. “The dark Families are the only ones left to protect the old traditions.”

Silence fell between them then, both ending up lost in their thoughts, until Daphne shook herself out from her pensive mood, and got up.

“The next lesson is going to start soon, I think it’s best we go.”

Harry agreed, and together they headed towards Hagrid’s hut. While they were walking, they barely speak, until the raven decided to offer her to meet sometimes to study together.

The blond Slytherin watched him with a veiled spark of suspicion still present in her crystal eyes. “Why?”

“I liked speaking with you.” He replied easily. “I thought we could study together so we could get to know each other better. You can bring some of your friends, if you wish.”

“Very well,” she agreed, “I’ll think about it.”

Harry smiled. It wasn’t a definite yes, but it was more than he thought he would get. Hopefully this friendship with the girl would work out. He wasn’t lying when he said he had liked speaking with her, and this could also help him forge friendship or alliances with other Slytherins that could aid him in the future. Tom would be proud of him, he mused.

“Nobody in Slytherin thinks you are an attention seeking liar, you know.” Said Daphne suddenly.

“What?” He got out, taken aback.

The girl turned towards him. “My entire House believes what you said about the return of the Dark Lord. They go along with the Prophet version and ridicule you just because you are Gryffindor and the Light’s section Golden Boy.” She elaborated.

“Oh, okay.” He said, unsure of how to respond. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I just thought you deserve to know that not everybody is against you.” She said. “And – “ she stopped, seemingly to ponder over what to say, “I believe some would also support you, if you show them you are supporting and following the Olde Ways.”

The raven blinked; the blond girl was practically assuring him her support and that of some other people of her House. “Thank you.” He said, truly grateful.

She looked at him and nodded. They didn’t speak anymore until they reached the Care of Magical Creatures class, but harry felt better knowing that, if needed, the other girl would back him up.

Chapter End Notes
So... how was it?
Did you like the kiss? Was it worth the wait? (I know that it happened in a dream, but at this stage things between Harry and Tom can only happen in that dimension.)
And what do you think about the new character?
I confess that the last part doesn't convince me much and it was another reason for such a delayed chapter. I hope it's good enough, though.
Chapter Notes

So... hi. I'm back with another chapter. After another long absence. *sigh*

And now, I'm probably going to bore you all with a long explanatory note. So, lately my chapter have took a long time to come out and I feel like I need to warn you that it's possible that it will always be like this, unless I happen to write a short chapter. This is caused by two different things: first, I find myself with very little time to spare to write and second... well, this story is not planned out. I mean, I have in mind how it's going to end, and a couple of general situation that I want to happen, but, except this, every chapter is born as I write it. And this, unfortunately, take more time than writing an already planned one, because more times than not, the original idea of the chapter ends up not working out, and so i need to rewrite it differently to make it seems satisfying. Despite this, I assure you that I will keep writing this story. After all, I have already planned for it to have a sequel.

And well, my inconstant muse, that likes to give me random burst of inspiration about various kind of different stories that could be or not concerning to this story, has already made me wrote a part of the epilogue of this story, the epilogue of the series, and a random part of a random chapter of the sequel. *sighs again*

So, after this long rant, about the chapter...
It's a little bit shorter than the last, but in origin these two should have been one single chapter that has ended up being divided in two both because it would have ended up being too long, and because it felt right end the last chapter where it has. On the plus side - at least I hope it is - this chapter has more Daphne, different points of view, and the return of Luna. :)

So, I thank all who have left a kudo and a comment, and those who are still here to read. I hope the chapter will be worth the wait. :)

Not beta-ed, and Harry Potter doesn't belong to me, but to J.K. Rowling.

And now, on with the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

...& the Odd Raven

The patch of grass in front of Hagrid’s hut, where the class of Care reunites, was still bare for the most part: only the professor, and a couple of Slytherins and Gryffindors were present.

After a brief farewell, Daphne headed towards two of her classmates, a very tall boy with dark hair and an impassive expression, and a dark-skinned boy with light brown hair and peculiar violet eyes. As soon as she had reached them, words started to be exchanged and, from the glances they were sending his way, he deduced that they were discussing about him and what had transpired from his
and Daphne’s discussion.

As their gazes met, he inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment, gaining surprised, but intrigued looks. Contrary to what usually happened between Gryffindors and Slytherins when they were together – mutual avoidance at best, and insult-trading at worst – the two boys slowly reciprocated the gesture, making him feel hopeful about the good success of his plan to befriend some Slytherins, and glad about his decision to talk to the blond Slytherin girl.

He hoped Daphne would decide to accept his offer to study together and that she would bring with her the two boys, too. Having allies in the Snake House, other than her, would surely be a great resource, and he thought that those two would be favourable to an offer of alliance with a prospective chance of becoming a friendship in the future. Or, at least, them reciprocating his greeting seemed to suggest so.

He knew, thanks to Tom’s lesson, that because of ignorance of Pureblood’s custom, he had offended, and thus made enemies of them, quite a bit of people without meaning to. It was a lucky thing that there were people like Daphne willing to offer him another chance. Many others wouldn’t have.

Malfoy was someone who belonged to this last category. Not that he wanted to befriend the blond boy – he was too spoiled and arrogant – but still, it troubled him that it was his ignorance that gained him the hate and consequent bullying treatment of the blond boy. But he had lived with muggle till the day that he had first departed from King’s Cross to reach Hogwarts, so, how could he have possibly known that ignoring an offered hand would not only mean refusing an offer of friendship, but also transmitting the belief that he thought himself above the other boy? He had involuntary treated Malfoy like he was nothing, not even a person worth of any acknowledgment. The lowest of the low.

On those bases, he could partly understand the boy’s animosity towards him. And the hostility of the other Slytherins, when he never once acknowledged any of them like he had just done with Daphne’s two companions. This, thought, didn’t excuses Malfoy’s bullying of helpless student, nor the horrible behaviour of other older people of the Snake House. Still, he agreed with Tom about the need to institute wizarding’s tradition classes for the muggle raised students.

But that was a thought for another time. scanning his surrounds to see who were the people present, he immediately cursed his luck. Of course, his only housemates already there were the three people he less wanted to see: his friends, and Tom. All three of them were looking at him with different emotions swimming in their eyes, making him aware of the fact that his arrival in Daphne’s company hadn’t gone unnoticed.

Tom was sporting an annoyed, but pensive look; Hermione’s was dumbfounded, and Ron, true to his nature, looked angry and betrayed. He sighed: Ron would be the greatest obstacle if the study group with the Slytherins came to be. He was well aware of the red-head hate of all things Slytherin. The boy firmly believed that they were all evil Death Eaters in training, but he had never contemplated the possibility that him simply greeting them would make the boy look at his as he had just sworn his fealty to the Dark Lord.

Well, okay, maybe he was being a bit dramatic in his interpretation of his friend emotions, but really, his expression wasn’t too far away from reaching that state. He really needed to have a nice long talk with the boy: it was about time that Ron grew up and realized that not all Slytherins were bad, and that his pettiness would only hinder him in the future, since he would probably need to also work with ex-Slytherins. This was even more important now that there was the possibility of Daphne joining them in their study time. He didn’t want Ron attacking or making her uncomfortable. She
would be subjected to this behaviour already by her House, if she showed to be willingly consorting with him.

He doubted Hermione would be a problem, since she was a bit more open-minded than Ron, and Tom… well he was sure that Tom would not only understand his reason, but also supporting him. Once they resumed to speak with each other. Thing that would happen soon. He hoped.

… But not now. He decided, seeing the boy approaching and feeling his stomach doing flip flops. Searching desperately for an excuse to avoid the determined dark brunet who was fast approaching him with the clear intention of speaking about his perceived weird behaviour of that morning, he felt his eyes stop on a person who shouldn’t absolutely be here: Professor Grubbly-Plank.

Making a hastening retreat he hurried towards the stout woman to inquire about the curious absence of Hagrid. He had noticed his half-giant friend missing all the meals in the Great Hall these last couple of days, but he hadn’t given it much thought before now, believing the mad was simply being held back by some problem in the Forest and that he would turn up in time for his first lesson.

Now, though, seeing the closed curtains on Hagrid’s cabin, and taking into account the presence of the woman that had took on his friend’s lesson after the disaster that Skeeter’s article the previous year had been, Harry was beginning to worry. So, armed with all of the politeness he was capable of, and the stubbornness possessed only by a person concerned about his friend’s well-being, he approached the woman and enquired about Hagrid’s whereabouts. Professor Grubbly-Plank, far from being helpful with her answer, quite rudely informed him that it was none of his business. Harry very nearly bristled, offended by her ill-mannered behaviour, and prepared himself to pester her until the start of the lesson, if that was what it took to obtain information about his friend’s concerning absence, when something else occurred to him. Thinking about it, Professor Grubbly-Plank was unaware of the friendship present between him and Hagrid, so, to her, he was probably just an overly noisy student inquiring about the personal matters of one of his professors, something that, truly didn’t concern him. And probably that was the reason for her dismissive actions. If this was the case, then, pestering her would bring forth no better results: if he really wanted some answers, he needed to convince her of the validity of his question. Hopefully, sincerity about his motives would be enough.

“Professor.” He called, managing to maintain a polite tone., despite the annoyance he still felt simmering just beneath his skin.

Grubbly-Plank looked at him with suspicion and aggravation. “Mr Potter, if it’s again about Professor Hagrid’s absence, I already told you that his motives don’t concern you.”

“It is.” The raven confirmed, undeterred by the woman harsh tone. “And I know that I may appear noisy, and it’s perfectly in your right to deny me an answer, but I’m asking only because Hagrid is my friend and I’m concerned.”

“I see.” She said, unconvinced, but beginning to falter thanks to his honest, bracing voice. “Even so, Mr Potter, I can’t disclose personal information about a colleague to a student.”

“I understand.” He assured, earnestly. “But I only want to know if he’s alright.”

“He was the one who gave me my Hogwarts’ letter.” He disclosed in an effort to appease to her sympathy and change her mind. He was really spending too much time with Tom if he was about to play on her compassion to have his way. “And he’s one of the very few who writes to me during the summer. But this year I didn’t receive even a single letter, and now he’s absent. That’s why I’m worried.”
Grubbly-Plank looked torn between her desire to dismiss and reassure him. After a couple of intense minutes, in which he tried to maintain the most troubled and earnest expression he could muster on his face, she caved, sighing in exasperation. “I can’t tell you much, Mr Potter, since I don’t know where Professor Hagrid is. I’ve only be told he’s performing other duties for the Headmaster, but I can assure you that he’s perfectly fine.”

“Are you sure?” He asked, dubiously.

“The Headmaster didn’t make me believe otherwise.” She stated with finality. “Now, please step aside, we need to begin the lesson.”

Begrudgingly, Harry moved away. Okay, that didn’t reassure him in the slightest: it wouldn’t be the first time Dumbledore had lied or purposefully withdrew information with the apparent intent of spare someone worry or other such nonsense. Like when he asked the man why Voldemort had tried to kill him when he was a baby at the end of his first year, and the Headmaster had kindly informed him that he was too young to worry about this. After all, it wasn’t like there was a mad man after his life for that exact same reason that Dumbledore refused to tell him. A man, who he might add, had every intention of destroying his life. It was ridiculous! **Ridiculous!**

This situation with Hagrid was probably similar, he seethed silently. He could very well picture the man sitting behind his desk, smiling down benignly at him, and stating that he shouldn’t worry about this because he was too young to concern himself with the Order’s business in that customary grandfatherly tone of his. Because he was sure that Hagrid doing something on the Headmaster’s order could only mean that the half-giant was away performing some work for the Order.

He continued to fume about this, not bothering to listen to what the Professor was actually saying. It was only when Grubbly-Plank told them to divide into groups of two or three that he forcibly brought back his mind on the lesson. He cursed softly. And now? He had not paid attention at all, so he had absolutely no idea what they were studying, nor what they were supposed to do.

And Ron and Hermione were looking at him, purpose in their eyes. Great! He really, really didn’t want to group with them. He could already hear his bushy friend chastising him for not paying attention to the lesson. And the predictable following discussion about what had he been doing with a Slytherin. Merlin, he doubted he would be able to bear this without exploding.

But he needed a partner, and they were already advancing towards him. Searching around, he saw that Neville was still alone. Relief flooded him; thank Morgana Neville was always one of the last to find a partner. He walked towards the boy, with all the intention to ask him to work together, when he was blocked by a firm hand caging his wrist. Dread filled him. **Oh, no, please don’t me…**

He turned, and like he feared the hand stopping him from going towards Neville belonged to Tom. There was a kind of furious fire in his eyes, and his smile was sharper than usual. It was an expression that he had not seen on the other boy for quite a long time. Not directed at him, at least.

“Why don’t we work together, Harry?” Despite being a request, it sounded tremendously like an order, and something told Harry that it would have been a very bad idea to say no.

He nodded, fear prompting him to answer positively. A beautiful and equally dangerous smile was his answer, and that, for a strange reason, scared him more than the sharp shark-like grin Tom had directed at him before. It was fear of losing Tom, of seeing the young Dark Lord reflected in those intense blue eyes and not the teen he had come to care so much about, and of never seeing such a sincere and entrancing smile aimed at him ever again.

He had felt justified that morning in his decision of avoiding the teen for the time being. He had felt
like temporary distance would have been better than the resulting awkwardness and consequential straining interaction that would surely be the result of Tom discovering the depth of the affection that Harry was harbouring towards him. And yet… was this really worth the risk of losing the other’s friendship forever?

Tom was very much like him in that aspect, after all: trust, once broken was difficult to regain. The only difference between them was that, while Harry would gladly accept the apology and the renewed bond after a long period of grudge if the offending party was sincere in his remorse – as the incident with Ron last year was testimony of – Tom would never again offer his trust after being betrayed once. And hadn’t Harry nearly done that, by ignoring the dark brunet when the other had been so open with him, more that he had been with anyone else?

He wouldn’t apologize for his actions, because he still felt like they were somewhat justified, but he would apologize for the hurt they had caused to Tom.

“I’m sorry.” He murmured softly, his wrist still encased in the dark brunet’s warm hand.

Tom, who had started to walk while he was lost in his thoughts, stopped in a spot of grass a bit isolated from the others students, his back turned towards him. “For what?” He asked, tone sardonic and emotionless at the same time.

“Not for how I acted this morning. I apologize, but I can’t regret what I did, since I had a good reason.” Harry answered, feeling guilty. “But I’m sorry for the pain it caused you and for not giving you an explanation. And not being able to give you one even now.” He continued softly, lowering his head.

Tom was still, and no noise came from him. Harry waited, holding his breath: had he hurt Tom so much – because he now knew that it was hurt what he had seen in Tom’s expression that morning – to render his apology pointless?

After a time that felt endless, Tom finally sighed and turned towards him. There was hurt in his eyes, yes but also… specks of red? “Why?”

It was such a simple question, but Harry knew he couldn’t answer it. The overwhelming fear of losing the other’s friendship stopping him from doing so. “I can’t…”

“Why not?” Tom nearly cried out. “It is something I did?”

“No!” Harry denied immediately.

“Then why? Why won’t you tell me, Harry?”

“Because I fear you’ll stop being my friend if I tell you!” The raven shouted back, horror filling his eyes when he noticed what he had said.

Tom froze, shocked. Harry was breathing heavily, heart thrumming in his chest. He should have let those words escape him. “And why would I?”

“You would, if you knew what I dreamed about.” Muttered Harry, sadness coating his words because of the conviction he held in the truth of his statement.

Tom broke out laughing. “All this for a dream?” He sounded incredulous.

Harry scowled, blushing from embarrassment. He wouldn’t be laughing if he knew what his dream was about, he was sure.
The dark brunet stopped chuckling, and put his hands on the raven’s shoulder, a reassuring smile gracing his features. “No dream will ever have any weight on us, Harry.”

The younger Gryffindor would have gladly believed him, but he couldn’t. “Okay, but I still won’t tell you what it was about.”

“Fine,” agreed Tom, “not now. Someday you will, though.”

Harry looked at him. It was said as a statement, but would he really ever be comfortable enough to tell Tom about what he felt about him? He doubted it, and yet… “Maybe.”

Tom nodded, appeased for now, and his hands left his shoulders, one of them returning to hold his wrist. “That’s good enough for me now.” He said. “Now it’s better if we go on with the assignment the Professor gave us, though. I doubt she could be fooled for much long.”

Harry blinked, confused. What was he talking about? Wait, now that he thought about it, it was strange that nobody had noticed them talking. Nor tried to interrupt them. Their talk had been pretty long, and they had even been quite loud.

Tom must have seen his puzzled expression, because he hurried to explain. “I casted a notice-me-not spell on us.” He shrugged like it was not such a big deal.

Harry shook his head fondly. Of course, he had. It was just like Tom to make sure that they could speak in the middle of a class without being interrupted.

“So, what do we have to do?” Asked Harry looking down at the crate full of what looked like squirming twigs.

Top plucked one out. “You didn’t hear what Grubbly-Plank said?”

The raven blushed. “I… was thinking about something else.” Admitted.

“Hagrid?” Chanced Tom.

“Yes, how do you know?”

“It was all Granger and Weasley talked about while coming here.” Informed him the dark brunet, in a long-suffering tone.

“I suppose you are concerned about his absence as well?” He asked while they sat in a patch of grass a little away from the rest. Tom told him they were requested to do a drawing of a Bowtruckles, the strange twigs-like creatures, and proceeded to put him on the space between them, giving him a strange insect as an offering – “A Woodlice.” he explained, “It’s one of their favourite foods.” – and casting a sticking charm to glue him to the ground.

“Yes.” Answered Harry, as they started working on the assignment. “I tried to ask Grubbly-Plank, and, though I managed to convince her to tell me something, she didn’t seem to know much more than us.”

“I see.” Said Tom. “Did she perhaps tell you that he is out on Dumbledore’s orders?”

“Actually, yes.” Confirmed the raven. “And I believe that, from this information alone, it’s safe to say that he’s doing something for the Order.”

Tom was silent for a moment then, pondering various possibilities, and then spoke confidently.
“Giants.”

“Giants?” Repeated Harry.

“Hagrid is a half-giant, is he not?” The raven nodded. “If Voldemort is even in the least bit smart – and I know he is because, despite everything, insanity included, he’s still my future counterpart – then he will try to recruit magic creatures, giants among them.”

“So…” Harry began tentatively. “Hagrid was sent to recruit them for our cause then?”

“Before Voldemort could do it.” Confirmed the dark brunet. “And this is probably the reason why he’s still not back.”

Harry looked at him, questioningly.

“From what I know,” explained Tom, “– and be aware that my knowledge could be a bit outdated – giants live on the mountains, hiding amidst harsh rocky conformations very hard and dangerous to reach. And they don’t like magic.”

“And to this the time needed for the negotiations –” He continued.

“And Hagrid absence begins to make sense.” Finished Harry for him.

Tom nodded. “I think that… your friend won’t come back for quite some time. How much time he will actually still spends away depends on how much trouble he will encounter in dealing with the giants.”

Harry didn’t like much the inflection Tom applied on the word friend, but he acknowledged that the teen could have called Hagrid something much worse. And the disdain with which the word was spoken wasn’t very different from the one directed towards his other friends. Considering their history and the fact that it was obvious that the dark brunet didn’t held the man in high regard, he had actually been quite pleasant in the way he had spoken of him.

What was really important now was… “Trouble… do you mean… Death Eaters?”

“Yes.” Said plainly Tom. “As I said, Voldemort would try to recruit them and I’m pretty sure that he has already sent someone of his as an envoy to the giants. It’s the best course of action try to recruit an asset before your enemy has the chance to put his hands on it. And Voldemort wouldn’t be where he is now if he hadn’t retained at least part of his strategic mind.”

Harry didn’t like this. He didn’t like this at all. Hagrid could have been chosen for the negotiations thanks to his status as a half-giant, but it was also true that the man hadn’t finished his instruction and couldn’t cast many spells; he couldn’t properly defend himself. And the Death Eaters were wizards proficient in magic, Dark Arts included – okay, maybe not the likes of Crabbe and Goyle Sr., but he doubted Voldemort had trusted those kinds of people with such a delicate matter. So, what will Hagrid do if he encountered them? Could it be that this was also a part of the reason why he wasn’t back yet?

Far from reassuring him, the talk with Tom had only managed to heighten his concerns even more. So much so, that Harry found very hard to maintain his concentration after this discussion, his mind unbiddingly turning to Hagrid and the various reason that could cause his friend such a late return.

Tom tried to soothe his worries, but all of his attempts ended up in failure. As a consequence, neither him nor Tom completed their drawing, resulting in it being assigned as a homework together with an essay on the lifestyle of the Bowtruckles.
Harry was glad to have already completed some assignments the day prior thanks to Tom’s insistence, he didn’t think he would have been able to cope with the workload, otherwise. If yesterday and today’s lessons were any indications, the mole of schoolwork required promised to increase exponentially in the next days.

Gathering their things, and returning their Bowtruckle to his box, he and Tom started to head towards the next lesson, when a voice called him.

“Daphne?” Harry said, surprised. And, indeed, the blond Slytherin was heading towards them with calm, confident strides.

A lot of the class was watching her approaching him, and gossipy murmurs were already starting to rise; it was incredibly rare for a Slytherin and a Gryffindor to interact, but it was considered even more outrageous for a snake and the Boy-Who-Lived to be anything except enemies, especially with his current standing in the eyes of the public. In the midst of all the onlookers, Malfoy was looking at the unfolding scene with a progressively darkening expression.

Unbothered by all the attention she was receiving, Daphne reached him and started to talk as if her actions weren’t creating an extensive fracture in the Status Quo. “About your proposition, I decided to accept. You said I could bring along other people, right?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then I will bring along three friends of mine.” She stated. “I’ll see you in the Library after class?”

Harry nodded. “We’ll probably be in one of the tables in the back.”

“Me and Tom, I mean.” He clarified, indicating the boy at his left.

The dark brunet inclined his head in a brief greeting and Daphne nodded in acknowledgment: there would be time later for proper presentations.

After this she left, and he and Tom restarted to walk away.

“So,” started the dark brunet, “I see you are on first name basis with – Daphne, was it?”

“Yes,” confirmed easily the raven, “I decided to try to form at least a tentative friendship with some Slytherins – since most of them will end up being fellow Lords and Ladies in the future – and she seemed like a good starting point.”

Tom nodded, appraisingly. “That’s good.” He said. “Their support could be useful, not only in the future, but in the current climate, too. Their families usually detain a lot of power.”

“You invited her to study with us in the Library, I gathered?”

Harry nodded in confirmation.

“Very good approach.” Praised Tom. “The Library is a neutral ground and giving her the chance to bring along other people will help putting her at ease and allow you to form more connections.”

Tom sounded proud of him and Harry felt himself smile. He just couldn’t help it; his heart fluttered a bit. “Well, someone has been a very good teacher.” He hummed, making the dark brunet grin, smugness oozing out of him.

“I doubt Ron and Hermione would see it the same way, though.” He whispered quietly to himself.
Now that he thought about it... where were Ron and Hermione? It was strange that they weren’t there pester ing them by now. Not that Harry didn’t appreciate the break, but they had bothered him all morning, so why stop now? Watching around, he saw them lingering a few feet back, looking warily at Tom, clearly unwilling to come any closer.

“Tom,” he began, exasperated, “what did you do?” Because he could clearly remember the fact that the teen had spent the morning lessons in the two teen’s company, first Hermione and then Ron, without Harry being there and acting as a buffer. The raven could imagine without any effort Tom venting the frustration caused by his decision to ignore the dark brunet by doing something to his friends.

“Whatever do you mean, Harry?” The innocence in his tone would have fooled even someone as suspicious as Moody, and yet the wizened Auror didn’t know him nearly as well as Harry. And it was exactly because he knew him this well that Tom would need to do better if he wanted to fool him.

To prove this point, the raven simply arched an eyebrow, looking entirely unimpressed.

“Oh, I only tormented them a little.” Complained the older teen, trying to sound dismissive, but actually looking close to pouting.

Harry sighed: apparently Tom’s dark side had come to life that morning. And, really, could he fault him for that? Harry himself had felt a less than nice side of himself straining to come to life, spurred on by his annoyance at Ron’s and Hermione’s behaviour. He was quickly reaching the point in which he would do almost anything to make them shut up. Almost being the key word.

“You… didn’t hurt them, did you?” He asked, uncertain. He didn’t really believe the dark brunet would have done something like this, but still... it was Tom. And he could be incredibly cruel when he wanted.

And he wanted to. Harry knew that the other teen was dying to be cruel to his friends and that his affection towards Harry was the only thing stilling his hand. And that, at least for now, he was the only exception for Tom; the only person the other didn’t feel the need – and didn’t want – to be cruel to.

“Oh, only their egos.” Said Tom, unfazed. “Especially Granger’s.”

Oh. Harry blinked. The dark brunet was sporting a quite terrifying shark-like grin. This didn’t look promising at all. He really wasn’t sure he wanted to know what the other had done: Tom could be as deadly with his words as he was with his wand.

At least he only used his sharp tongue to inflict pain? It could have been worse. Right?

“I wouldn’t really hurt them.” The older teen suddenly stated. “No matter how much I despise those two, they are still your friends, so I will refrain from causing any actual damage.”

Harry stopped and looked at him, suspicious and a bit peeved. “Are you reading my mind, Tom?”

“Maybe.” Smirked the other, playfully.

The raven’s eyes darkened.

“Oh, don’t make that face, Harry, I’m just kidding.” Tom rolled his eyes. “I didn’t look in your mind. I had no need to do so: your thoughts were written all over your face.”
Harry winced. He really needed to control himself better. If he was so easy to read, there was a risk of Tom finding out about his feelings. He couldn’t let that happen!

“Anyway,” continued the dark brunet, oblivious to his intern struggle, “this way they probably won’t bother us for the next hour. If we are lucky.”

The sound of fast nearing feet made him frown. “I spoke too soon, it seems.” He said glancing behind him.

Tom took Harry’s hand and quickened his pace. “Let’s go. If we reach the greenhouse before them, there’s a possibility that we’ll be able to avoid them for the next lesson block.”

Both boys started to run, quickly making way through the last feet separating them from the greenhouses.

Behind them, Ron and Hermione watched, helplessness making way in their hearts.

“Harry is avoiding us. Again.” Whispered Hermione, sadness displayed in her chocolate brown eyes.

“It’s all Riddle’s fault.” Burst Ron. “He must have done something, recurred to some sort of Dark Magic: it’s not possible they made up so quickly.” He stated confidently. “And now Harry has even started to speak with Slytherins!”

The girl huffed. “I don’t see why this would be a problem, Ron.”

“They are Slytherins, Hermione. Slytherins.” Emphasised the boy. “The slimy snakes who had always been our mortal enemies.”

The girl rolled her eyes at how dramatic the other was being. Sure, Gryffindors and Slytherins had never gone along very well, but she wouldn’t define them their mortal enemies. And the girl she saw Harry speak to… she remembered her from their jointed Runes class and had never been as unpleasant as Malfoy or many others had been; nor had looked at her with disgust or contempt. On the contrary, she could remember having different pleasant, or at the very last civil, conversations with her. Sure, she had always come off as a bit distant and aloof, but she had a feeling that it was simply her normal disposition towards the people she wasn’t close to.

“This is just one of your prejudices speaking, Ron.” She sighed. “They aren’t really our enemies and Harry speaking with them is not the main problem here.”

The red head grumbled. “To me it looks important enough.”

“Oh, so Harry speaking with Slytherins is more important than him ignoring us in Riddle’s favour?” Enquired the girl, annoyed.

“Of course not!” Objected Ron. “I’m just saying we shouldn’t dismiss it as being nothing.” He protested. “Harry had never spoke with any snake before Riddle came.”

Slim brown eyebrows rose. “So, you think this is some evil plot of that guy, too?”

“Of course, it is! It’s all part of his plan to make Harry go Dark!”

“While I agree that this is Riddle’s main goal, I doubt that Harry speaking with a girl in green and silver lined robes would accomplish that.”

“It would if her and her parents are You-Know-Who’s sympathizer.” Insisted Ron.
“But isn’t the Greengrass family widely known for being neutral?” Pointed out Hermione.

The red head opened his mouth to counter her words, then closed it, realizing she had a point. “Ok, then.” He grumbled. “You are right. So?”

“So,” said Hermione, exasperated, “we need to leave alone the fact that Harry spoke with Greengrass and concentrate our effort on making Harry see reason about Riddle.”

“We already tried.” Complained Ron. “And it did nothing.”

“True, but…” Hermione stopped, looking deep in thought.

“What are you thinking?” Said the boy, watching the deep frown etched on his friend’s face.

“What if we pretend to change our minds about him?” Pondered the girl.

“About Riddle?”

She nodded. “Harry won’t listen to us because we are the only ones working against Riddle; apparently without a good reason, too, since he hadn’t really done anything for the moment…” her voice started to fade.

“Because he doesn’t need to!” Realization suddenly hitting her. “We are doing all the work for him. And he knows we don’t trust him, so he’s being careful to not doing anything incriminating.”

“But what if we change our way of treating him?” She proposed. “What would happen if we pretend to accept and believe him like Harry does?”

Ron stared, trying to grasp what the girl was trying to convey, and finally, after a couple of minutes, understanding broke out on his features, and he grinned.

“He would either believe us and lower his guard, ending up committing some mistake, or his frustration with the situation will spur him to do something drastic to get rid of us!”

“And in either case he will expose his true nature to Harry.” Said Ron, sounding excited. “And then Harry will see that we were right and desert him.”

Hermione nodded, smiling.

Elation fading, the smile faded from the red head face, and he grimaced. “Ugh, we’ll need to pretend to like Riddle.”

“Well, if he can do it, so can we.” Stated Hermione confidently.

Ron looked at her, and, seeing the determined look in her eyes, nodded, feeling the same resolve rising inside of him.

They would do this! For Harry.

Tom’s Pov
Tom bristled. He had really enough of Weasley and Granger and their annoying habit to appear whenever he thought he had finally managed to get rid of them.

Despite the little hiccup of that morning – that had been quickly resolved by him essentially cornering Harry during Care – his plan to gain ownership of his raven was going quite smoothly, all things considered, what with the two Gryffindors making a blunder after another and alienating the boy with little to not help from him. And what he did to them that morning should have been the final blow that would have convinced them to stay away from both him and his raven for good. Instead they kept coming back. Like cockroaches.

His eyes narrowed in irritation, watching Granger conducting a one-sided conversation with his green-eyed lion, mind whirling with possible courses of action. It was apparent that he needed to step up his game, since nothing he had done till that moment had been able to bring him the desired result of chasing away permanently the annoying Gryffindor duo. Not even reversing all of his frustration from Harry ignoring him so suddenly had accomplished this. It was something that irked him to no end; he was used to people leaving him alone until he gave them permission to come near him again when he was in a bad mood, too afraid to incur in his ire.

And that was something he loved and revelled in. A lot. It gave him a certain rush holding this sort of power over people, knowing he could manipulate them like puppets. It was something he was used to since his childhood, an art that he had perfected during the years. So, it was no wonder he found himself annoyed by the ineffectiveness of his methods. Sure, considering the precarious position in which he found himself in, he couldn't use his most persuasive tools, and had to rely on his wit and words alone to cower the two bothersome Gryffindor.

But this shouldn't be a problem. And yet, despite his sharp tongue and poisonous words, the two refused to be intimidated for long. And what was worse, it took them only a handful of hours to be back more combative than before, sporting a shining new strategy.

Oh, yes, because they had apparently gained a modicum of intelligence since their last interaction and understood that their behaviour till now had only made them and Harry drift further and further apart. And so, their solution had been to pretend to buy into his fake efforts of becoming a better person and to act as pleasant as they were capable of around him. All with the purpose of unmasking him, of course.

Ha, as they would be able to! Even the mere thought of them being able to, was ridiculous.

Did they truly believe he would be so easy to fool? Were they not aware that it wasn’t only his charming appearance what made it possible for him to trick whomever he wanted, and that his mind was the best tool he possessed and what made sure he could get away with whatever he wished to? Did they truly believe they would be able to outsmart him?

Absurd! As if something like this was even contemplable! Not only was he too careful to let wizards of their calibre best him, he was also too good at the manipulation game to fall for their pathetic charade. He had spent six years in Slytherin, rising from being considered a simple Mudblood to the position of uncontested King of the House. In the end their efforts would amount to nothing!

At least it seemed that Harry was just as annoyed by this development as he himself was. Probably because he, too, could see that neither Granger nor Weasley were even marginally truthful in their intentions, and that they were simply still trying to prove their point, only by using a different method.

And this was the reason for the mostly one-way conversation the bushy brunette was engaged in. If this didn’t put a dampen on his chance to further his agenda, he would find quite amusing how the
Mudblood didn’t seem to notice how his raven didn’t have any desire whatsoever to speak with her. Or Weasley, for that matter. Instead he was there, pruning a stupid Puffapod, imagining steadily growing gruesome torture methods he could subject the two Gryffindor to once he had gained control of Magical Britain, and eagerly waiting for the end of the lesson.

“…so, considering how many assignment we already have, I was think it would be best if later we sit in the Common Room and start on them.” Granger’s voice filtered to him.

He heard Weasley grumbling about how starting this early to do their schoolwork was unnecessary, and Harry cutting through it.

“Tom and I have already planned to go in the Library later.” Said the raven with forced calm.

Weasley cry of dismay “The Library?” was covered by Granger overexcited statement of “we can go together!”

He snorted. “I don’t think the company will be quite the one you’ll be comfortable with.”

“If you are talking about yourself,” said the red-head “we already told both you and Harry that, despite still thinking that you are a slimy bas – ”

“Ron!” Admonished the girl, taking reign of the conversation again, and sending the boy a chastising and meaningful look. “He means that, despite not trusting your self-proclaimed good will, we are willing to give you a chance to prove us wrong.”

“Yes, well,” grumbled the other, “since Harry is so convinced of it…”

Harry sent them a bemused expression, clearly unconvinced and was about to said something when he stopped him. “And you are willing to extent this way of thinking to other Slytherins as well?” He questioned.

Now it was his turn to be subjected to Harry’s glare, with the raven sending him a scathing look, clearly annoyed by his interruption. Tom simply responded by sending him one that meant I’m just helping you. At this the raven huffed and turned away. However, since he didn’t comment, Tom counted it as a victory.

“What do you mean?” Asked Granger, confused.

“I invited Daphne to study with us.” Supplied Harry, irritation clearly present in his voice.

“Daphne? Do you mean Greengrass?” Inquired the girl.

“Yes, and she is going to bring along a couple of friend, too.” Continued his raven.

“But why?” Protested Weasley.

“Why not?” Countered Harry with defiance.

“You can always decide not to come, if this represent a problem.” Offered Tom silkily.

“We never said it would be a problem!” Denied quickly Granger, elbowing Weasley. “Right, Ron?”

The red-head grimace a bit but nodded anyway. “Yes, we just want to know why you decided to suddenly speak with her.”

“I’ve noticed that I’ve been incredibly and unfairly biased towards Slytherins in these last four years,
so I want to rectify the situation.” Explained Harry, shrugging his shoulders. “Plus, I’ve met Daphne and spoke with her for a bit before Care, and I quite like her.”

“And she has the potential to be a great ally.” Added Tom, as if musing about this to himself, but actually trying to goad the two Gryffindor into arguing with him. He knew they would never approve of a friendship based on these terms, they would consider it morally wrong, and this would come to clash with Harry’s new set of opinion.

He seriously doubted they would ever be able to understand that, for a Slytherin, a rapport with this kind of foundation, was the only acceptable one. That didn’t mean there couldn’t be true friendship with people of the Snake House, just that the requirement for its beginning were different.

Harry, opposed to them, understood and had accepted this fact, so this would undoubtedly put even more strain between him and his friends.

Contrary to his expectations, though, Granger ignored his words, and instead proceeded to praise the raven for his decision. “That’s wonderful. Harry! I see you took to heart the Sorting Hat’s words at the welcoming feast.”

“But Hermione, they are Slytherins!” Whined Weasley, and he fought the impulse to roll his eyes: what was he, a child?

“So? You too should grow out of your pettiness and stop putting them all at the same level of Malfoy.” Said the girl; then she started to go on a tangent about how Weasley should stop being so immature and judging people based on the House they belonged to.

“That’s not why I did it, though.” Harry muttered so quietly that only he heard him.

“Let them believe what they want.” Tom whispered back. “Your friendship is already suffering enough, isn’t it?”

“I thought you will be happy about this.” Said his raven, surprised. “You hate Ron and Hermione.”

“I do, but I already told you that I care about you enough to be willing to put up with them. They are important for you, are they not? And make you happy.” And they would soon make another wrong move anyway. Better not to rush things too much.

“So, it’s decided!” Stated Granger after she had stopped reprimanding Weasley. “We are all going to study in the Library after Herbology.”

The red-head grumbled a bit but agreed anyway, and Harry sighed in defeat. Oh, what a wonderful afternoon this preannouncing itself to be. Tom only hoped that the two busybody Gryffindors would refrain from disrupting their studying schedule too much: he and Harry had planned to start with Runes today and postponing again was not an option.

Harry’s Pov

Hermione and Ron were making light conversation and shooting surreptitious glances towards the Library entrance every few seconds, obviously waiting for the four Slytherins Harry had warned them that would come, to make an appearance.

From his place beside Tom, Harry observed them warily. He had tried to convince them to not come, but his efforts hadn’t bore any results in the end.

He hoped that their presence wouldn’t have a negative effect on the proceedings of the afternoon. To
be fair, he wasn’t very concerned about Hermione presence – annoyed, maybe, since she and Ron had approached him in herbology acting as if they hadn’t spent the entire morning speaking ill about Tom and started to be very affable with the dark brunet - but Ron was a problem. The boy not only wasn’t thrilled at the idea of spending a couple of hours in the company of a handful of Slytherins, he wasn’t even making any effort to pretend otherwise.

Harry wanted to scream in frustration. He didn’t like thinking bad of his friends, and so he hated his thoughts even more because of how true they were. He liked Ron, he really did, the boy was his first and best friend, but for how many good qualities the red-head possessed, the fact remained that he was very narrow-minded and childish in his approach towards the Snake House. And in this could present a serious problem.

The raven truly hoped that his first friend would be able to contain himself and that he would refrain from making comments that could offend Daphne and her friends; he was trying to build bridges, not creating himself even more enemies.

Luckily, he had Tom with him. Between the two of them he was nearly certain they would be able to salvage the situation if it became obvious Ron’s petty vendetta against Slytherin would reveal itself too difficult for the red-head to ignore. Still, he would frankly prefer if things wouldn’t come down to this.

The seconds tickled by and Harry couldn’t help but be worried of what would transpire from the next two hours.

---

**Daphne’s Pov**

The raven wasn’t the only one worrying over the pending encounter in the Library. On the corridor outside, Daphne, too, was thinking about it, wondering what kind of things this study time with two Gryffindors, one of which was the famous beacon of the Light, the Boy-Who-Lived, would bring.

She had been surprised when the boy had approached her just before Care, and even more when he had been courteous and polite in the following discussion.

It had been nice speaking with him, she admitted, and she wouldn’t have been opposed to a prolonged relationship that would not resolve itself only in a brief discussion that had taken place one quiet afternoon under a willow tree, but she hadn’t expected him to propose to study together. Even less that he would let her bring company in case the idea of being only the two of them would make her uncomfortable.

It had been considerate of him, and it was this last suggestion that convinced her to accept his offer, in the end.

“Daphne are you sure this is a good idea?” A voice on her left suddenly enquired.

Tracey, her best friends since the beginning of Hogwarts, was clearly having doubts about her decision, despite having agreed to accompany her when she had explained what she wanted to do less than half an hour ago.

“Studying with Gryffindors? And Potter at that?”
“I understand your reticence, Tracey. Truly, I do.” Said Daphne. And it was true, she could understand, how could she not when her, herself was a Slytherin? There was a reason usually the green and red House didn’t mingle. “But I have a feeling this is going to bring out something good.”

“And even if I am mistaken,” she went on “there will be only Harry and Gaunt here, so it wouldn’t be too difficult to defend ourselves if things start to go bad.”

“The new guy, right? The one who is always with Potter.” Asked Blaise, another one of her friends. Well, it was more correct to say that he was one of her only friends. In fact, Tracey, Blaise, and Theodore were the only people, other than her sister Astoria, which she was close to.

It was pretty much a given, really. The majority of Slytherin tended to pander to Malfoy’s whims, given the standing of the blond’s family and his attitude towards Gryffindors. His constant demeaning of the lions, and especially of the Boy-Who-Lived, tended to endear him to both the lower and older years. Everyone thought him clever and his comments very witty, a model Slytherin who always managed to bring the Gryffindors and the ‘great defeater of the Dark lord’ down a few pegs.

Personally, she found him very immature and an incompetent coward to both. He was a brat who hid behind the power of his family and the favouritism of their Head of House. He was underserving of the high regard he was keep in.

Unfortunately, only a very small number of people saw this, and even less had the standing necessary to stand up to him. Her, Blaise and Theodore belonged to both of these groups, and it was what brought them together. Tracey was different because, despite lacking the high standing necessary to stand up to Malfoy by herself, could count on the protection of Daphne’s friendship, and thus of her Family.

“Isn’t the one against which Malfoy warned us about?” Put in Theo.

“He did?” Asked Daphne.

Blaise nodded. “Now I remember. He didn’t spoke of anything else the first night in the dormitory. And I remember finding it strange since he usually spends all his time complaining about Potter. Especially the first night back to Hogwarts.”

“Why, though? Isn’t he a transfer student? Did he know him from before?” Questioned Tracey, confused.

Blaise and Theo shared a glance. “We don’t know. His explanations weren’t very forthcoming.” Answered Blaise.

“He seemed scared to even hint at the reason of his warning.” Added Theo, pensively.

None of them really considered Malfoy’s opinion being worth very much, the boy was known to exaggerate to make himself look better or others look worse, but Daphne agreed that Gaunt possessed an unusual intimidating aura for a boy their age, and so, they decided to stand on their guard around the new student, just in case.

It didn’t take them much time to reach the Library, but when they approached the entrance, all four of them stopped. In one of the first visible tables, and not one in the back as Harry had told her, stood, not only Harry and Gaunt, but Granger and Weasley, too.

“Didn’t you say there would be only Potter and Gaunt?” Asked Tracey, wary of the situation.
“He didn’t mention the other two.” Said Daphne, analysing the setting. The raven boy was sitting beside the new student and was watching his two best friends with a very upset expression on his face.

“I don’t think they were supposed to be here.” Commented Blaise. “Potter doesn’t seem to be pleased about their presence.”

“So, what do we do?” Asked Tracey.

It was Theo the one who answered. “We may as well go. Since we are already there.”

Daphne nodded in agreement and stepped forward, soon followed by the other three.

---

**Harry’s Pov**

It was a sudden stillness in the posture of his two friends that clued him on the fact that the Slytherin’s group had arrived.

“Harry, I thought that only Greengrass would come. Why are there other three people with her?” Hermione hissed to him.

Only Daphne? Hadn’t he specifically stated that she would bring a couple of friends with her?

It was Tom who answered in the end, tone flat and unimpressed. “We told you she would bring some friends along. It’s not our fault you are too daft to listen properly.”

Hermione bristled, hackles rising like those of an angry cat.

“So? Even if what you are saying is true, and you had really said that, Harry only talked with Greengrass, so what are those other Slytherins doing here?” Said Ron, temper rising.

“Do you really think she would have come alone?” Said Harry, incredulous.

“Yes.” Answered Hermione promptly. “If she truly wanted to be your friend, she wouldn’t find the need to bring along so many reinforcements.”

The raven shook his head. “Slytherins don’t work that way.”

Ron scoffed. “Of course, they don’t. Slimy snakes.”

Tom looked at him with clear contempt. “First, your insults are becoming annoyingly repetitive, but I suppose I shouldn’t expect too much from someone with such a glaringly lack of vocabulary and brain cells.”

“Tom!” Hissed Harry.

“Oh, okay, I’m sorry for insulting your intelligence Weasley.” He apologized without meaning even one single word of his sentence.

The red-head stood still in his place, arms crossed and hate in his eyes, anger reddening his face. He opened his mouth, ready to retort, but Tom interrupted him.
“Second, I know you won’t understand, but Slytherin inter-house political situation is completely different from the one of the other Houses.”

“There every single action has a consequence. And every single interaction with people inside and outside of the House matters.”

Seeing the looks of utter confusion on the two faces in front of him, the dark brunet explained, letting out a long sigh of frustration. “In Slytherin every person has a different standing based on the year they are attending, their magical power and the political power of their families.”

“And what does this have to do with Greengrass bringing along so many people?” Asked Hermione, not understanding.

“They are assurances.” Answered Harry. “And she probably felt uncomfortable with the idea of being outnumbered by Gryffindors, too.” He added, deciding to also give an explanation with which Ron and Hermione – well, mostly Hermione – could rapport to.

“But she didn’t know we would come.” Contested Hermione. “Or did she?”

“She didn’t.” Confirmed the raven. “But she was aware that Tom would be here.”

“She still brought too many people.” Groused Ron.

Tom rolled his eyes. “Harry just told you they are also assurances. Didn’t you listen?”

“For what?!” Cried Hermione.

“To make sure she doesn’t become a pariah in her House.” Said Harry simply.

“It’s a risk she’s facing by talking with Gryffindors in the current climate.” Explained contemptuously the dark brunet.

“Especially if the Gryffindor in question is Harry Potter.” Added a cool female voice at his side.

Looking up, he saw that Daphne and her group had reached them, and that she was the one who had spoken.

Smiling, Harry greeted her. “Hi, Daphne. I’m glad you came.”

“Thank you for your invite. These are my friends: Theodore Nott, Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Nott, Blaise Zabini, Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Zabini, and Tracey Davis.” Each one of them nodded in acknowledgment as they were introduced.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you all. I’m Harry Potter, Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Potter and Black.” He answered in kind, kissing the air above Davis’ hand and offering his hand at the other two boys to shake.

All the Slytherins – and Tom – looked pleased at his formal introduction, while his two friends watched the exchange with a mix of confusion and irritation.

Ignoring the two of them, Harry started with his own round of presentations. “These are Ron Weasley, son of the Ancient House of Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Tom Gaunt – ”

“Heir Apparent of the Most ancient and Most Noble House of Slytherin.” The dark brunet concluded for him, smirking and adding “for now” under his breath.
Harry was surprised by Tom introducing himself as Heir of the House of Slytherin, considering the fact that Voldemort was the widely known last Heir – not Lord, because, as Tom pointed out, it was unlikely the man had claimed that title considering his deteriorating mental stability, especially since he never presented himself as such – with all that which comported. In truth, Harry had expected Tom to use his Gaunt Lordship until his older self death, but he must admit that the Slytherins expression at his statement was extremely amusing. The utter astonishment in their eyes was a sight to behold.

It was then that Ron chose to open his mouth and spoke up rudely. “What is it with this pompous way of introducing oneself?”

He noticed he had made a mistake when everyone looked at him, Hermione included. She may not have been aware of the Pureblood’s usances, but she was smart enough to understand that undermine this little formality was not a smart thing to do, despite she actually agreeing with Ron’s words. The glacial glances sent towards the red-head after his affirmation were a dead give-away.

“Please, forgive him, he’s not aware of these kinds of things.” Harry tried to savage the situation.

“He shouldn’t be held accountable for his lack of proper upbringing, considering his family doesn’t follow tradition anymore.” Tom said, sending to the four snakes a disarming smile.

“True.” Smirked Zabini.

“Oi.” Protested Ron, but Hermione wacked him, effectively silencing the boy.

“So, are you joining us?” Said the raven, offering them a seat.

The four Slytherins nodded and sat down, Daphne beside him, with Davis on her other side, and the boys in front of them, at Hermione’s side.

The next couple of hours passed quite peacefully, each one of them concentrating on their respective assignment, and sometime speaking about inconsequential things and more serious topics. At some point it even came up the situation of Voldemort’s return and the slandering of Harry’s name perpetuated by the Prophet. Daphne and her friends refused to take a definitive stance, but at least proclaimed to believe Harry’s words about the return of the Dark Lord and Daphne even offered her silent support.

This made Ron and Hermione warming at them, even though the fact they refused to support Harry more publicly offended them still. Harry, for his part, was content with just the knowledge that they believed him. It upset him a bit the fact that they wouldn’t stand up for him in case of necessity, but he knew that their behaviour was dictated both by their survival instincts and by the fact that their acquaintance was still new. Showing openly their support could damage their social standing in their House, so he couldn’t begrudge them for their decision.

Daphne offering her family’s support in case he decided to use his political power and take active action against the Daily Prophet, and the others willingness to do the same in case the situation turned out to be in his favour, tough touched him. It also made him think.

He could utilize his stance in society to defend himself from the Prophet’s slandering campaign, but this would mean taking a more active role as a public figure, something he was loathed to do. In the end he decided to do so only in case of extreme circumstances.

Anyway, Voldemort’s return wasn’t the only important thing they talked about, Ubridge was also a popular topic of conversation and the Slytherins shared some fewer known titbits of information.
about the woman that they had received from their parents. Apparently, she had been planted in Hogwarts by Fudge, as he and Tom already suspected, to act as his guard dog of sort and control the situation inside the school. She planned to stop them from learning anything that could prove itself too harmful for the Ministry and, to do so, she was going to receive an inordinate amount of power, much higher than that of a normal teacher.

At this Tom and Harry exchanged a glance: Umbridge was going to be a truly insidious danger and they would need to thread even more carefully in her presence from now on.

All in all, their study session was a success. There were some hiccups, like the Slytherin being quite cold in their interactions with Ron, and downright formal in those with Hermione, not to mention the incredible scathing comments the read-head tended to mutter every so often under his breath, but in the end the pro decidedly outweighed the cons. By the end of their time together, in fact, both he and Tom had gained the permission to call all four of the teens by their first names, and a promise to meet again. Even Hermione had enjoyed their company, after she had overcome her initial diffidence, losing herself in a heated conversation about some of their O.W.L.s coursework with Daphne and Theodore Nott of all people.

Sure, in the end he had been unable to start on his study of Runes, and while Tom had been displeased by this, he agreed that it had been worth it, tanks to the information and he connections they had gained. Though he had made Harry promise to let him set some kind of groundwork after dinner.

Later that night, Harry was laying awake in bed, listening to the sound of his roommates sleeping, and replaying the conversation he had with Tom just before they went to bed.

He sighed. His mole of work had just increased even more.

He couldn’t exactly remember how it had happened, but, just as they were about to go to sleep, he and Tom had ended up speaking about the recent problems Harry was encountering with managing his emotions.

Flashback

It was night-time, and Tom and Harry were preparing to go to bed. He didn’t know why, but Tom had brought up again his strange actions of that morning and Harry, panicking, had blamed his emotions, defining them volatile and sometimes even out-of-control.

“Volatile?” Asked Tom, bemused and yet intrigued.

Harry grimaced and nodded. “They are stronger than usual, and at times even baffling, like they don’t belong to me, despite the fact I’m experiencing them. They feel nearly alien.” He tried to explain. Sure, there was also the problem of his blossoming love, but that was something he didn’t wish to be confronted with, being perfectly content to ignore the issue. And even if he hadn’t been so inclined, he wouldn’t have talked about it anyway, especially not with Tom.

“Mmh, this could actually be caused by different potions, or spells.” Mused the dark brunet. “When have you started to notice this?”

“Just recently.” The raven paused. “But now that I think about it, I think it has been like this since
this summer.”

Tom frowned, but his eyes glittered with intrigue. “When you were with your Muggle relatives?”

Harry nodded in confirmation, and the dark brunet curiosity seemed to increase.

“Then we can safely exclude both spells and potions as causes.” He said, with a thoughtful look. “The only other possibility would be some kind of connection, but – ”

Harry paled: the only kind of connection he had was with Voldemort. And speaking about it, didn’t Dumbledore said last year that he could feel when the other man was angry? So, did this mean that those strange emotions could be coming from the Dark Lord?

“Voldemort.” He whispered, feeling faint.

Tom looked at him and Harry repeated. “Voldemort.” The raven swallowed. “Last year Dumbledore had told me that I could feel when he was angry – I told you about this, remember? – so… could it be possible that he is the cause of my volatile emotions?”

Tom’s expression was considering. “It’s possible, yes.” The boy started slowly. “And yet, for such a connection to be so strong…” Tom trailed off, and blue eyes locked with green ones burning.

“So peculiar.” Murmured the teen, cradling Harry head in his hands, dark, cobalt eyes seeming to look deep into his soul.

“T-Tom?” Said Harry, feeling heat rising on his face and his heart hammering fretfully in his chest.

But Tom didn’t make any sign that he had heard him. The boy kept staring at his eyes, casually leaning down, in a situation similar to the one that had happened in his dream, and the only thing that Harry’s mind, at that point nearly hysterical, could process was that he was glad they were the only two awake in the dormitory in that moment.

Just when the older teen was a breath away from him, and the raven thought they would actually kiss, the dark brunet blinked and leaned away, a spark of something akin to comprehension flashing through his frightening dark eyes.

“It can’t be…” He whispered, seeming to be speaking to himself. “And yet, this would explain so much…”

“W-what?” Stammered out Harry, the hands still resting on his cheeks, scattering all the thoughts he was trying valiantly to gather.

Finally noticing his situation, Tom expression changed, and an alluring smirk blossomed on his handsome visage. Harry’s heart lurched in his chest. A hand stroked lightly his cheek before retreating, while the other remained where it was. Tom leaned forward, just enough so he was invading his personal space. Harry’s mind was floundering, trying to form coherent sentences.

Suddenly, Tom took a step back, releasing the raven – his smirk becoming a self-satisfied smile – and leaving him feeling quite unbalanced.

“I have a theory.” He started, pretending to not notice the state the young Gryffindor was in. “But I need your aid to verify it. Would you help me, Harry?”

The raven blinked, realigning himself. “I – yes, of course.”
Tom’s answering smile was blindingly bright. “Wonderful.”

“Tell me,” he murmured, “have you ever heard of Occlumency?”

Occlumency? The raven shifted his head.

“I thought so. Basically, it’s a technique that allows someone to defend his mind against Legilimency.”

“And you want to teach it to me?” Guessed Harry, correctly.

“Yes.” Confirmed Tom. “I was thinking to teach it to you anyway, since, as an Heir, it’s a skill that would be useful anyway, but it could help confirming my theory, too.”

“How so?” Asked Harry, confused.

“By showing how strong your connection with Voldemort is.” Answered the dark brunet vaguely. “So, what do you say?”

“Well, if you think this will help…”

“Don’t worry, Harry. It will.” Assured him the dark brunet. And then he began to explain.

“So, first thing, you’ll need to find your mindscape…”

End of Flashback

Tom had told him, that, at first, things would be very simple: Harry just needed to meditate for about an hour every night before going to bed and try to reach his mindscape. After that, Tom would guide him through the process of constructing his mental barriers.

What worried Harry, though, was the last phase: Tom would actually try to break into his mind to test the strength of his barriers. Harry had already allowed the other teen to enter in his mind, but the idea of Tom forcing himself in unnerved him. Truth be told, he was worried the other teen would see something he would prefer to keep buried. Like the worst part of his childhood with the Dursley, that nobody, not even Tom, knew about, or the fact that he was slowly falling helplessly in love with him.

Yes, he has time before it even came to this – Tom had assured him he would try to break in only when Harry felt confident enough with his barriers to let him do so, and this would probably take months – but this only made him fear that day even more, because he was sure that, for that time, he would surely be completely and utterly in love with the other boy.

Feeling restless at his thought, and finding himself unable to sleep, the raven slid quietly out of his bed, and taking his invisibility cloak out of his trunk, making sure to not make any noise as to not wake anybody, he quickly and silently stepped out of the Tower, heading towards his favourite spot, the place only Tom knew about.

The walk till there was easy and he didn’t meet anyone, be it ghost or professor. He navigated the halls quietly, lost in own thoughts. Place reached, however he stopped. There sitting calmly and serenely humming to himself, was the blond girl he had met on the train, Luna Lovegood.

As if sensing his presence, the girl turned towards him and, upon not seeing anyone, cocked her head in confusion. Taken by an unexplainable urge to reveal himself, he took out his cloak and approached the girl.
Upon seeing him, Luna only smiled in that dreamy way of hers. “Hello, Harry.”

Not knowing exactly what to say, he set on “hi, Luna.”

The girl simply continued to smile and, after pondering for a bit, Harry lowered himself down to sit beside her.

“Do you come here often?” He asked.

Luna hummed. “Actually, this is the first time. The drýminga showed me this place and told me to come tonight. It’s quite beautiful, isn’t it?”

She was gazing dreamily at the window who was showing the cloudless night sky. The dark blue quilt was speckled with bright stars, shining down upon them.

“The drýminga? What are they?” Asked Harry, confused. He had never heard about anything called like this.

“Oh, they are little shadow-like creatures.” Began Luna, happy to have someone interested in her creatures. Usually, when she brought them up, people simply scoffed and ignored her. “They always speak in soft murmurs and can only be heard on starry nights such as this.”

“I see.” Harry turned his head towards the sky and for the next minutes neither him, nor Luna said anything, silently admiring the beauty of the night.

“Say, Luna.” The raven interrupted the companionable silence that had been created between them. “On the Hogwarts’ Express I heard Ginny calling you Loony Lovegood. Why?”

The girl smile dimmed just a little. “Oh, it’s a name my housemates gave me. They think me odd, you see.”

“But why did Ginny used it? By what she said, I had understood that you two were friends.”

The blonde girl hummed, dreamy smile back in place. “I don’t think Ginny uses it with malicious intent. It’s just that all my year-mates know me by that name by now.”

“Still,” insisted Harry, “she shouldn’t do so, if she’s your friend. Doesn’t the fact she does upset you?”

“A bit.” Admitted the girl. “But she’s also always nice with me, so I don’t give it too much though.”

Something in her voice made him think that wasn’t the only reason. “And she’s your only friend, is she?” He guessed.

“That, too.” Admitted Luna.

The raven felt a pang of sympathy for the strange blond girl. Her situation reminded him of his own childhood: how everyone had avoided him not only because his cousin scared potential friends away, but also because he was the strange kid, the different one who nobody really wanted to have anything to do with.

It was because of this that he hadn’t like when Ginny had called Luna by that name. As a friend, the Weasley girl should have know to avoid doing so. Friends weren’t supposed to use a term whose purpose was to insult and hurt the person it was referred to, even if they didn’t do it with malicious intent. And it was this that spurred him to say his next words.
“Would you like to be friends? I promise I’ll never call you Loony.”

The girl looked at him with large, unfocused eyes, and then smile. “It’s really nice of you Harry. I would like it very much.”

Harry returned the smile. “Good. I can also introduce you to my other friends. I’m sure they won’t call you by that name, either.”

“Not to my face you mean.”

The raven sighed. She was probably right. “True. So, do you prefer to keep on meeting like this?”

Luna thought for a moment. “Why not? This is a very nice place.”

“Okay, then. If this will make you more comfortable, for me it’s okay, too.” He acquiesced.

They smiled to each other and relapsed into silence.

They remained like this, looking at the night until the sky started to lighten, neither of them saying anything.

“I think it would probably best to head back.” Stated Harry as the black night assumed a Prussian blue shade.

“Yes, it would.” Hummed Luna in agreement.

Silence re-descended upon them.

After a moment, Harry sighed and stood up. “Do you want me to accompany you to your Common Room?” He offered.

The young girl turned towards him. “No, thank you. I think that I’ll stay here for a little bit more.”

“Okay. Then… I’ll see you there next week, same day and time?” He asked.

The girl nodded wordlessly, and it was just when he was near the door that she opened her mouth to speak. “I don’t think it’s really necessary, but I figured it’s best if I said it anyway. I believe you, Harry. About the Dark Lord’s return, and what happened in the Third Task. Everything.”


“Goodnight.” She returned as he left.

On the way back, as he was donning his invisibility cloak, he noticed that the talk with Luna had actually managed to calm his tumultuous thoughts. He smiled, as he climbed on his bed, thinking about the soothing presence of the blond Ravenclaw. Luna was certainly a strange girl, but he was glad to have met her.

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think about the insertion of different points of view? In the beginning I planned to have only Tom's, Harry's and Voldemort's point of view, but then I thought that it would be nice to give voice to the opinion of other characters too. And that's why
Daphne found herself with a little part all dedicated to her.

And what about Luna's scene? She has just gained a new role, one that had been decided after a sudden burst of inspiration, and the reason she was there at that time, and why her presence was so soothing to Harry, are all things that depend upon the role she will have in Harry's life. Role that, if all goes as planned, will be explained in the sequel. :3
But there are going to be Luna's Povs that could hint at it.

See you in the next chapter. :D
So... hi again. I'm still alive and writing this story. I apologise again, for the long wait, but I went through a bad period and was thus unable to continue to write. The result was that I had this chapter half-written since August, but was able to finish it only recently. I hope that at least the Tom/Harry interactions will be worth the wait. :) 

A big thank you to all those who left kudos, and a special thanks to those who left comments. Your support really means so much to me. ^-^ 

Still not beta-ed, and Harry Potter still doesn't belong to me, but to J.K. Rowling.

Tom’s Pov 

The gentle light of dawn was filtering through the glass window of Gryffindor Tower, cloaking the room in a soft morning hue and casting long shadows on the floor and the walls of the fifth-year dormitory. The green-eyed raven was sleeping peacefully, turbulent thoughts for once put to rest by the soothing haze of dreams, and soft puffs of breath were escaping his slightly parted lips. Sitting on the edge of the slumbering boy’s bed, darkness wrapping around his form like a silk mantle, Tom Riddle stood, motionless, watching the slow rise and fall of the younger boy’s chest, cobalt eyes dark and blazing.

One pale hand rose silently to brush away smooth dark bangs, revealing the famous scar that stood out so starkly against the young boy’s forehead. Long fingers traced softly its outline, leaving little sparks of warmth in their wake. It was astounding how much weight such a little thing could have on a person’s life.

Oh, how more precious that simple little scar would make his raven, were his suspicions turning out to be true; he would be an even greater treasure than the invaluable gem he already was. The possibility had come up to him unexpectedly while he was browsing his raven’s mind, trying to pinpoint the reason for the Gryffindor’s fluctuating emotions. He didn’t go too deep, he never did, not wanting to lose Harry’s trust by seeing too much, so he couldn’t be completely sure, but it would explain so much: the weird connection the boy had with his other self, the strange buzzing energy that assaulted him if he touched that scar…

A Horcrux! A human Horcrux! He had never heard about a similar situation occurring before. None of his – admittedly limited – sources even hinted at this being a possibility. It was true, though, that the subject of Horcruxes was one branch of magic still largely undiscovered, since they were
considered the darkest and foulest magic in existence. He was one of the very few people who had been daring enough to pursue soul magic, and the only one who had dared to surpass everyone else by going further than any other magician before himself by creating not one, but multiple Horcruxes. It was also true, though, that the purpose of a Horcrux was that of assuring the immortality of the creator, and having a living, human soul container would not be helpful, since the person in question would still be susceptible to the passing of time and bound by his mortality. Once dead, the person would lose his function and usefulness; unless, they became immortal themselves.

And this last possibility was what really appealed to Tom. If his raven truly was a vessel of a part of his soul, he could find a way to make so that piece of Voldemort residing inside of Harry was tied to him and not the Dark Lord. And then, Harry would be his Horcrux! His raven would never be able to leave him then, he would belong to him for the rest of the eternity!

The elation he felt at the thought, evaporated abruptly and the hand that had started to unconsciously thread through his raven’s untameable hair stopped. Yes, he needed confirmation, but he was pretty sure that his hunch about Harry being a Horcrux was correct.

So, this begged the question: how was possible for Voldemort to be unaware of this? The young Gryffindor was his future self’s soul container! Shouldn’t the Dark Lord have felt the presence of that piece of himself inside the boy during one of their numerous confrontations? Apparently, no. He was sure that the man would never try to kill the boy, were he aware of his status, so, considering the man’s obsession with the raven’s demise, the only explanation was that Voldemort was completely unaware of Harry’s situation.

But how could this be possible? Yes, the first time, in Harry’s first year, could be explained away by Voldemort being a formless wraith, a simple parasite inhabiting another body, but this wasn’t the case of last year. He knew that the man had regained a body the previous May using the young Gryffindor’s blood, so, surely, the man should have noticed something at that time. And yet, the fact that the Dark lord was still clearly trying to kill the raven showed that this was not the case; the man was still unexplainably unaware of Harry’s true worth.

The hand that had stilled upon the realization of Voldemort’s lack of knowledge on the possibility of Harry possessing a piece of his soul, returned to caress the sleeping boy’s hair; the repetitive motion and the contact with his raven helping to soothe Tom’s agitated thoughts. Apparently, the damage on the Dark Lord’s mind was worse than he had initially thought. If the man couldn’t even tell when a piece of his soul was near, fracturing it didn’t only affect his sanity, but also his magic. After all, this kind of sensitivity and self-awareness, depended just as much from the size of one magical core, than the control one had of his own magic. The multiple Horcruxes, then, must have weakened not only his mind, but his core, too. Not for the first time since reaching this reality, Tom found himself extremely grateful for his decision to travel to the future.

Had he not done so, he would have become like Voldemort: an insane, rabid animal, who only craved blood and senseless destruction. His goal of conquering the magical world would have been out of his reach and, what’s more, he would have never found out the rare treasure that was his Harry. His lovely, lovely raven, who was slowly falling for his little manipulations and that would soon find him utterly and willingly trapped in his carefully crafted little web.

His beautiful Harry, who had looked so troubled when he had woken up and gone out of the Common Room last night.

The dark brunet frowned. He didn’t really care about his little raven’s nightly trip, but the fact that he went out of the dormitory without him and that he had only returned around dawn, smiling happily about something, previous concerns seemingly disappeared, troubled him. It was as if he had met
someone with the ability to lift his worries. Someone who was not Tom.

This was unacceptable!

In hindsight he should have probably followed him, but that had been the perfect opportunity to go to the Chamber, and he couldn’t have wasted it. It was quite unfortunate, however, that his attempt ended up bringing no results.

He had suspected – of course he had, he wasn’t a fool and the old coot wasn’t one either – that Dumbledore wasn’t relying only on Harry and that he was implementing other methods to keep him under control; still, having a professor patrolling the exit of the Common Room during the night had not been quite what he had expected. And the fact that he had been able to sense him despite his strong Disillusionment Charm had been another unpleasant surprise.

Tom had been forced to retreat before the sour Potion Master could pinpoint his exact location and confirm that it was indeed him who had tried to sneak out after curfew. A founded suspect without proof was better than a proved certainty. Being caught would have definitely made impossible his return to the Chamber.

That wasn’t to say he had given up, of course. Oh, no, on the contrary, he was more determined than ever to bring his plans to fruition, even just to spite Dumbledore and show him he couldn’t be stopped. Unfortunately, to be able to do so, he needed the tomes in Salazar’s library and he didn’t yet have a plan on how to reach them. The fact that Harry appeared to have been able to sneak out without problems, though, made him think.

Could the feat be credited to the raven’s invisibility cloak? Did the fabric have the ability to completely conceal the presence of the bearer? Usually, invisibility cloaks or the enchantments casted upon them weren’t this powerful, but it was the only explanation he could think of for how Harry had been able to pass through the entrance unnoticed. He would need to ask the boy once he woke up. That kind of asset would be truly invaluable.

And speaking about walking up, he could hear shuffling coming from one of the other beds. He sat up and returned quietly to his bed, being careful to go unnoticed by the other boys in the room. It wouldn’t do for Harry to find out that he had developed the habit to watch him sleep so early in the game, after all.

Harry woke up a lot later than he had expected. Later than he had ever seen him do since he had met the boy. However, Tom took this as a sign that, for once, the raven was finally experiencing a couple of hours of blissful sleep and didn’t complain. Even though it had condemned him to a half an hour in Weasley’s company: thirty minutes full of distrustful stares, dull conversation, biased belief and ‘subtle’ – as ‘subtle’ as Dumbledore’s hideous robes in a white and grey dreary orphanage could be – digs on his dark and evil intentions. Really, Weasley was truly the epitome of a standard, brash and obtuse Gryffindor.

What bothered him most, though, was how wrong and biased were the red head’s views on magic. He was frankly disgusted by the disrespect Weasley showed towards his very own traditions. And he was a Pureblood! He knew the boy’s family were outcasts in the Pureblood Society, and that they were tagged as Bloodtraitors, but he wasn’t aware that they had completely denounced the Olde Ways. This, coupled with the loss of their Lordship, made it more than obvious why they were
looked down so much by the other Ancient Families. No self-respecting wizard would completely
discard his culture in favour of adopting the muggle ways.

Tom had to nearly physically stop himself from both tearing the boy down verbally and using some
carefully chosen curses to try and make Weasley’s brain work. The loss of great part of their rich
culture was something he felt very strongly about, but he also knew that the teen was a lost cause,
and frankly, he didn’t care about him enough to devolve some of his precious time to change his
mind. The boy didn’t have any particular talent that would make any kind of effort to recruit him
worthwhile; Harry was the only reason for which he tolerated such a hard-headed and bigoted
person.

However, he swore that, once he had secured himself Harry’s undiscussed loyalty, and his heart, the
boy would be the first one to go: Weasley was neither interesting, nor particularly powerful
magically; he also didn’t possess any useful connections, so it was of no use to him. Consequently,
he wasn’t needed as Harry’s friend and didn’t deserve to stand by his side.

Though, he must admit that he had at least the merit of showing the raven every fault present in the
current administration, and how the people in power were slowly killing the precious culture magic
offered them all. It was beautiful to see how well it was working: the contemptuous way his raven
looked at Weasley once he woke up in the middle of the boy’s tirade was extremely satisfying. He
even berated him!

Tom hid his smirk at the gobsmacked expression of the red head. He really shouldn’t have been so
surprised at Harry’s irate-voiced disagreement; he thought that the previous day had showed well
enough how much the raven’s belief were starting to align more and more with his and the other
Slytherins’, but apparently this fact hadn’t quite sunk in just yet.

The good mood caused by Weasley’s shocked and offended expression, however, lasted only until
breakfast, when he found out why exactly Harry had come back in so high spirit at the early hours of
dawn. As he had theorised, the reason was a person, and specifically, the blond Ravenclaw they had
met on the train. Her name was Lovegood, if he wasn’t mistaken.

“Isn’t she the strange girl we shared the compartment with?” He asked, seeing Harry greeting her as
she bubbly made her way to her House’s table.

The raven turned towards him, a small fond smile playing on his lips. “Oh, yeah, Luna.” The
familiarity and fondness with which he said the name irked him: it sounded so natural, as if he had
known her for years, and not only spoken with the girl a couple of times. “We met last night, when I
went out to… for a walk.”

“Troubled thoughts?” Tom inquired carefully, a crease forming between his brows at the younger
boy suspicious pause.

“... Something like that, yeah.” Answered Harry vaguely, before changing the subject. “Anyway,
we spoke for a bit and ended up becoming friends.”

“Very quickly.” He deadpanned, his possessive side roaring his discontent.

The smaller boy, oblivious to his irritation, nodded in agreement. “I don’t know why, but I feel her
company soothing.” A contented smile was playing on his lips.

“I see.” Said Tom stiffly. It was unusual for Harry to get so close so fast to someone. And to feel
comfortable enough in their company as he was suggesting to feeling in Lovegood’s presence? How
could she have been able to break his barriers so easily?
He glanced discreetly behind himself and saw the Ravenclaw girl looking directly at him, her usually unfocused blue eyes sporting a disconcerting sharpness, despite the soft, little smile playing on her lips. Like she knew exactly what he was thinking about and was aware of something he wasn’t privy to. He felt like her smile was mocking his ignorance; it looked downright condescending, and his annoyance flared up.

How dare she? Who did she think she was, looking at him like that? Anger swelled up inside him like acid, and he turned swiftly away, letting it simmer softly under his skin.

Tom took a mental fortifying breath, blocking the growl that wanted so desperately to escape, and started to talk with Harry about their Divination assignment, purposefully avoiding turning back to look at the Ravenclaw’s table. It was no use keeping his attention too focused on the Lovegood girl for now. Not only would it spur him to do something he would surely regret later, like attacking the blonde, but it didn’t look like it would be a great nuisance. Unless that new bond started to clash with the time he could spend with the younger boy, he won’t intervene; he could tolerate it. He would tolerate it.

Murder wasn’t the solution. Not in this case. It would upset his raven too much. And he was already working to increase the rift between Harry and his two best friends – and Harry turning towards someone else in search of friendship was a clear sign of his plan working – trying to intrude in this developing bond would surely make his presence feel suffocating, and thus driving his raven away from him too.

Lovegood wasn’t a problem. For now. Despite her irritating condescending smile, she didn’t look like she was against him getting close to Harry – at least from what he was able to gather during the train ride – so it shouldn’t be necessary to deal with her. He could always do so in the future, if her presence became too unbearable.

With his possessiveness assuaged as much as it could ever be with a new perceived threat looming on the horizon, he sat near Harry and started breakfast, not noticing the suspicious gaze of a pair of azure eyes pinned on him.

---

**Dumbledore’s Pov**

At the Head Table, Albus Dumbledore watched the easiness with which Tom and Harry interacted. Worry lines marred his aged face at the way the two boys looked so in tune with the other; the way they seemed to gravitate around each other was being the cause of great concern for the venerable old wizard.

He had never imagined this could have happened. When he had assigned Harry the duty of controlling Tom Riddle, the two boys becoming so close so fast had never been part of his plan. Sure, he had hoped that forcing the two to be in constant contact with each other would lead Harry to influence positively Tom, but, in truth, he had never held much faith in the success of this venture. Tom had always been a lost cause, even at this still quite young age.

Another thing he had relied in, was the thought of Harry being wary and reticent in forming any kind of bond with the other boy. With all of their past encounter ending with the young Gryffindor almost dying at Voldemort’s hands, and all the other times Harry had been in danger because of an indirect consequence of the Dark Lord’s actions, he had expected the raven teen to be immune to Tom’s
charm and manipulations.

He had been so sure that Harry would have been able to resist any tentative the young Dark Lord would have made to entice him. He had been so sure that Tom would have failed to charm Harry and that the ones more at risk were the boy’s friends, who hadn’t had as many encounters with Voldemort and who didn’t know the young and charismatic Tom Riddle. Instead the unfathomable had happened and the situation was the exact opposite: young Mr Weasley and Ms Granger were being distrustful of the Slytherin-now-turned-Gryffindor, while Harry had relaxed into an easy friendship with the boy.

And this was causing a rift between the three students as well. Five years of friendship, overcome hardships and mutual sacrifices made for each other sakes, reduced to nothing in the span of a few weeks because of the machinations of a power-hungry teenager.

The old Headmaster closed his eyes, remembering how distraught his two students had looked when they had come to him searching for help and reassurances, eyes full of fear at the thought, the knowledge, that they were slowly losing their best friend.

How much he wished to have been able to offer them the solution they so desperately needed; instead, the only thing in his power, had been to offer meaningless assurances and comforting words.

That was all he could do: lie on how everything would be fine in the end, and request that they believe in the strength of their friend’s soul. How could he offer more, after all, when his own weaknesses and decisions had caused this?

He was the one who brought Tom to Grimmauld Place, and it was his fault that Harry felt such bitterness towards both his friends and him. Maybe such a dangerous situation could have been avoided if he had not isolated the young Gryffindor during the summer or if he had been more open with him. The reasons he had used to convince himself he was doing what was best for Harry sounded like extremely weak excuses now. And yet, he still asked himself if it would really have been better to needlessly worry the boy with information about Voldemort’s movements, depriving him of a nice, relaxing summer with his family. Moreover, how could he tell Harry about the prophecy, knowing that it would take away the last silver of innocence the child still possessed?

He sighed with a bone deep exhaustion that had nothing to do with his physical condition. It was useless to regret his actions now; what has been done, was done. It was both too late to fix things and too early to salvage what still remained of the trust between him and the young Gryffindor. Were he to try, his efforts would only push the boy even further away from himself and deeper in Tom’s arms, giving the young Dark Lord the power to tie Harry indissolubly to him.

It was quite disturbing the amount of care the young Dark Lord was showering the smaller raven with, even more so because it looked—was—genuine. The affection Tom showed towards Harry wasn’t artificial, Albus has noticed, but it wasn’t positive either. It wasn’t the selfless kind of sentiment born from a love shared between friends, nor the passionate and self-sacrificing one typical of lovers.

He had observed them from a distance, and had seen the sharpness of Tom’s smile, the hunger in those dark eyes, and the possessive red spark that appeared, though briefly, whenever the dark brunet set his gaze on his companion. It was a dark kind of passion, greedy and obsessive, that, if let to fester, was sure to trap Harry in an unhealthy relationship from which the boy would be unable to escape.

But how could he stop this from happening? Both Mr Weasley and Ms Granger were unaware of Tom’s true intentions, and even if this wasn’t the case, their words of cautions would be disregarded
either as other baseless concerns or as even more biased judgement on the dark brunet’s character. His best bet to block this relationship from developing further than it already has would be Sirius.

Harry cared a lot about his godfather and his opinions, since the man was one of the last links to his parents, and thus would surely take his warnings to heart. With all the Ministry’s forces after him, though – helped by Death Eaters like Lucius Malfoy who were more than happy to pass along any scrap of information that Peter Pettigrew had been able to offer to aid in the animagus’ capture – and Dolores Umbridge’s presence at the castle it was too risky to offer the man any form of contact with his godson. Sirius needed to remain hidden and as unaware as possible of the happenings of the school. For his own good.

Albus sighed again, feeling older every time he did so. Another source of worry was Harry’s decision to befriend a particular group of Slytherins. On one hand, it was a commendable action and spoke a great deal about the goodness and strength of the youth’s soul and of his willingness to look past his prejudice on the snake House, by expanding his group of friends to cover people belonging there, too. Yet, at the same time, Albus considered the Slytherins Harry had chosen to associate with to be less than ideal candidates.

True, the four students weren’t part of the Malfoy’s heir group and seemed to not support Voldemort or young Draco’s hate for the Lion House; they mostly skirted on the edges of the Snake House, content to keep to themselves. But he knew their families – and he had also asked Severus information about them to have a more comprehensive picture – and all four shared belief very in line with Tom’s thinking.

It was normal, considering their families’ history and status. Ms Davis was a halfblood, true, but she was very close to the Greengrass heiress, and this has shaped her convictions, bringing her closer to the Dark sect’s mentality. Ms Greengrass and the Zabini heir came both from two Neutral Houses, however they leant more towards the Dark edge of the magic spectre and possessed a very traditional view.

Despite all this, the one who worried Albus the most was probably the young Mr Nott, since both his father and grandfather had borne the Dark Mark with great pride.

He didn’t want to appear biased towards the green and silver House, nor did he desire to insinuate that they would be a bad influence, but he was also realistic. Slytherins were traditionally dark and ambition-driven. They appreciated power and tended to follow those who were able to offer them what they longed for. And Tom was exceedingly charming, with a vision of the world that catered to their inner desires. With the right incentive and the correct kind of persuasion, they could easily be convinced to join him and his cause, and help bring Harry into it, too.

If only Albus knew what exactly was Tom’s objective. He suspected that his goal didn’t differ greatly from Voldemort’s – Tom craved power above all else, after all, so even with his sanity intact, he had no doubt the boy would aim to become a figure similar to an Imperator, a dictator with full control on the entire wizarding world – but, apart from this, his other aims were still unclear. He knew he had made certain changes in his original plans, probably only so that he could include Harry in them, but he was unaware of what both versions, the old and especially the new one, exactly entailed. And this made him unpredictable. And dangerous. Because there was nothing more terrifying than an unpredictable foe.

The only saving grace was that Tom, at the moment, lacked the tools necessary to bring his plans to fruition. Despite this, Albus couldn’t bring himself to feel completely at ease because the extensive collection of books of the Hogwarts’ library wasn’t the only source of information Tom could rely on. The Headmaster had feeling that the boy possessed many more useful and obscure tomes in that
Fortunately, though he was unable to stop the boy from frequenting the library – something that didn’t actually present a great problem, since he doubted the accessible part of it could offer Tom anything of interest, and he could deny him access to the Restricted section for now – he could make it difficult for the teen to sneak out to the Chamber by stationing someone outside the entry to the Gryffindor’s Common Room.

For this reason, one of the first thing he had done after the sorting banquet, was to ask Severus to do rounds in front of the Fat Lady’s Portrait, and report to him any attempt made to leave the Common Room after curfew. Severus was a powerful wizard and, since it could help him with his role as a spy, had trained himself to be always especially aware of his surroundings. Moreover, the man, like Albus, could detect magical presences, even when the person in question was using a spell to conceal himself. An ulterior point in favour of the man was that he despised Voldemort, and his every incarnation, for what the Dark lord had done to his beloved Lily, so he could be trusted to keep a tighter lash on Tom than any other professor, not counting Albus, would do in his place.

The man, as usual, had acted disgruntled at his request, but had acquiesced anyway. When Severus had returned with no news for the two following nights, he hadn’t been very surprised, because he knew that the teen was lying in wanting for the good occasion, and he was proved right when the third one had borne different results. The man had come back, in the early hours of the morning, reporting to have felt a presence trying to leave the Gryffindor’s Dorms.

He was a bit surprised, though. Tom had moved faster than he had anticipated: it was only his third night at Hogwarts and the boy was already testing his boundaries; it was unusually reckless of him. Sure, the person had been under a heavy Disillusionment charm and made a quick retreat once he noticed Severus’ presence, so the Potion Master had been unable to correctly identify him, but, by the sound of it, the man had remained rather impressed by the ability and power of the student in question.

Albus had no actual proof that the mystery student was Tom; there were too many people who could have tried to leave the Common Room after curfew, especially in Gryffindor – Harry or the Weasley twins, for example – but someone skilled enough to impress Severus? He doubted anyone other than the young Dark Lord had that kind of ability. Moreover, he trusted his instinct and there was a feeling in his gut that told him that he was right.

He was unaware of the destination and the purpose of his intended night excursion, but knowing him, it was either the Restricted section or the Chamber and his objective could be nothing but something unsavoury.

He was worried; horribly so. He had not trouble to admit so, even if only to himself. Even since Tom Riddle had appeared in his office, he had been full of doubts, and felt so out of control. Till now his measures to stall the teen seemed to be working, but how long would they last? Albus knew how resourceful Tom Riddle could be when he was working towards an objective, and just how obsessive his interests were: once the boy had put his eyes on something, he wouldn’t stop until he had reached his goal, no matter how many obstacles he found on his path.

And now, he had also Harry as his ally. The young Gryffindor had accomplished many things without him being aware of them until the deed had been done and was one of the people who knew their way around the school better than probably even himself. The Headmaster feared, that, with the young raven on his side, it won’t be long till the fledging Dark Lord would obtain the information he was so clearly yearning for.

Moreover, Harry had on his side two wonderful tools that could help Tom in his quest: the
Invisibility Cloak and the Hogwarts’ map. He had no doubt the raven would lend the other boy
them, if he so required, and they could very well be the secret of his success.

The map alone could offer him insight on the perfect night in which it could be possible to leave
Gryffindor Tower – Severus couldn’t patrol the corridor every night, after all, and it would be
beyond unreasonable of him to request so; the man needed to sleep sometimes – and the Cloak…

well, for many years he had known that Harry’s invisibility Cloak was unique and more powerful
than the ordinary one sold in the best defence shops. He couldn’t prove it, but he was sure that it was
the fabled Death’s Cloak and thus, if the story was to be believed, it could conceal completely the
wearer presence.

And he was inclined to believe in it, since he had received a couple of proof that substantiated this
theory. An example was what happened in the boy’s fourth year, when he had asked Alastor, who
was being impersonated by Crouch Jr., to look after Harry. The at the time Death Eater had took his
task to heart, probably because Voldemort had requested the same thing from him, going as far as
trying to follow the teen on some of his nightly wanderings. During one of the meetings in which the
fake Auror had to report the boy’s movements, the man had mentioned his task being made
extremely difficult by the teen’s possession of his Invisibility Cloak. Crouch Jr. had stated in more
than one occasion of being quite confused about the item’s ability to conceal Harry completely from
even his magical eye.

The sound of countless feet leaving the Hall broke him abruptly out of his musings, and he sighed
deedlessly. Refocusing his gaze on the scene in front of him, he saw Harry and Tom walking
together, still chatting quietly with each other, while Mr Weasley and Ms Granger lagged sullenly
behind, uselessly trying to join the conversation.

It troubled him, but there really was nothing anyone could do at the moment. He could only wait and
let things take their course, hoping that in the end everything would turn out for the best.

---

**Harry’s Pov**

For some strange reason, the day seemed to be dragging on as though the time was passing through a
thick, viscous fluid. An ominous dark cloud of gloom had settled on his soul, drowning him in a
numbness sort of haze. Even the bad feeling he had felt that morning at the approaching of the
detention with Umbridge felt dulled. His bad luck, usually so prominent in these sorts of situations,
seemed to be giving him a break and even the hands of the clocks were showing him some mercy,
for once, ticketing slowly towards the appointed time.

But he knew it was too good to last, and, as he expected, after another drab hour of Defence, his bad
luck decided to return with a vengeance, as if wanting to make up for the wasted time. The flow of
time turned to speed up, doubling his pace, and suddenly, much sooner than he wished, Harry found
himself in front of Umbridge’s office, knocking apprehensively at her door.

That peculiar sweet and saccharine voice floated out from within as he was asked to enter. Dread
pooled in his chest, squeezing his lungs until he found hard to breathe. It rose up from the depths of
his soul, threatening to choke him. He tried to swallow it down as best as he could and then opened
the door, entering in one of the worst kind of nightmares the human mind could imagine.

If Hell ever existed, thought the boy appalled, this was surely its form on Earth. An hideous pink
covered every available surface, and frilly, girlish decorations poured out from seemingly everywhere. Tacky ceramic plates decorated the wall behind the woman, all of them portraying a chubby, fat cat, each one wearing a different coloured ribbon. There was a sense of decadent sweetness in the air, a mouldy kindness, and chilling danger. Every single thing in that office mirrored the rotting soul of their mistress in the worst way imaginable, and here she sat, in the very centre of the room. The Queen of that kingdom of horrors.

Comfortably settled on her throne, looking like a particularly large and nasty toad, she motioned for him to come forward with her pudgy, stout fingers. Harry advanced further into the room, warily observing the foreboding smile stretching on her flaccid face.

“Come, Mr Potter, don’t be shy.” She spoke gently, danger dripping from her every word. “Take a seat.”

The raven slid in the place she indicated. It was an unassuming student desk situated in one of the corners of the room. Its appearance was small and childish if compared with the furniture that decorated the rest of the room. It was paired with a chair equally as small and uncomfortable: straight backed and made of hard wood; a dark contrast with the soft, cushioned one of the Professor.

Harry had no problems in understanding the reason behind this set up, since it was so obvious that it was almost painful. It was an intimidation tactic. Everything was positioned in the best way as to make the student, the ‘miscreant’, to feel as small and inadequate as possible in front of the woman’s authority. Every single detail, from the constricting space to the elevate position of the professor’s chair from the floor, was meant to humiliate the transgressor, and to make him feel inferior.

It was an intelligent strategy, he must admit, that appealed to the woman overly self-important belief. And it would have probably worked, too, was Harry not already used to adults trying to put him in his place and make him feel worthless: the Dursley had delighted in this kind of power show, after all.

“So, Mr Potter, as punishment I want you to write some lines for me.” Said the despicable woman in her usual syrupy voice. “Maybe this would teach you to respect your betters, hmh?” The toad broad smile set his teeth on edge. As did her words.

She was taunting him! Enjoying his predicament, making it seem like he was at fault and had brought this upon himself. As if she hadn’t showed her hand that day in class! The raven could admit that this week worth of punishment was, in some way, deserved. Or it was at least justifiable, since he had been the one stupid enough to walk right in her trap and lose his temper. However, the punishment earner earlier that same day was not! The toad had assigned him more days in detention, and this time for no reason at all!

It had all started with Hermione, exactly as it had last time. The girl had proclaimed to have already read all the book and then had proceeded to prove it by reciting word for word what was written in the chapter they had been assigned for the hour, sounding as usual as if she had eaten the entire text. Then, not happy with this, she had proceeded to contest the author’s beliefs. Beliefs that aligned with Umbridge’s ones. So it was to the surprise of no one, that another discussion had started between the professor and the students.

This time, both he and Tom had stayed out of it. it took a great amount of effort on his part, and a lot of help from his friend, but he had managed to control himself. And yet, the woman had found a reason to punish him anyway!

In her opinion, he had earned another week of detention by ‘instigating’ the class to rebel against her. Absurd! He hadn’t even opened his mouth!
Moreover, she had no proof of this being his fault! Hermione had started it, she had seen that! And not only he did he not participate in any way, he had even pretended to read her accursed book! Yet, with her being his professor and without an explanatory slip to bring to McGonagall to give him the excuse to go to his Head of House and complain, not to mention the proof of the unfairness of the treatment, he had been unable to do anything. Especially since arguing with the Ministry’s woman would only end up with him gaining even more days in detention.

Knowing this, he had bit his lips to stop himself from speaking out and hung his head, shaking all over from his anger at the unfairness of it all. It was then that Tom had apparently decided to embrace the brashness Gryffindor House was known for and had started to verbally attack Umbridge. The toad-woman had gleefully taken away points but had refused to reserve the dark brunet the same treatment he was being subjected to. This had left Tom fuming beside him and the teen had spent the rest of the period sending murderous look at the Professor.

Harry had been surprised by his friend’s behaviour, but when he had questioned his reasons, Tom had simply explained that the thought of him alone and at Umbridge’s mercy made him feel uneasy.

Knowing that the older teen had been willing to share his punishment just to make sure he would be okay had made his heart flutter, but he had also been glad his effort had been for nothing. Trying to image the woman’s idea of detention had sent all kind of warning sign in his mind, so he had been glad that Tom wouldn’t be forced to suffer with him.

And now, here he was, alone, serving the first of a long chain of detentions, and, despite the apparent innocuous request of the professor, he couldn’t help but feel his inside twisting and his skin crawl, the dread flowing in his veins, growing tenfold.

Yet, he despised the idea of appearing weak in front of this woman, so he forced his face into the unperturbable mask he had practiced for his hearing. He slowly took out a sheet of parchment and his quill, ready to begin, and waited for the inevitable strike to come. And come it did.

“Oh, no, Mr Potter. You won’t be using your quill, but a special one of mine.” And Umbridge presented him with a long-feathered thing taken from one of her desk’s drawers.

It was a fine instrument, sleek and black as ink, with a point so sharp that could easily draw blood. It was also cloaked with magic, an oppressive oily kind that made him shudder. The obvious absence of an accompanying inkpot was worrying too, and the woman suspicious dismissal of the matter after his inquiry managed only to worsen the situation.

Something clearly wasn’t right, especially since Umbridge was watching him with an eager, almost hungry, expression on her face. Everything in her posture excluded anticipation and Harry didn’t know what to do. The way the woman seemed to wait for something to happen gave him a bad feeling and the phrase she had asked him to write irked him to no end.

The quill was hovering on the paper, while his hand trembled faintly, but no inkblots were appearing on the parchment. It was strange and yet, everything he could think about was that phrase. ‘I must not tell lies’. That was what the woman had asked him to write. She was treating him like a liar, like the unstable child the Prophet was trying to portray him as.

He didn’t know if she truly believed he was being untruthful in his claims, but it was clear that the truth didn’t matter. Not to her, anyway. His words went against the Ministry’s official stance, so he must be in the wrong. His supposed fame, his stance as an Heir – even the proof of Cedric’s corpse – didn’t count. He was considered a child and, as such, he must conform to what the people in power said. And since he wasn’t willing to do so, and his version of the fact threatened the peace and comfort of some of them, the Minister in first, he needed to be convinced that his words were only
the mad rants of a deluded boy.

He supposed that was the purpose of this detention, in the end: pressure him into retracting his claims. The method she was using to gain her objective was strangely unfitting, though. Forcing someone to write lines wasn’t exactly a harsh punishment; it could be mentally exhausting, he supposed, since he knew he wasn’t lying, but bearable. And that was the reason that made all this setting look fishy.

Looking at the object in his hand, he couldn’t understand why Umbridge had chosen to use that method to discipline him, but as soon as he posed the quill on the sheet and started to write, he understood. Oh, how well he understood.

Blood. The thing was using his blood as ink! He knew that writing lines was too tame for the toad and that there was something more to it, but he would have never imagined that she was sick enough to ask him to write using his own blood!

The first thing he felt was betrayal. A betrayal so deep that it was almost a physical pain. How could McGonagall condone something like this? How could she refuse to listen to him and simply dock points to show her displeasure about gaining so many detentions with Umbridge in just the first week? Even if she was unaware of what those detentions were going to be like, she should have suspected something. She was the Deputy Headmistress, his Head of House and knew that Umbridge was there to create problems! And yet, she had simply warned him to be careful about the pink toad and then punished him when it appeared like he hadn’t done what she had told him to do.

Was he being unfair in his accusation? Maybe. Did he care? Not at all. He was a bit fed up with professors forcing him to take care of things on his own. And the pain could also be making him a bit irrational, he must admit. But who could blame him? When he wrote, it felt like a hot poker was carving the words on his hands, before acid was spread on the wound to prolong the agony. He had been taken by surprise so much when it had begun, that a pained hiss had managed to escape unbidden from his mouth.

The gleeful expression on Umbridge’s face and the widening of her smile, though, had been enough to convince him to not let something like this happen ever again: he refused to appease her sadism by showing any kind of weakness!

With determination burning in his eyes, Harry repositioned the quill on the parchment and kept scribbling away. Line after line appeared on the page, blood flowing incessantly from the tip of the pen, and during all this, the raven stoically refused to show his pain in any way, be it with his voice or his facial expression.

While this refined torture was going on, his mind kept whirling with million thoughts, about Umbridge, about the detention, and, more than anything else, about how to make her pay.

He grinned wryly to himself, trying to conceal his smirk as best as he could; Tom would be so proud of him, of his desire for revenge. He could even feel his encouragement, his low voice that resembled dark chocolate whispering in his mind to not be haste in his actions; to breathe, plan and analyse, so that he could be sure to deliver the most devastating blow possible.

The quill was clearly using his blood as ink and hurt like hell. This was a fact. Thus, even not taking into account the fact that Hogwarts had banned corporal punishment long ago, the use of such a thing to discipline students must be illegal. Blood in the wizarding world, he had learned, was a powerful magic conduit and held the very essence of a wizard; in the wrong hands, it could spell a lot of problems for the person it belonged to.
The blood of a magical person could be used to heal, protect, but also harm or curse said person. Or resurrect a supposed dead Dark Lord in an obscure dark ritual, Harry added bitterly in his mind.

To be fair, he didn’t think that Umbridge had an ulterior motive by making him use that quill other than hurt him in these detentions of hers – he doubted she possessed the knowledge or even the power required to successfully perform a blood ritual – still it was better be safe than sorry in these kinds of situations. For this reason, Harry carefully angled his hand so that no red drops would fall outside the parchment, and then he would make sure to take the page with him.

This parchment, and the ones that would surely follow, would be the perfect proof of the woman’s actions. The blood twisting into countless letters showed just how much enjoyment Umbridge gained by causing the most damage possible, both physical and psychological. Her superiority complex and arrogance would be her downfall in the end, Harry swore to himself.

The raven was a bit baffled by her inability to see the possible repercussion her actions could bring. Did she really feel so confident in her position and the Minister’s support to believe herself above the laws? If words of her actions got out, the backlash would be immeasurable: she would lose everything; she will be condemned and not even Fudge would be able or even willing to help her.

Harry glanced to the side and saw that yes, Umbridge was not worried at all. The woman was daintily sipping from a delicate pink teacup, her toad-like features deformed by a wretched smile of pleasure. Her foul gaze was set firmly on his figure, cataloguing his every expression, every little twitch of his features, drinking perversely up his distress. In that moment she quite resembled a twisted, meaner version of his aunt.

Clinking, the tea cup met the surface of the desk, the noxious mixture swirling inside – and how was it possible for that over-sweetened concoction to be pink, too?! – and the woman leaned over, eager for his protests, his suffering.

“Is something the matter, Mr Potter?” Saccharine was her tone, so disgustingly sweet and rotten, like her soul. She wanted a reaction, he could read it in her eyes, she was keenly anticipating it.

“No, Professor.” He answered, voice strained. He was trying to appear unaffected, but the trembling in his hands betrayed his barely suppressed fury. He would bring her down, this he swore to himself. And without the help of anybody, too.

Sure, the wisest thing to do would probably be to bring this to McGonagall, or even Dumbledore, but doing this would mean complain about the punishment; it would mean appearing weak in front of the woman, something that he refused to be. It may be petty, and childish, but it felt like he had been issued a challenge and he refuse to lose!

The raven blinked, the haze of fury dissipating suddenly. Oh, that was why she was so confident. How horrifying clever of her: his pride would stop him from bringing this up with anyone, thus letting her get away with her barbaric idea of detention. And yet, even knowing this, he refused to abandon his pride. He would gladly let himself be trapped by her carefully crafted web, just so he could show the woman that he couldn’t be broken.

In the meantime, he would plan and gather the evidence, laying in waiting until the time was right for him to strike back. And then he would bring her down, crushing her completely.
The rest of the time passed in complete silence, the scratching of the quill on the parchment the only
noise in the room. He didn’t know how much time passed, but the soft cobalt of the sky slowly
darkened, turning a deep ink black, and only then Umbridge deemed his punishment finished for the
day.

When she allowed him to go, Harry rolled the sheet of parchment up, put it way in his school bag
and headed towards the door, a ‘good night, Professor Umbridge’ on his lips. He had just placed his
hand on the handle, when the woman called him back, finding great pleasure in delaying his escape.

“Mr Potter, come here a moment, please.”

He froze, fearing she was about to request he returned the page to her. But, even if this was the case,
he knew that he couldn’t refuse, so reluctantly, he turned back and approached her, expression stoic
and undecipherable.

Extending her ringed hand, she demanded to see his left one. He exhaled a relieved breath then and
lifted his abused appendage – raw skin throbbing – presenting it to the woman so that she could
scrutinize her work. He flinched imperceptibly when she grasped it and her flabby finger started to
cress the inflamed flesh. Her touch was unbearable, and he had to physically stop himself from
shuddering in revulsion at the abhorrent sensation.

“Mmh,” she murmured amused “it seems the message has not sunk in yet. We’ll have to try harder
tomorrow.”

The raven balled his uninjured right hand into a fist. His blood was pounding in his veins, anger
bubbling like acid under his skin. This foul, disgusting, wretched excuse of a human being. This
absolutely despicable woman!

He had to bite his lips to stop himself from spitting out the venomous words that were threatening to
spill out from his mouth, but his Avada green eyes were blazing hot with unadulterated hate.

Umbridge looked right at him, her expression challenging him to do something, to speak up. He
gazed back defiantly for a couple of second, before lowering his gaze in submission. Not yet, Harry,
not yet. It’s still not the right time; control yourself.

The woman, looking pleased by his apparent docility, let his hand go. “Very good, Mr Potter, it
seems you are starting to learn.” His blood burned. “I’ll see you tomorrow evening.”

Harry nodded tersely and bid her good night, vacating quickly the room. Casting a Tempus, he
noticed that it was well past curfew; he swore and hurried towards Gryffindor Tower, running
through corridors and secret passages, all the way cursing profusely Umbridge and her stupid power-
plays.

That woman had kept him in her office for more than five hours and had not even had the decency to
give him a permission slip to be out after hours; it would be just his luck to find another professor and
gain even more detentions. Probably it was what she was hoping for, too, the toad.

He wondered if he should consider bringing his cloak along in the future. He had an inkling that the
next detentions would be no different, so he supposed it would be safer to have it with him; he really
didn’t fancy risking every night to be punished by a Prefect or a Professor for being out after curfew.

And speaking about being out so late, he wondered if Tom was already asleep or if he was waiting
for his return. He hoped the first option was the right one because he didn’t know what he would tell
him otherwise. The dark brunet would certainly want to know what kind of punishment Umbridge
gave him and he, in his current frustrate state, didn’t feel confident enough in his ability to successfully lie to his friend. It was also true that Tom would probably see immediately through whatever lie he tried to feed him. Maybe a slightly twisted version of the truth would work?

Lost in his thoughts as he was, the raven failed to notice a certain sour Potions Master hidden in the shadow of the seventh-floor corridor, just in front of the Fat Lady. The man was about to step out from his hidden alcove to punish the arrogant boy who thought that rules didn’t apply to him, when he heard said boy answering the portrait’s question about where he had been by saying the he had just come out from Umbridge’s office. Severus Snape’s eyes narrowed. Had Potter really been in detention with the Ministry’s toad till then or was just an excuse? The brat certainly looked annoyed and exhausted enough to sound credible. And was his imagination, or there was an unusual pallor present on his face?

Well, he supposed he could cut the boy some slack, this time, since revealing his presence would compromise his work and prevent him from doing what Albus had asked. And he really didn’t want to spend hours being chastised by the old man like an unruly child, while his annoying azure eyes twinkled in disappointment.

He could always punish him the next time, if this happened to become a recurring situation, he reasoned. If the brat started to make a habit out of this Albus would be unable to find fault with him disciplining the boy, even if had to show himself to do so. After all, he doubted that Umbridge – no matter how distasteful she was, the woman was still a professor – had truly kept Potter in detention till after curfew.

The brat couldn’t be left free to do whatever he wished, especially this year with both the Dark Lord and the Ministry after both him and Dumbledore.

Harry dragged himself to the fifth year’s dormitory, looking forward to simply collapse on his bed and forget everything about that awful evening. He had covered all the distance between Umbridge’s office and the Gryffindor Tower at a run, fuelled by his anger, but now that his fury has dulled to annoyance, only exhaustion and a dull throbbing pain in his left hand were left behind.

Cracking open the door he looked inside and sighed in relief when he noticed that all the other boys were asleep. Apparently, luck was on his side and he wouldn’t need to confront Tom till the next day, when his more rested mind would hopefully find a way to avoid the topic of Umbridge’s detentions. He walked quietly to his bed, trying to not make any noise and was just about to slid under his covers, when the hangings of the bed next to his opened, revealing a very much awake Tom.

The dark brunet was leaning against the headboard, a thick book held loosely in his hands. A little bubble of light was floating in front of him, its brightness soft enough to be covered by the previously close draperies.

At the sight of the deep frown and expectant gaze on the other boy’s face, Harry froze like a deer caught in the highlights.

“You have been away for quite some time.” Tom commented, a steely undertone coating his words. “Did she keep you in detention until now?”
The raven wanted nothing more than just lie and go to bed, but there was a glint in the other’s eyes that told him that doing that would have been a very bad idea. Not wanting to have an argument on his hands when he felt so drained and feeling too exhausted to think about a believable excuse, he went with the truth. Or, a part of it at least. “Yes, but it wasn’t so bad. Just awfully drab and numbing.” He tried to downplay it.

He smiled as reassuringly as he could, trying not to look his friend directly in the eyes, knowing that he would instantly be found out if he did so.

“That’s so.” Drawled out the dark brunet, unamused by his tentative. “Then I suppose it wouldn’t be a problem for you to tell me in what exactly consisted this tedious detention.”

“Writing lines.” Responded promptly the raven, sticking with his edited version of the facts, despite Tom’s unconvinced frown. The other was a master in detecting a lie, so the trick was to be as truthful as possible while hiding the more… worrying details. Like the fact that he had to write those lines in his own blood.

Tom’s midnight eyes narrowed. “Are you hiding something from me, Harry?”

Oh, Merlin, was he being so obvious?

“Of course not.” He smiled nervously. “They were only lines.”

Please, he pleaded in his mind, please, just believe me. He knew it was foolish to hide something of this magnitude from the other because sooner or later Tom would find out the truth, and he wouldn’t be pleased; not at all. But he wanted to take care of this thing on his own: it was a battle of wills between him and Umbridge and he felt as if telling what really happened in that office to someone, even if this someone was Tom, would be as good as admitting defeat.

It was immature of him, he had already acknowledged this in his mind, and the dark brunet would not only reprimand him for this decision, but be borderline furious, too, he knew. Still, he really didn’t want to lose to that toad. He just hoped that, once the truth came out, Tom would be so angry with Umbridge to overlook his little omission.

… if he managed to hide the fact from him for long enough, that is. The blank stare he was being subjected to, made the success of his plan not look very promising.

He needed a quick distraction. Anything would do.

“So… why were you still up?” He ended up asking and cringed internally. What kind of stupid question was that? He berated himself. It was obvious he was waiting for him!

Tom arched an eyebrow. “I was waiting for you, obviously.” He deadpanned. Called it. “Did you really expect me to go to sleep without ascertain for myself that you had come back unarmed from the detention with that dreadful woman?”

Warmth blossomed in Harry’s chest at the teen’s words; the knowledge that Tom had waited for him because he was worried gave birth to a strange mix of pleasure and guilt. The fact that the other boy cared for him, and didn’t want him dead, was still somewhat surprising at times; it made him feel so fuzzy inside, and always sent his heart into a fluttering mess. It made him so happy that he was even able to muster up a genuine smile. “I’m fine, really.”

And he truly was. He had endured worse injuries in his life; a throbbing hand was nothing compared to some of them.

“Very well, if you say so. I will trust your word. For now.” Tom said, pointedly.
Harry grinned fondly: always so suspicious, his Tom.

“So, how did your request go?” Went on the dark brunet, changing question.

Harry blinked, confused, and then horror drew upon him: he had forgotten to ask about Friday! Angelina would be furious! “Oh, Merlin, I forgot! Angelina will kill me!”

“You forgot?” Asked Tom baffled. “About Quidditch.” An incredulous ‘seriously?’ was implied.

“I-I really don’t know how this could have happened.” He shook his head. He couldn’t believe his own forgetfulness: the shock and anger must have affected him more than he thought. Still, forgetting about Quidditch…

How would he explain this to Angelina? She had already been furious enough about him getting detention and the relative consequence of not being able to participate to the try-outs. Him forgetting about asking Umbridge to let him free that Friday evening was sure to set her off again.

And Tom. The boy knew how much he cared about Quidditch, so him forgetting about this would clue him on the fact that something was wrong, especially since he had been so determined to plead his case to her that afternoon, despite both Tom and Hermione discouraging him from doing so.

“At least you refrained from giving her more ammunition.” The dark brunet said with a side glance. “Still, you forgetting something like this is quite… mmh, peculiar.”

“I was probably too shocked by the décor.” Muttered the raven, and too focused on the fact that I had to write using my own blood.

“The… décor?” The dark brunet looked completely thrown off by his words and Harry rejoiced: that was the perfect excuse to divert Tom’s attention on a safer topic.

He proceeded to describe the horror that was Umbridge’s office, watching Tom slowly assuming a slightly green tinge as his tale proceeded.

“And people say that there is nothing worse than the Unforgivables. Passing any amount of time in that room sounds just as bad.” He commented, full of disgust.

Harry snorted. The dark brunet smirked and he grinned back. Sure, the Unforgivables weren’t something one should joke about, and yet, the idea that the toad’s hellish domain was comparable sounded so funny simply because it was the frightening truth.

How things had changed, mused Harry; before meeting Tom he would have never been able to think about those three awful spells with anything except disgust. And yet, here he was, laughing at Tom’s joke, who appeared quite proud of himself at that and so arrogantly smug.

“So, everything is fine? Are you sure?” Asked the dark brunet.

“Yes, don’t worry.” Reassured Harry, smile still on his lips.

Tom hummed. “Well, then, I suppose there is no reason to stay awake anymore. You must be tired.”

The raven agreed and the exhaustion he had tried to hold back washed suddenly upon him. Tom watched him with soft eyes as he yawned and slid under the covers, and stopped him as he went to close the hangings. “Just another question: did you perhaps notice someone lurking in front of the Fat Lady?”
“No?” Harry answered, confused. “Though, now that you mentioned it…”

Tom leaned over, gaze intense.

“While I was speaking with her, I had the sensation that someone was watching me…”

“I see.” The older teen frowned and muttered something under his breath.

“Why?”

The boy’s expression smothered out. “It’s nothing, don’t worry.” He smiled. “Let’s sleep.” And he closed the bed curtains without saying anything more.

Harry, despite the drowsiness, kept looking in his direction for a while, but the dark dormitory remained silent. He sighed and burrowed more into the soft duvet. He was too tired to think about Tom’s strange question. It probably wasn’t nothing important anyway, just as his friend has said; he would have told him, otherwise. Sleep claimed him quickly that night.

---

Thursday started in the worst way possible. And for ‘the worst way’, he meant that things were downright awful since the morning.

First there was Angelina, who stomped to him looking as she was on a war path and proceeded to ask him if he had managed to free his Friday evening. As he has expected, at his negation, she became so enraged that looked like she was about to spit fire at a moment notice. What he didn’t expect was for her to threaten to kick him out of the team. She looked horrifying serious about it, too, especially once she discovered he had gained another week of detention.

In her words, she ‘couldn’t accept in the team someone who wasn’t completely dedicated”. As if he enjoyed being in detention! And she didn’t even let him explain! She acted like the detentions were his fault! Okay, he admitted that maybe, from her perspective, it looked like it was, but if she had only listened to him, then she would have understood that he wasn’t to blame in this case.

She wasn’t the only one, though. After her, it was McGonagall’s turn. The professor hurried over attracted by the girl’s shouting, and, once she discovered the reason, she too, berated him. Like the previous day, she refused to listen to his explanations, and took away ten – ten! – points from Gryffindor! Harry was furious. How could she?! It wasn’t his fault Umbridge hated him!

Ron’s understanding noises and Hermione’s consoling words ‘at least it’s only lines’, only worsened his mood. Tom’s scathing words in his defence, though, managed to make him feel a bit better, even if they couldn’t erase the betrayal he felt towards his Head of House.

The rest of the day passed quickly, too quickly for his liking. On the upside, the lessons weren’t too bad: despite not doing as well as Hermione, or Tom, who had obviously been the best, he was still the third in the class to cast the required spells correctly. On the other hand, though, the fact of that morning and the knowledge of what awaited him that evening made him feel quite morose.

His friends spent the entire day trying to lift his mood: Ron was incredibly supportive, and Hermione passed the time letting out an endless stream of encouraging words. He appreciated their attempts, he truly did, but the idea of a night trapped in the company of Umbridge, forced to use again that bloody quill, made it impossible for him to think anything remotely positive.
Apparently, he wasn’t the only one, though; for some strange reason, Tom, too, appeared to be in a mood the entire day. After the impassioned spiel against McGonagall done at breakfast, the teen didn’t say anything else until that evening. Had Harry not been so lost in his brooding, he would have probably noticed the dark brunet strange behaviour, but as he was, he missed both the teen’s thoughtful silence and the innumerable considering glances sent his way.

It was only when it was clear that he was preparing to go to Umbridge’s office that Tom stopped his silent staring to do something. It was like a switch had been flipped; the dark brunet stood up from the armchair he had occupied for the entire afternoon and approached Harry just as he was about to leave the room.

There was an intense and determined fire in that dark blue orbs, as Tom stalked towards him, and when he was near enough, the older boy took his hand, and closing upon him, whispered a simple ‘tell me if something happens’ that short-circuited Harry’s brain.

The raven, then, with a sand-paper dry throat and a decidedly hot face, did the only thing he was capable of at the moment: he nodded.

“Good.” Breathed Tom. And then let go.

Harry took that as his cue to leave and rushed out, reaching that toad’s office much too soon for his taste. Maybe he should have refrained from running, but Tom’s behaviour had made him embarrassingly flustered and quite a bit irrational. He could still feel the dark’s brunet’s body heat, and entered the office in almost a daze.

Unfortunately – or fortunately, since in that room one needed to be as aware as possible of his surroundings, and thus he didn’t have the luxury of occupy his mind with thoughts regarding Tom – he had an abrupt wake-up call as soon as he entered the office. The woman was already waiting for him, quill and parchment on his desk, ready to be used.

As he had expected, the detention went on exactly as it had the previous day. Harry had to sit at the desk for hours, carving his hand and writing ‘I must not tell lies’ in his own blood, while that insufferable toad enjoyed his suffering, an amused expression stamped on her ugly face. The only difference was that, after an hour or so, the words on his hand stopped to heal, leaving them to stand out brightly against his pale skin. And yet, he kept writing, the woman forcing him to go on.

In the end, he left the room even later that the night before and thanked his forethought of bringing along his invisibility cloak for now giving him the meaning to move around undisturbed. After donning it, he turned his back to the corridor leading to Gryffindor Tower and headed towards his favourite secret place. He knew he should probably return to his dorms, but he was in desperate need of some fresh air, the only thing that could marginally help him to deal with his own raging thoughts.

He expected to be alone there and yet, like the last time he had decided to visit the top of the tower, he found Luna sitting on the floor, eyes focused on the stars, and a mysterious bowl resting innocently beside her. The peculiar girl turned towards him as soon as he shed his cloak.

“Harry, I knew you would be here tonight.” She said, in that dreamy way of hers.

“Luna?” He whispered confused, as he went to sit beside her. How did she know about his decision to come here? He had chosen to do so on a whim only a couple of minutes before.

He watched her, but she simply kept smiling, so, shaking his head, he glanced down at the bowl, noticing a strange silty liquid swirling inside.
“It’s Murtlap essence.” Explained Luna. “For your hand.”

Harry looked up, taken aback by her words. “My hand?!”

Luna nodded. “It will help with the pain. Here, try it.”

She offered him the bowl and he, reluctantly took off the scarf he had wrapped around his wounded appendage and immersed it in the gold substance. Instantly, the pain subsided, and cool relief washed upon him.

“I’m afraid this won’t stop it from scarring, though.”

Harry shook his head. “It doesn’t matter, this is more than enough. Thank you, Luna.” He smiled at her. “But how did you know – ”

She smiled brightly. “Why, the fire spirits told me, of course.”

“The fire spirits?”

She nodded enthusiastically. “Oh, yes, they are little sprites that communicate through short flash of images. You can usually see them napping or playing in the fire and though they prefer the large ones, you can find them even in the flame of a lighted candle.”

“Oh, I see.” Said Harry, not knowing how else to respond at this new creature that only Luna seemed to know.

Seeing his barely concealed confusion, the girl giggled. “Oh, don’t worry, Harry, they are quite an obscure species: very few people could see or even sense them.”

Her smile turned sad at this and the raven remembered, once again, how all the students called her ‘loony’.

“I don’t doubt it. People as special as you are exceptionally rare.” He found himself saying.

She blinked, surprised. “It’s awfully nice of you to say this, Harry.”

“I’m just stating the truth: you are a great girl and a great friend; the other people would notice this too, if only they bothered to get to know you.” He stated confidently.

“Maybe if they weren’t infested by Nargles they would.” She hummed, thoughtfully.

“Another creature?”

“Oh, yes.” She explained, grinning broadly. “They are little, buzzing creatures that swarm inside of a person and make their head fuzzy.”

“There are a lot of them surrounding your new friend, too.” She added thoughtfully.

“Tom?”

“Yes, probably it’s because he’s hiding his true identity.” She mused, watching the stars.

Harry stiffened. “Luna, you know who Tom really is?”

The young girl hummed, thinking about it. “I think I know who he wants to be. Or who he believes he wants to be.”
“What do you mean?” He asked, once again thrown aback by the Ravenclaw’s enigmatic words.

She just smiled mysteriously. “Don’t worry, Harry, at the right time you will understand.”

He watched her, feeling even more confused.

“You should go back now. He’s waiting for you, you know.”

The raven sighed; if Luna said so, it was probably true. In these couple of meetings, he had learned that she was an incredibly insightful girl, and so, if she said something, he was very much inclined to believe her.

Deciding to follow her advice, he made to stand up, but the girl stopped him.

“Just one more thing.” She soaked a gauze in the Murtlap essence ant then bandaged his hand.

“Keep this on for the rest of the night. For tomorrow the pain should have faded.”

Harry watched her, not knowing how to correctly convey how much he was grateful for her help, but the young Ravenclaw simply smiled knowingly and waved him away, biding him Good Night.

Like the last time he had spent with the girl, he returned to Gryffindor’s Tower feeling lighter than before. He didn’t know why, but it was the second time he felt better after passing some time in Luna’s company; it was like she possessed the ability to purify him of all his bad thoughts.

Returning to his dormitory, he though back on Luna’s words. Was Tom really waiting for him? As soon as the question popped in his mind, he scoffed at his foolishness: of course, Tom was! He was probably expecting him so that he could know how his detention went. And, in fact, as he approached his bed, he found the dark brunet in the same position he had found him the previous night.

“You came back even later today.” He noted. “Had something happened, then?”

“No, the detention was the same as yesterday, I just went to the tower and found Luna. And we spent a couple of minutes talking.” He tried to pacify him.

Tom’s eyes narrowed. “Didn’t you, yourself told me that you go to the tower only when you feel particularly troubled?” He drawled.

Harry berated himself; he had indeed told the boy so, seeing as it was the truth, so it was no wonder that the teen had correctly guessed the evening didn’t go well at all. But maybe he could still blame everything on the stress getting to him? “Really, it was nothing. You know just how awful every day is, with everyone believing I’m an attention-seeking liar; passing such a long time in Umbridge’s company had only made it worse. That’s why I went there: I needed a bit of fresh air and some quiet time by myself.”

He though it was a plausible enough excuse, but Tom suddenly stiffened, and a red spark seemed to flash in his eyes. “Harry.” He said slowly in a deadly voice, “Why is your hand bandaged?”

The raven stilled, too. In his haste to reassure his friend, he had inadvertently brought his injured hand in the boy’s line of vision. He quickly hid it behind his back. “It’s nothing.”

Tom looked at him, unimpressed and lifted his own hand. “Harry, show it to me.”

“Tom, it’s nothing, really. There’s no need to – ”
“Harry.” He said, lowly, in a warning tone.

The raven offered reluctantly his injured hand to the dark brunet and Tom slowly, taking care to not hurt him, unwrapped the bandage. He knew that the other teen had saw the words when his jaw clenched, and the temperature in the room dropped.

“Harry, there are words on your hand.”

“I – yes, well – ”

“Harry, why there are **words** carved on your hand?” And Harry could not fault the light this time, Tom’s eyes were a bright crimson red. Red like fresh spilled blood, like Voldemort’s.

He should be scared, or horrified, but they were like this because Harry was hurt. They were so full of rage and yet – he didn’t know if it was because he knew the teen was angry because of the scar on his hand or simply the fact that it was Tom – he couldn’t help to find them beautiful. Yes, they were as stunning and mesmerizing as they had been in his dream.

“I – you know I told you Umbridge makes me write lines in detention?” He murmured.

The dark brunet nodded, eyes still blazing like embers. The raven gulped. “Well, she makes me write them with a special quill of hers and – ”

“A Blood Quill?!” Tom interrupted suddenly. “She forces you to write the lines in your own blood?!”

“Yes.” He answered, his voice barely a whisper.

The fire in Tom’s eyes flared up and they started to burn even more fiercely. He was watching his hand with unadulterated hate, all the way passing softly his finger on the cut, creating warm sparks that rattled through the young Gryffindor’s frame. And it took all of Harry’s willpower to stop himself from shivering due to the sensation.

Then, suddenly, remembering something, the dark brunet lifted his gaze to the raven’s face. “The sheets.” He said, “The sheets of parchment. Do you still have them?”

Harry nodded. “Yes, I remembered you telling me about how dangerous blood could be in the wrong hands, so I brought them back with me.”

The dark brunet nodded appreciatively and turned to caress his wound. “Good.”

“Tom, I – ” He began, not knowing what exactly he wanted to say.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Tom’s tone was accusing, and his eyes were still red, but his anger didn’t seem to be directed at Harry.

“I didn’t want to give her the satisfaction.” The words burst out of Harry without his consent. “She is trying to break me, and I refuse to let her win.”

“Harry, this useless pride of yours will bring you nothing but pain.”

“Don’t patronize me, Tom, I’m not an idiot! I didn’t plan to stay quiet indefinitely, just until I can use this information to bring her down.”

The dark brunet blinked, and then, suddenly, he started to laugh. Harry puffed out his cheeks. “Oh, don’t pout.” Tom said, mirth in his still crimson eyes. “You should have said so since the beginning.”
“It would have changed nothing.” Deadpanned the raven. “You would have reacted in exactly the same way because I still hid the fact that she was hurting me from you.”

The dark brunet hummed, tracing circles on Harry’s injured hand. “Mmmh, true.” Tom’s hold tightened for a moment. “But I have every right to do so, since her quill will scar you. Permanently.”

“And” he continued, “you promised to tell me if something happened. Yet you still tried to hide this from me.” Suddenly, the older teen was much nearer and his free hand had come up to cradle delicately Harry’s face.

The raven’s breath hitched. “But it doesn’t matter now, because we are going to destroy that woman together and you won’t ever do something like this, would you?”

The whispered words were softly fanning his face, and Harry’s mind turned blank. “I…”

Tom was just so close. Harry could smell his spicy cologne and feel his warm breath against his lips. It was just too much; the overwhelming presence of the dark brunet was robbing him of his ability to formulate any kind of coherent thought, and, from the expression on his face, Tom was well aware of this.

When the older teen brought his scarred hand to his lips and kissed the letters etched there, the raven reached his limit and capitulated. “Okay.”

Tom’s crimson eyes sparkled in pleasure. “Good.”

A beautiful, affectionate smile spread on that angelic face. “Now, why don’t you go to sleep? You seem exhausted.”

His voice was feathery soft, so enticing and pleasant to the ears. Harry’s mind swam, and he felt an unbearable tiredness crept upon him all at once. Suddenly, sleeping didn’t sound like a bad idea at all, and yet a minuscule part of him was protesting, insisting that he should fight against this unexpected urge. But why? Why should he fight? It was so difficult to keep his eyelids open and he felt so warm and blissfully comfortable.

Tom’s breath was still fanning his face and his beautiful smile was still there, he could barely see it through his heavily drooping eyes. Why shouldn’t he let himself go?

“Sleep.” The dark brunet whispered once again, and Harry was lost. His eyes closed, and he fell into sweet oblivion.

**Tom’s Pov**

Tom watched his little raven going completely lax in his arms. With a flick of his hand, he replaced the bandage and changed the boy in his pyjama. Then he tucked him into bed.

Tenderly, he shifted the boy’s bangs and lean down to kiss his forehead. “Sleep well, my dear.”

As he got up, his smile sharpened, and his white teeth glimmered in the dark like those of a vicious predator. It was time for Umbridge to face the consequence of her actions. She would soon learn the pain that befell those who touched what belonged to Tom Riddle.

A chilling laugh echoed in the silence. He had the perfect spell in mind to teach her a lesson; she would soon regret ever deciding to lay a hand on his precious Harry.
Chapter End Notes

So, Tom had decided to be more forward in his approach from now on, and Umbridge has finally gone too far. Next up: the revenge began!

What do you think about Dumbledore's and Snape's POV? Were they enough in character?
And the part of Umbridge's detention?

On a side note, I created a Tumblr account (username: lauryeile), so, if you want to ask something about the story or when the next chapter will come out, or even encouraging me to post soon, you can come there.
See you next chapter. :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!