**The Devil's Tithe**

**by Shihane**

**Summary**

Every seven years, the Fae must pay a Tithe to the King of Hell...

**Notes**

This is my entry for the **Tomarry Dark Spring Exchange** and written for **purpleravenwhitesuit**.
“What story do you think good old Bagshot will tell us tonight?” Ronald Weasley eagerly asked his companion, a broad grin splitting his freckled face. His wide orange-and-yellow, black-edged translucent butterfly wings fluttered and twitched about in excitement even though he was sitting.

“It could be anything,” Hermione Granger pointed out primly; her own brown, black-edged translucent butterfly wings were perfectly still in contrast to her close friend. She then added sternly. “Be more respectful, Ronald! She’s our Lore Mistress, the oldest Fae in our kingdom—she will be three millennia and nine hundred one coming next Spring.”

“And she shows i—ow!” the redhead yelped, clutching his now throbbing ribs. “Great Haven, ‘Mione, you have really sharp elbows!”

“I have a harder fist, Ronald Bilius Weasley. If you want to see just how hard; keep talking poorly about the Lore Mistress and I’ll be happy to show you!” Hermione growled, hazel eyes narrowed dangerously. She quickly concealed a little smirk when her childhood friend cowered away from her, audibly swallowing.

“Okay, okay! I’m really sorry!” he raised his arms in surrender. “You’re really overprotective of your teacher!”

“It is one of the greatest honors you can receive to be chosen by her, you know!” Hermione shot back. “I never thought she would even pick me; there were so many other, better candidates!”

Dropping his arms, Ron snorted, sending his friend a new grin. “Of course, she would! You have the best memory out of all of us, and your Elemental Affinity of Water is exactly what a Lorekeeper needs! In fact, you’re so good; I know she’s already having you teach the new Sprites!”

Hermione flushed brightly, like she always did under such exuberant praise. “Just the littlest ones,” she demurred modestly. “I still have a very long way to go before I can even consider myself An apprentice Lore Mistress. I haven’t even started on Ancient Histories!”

“I’m sure you’ll have them memorized in no time!” Ron told her confidently. “You’ll be an even better Lore Mistress than O—er, Lore Mistress Bagshot!” He amended hastily as he saw Hermione’s right hand curl into a loose fist on her lap.

Hermione smiled sweetly. “Thanks!” She looked towards the brilliant azure sky and searched the cloudless horizon. “Where is Harry? He’s late again.”

The redhead shrugged, not even sparing a single glance towards the heavens. “Probably got held up again. If you’re going to be the greatest Lore Mistress ever, Harry’s on his way to being the most powerful High Mage we’ve seen since the First Fae King.” His tone was mixed, pride and jealousy tangling together. Hermione felt a wave of sympathy for one of her oldest friends. She knew how much Ron struggled over accepting how gifted his two best friends were while he was, at best, average.

“Well…” Hermione started, trying to find the right words to comfort him while she offered a weak, nearly sheepish smile. Once more, she found herself incapable. Inwardly, she wished Harry was here; the black-haired Fae seemed to know exactly the best (and worst) things to say to someone. Harry would have easily soothed Ron’s ruffled feathers, like always. Hermione wondered if it was because he had been raised with Ron, unlike her.
Her meager efforts at comfort and musings were cut short when a loud, very sudden crack resounded right beside the huge boulder the pair of Fae were sitting on. The sharp noise startled Hermione and Ron so severely that they instinctively scrambled away; losing their perches and falling over the side of the huge rock to sprawl ungracefully on the ground in a daze.

“Ugh,” Ron announced with eloquence.

“Yes,” Hermione echoed, her head still ringing from where the back of her skull had smacked into the grassy ground. Silently, the pair of Fae agreed to just lie there for a bit.

“Oops, sorry!” A familiar voice called over the side of the boulder as the equally familiar face of Harry Potter appeared; framed by the small Fae’s stunning emerald-and-gold, silver-edged translucent butterfly wings. He peered down contritely. “I didn’t mean to surprise the both of you so badly. I just wanted to get here as soon as I could and flying would have just made me later than I already was!”

“Right, Harry,” Ron assured him. “We’ll be fine. What was that?”

“Oh,” Harry beamed with just a touch of pride coating his voice. “Apparition.”

The redhead seemed to recover instantly. “You can apparate?!” He sat up and rose to his feet; Hermione had also righted herself quickly in her own excitement. “Wow, I thought you had several more lessons to go before you could even start doing that!”

Harry shrugged modestly, settling himself comfortably on the slightly flat surface of the massive rock. “I have a great teacher and he’s good at pushing my limits.”

“Yes, High Mage Dumbledore is legendary!” Hermione gushed, she flashed Ron a wide smile as he first helped her onto her feet then back onto the boulder so the trio were sitting in a loose circle. “Thanks, Ron.”

“Is that why you’re so late again?” Returning Hermione’s smile with a trademark grin of his own, Ron switched his gaze back to his best friend and foster brother. “I mean, for the last couple of weeks, you’ve always come back later and later.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry apologized earnestly. “Yes, the lessons have gotten really extensive.”

“You’re not exhausting yourself, are you?” Hermione chimed in, her eyes scanning the black-haired Fae critically. Like always, she lingered on his strikingly beautiful and exotically-shaped wings but she could spot no signs that Harry was pushing himself too hard.

“I’m fine, don’t worry, ‘Mione!” Harry promised. “I guess I just got caught up with what High Mage Dumbledore has been teaching me and he’s watching me closely to make sure I don’t overdo it. What I’ve learned so far is nothing like the Magics we’re taught when we were younger.”

“That’s unsurprising,” the brown-haired Fae nodded in agreement. “It’s High Magic after all. Fae Magic has so many branches and so few of us now can learn the Ancient Crafts.”

Harry sobered and nodded curtly. “Yes, Lore Mistress Bagshot gave me a long lecture about it.”

“I know,” Hermione smirked. “I was there; I was very happy to see you didn’t fall asleep unlike in some of her other lectures.”

Harry was utterly unrepentant. “This lesson was really interesting! Not like some of the other histories she was telling us! I don’t know how you can stay awake through some of them! Besides, if
I forget something; you’ll be there to tell me.”

Hermione rolled her eyes but was secretly pleased about Harry’s confidence and trust in her. “Of course, I should have known.” She sent him a hard look before breaking into a soft smile. “Just don’t rely on me too much.”

“Right.”

“Anyway,” Ron cut in. “What else have you been learning?”

“Elemental manipulation,” Harry answered promptly, smiling as his friends’ faces lit up in wonder and awe.

“What element?” Ron asked breathlessly.

The Fae had natural Earth Elemental Magic but it was focused solely on plants and animals. Most of their kind could not touch any other Element, rarer still was a Fae who had a different Elemental Affinity or could manipulate more than one Element.

“All of them,” Harry admitted, a dusting of pink on his cheeks as his friends stared at him in awe and deep respect. “I have a very strong affinity for Wind, Void and, surprisingly, Fire.”

“That’s a strange collection of affinities,” as he expected, Hermione was quick to realize the oddity. “Fire is the most dangerous and is naturally contradictory to the nature of the Fae.”

“Yes, High Mage Dumbledore said the exact same thing which is why he’s making me train extensively in the Elements; especially with Fire.”

“A Fire Elemental Affinity?” Ron shuddered. “Don’t get careless, Harry,” he warned, poorly concealed fear and worry underlining his words. Hermione mirrored the redhead’s expression even though she kept her silence; her look was more than enough for Harry. “That is one Element I wish you’d avoid.”

Harry wasn’t too surprised about Ron’s reaction; Fire was the most destructive Element after Void and the Fae were naturally wary and wisely fearful.

Harry shook his head. “Sorry, Ron. But I can’t; an affinity with an Element also indicates that the Element would be drawn to me. I’m better off knowing how to handle it than ignore it.”

His friend nodded slowly in reluctant acquiescence. “Can’t fight that logic,” he conceded with an explosive sigh. “Does that mean you’ll be busy all through the rest of the season?”

Harry sent Ron an apologetic look. “Yes, in fact, I may have to skip some of our usual meet-ups in the future.”

Ron grimaced. “I figured.”

“I’m also going to be a little busy myself,” Hermione added delicately; giving Ron her own look of sympathy and apology. “But, I’ll be freer when Winter arrives; Autumn is the shortest season and our busiest after all.”

“Don’t worry about it, Harry, ‘Mione,” Ron waved his hand dismissively. “I knew what would happen when I heard you both got chosen by Lore Mistress Bagshot and High Mage Dumbledore.” He grinned crookedly. “Just don’t forget about me completely!”
“Never!” Hermione vowed fiercely.

“Hard to forget Ronald Weasley even if I wanted to,” Harry added, smirking. “You’re good at making yourself unforgettable.”

“Good.” Ron nodded vigorously in satisfaction, his chest puffing out.

A comfortable silence settled over the trio, enjoying the simple presence of each other. When the sun had begun to dip towards the peaks of the massive mountains to the west did Ron speak up again.

“There’s going to be a Telling tonight.”

“A very important one,” Harry confirmed quietly. “High Mage Dumbledore was very solemn about it; he told me to pay very close attention to this Telling.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “He did?”

The black-haired Fae shrugged. “You know the High Mage; he knows everything. Apparently, he knows I…”

“—take naps during our history lessons with Lore Mistress Bagshot.” Hermione finished with a knowing smirk.

“Even when he isn’t around or anywhere near!” Harry huffed, pouting. “And I know the Lore Mistress doesn’t tell him when she catches me sleeping.”

Ron and Hermione only laughed.

“This makes me glad I can slack off all the time compared to you two!” Ron chortled.

“Whatever.” Harry stuck his tongue out at the red-haired Fae who just countered with an unabashed grin.

“The Lore Mistress told me the very same, without the lecture about sleeping,” Hermione remarked thoughtfully.

Harry snorted. “Hermione, you rarely sleep at night because you have a nose in a book or are meditating. I doubt you’ve even slept during the day. When was the last time you took an afternoon nap?”

“He’s got a point there,” Ron agreed readily. “You don’t like sleep, ‘Mione.”

“Should balance out then, since I’ve lost time I’ve caught you sleeping, Ron!” Hermione snipped back good-naturedly; this eliciting another round of laughter among the friends.

“From what you’re both are saying, this is really sounding interesting; I think I’m looking forward to the Telling tonight,” Ron told the pair once they had quieted.

“So am I,” Hermione admitted enthusiastically. “It’s clearly a very special Telling!”

“Are you going to leave early?” Harry asked her. “Usually, you help her prepare.”

“No,” Hermione answered, noticing the glances of mild surprise exchanged between Harry and Ron and pointed out pensively. “Those were my thoughts too when I was told; the Lore Mistress said that I was only to listen tonight.”
“Great!” Harry said with an elated smile, “we can talk longer than usual today; I don’t have to return for my nightly classes with the High Mage until after the Second Evening Bell,” he explained. He tucked away his growing curiosity of the upcoming Telling for now. It really had been quite a while since Ron, Hermione and he had simply talked with each other.

Ron and Hermione bobbed their heads in ecstatic agreement and the trio of close friends met the arriving twilight with laughter and stories.
“Is that you, Harry dear?”

Harry halted, hands still fixing his outfit with quick, practiced movements. He had lost track of time during his evening lessons with the High Mage so he had had to rush back home to change into the proper robes for a Telling. Now if he didn’t move quickly, he would be late and the Lore Mistress—more importantly, Hermione—would be very unhappy with him if he dared to show up after the Telling had already begun.

Looking towards the voice, Harry smiled briefly at the matronly Fae who stood nearby.

Molly Weasley had raised him alongside her many children and showered him with as much care and love she bestowed her own brood.

“Good evening, Molly,” he greeted hastily. “Sorry, I can’t stay and talk; I need to go now or I’ll be late.”

“Yes,” she nodded slowly. “It’s the Telling tonight, isn’t it? The Telling of ‘The Devil’s Tithe’.”

Harry inclined his head in acknowledgement. Instantly, he could see how unsettled she was and this brought him up short.

Dismissing his now trivial worry about tardiness, he marched over and clasped his foster mother’s forearms in concern and slight urgency. “What’s wrong? What can I do to help?” he asked, staring deeply into brown eyes.

The older Fae only smiled benignly, her troubled features smoothening into a grave countenance. She gently shifted out of his hold; her warm, calloused hands reaching to clasp his own smaller ones. “When the Telling finishes, I’ll be here waiting for you. Be strong, Harry.” She squeezed him tightly before pulling him into a fierce embrace then, just as quickly, gently pushing him away from her. “Now, go. Great Haven, if you were ever late. I’m sure sweet Hermione would never let you hear the end of it!”

Harry hesitated but another, firmer push from Molly decided him. Besides, she said she would be waiting for him. He exited the treehouse he called home and leapt up into the black horizon.

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There was no moon.

Only the light of countless stars could be seen in the ebon canvass of the sky; the silver radiance seemed to cast the forests circling the city in more of an ethereal glow than usual. More magical, Harry mused idly as he flew low, nearly brushing the tops of the highest trees. He looked up occasionally, admiring the heavens as much as the woods.

It was a magnificent night, and Harry shivered as the wind raced over his skin; it was cold. The first chill of the coming winter was very harsh tonight even if Winter was still more than a month away. Swiftly, he passed the last of the trees and came to the glade.

The vast clearing where all Gatherings and Tellings that took place outside the city was barely filled. Circling, Harry searched for Hermione and Ron among the small throng. He noticed that only the Fae of fourteen springs or slightly older were present; the oldest hardly more than twenty springs.
There weren’t many of them, perhaps five dozen or so; Fae children were very rare and each Spring few were born. Their group had been unusually very large but other such births had been far less. No one knew exactly why this was so.

Catching sight of his friends, he circled one final time then, gracefully, the black-haired Fae dropped and landed nearby with only a whisper of his wings and the gentle stirring of wind. Carefully, he moved towards where he had spotted Hermione and Ron, nodding in greeting to each familiar face he encountered; an occasional quick smile or a wave for some. By some unspoken agreement, no words were exchanged. The silence seemed too formal to be broken.

Reaching the pair, Harry sat; taking a seat on Hermione’s left side. Ron was always on her right. They traded wordless smiles and looks in greeting before focusing in front of them. Unsurprisingly, they were right in front of the ‘stage’; Hermione’s doing, he was sure.

Seconds crawled forward and there was only the rustling as the other few stragglers arrived and all present settled down; Harry had been among the very last to reach the glade and he was only too glad to have made it in the nick of time.

He hadn’t missed the strange expression on Dumbledore’s face when the Ancient Fae had sent him off earlier that night; it had been undecipherable. But Harry had noticed the grimness carved into the faint lines of his mentor’s visage. He wondered what had put such an emotion on Dumbledore’s features. The High Mage had always been unfailingly cheerful for as long as Harry could remember. In fact, Harry hadn’t known of anything that could overcome the overly optimistic façade of his teacher.

Until now.

What could it possibly be that disturbed the High Mage so much? He wasn’t alone. Harry had noticed how all the older Fae had moved with a sense of urgency and dread. Abruptly, he remembered his meeting with his foster mother. All of this was connected, somehow.

Harry’s thoughts were interrupted as he heard the slightest rustle of flapping wings and he looked towards the noise. From overhead, the elegant form of Bathilda Bagshot, the Lore Mistress of the Fae, descended before them. Her kind, weathered face was unsmiling, which was very unusual for her and she was dressed in the full gossamer robed ensemble of her station. Harry felt himself straighten, he could feel Hermione stiffen beside him. Even Ron fixed his slouch. He knew the other young Fae around them had adopted more formal postures too.

As he studied the Ancient Fae, he could easily perceive the same grimness he had felt from Dumbledore draped on her too. Again, his thoughts drifted to the possibilities…

Alighting with all the elegance and grace of their Queen, the Lore Mistress let her gaze rove the silent sea of young, intent faces.

Harry had been watching very closely so he didn’t miss the flicker of sadness cross her features before she raised her chin and her rich voice rolled out of her mouth.

“In fourteen days, shall the night of Samhain come. To Humans, this is the night of the Dead,” she paused and let the words settle. “For we, who are far longer lived, nearly immortal in our own right. This night is one of sacrifice.”

At the last word, there was a wave of heated murmurs.

The Lore Mistress raised her arms smoothly and the voices stilled. “Our Ancestors once lived in
another world entirely. Where rich woods like this very one that circles our city were countless and spread across a vast land. Our people spread and flourished.”

Enthralled, Harry listened intently; falling into the weave of the Fae magic. The vision of a whole world covered in forests and so many Fae he wouldn’t know all of them by face alone filled his mind. The very idea was wondrous and incredible.

“However, Humans are greedy, petty creatures by nature. They wanted far more than what was ever necessary and were all too willing to kill needlessly for gain and to destroy mercilessly what could not be owned. Our people attempted to live among them at first; this ultimately failed. Our people were hunted and enslaved for what use we could be to the Humans while many of us were killed for fear of the powers we possessed that Humans did not. Even more of our people died by the callousness of Humans simply because we were different…”

“Our Ancestors sought faraway places where Humans would not venture but, as time marched forward, Humans came to even these remote locations and claimed them for themselves. Eventually, our people had no place where Humans could not find us. Once, our people did not know suffering, fear and death; during this time, we only knew suffering, fear and death. Many Fae welcomed death instead of continuing to live once they were taken by Humans. To many of our Ancestors, death was a far kinder fate. Soon, our people were driven to the very brink of extinction.”

Harry shuddered, the powerful Elemental Magic raised by the Lore Mistress Sharing the gruesome memories of this bloody history; the great suffering, the unceasing terror, the all-consuming despair and the desperate search for safety and peace…

There were muffled noises around him; Harry knew many of the Fae were crying quietly. A glance towards Hermione showed soundless tears stained her cheeks and Ron was grim, his own eyes glistened wetly in the stars’ glow. Harry knew his own emerald eyes were moist but he steeled himself. Molly’s words flitting through his mind.

Be strong.

Surely, as they were here now, living in peace, safety and even happiness; their people had found some way to escape!

A voice inside of him whispered grimly. Yes, but what was the price that was paid? After all, wasn’t she talking about a sacrifice earlier?

“When there were only a handful of us left when long before we could not be counted; our King and Queen were visited by the King of Hell.”

Harry jolted, a loud gasp escaping him before he could quell it. The sound was thunderous in the deep hush. He cringed at the scathing looks he was now the target of; Hermione’s own glare was especially vicious. The Lore Mistress fixed him with a reprimanding stare of her own but there was also a hint of knowing amusement in her warm, azure eyes. Harry offered her an apologetic smile and low dip of the head.

Harry knew of the King of Hell; a title he had found scattered in some of the many books he had read in the High Mage’s extensive library. But, the reason the King of Hell had left quite an impression on him was because he was the undisputed master of the Fire Element—the most volatile and nearly impossible to control of the Five Elements—even the Element of Void was far easier to command. Also, according to several other tomes, he was the most cunning, most vicious and most deadly entity in existence; that his power was unmatched. He was well-known for fulfilling wishes and making the impossible happened.
All for a price.

And, most emphasized in all the books and scrolls he had managed to find the King of Hell mentioned in, was the warning that the price he demanded was always greater than the boon granted.

But, Harry mulled over, if his people were so close to being annihilated; they would have been desperate and more than willing to pay any price. Secretly, he admitted to himself that there were some things, and people, who he would do anything to save if he was ever faced with the same choice.

The voice of the Lore Mistress tore Harry out of his thoughts again; the Telling was far from over and he, more than ever, wanted to know what happened. Once more he let himself slip back into the next round of visions.

The memory of a very tall, broad-shouldered form; shrouded entirely in flowing black robes that moved like liquid darkness and seemed to consume all the light appeared in his mind’s eye. The only feature he could see clearly were the alabaster hands that gestured gracefully as the figure spoke, though he could not hear the words. Harry was transfixed by this large hands with very, long elegant fingers tipped with equally long, razor-sharp black-painted nails.

“The King of Hell offered sanctuary. A true haven to our people so we may recover; where we could live in safety and peace once more,” Lore Mistress Bagshot paused, nodding slowly. “Faced with absolute destruction, our King and Queen could only accept…” She trailed off, her lined face taut with a myriad of emotions: fear, pain, helplessness and grudging acceptance.

“It was not without a price; the King of Hell is never generous or kind.” Her long fingers steepled together, her joined hands pressed against her breasts, and she drew in a long deep breath. Harry blinked as the memory swirled away.

“The King of Hell favors the number seven, as we do. Thus, once every seven years; he demands a tithe.” Bathilda finished grimly. “The offering of a single life for our people to live in his lands where we are protected and at peace.”

Like a blast of unleashed Elemental Magic, the voices of the listeners burst forth, horrified and panicked; questions were shouted. Many jumped to their feet, arms flailing or clutched to their chests. Hermione let out a low noise of despair while Ron released a strangled moan. The Lore Mistress’ arms shot upwards, palms held up; cutting into the cries with the sharp gesture.

“No, she declared in ringing tones. “The sacrifice will not be any one of us.”

Slowly, calm was restored and the audience quieted but there were still furious whispers like the buzz of insects.

“The sacrifice has always been a Human who is taken from the world we fled. It shall be the 299th Tithe come this Samhain night.”

Harry reeled, barely keeping himself in his seat; exchanging stunned looks with Ron and Hermione even as the other Fae exclaimed loudly among themselves. His friends were equally shocked and appalled over this. Two hundred ninety-eight Human lives had already been sacrificed so they could live as they have? A part of Harry recoiled over this revelation of their gruesome history; to the Fae, a life was sacred after all. Their people treasured each life; that was why they offered thanks to the plants for fruits and seeds that sustained them and to the animals they killed when they needed to.

Yes, but should the life of a Human matter at all? Harry frowned slightly at the sudden, callous
thought.

It had been Humans who had driven the Fae from their old home. It was only fair... and, it was simply one life every seven years. How many Fae had died at the hands of Humans? And for needless reasons? The Shared memories from earlier told Harry that the number had been over hundreds of thousands when only a couple of hundred Humans had been killed so far. Still, this did not assuage him.

Troubled, he pursed his lips. He could hate this deal the Fae have with the King of Hell but, ultimately, he would not interfere or jeopardize said arrangement. In the end, his people and, especially, his friends and the Weasley family mattered the most to him. If the price was not paid; the King of Hell could easily banish them back into the old World.

Then, where would they be?

He shuddered, mind flicking through the visions of the Telling. He would never condemn his loved ones to such a fate; it would be no life, barely an existence. The horrible prospect of this was even more starkly apparent when he thought of the lives they lived now, here in Great Haven. At least now, he mused with a short quirk of the lips, he knew why they called the city Great Haven.

It really was.

The Lore Mistress had been merely watching her audience until she saw they had once more quieted. “The ceremony will occur on the night of Samhain, when the night meets its center. As you are all fourteen springs and older; you shall be required to attend. As dictated by a clause in the Devil’s Deal; your families will guide you on how you will act and what you must do during this ceremony. However, if you have questions, ask them now; silence will be strictly observed during the Giving of the Tithe.”

Again, voices rose, calling questions that jumbled together into an incomprehensible tumult. Lore Mistress Bagshot released a commanding snap of “Silence!” that sliced into the cacophony.

“Ask one at a time! I will call you to ask!” She ordered sternly. “I will not entertain any questions from uncouth children. Where is your decorum? If this is how you all react; I will request of the King and Queen that you be enchanted to be silent for the entirety of the ceremony!”

Harry concealed a grin at the threat; it was very good punishment. He knew that the Lore Mistress would do this too.

Instantly, the audience stilled and several hands lifted.

“Much better.” Lore Mistress Bagshot nodded in approval and satisfaction. She surveyed the crowd and fixed her keen gaze on a Fae. “Yes, Seamus?”

“How exactly do we get the Human, Lore Mistress?” the dark-haired Fae looked both eager and fearful of the answer.

“Of course, this is what you would ask first,” she huffed. “All of you sprites are the same.” The Lore Mistress pursed her lips. “Humans can only be found Aboveground; we live here in what we have come to call Great Haven; a small realm created by the King of Hell. When the year of the Tithe comes; a family is chosen—by lottery.” She added quickly as she clearly anticipated the newest question on everyone’s mind. “The chosen family ventures up into Aboveground to bring back a Human.”

Once she had fallen silent; several hands shot up.
“Yes, Lavender?”

“Yes, it so very hard and dangerous? To go Aboveground and to get a Human?”

The weathered lines of the Lore Mistress’ face deepened as she became grim and sorrowed. “Yes,” she admitted quietly. “It is a very difficult task; which is why many chosen families ask for aid. However, while we have never failed to give the Tithe; there are some years where we paid in more than one Human life.”

She searched the crowd and inclined her head towards Ron who had his arm raised. “Ronald?”

“What happens if we can’t get a Human for the Tithe?”

“Then, a life must still be offered,” she proclaimed with finality and conviction. “The King of Hell will accept the life of a Human… or a Fae.” She inhaled deeply. “I pray that this will never come to pass.”

She stared at the few hands that still remained aloft. “Yes, Dean?”

“What was the worst circumstances we ever came to not getting a Human? Can you tell us about it?”

The Lore Mistress snorted, shaking her head; pinning the youth with a hard stare that bordered on a glower. “Trust a sprite like you to ask that.” She glanced around, her expression stony. “Yes. I have lost count how deadly the task to bring a Human back from Aboveground has become. While we have been fortunate in most years, in a few others the price had been very high… It was fourteen years ago that the worst events involving the task of acquiring a Human for the Devil’s Tithe transpired.”

Harry felt a chill race done his spine. This only deepened when the Lore Mistress’ heavy gaze rested on a point behind him.

“The Longbottoms were chosen.”

A choked noise came from behind him and Harry knew it was Neville Longbottom.

“When the name of his family came from the Goblet of Fire and, realizing the enormity of this task, Frank Longbottom requested aid. His call was answered by James Potter, Lily Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew.”

Harry lurched at the names, feeling the eyes now fixed on him.

“The seven set out; there were high hopes of an easy success. After all, James Potter, Lily Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Frank Longbottom and Alice Longbottom were extremely powerful. While Peter Pettigrew was not so talented, he brought the group to the number of seven. Which, as I told you all earlier is the number favored by the King of Hell and the Fae. Seven signifies the greatest magical power that can be gathered in one place. Less than this number, the magic is drastically reduced; more than seven and the magic becomes far too unstable and even deadly.”

Harry nodded silently in agreement, recalling all the lectures the High Mage and all of his other teachers kept giving him about the magical might and significance of the number seven. He could probably dictate the facts in his sleep if he was asked.

“None of us could have imagined the outcome of this particular quest. They were sent through the portal that connects Great Haven to Aboveground like all the others before them with no incidents. Many believed they would returned well before the required sealing of the Gate...” The Lore
Mistress drew a deep breath and seemed to brace herself. “We were so very wrong; they did not return. It was feared that they failed as there was no sign of them whatsoever. We assumed the very worst fate imaginable and the Fae Court gathered to discuss the prospect of offering one of our own since the Tithe must be given no matter the cost. In fact, one of us had already been chosen and was preparing for the ceremony. When, at the twilight of Samhain night, a miracle occurred. Lily Potter returned to us; along with the Human offering. She was alone and severely injured; dying only moments after she entrusted the Human into the custody of the Fae Guard and a request that her sole child be raised by Arthur and Molly Weasley.”

The poignant silence that encompassed the glade was ringing; Harry felt his heart constrict painfully. He had never been told what exactly happened to his real parents… now, he knew why. It explained why Molly had taken him aside earlier and told him she would talk to him after this Telling. He felt an arm wrap around his shoulders and he was pulled into a comforting hug by Hermione; another hand gripped his own hand tightly. Harry knew it was Ron’s own show of support. He flashed his friends a weak, but grateful smile.

“No one ever learned what happened,” the Lore Mistress continued with gentle steel. “However, from the memories of those who have ventured Aboveground; it was believed that Humans have poisoned the world itself in their greed and callousness. That to remain too long would be fatal for our kind and that there are many things Aboveground that can easily harm us now. Already, Humans knew of how to hurt us severely; iron has long been the bane of our people and Humans use countless items made of this material. We have no idea what other weapons Humans have created throughout time; they have merely proven to be very adept at making tools of destruction and causing great harm.”

She let this sink into the young minds around her before looking around. “Yes, Justin?”

“How much time does the family have to get the Human, Lore Mistress?”

“It is exactly one cycle of the moon, from full moon to full moon; no more. That is all time we can allow; a portal to the Aboveground cannot be held open longer. It is also dangerous to keep a gate open or even to keep any opening present indefinitely…” she glanced at Harry pensively.

There was something she wanted to say that was related to him; most likely about his parents. But, she evidently decided against it in the end and continued smoothly, “Once this time passes, whether the ones sent have returned or not; we must seal the portal.”

There was only one hand still raised. “Yes, Zacharias?”

“Once your family is chosen; how long before there is a chance your family can get picked again?”

“Ah, yes.” She peered at the young Fae. “Your family was chosen seven years ago.”

Zacharias nodded curtly. “I suppose that’s why I lost my parents, my uncle, my aunt and my older sister. I was never told exactly how they died but with the timeframe…”

“Yes, they died because of the task. If you wish to know all the details, speak with your grandmother, Hepzibath; she will be able to tell you all you wish to know. If you are still unsatisfied with her answers, come to me and I will Tell you.” The Lore Mistress nodded solemnly. “There are three hundred and seventy-seven Families in Great Haven. Until the last Family is selected; your family will not be chosen again.”

Harry could plainly see the rigidness of Zacharias’ frame vanish; he couldn’t blame his evident relief in the slightest.
Hermione’s hand suddenly shot up and the Lore Mistress sent her apprentice a mildly amused and miffed look. “Yes, Hermione?”

“What if the family chosen can’t perform the task?”

“So long as the family has a member; they cannot refuse. If the family no longer exists; the name is removed from the list.” She swept her gaze around the glade. “Any more questions? Very well. If you find yourselves with more at a later date. You know where to find me; but be sure to ask your families first. They will most likely know the answers too. Now, it is late; to bed, Sprites!”

There was a rustle and muted clamour as the audience stood, voices both loud and soft rang out as the small throng dispersed and gathered in little bands. From the sides, Harry spotted Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnegan, Lavender Brown and the Patil Twins weave through the thinning crowd to reach them.

“That was unbelievable!” Ron burst out. “I don’t know how she can expect us to quietly go to bed with a Telling like that!”

“It was incredible, yes!” Seamus agreed as the rest of the group nodded enthusiastically.

“I don’t know,” Hermione chimed in. “I’d like to sleep early and see if the library in the Fae Palace has any more details about this. I know majority of our history is by memory but I’m sure there’s something that’s been written!”

“If you find anything, you’ve so got to tell me!” Ron begged.

“Wow, Ronald. Are you actually asking me for a history lesson?!”

“Yes, I am. This is the kind of history I would love to hear about!”

“You are impossible!”

“We would like to hear it too, Hermione!” Dean urged.

“Yes! I’d love to know more too!” Seamus grinned winsomely.

“And given how well you’re able to gather all the details; I’m sure you can tell us things even the Lore Mistress glossed over.” Parvati added, her sister bobbing her head in agreement and watching the exchange with a faint smile. Lavender was also looking eager and hopeful.

“All of you are hopeless!” Hermione rested her hands on her hips as she glowered at the unrepentant Fae circling her. “Why don’t you research yourselves?”

Harry kept silent, standing leisurely with his friends as they appealed and cajoled a very unimpressed Hermione. He knew that the Apprentice Lore Mistress would succumb and share whatever she does end up reading. The corners of his mouth curling up at this thought.

He knew that the Lore Mistress was still present; he could feel her aura behind him. She was probably watching the small knots of young Fae talking animatedly amongst themselves. He wagered in fifteen minutes or so; she’d remind them to head to bed now or else. Likely with a well-planned threat. He wasn’t sleepy in the slightest himself and he had some questions of his own. Private questions, and he knew that she may have them but she wasn’t the only one.

“Excuse me, everyone?” Harry called and, seeing the troupe look towards him expectantly, said. “I’m going to head back home, okay?”
“Oh, sure, Harry,” Ron shrugged. “Tell mom I’m around and with our friends in case she worries.”

“She might worry more if she finds out you’re with them, you know,” Harry grinned, fixing his best friend and foster brother with a knowing look. “I’ll just say you’re out and will come back in later?”

“An hour or so right before curfew, I guess,” Ron estimated distractedly.

Dean and Seamus were already excitedly exchanging speculations about the Telling. The Patil twins and Lavender joining the conversation with an usual amount of enthusiasm.

“Of course. Good night.” Harry waved in farewell to the redhead and the rest of their friends before turning to Hermione. “Headed off yourself?”

“Yes,” she admitted easily. “I need to be up early too, like you.” She nodded and waved as they stepped away from the chattering group. “Good night, everyone, try not to stay out too late!”

As Harry—and Hermione—expected, their friends called out their own absentminded farewells and noncommittal replies to her farewell and admonishment. The Apprentice Lore Mistress huffed faintly as she heard this before eyeing her quiet friend carefully. “Are you alright?”

*Trust her to notice something with me; I need to learn better how to mask my reactions,* Harry mused to himself with a concealed smile. “Yes, I’ll be fine. If not, I’ll talk with you,” he appeased. “Good night, Hermione.”

“Very well,” Hermione huffed, now folding her arms over her chest. “I will hold you to that promise, Harry, and good night, too.”

Nodding to her in farewell, Harry stepped back and fluttered his wings; flexing them before he jumped high and sped up into the night sky.

It was time to get his own answers.
Despite his brooding thoughts, Harry found himself grinning broadly as he relished the chill wind whipping around him and stinging his eyes slightly as he flew with abandonment and so swiftly if he was seen by any of the older Fae; he’d certainly be scolded again. The city of Great Haven spread out before him, a myriad of huge trees where the Fae lived; it was without any symmetry, wild, untamed and free.

He had never appreciated this familiar sight more than he did tonight. He could easily understand why his parents had done all they could to protect Great Haven and their people. He lingered a little in the sky, even though he knew he was near the gigantic treehouse he had called home for as long as he could remember. Making a final wide circuit around the slumbering city, Harry descended and alighted at the widest balcony of his home. He knew where this particular platform went; it was the most used by all of them as it connected directly to the large, cozy kitchen of the treehouse. Smiling in memory, Harry headed quickly for the passageway; there were no doors here. As he neared the threshold, he easily smelled the rich aroma of hot chocolate. At the delicious scent, Harry hurried through.

Inside, he found Molly Weasley waiting patiently; sitting at the end of the massive wooden table dominating the large space.

“Good evening, dear,” she smiled gently. “Have a seat, drink up and ask your questions.”

Giving her a smile of his own, Harry obeyed immediately; sank onto the long bench and took a sip of the beverage in front of him. He savored the delicious taste and heat of the thick liquid. Molly nursed her own mug and watched him silently with open affection.

Letting himself have one larger sip before starting, Harry set the mug down and swiveled slightly to meet her gaze. “I know you and Arthur always told me how wonderful and powerful my parents were but I’d like to know exactly how they died; the Lore Mistress didn’t go into details.”

Molly set her own cup down on the table with a measured movement, her features becoming lost in recollection and sorrow. “Because, to be honest: there isn’t much to tell; the events happened so quickly, the Lore Mistress wasn’t present to witness the exact events and Sharing the memories showed little. It was pure luck that I was present; even Arthur wasn’t around. I was the one to find your mother.”

Harry stared at her. “Please tell me what happened?”

“It was twilight of Samhain day. The Fae Court was in an uproar; the group who was tasked with bringing the Human had not returned so the frantic preparations of readying the chosen Tithe to be given to the King of Hell was in full swing… I only found out later who had been chosen…” Molly pursed her lips, giving her head a curt little shake before picking up her tale again. “I’m sure the Lore Mistress didn’t say this with the others present but the Gate to Aboveground was already sealed. Thus, it was believed that the offering must be a Fae. The portal has to be closed at dusk of the day before Samhain; otherwise it would interfere with the Gate opened to Hell.”

Harry gaped. “What? Then how did my mother get back to Great Haven?!”

“She reopened the gate from Aboveground. I was merely passing by the glade where the Gate is normally opened when I heard a thunderous, tearing sound as the portal suddenly tore open.” Molly explained softly but with awe and respect clear in her voice. “I neared just in time to see your mother
and an unconscious Human woman tumble through before it was closed again. Somehow, Lily was
strong enough to bridge Great Haven and Aboveground alone and bring with her the Human. The
effort ultimately killed her but she didn’t care. All she wanted was to make sure the Tithe was paid
and the offering would not be a Fae. She knew, as many of us did that the Fae who would be offered
would likely be a Longbottom. The only ones left of the family were Augusta and little Neville…”
Molly gripped her hands tightly as she gazed down at them; Harry could see that the fingers were
trembling faintly. “Augusta was the one chosen. So… your mother was right in this. She told me she
couldn’t allow either to be sacrificed and since she was already dying…”

Molly seemed to recover and reached out, caressing his messy locks. She smiled at him lovingly and
with no small measure of pride. “It’s why I have always believed your magical talent came from your
mother more than your father. I admit that James was also magically very strong but he didn’t hold a
candle next to your mother!”

“Did she tell you why she was dying? And what happened to my father and the others?”

“Oh, Harry,” she stood, shuffled over and sat on the bench next to him, pulling him close in a tight
hug and tucking him against her side as she guided his head to rest on her shoulder. “I never really
found out the exact details. She was only able to tell me that they had been betrayed by one of the
group while Aboveground; that the traitor had allied with a very ruthless Human who wanted to
enslave them all and use them for his purposes. They had been trapped, and your father and the
others died getting her out; along with a Human who was to be the Tithe. I remember clearly how
your mother was; Lily had been so weak when she came through but still so very fierce. She was
more interested in asking me repeatedly to take care of you while I was healing her wounds as best I
could than her own health. While I healed most of her injuries, I realized she had used her lifeforce to
get back and she wasn’t strong enough to survive. I had to keep assuring her I would look after you
and that I’d raise you like one of my own. You were the last thing she was talking about.”

Feeling the tears he had fought against all night finally come, Harry buried his face in her shoulder
and clung to her desperately as the sobs racked his small form; letting his grief out at last. Molly held
him close, humming soothingly and comfortably.

“I’m so sorry I can’t tell you more, dear,” Molly murmured quietly, stroking his hair until he had no
more tears left. “But, I wanted to assure you both your parents loved you and are probably even
prouder than Arthur and I could be of you!”

Harry smiled weakly at the very thought. “I’m more like my mother than my father, am I?”

“Yes!” Molly declared decisively.

Withdrawing a little, she pulled a large, soft handkerchief from a pocket in her voluminous robes and
gently cleaned away the tearstains on his face, chin and neck then she handed the square of cloth to
him so he could blow his nose. She took it back once he finished, sending the sodden fabric flying
out to the laundry room afterwards with a flick of her hand.

“If you were like James; you’d put my twins to shame with the kind of pranks you’d pull off! That’s
why I’m honestly glad you didn’t turn out to be such a trickster. My Fred and George are far more
than I can handle sometimes already!” she informed him briskly. “But, I admit; you’re completely
your father’s son when it comes to flying. Lily couldn’t fly half as well! Nor would she even dare to
try.”

“Good to know I have a bit of my father in me,” he chuckled faintly before lighting up. “Yes, I
absolutely love flying!”
“Yes. Great Haven, do I know you do!” Molly fixed him with a stern, reprimanding stare. “I’ve lost count of the heart attacks I’ve metaphorically had when I see you pulling your stunts in the air. If Lily was around; I wager she would have locked you away to keep you from doing them. Even hearing it secondhand from Arthur or the other older Fae who’ve caught you is nearly as bad!”

“Sorry?” Harry tried, unable to suppress his grin; his bright emerald eyes sparkling.

Molly snorted. “Try to mean it, dear. Now, off to bed! I know you’re supposed to be up early to see the High Mage and your other teachers tomorrow.”

Harry hugged her again, now in thanks. “Do you think he knows anything about what happened with my mother?”

Molly cocked her head to the side in thought before giving a slight shake. “No, he wasn’t present and the Fae Guard who secured the Human arrived when your mother was hardly coherent. Lily pretty much threw the unconscious woman at the Guard when she saw her, with an overly strong burst of Fae strength-empowered with magic while ordering she make sure the Human didn’t get away. Poor Amelia!”

Harry winced. Magic and Fae strength was a dangerous combination, especially if it was overpowered and uncontrolled. He hoped that the Fae Guard hadn’t been injured; he couldn’t find it in himself to care about the Human. He perked up a moment later when he recognized the name. “Amelia Bones? The Captain of the First Fae Guard?”

“Yes. Luckily, she had good reflexes and managed to keep herself and the Human from breaking any bones. But, she did have an impressive set of bruises afterwards. The High Mage only arrived after her; he had felt the Gate open and raced over, fearful we were under attack. The rest of the Fae Court along with the King and Queen were on his heels. Goodness, it was quite the crowd!” Molly’s eyes glazed in memory. “Unfortunately, by the time they reached us, your mother was dead.”

Silence settled over them afterwards and Harry slowly allowed himself to come to grips with all the shocking revelations of the night. He was grateful that he now knew what had happened to his parents; ever since he learned his last name wasn’t Weasley and he looked nothing like them he had wondered. When he had finally gathered enough courage to ask, Arthur and Molly had promised him he would learn the truth when he was considered old enough to be told. He was very happy to discover it only now; he doubted he would be able to have handled it so well if he had only been seven instead of fourteen.

“Molly?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“Do you know which family was chosen this time?”

There were several beats of silence, then: “The Goldsteins.”

“Anyone helping them?”

“The Turpins, the Lis and the Boots have joined them in the quest. It’s only fair as in the past the Goldsteins have helped the other families when it had been their turn.” Molly reached over and took his hands in hers. “Don’t be so worried. The cases involving your parents are extremely rare; usually, all of the Fae who go return. And, while most are injured; nearly all of the time it isn’t permanent or fatal.”

“Zacharias Smith’s family didn’t fare too well, either,” Harry pointed out.
“Oh…” Molly’s mouth quirked. “They didn’t because they didn’t ask for aid at all. It was a matter of pride to them that they do it alone.”

“Ah.” Harry just kept himself from rolling his eyes. Yes, the Smiths were far too proud! Zacharias, especially. “Would I have to do this too? When my family’s name is picked? I should train hard if I am! I’m the last Potter…”

“No,” Molly assured him quickly. “The Potter name was already chosen centuries ago. Your great-great-grandfather did the quest alone. He refused aid; even from your father and mother.”

“What happened?”

Molly sighed deeply. “He was the oldest Fae who survived what happened to us at the hands of the Humans; far older than even Bathilda. She is only slightly older than the High Mage, the current King and Queen. While they also lived through the Time of the Void, they did not see the beginning of the war unlike your great-great-grandfather. He was also the former Lore Master; he was well over five thousand years when he died. He positively loathed Humans; they had killed his wife, then later, James’ grandparents and even his parents too. He never forgot their crimes against your family. Your father was the only Potter left aside from Henry, your great-great-grandfather, for so long. When our people finally came to Great Haven, he always volunteered to help whatever family was charged with the task. But, when the time came that the Potters were chosen, he absolutely refused to let anyone help him. He proclaimed that he would only risk himself; even if nearly all the Fae Families he had aided stepped forward. He forbade your father to join the quest; citing that he had obligations to the Family.”

Harry listened wordlessly; feeling a well of sadness and empathy for his Ancestor. Living with that kind of deep hatred couldn’t have been easy. “He didn’t want to live anymore,” he thought aloud. “Why else would he go alone?”

“Yes, we believed that the grief over losing his mate and the other Potters had become too much,” Molly nodded. “Your father had only recently met your mother and was courting her.” She nudged him playfully. “Did you know your father remained unmated for slightly over one thousand years? And when he finally chose someone; she turned him down flat!”

“Really?” Harry laughed. “I remember you mentioning this before but not like this.”

“Well, you wouldn’t have understood when you were younger but, let’s just say; your father had to do a lot to win your mother’s affections. In fact, most of his efforts to win her heart backfired spectacularly! He had to work for centuries to even get her to look at him at all.”

Harry only laughed harder. “You have to tell me some of those misadventures! I can just imagine how much of a fool my father made of himself for my mother!”

“I will, dear, but not now.” Molly smiled fondly, giving him another nudge and tucking a black strand of his unruly mop behind his ear. “Bed now, love; you do have a busy day again tomorrow. Unless, you want me to tell the High Mage you need a day-off?”

Huffing and pouting, Harry acquiesced. “Okay, okay, I’ll go to bed. Even if it isn’t even curfew yet.” He hastily shook his head at her offer. “No, I’m fine. I want to go to classes tomorrow. I want to talk to the High Mage too!”

“Curfew isn’t that far; it will be in half an hour. I’m also still missing one little Sprite.” Molly looked to the passageway, a mild furrow running along her brow. “I would ask you where he was but, knowing him, he would be wise enough to keep you in the dark.”
“Yes,” Harry admitted easily.

“Alright, I’ll see you tomorrow, Harry dear.” Molly stood and kissed him on the forehead before shuffling around the kitchen to set the kettle on the fire again. The black-haired Fae suspected she’d return to the seat at the head of the table right before curfew. So she could meet her wayward son when Ron arrived. While the rest of the treehouse had balconies; this was the only one that would remain open. The others would have Charms that would alert Molly, Arthur or any of their oldest children if anyone attempted to go through.

Smirking inwardly, Harry suspected that Ron would be in for a scolding tonight. The youngest Weasley son had the worst sense of time he had ever seen. Often, he would have to remind Ron when he was with him. He passed through the doorway that opened into the vast sitting room, climbed the winding stairs that led to the collection of bedrooms when his Magical Senses spiked. Reaching out with his Magical Senses, he realized that Molly had cast a powerful *Muffliato* charm that encompassed the entire kitchen.

Yes, Ron better get home soon.

At least, Harry mused, slipping into the room he shared with Ron; the rest of them won’t be woken when Molly started screaming. As much as he loved his foster mother, she easily put a banshee to shame with her screeching.

Still smiling faintly, he changed out of his clothes, hung them neatly and dropped into his small but comfortable bed.

Sleep was equally swift and, thankfully, undisturbed.
The Giving of the Tithe

“Can’t I go? Please!” Ginevra Weasley pleaded desperately from where she sat watching enviously as her entire family made final preparations. The entire clan was dressed in their finest robes, and wore grave expressions; even her older twin brothers, Fred and George, were serious and behaved for once!

“For the last time, no, Ginevra! And, for Great Haven’s sake, stop asking me or your father or any of your brothers already!” Molly said sharply, even her deep well of patience finally dried up from the constant and incessant begging of her youngest child.

The little redhead pouted, crossing her arms over her chest and huffing petulantly; her little orange-and-yellow, black-edged butterfly wings fluttering erratically in her agitation and disappointment. “I don’t like being left behind! I’ll be the only one at home tonight! I even have to wait seven years more before I get to join all of you!”

“Enjoy it, Sprite,” Ron said sagely. “Trust me, this isn’t the kind of event you’d like to attend, Gin.”

Ginny stared at him suspiciously. “When you say it like that; it just makes me even more curious!”

Ron threw up his hands in frustration. “Whatever, don’t believe me.”

“He’s right, Ginny,” Harry added, coming over and clasping her small shoulder and patting her comfortingly. “This is one of those boring, solemn and formal ceremonies. There won’t be any real festivities until tomorrow and those you won’t miss.”

"I see…” Ginny expelled a loud breath and looked down before she raised her head and smiled brightly; giving a decisive nod. “Alright, Harry. If you say so! I feel a lot better now.”

“Oi!” Ron cried in annoyance. “Why believe him and not me?!”

“Because, Ronnieskins,” his little sister said sweetly. “Harry’s been to so many boring and formal events; he’ll know. Unlike you.”

The rest of the Weasleys laughed.

“She got you there, Sprite!” Charlie Weasley chortled.

“I hate you all,” Ron proclaimed with conviction and stalked out of the sitting room. His affronted scowl only deepened when he heard more laughter trail after his grand exit.

Harry shook his head at the never-ending antics of his family and patted Ginny again on the shoulder before following his best friend.

The pair of them waited outside on the massive balcony; Ron’s scowl smoothening out into a look of excitement and apprehension.

“Any ideas how this is going to go?” the youngest Weasley son asked finally.

“As any solemn, formal ceremony, I guess,” Harry suggested with a careless shrug.

Ginny was right after all; he had attended more ceremonies and social gatherings than he could count by now. It was an integral part of his education and training; magic was highly structured and was
exceedingly involved with the very heart of Fae culture and life. And, while magic in all its forms was treated with the high respect among all the Fae; the magics Harry was learning was handled with not only the greatest reverence but the utmost caution.

“This is a Devil’s Deal; I don’t think the King of Hell would settle for anything else. So, you can imagine what kind of rituals and magics that will be involved,” he mused aloud.

“Sounds incredible.” Ron hummed. “I’m surprised you’re not a part of the preparations.”

“I’m too young,” Harry told him earnestly. “The High Mage as well as the King and Queen don’t want me witnessing or engaging in such magics until I’m at least nearly half a century. Although, I heard that majority of the Mages don’t even want me near said magics until I’ve reached one hundred years.”

Ron whistled lowly, impressed and mildly fearful. “That dangerous?”

“Ancient High Fae Magics.” Was all Harry needed to say.

“Oh,” His friend suddenly grinned impishly and elbowed him hard in the side. “Don’t be so modest! A century is still really young to be taught the kind of magics we’re talking about here!”

Harry only smiled sheepishly, feeling a flush rise in his cheeks. He never handled praise well. “Yeah… right.” He shrugged again, and straightened as the remaining Weasleys all filed out.

“Alright, Sprites!” Arthur Weasley called cheerfully, grinning at the protests from his five eldest sons. “You’re all always going to be Sprites to me; no matter what century you are!” he added firmly, he swept his keen gaze around carefully before nodding in satisfaction. “All set, then. Now, as I instructed earlier, we’ll all head to the south edge of the woods; right up to the Wall of the South. I want you all to be silent as soon as you land and follow my lead. Ron, Molly and I will be with you, alright? Since this will be your first ceremony. Oh, and remember to be in a line; eldest to youngest!” He paused and sent Harry a little, reassuring smile. “The High Mage wanted me to tell you your position is beside him, Harry. So you head over when he calls you.”

“Shouldn’t he be with us since it’s his first ceremony, too?” Molly quickly interjected, her brown eyes narrowed and worried.

Arthur shook his head. “High Mage Dumbledore insisted, Molly; I’m sorry.”

The Weasley matron frowned deeply; her mouth flattening into a very displeased line. Harry knew his mentor was going to be subjected to one of her infamous tirades after this. He made a special note to be nowhere near them when this happened.

Arthur, highly attuned to his wife’s temperamental moods, stepped close and embraced her. “The ceremony is perfectly safe, love, and Harry would be safest with High Mage Dumbledore. He’ll also be near the King and Queen as well as the other Mages and the Fae Guard.”

Molly sighed, pressing into her mate’s hold. “Yes, but he’ll be closer than most to all of this…” she fretted softly.

Arthur merely tightened his grip, dropping a kiss into her hair.

Harry stepped forward quickly and hugged her from behind. “I’ll be fine, Molly, really.”

“And we need to go now,” Bill, the eldest Weasley son, reminded them. “We don’t want to be late.”
Molly squared her shoulders and pulled away from the arms encasing her to face the small crowd. “Yes, very well. I’m sure everyone knows what they need to do,” she paused and waited for the nods and words of acknowledgement. “Good. Harry dear, fly with me.”

Harry suppressed a disappointed groan; out of the corner of his eye, he could see Ron, Fred, George, Charlie and Bill sending him knowing and sympathetic looks. Molly had requested that of him for two obvious reasons; so she could be further assured he was well until they had to separate but the main reason Harry suspected she had done this was so he wouldn’t fly too fast or too wildly as he tended to do whenever he was in the air.

“Sure, Molly,” he said dutifully, throwing a glare at the snickering Weasleys. Even Arthur was hard-pressed to keep the mirth off his face; Percy simply looked annoyed and impatient. Quelling a sigh, Harry stepped up to stand beside his foster mother.

When he saw Harry settle into his position, Arthur swiftly unfurled the orange-and-yellow, black-edged butterfly wings all of his children had inherited from him while Molly readied her own dark yellow, black-edged pair. Harry joined the Weasley sons as they followed suit. His own set of exotically shaped, emerald-and-gold, silver-edged butterfly wings stood out starkly amidst all of the orange, yellow and black.

A single nod from the Weasley patron and, with a muted din of rustling, the large family took flight.

As he ascended, Harry saw thousands of other Fae also take to the air around them; the silvery radiance of a huge full moon rained onto the countless gossamer wings and sent them glittering brilliantly in the darkness; flashing like little stars against the sable canvass of the night sky.

It was a silent, magnificent spectacle that Harry would remember vividly for years to come.

Harry had rarely been to the Wall. And, never to the Southern end of the Wall.

The Wall of the South had been forbidden to be traveled to or even be approached without the permission of the Fae Monarchs or the High Mage, and the entire section was very diligently patrolled by squads of the Fae Guards day and night. While the North, West and East ends of the Wall were open to all the Fae; Harry had flown to the Wall on several occasions, exploring the North, West an East corners when he went and found nothing especially interesting. He had always wondered what made the South End so different; now, he knew why this was the case. After all, the Hell’s Mouth—the portal leading into Hell itself was found here.

Known to be the boundary of Great Haven; the Wall was aptly named. As it was exactly what the vast mountain did; sealed Great Haven and the sprawling forests that cradled the city inside a perfect, circle-shaped lush valley.

Stretching from horizon to horizon in an unbroken line of solid rock, the Wall could easily be seen at any point within Great Haven. Because of his many lessons and intense Magical training, Harry had had little chance or time to make flights to the Wall; unlike Ron and his siblings who knew the site very well. But, very recently he had managed to join a large excursion involving all of the young Fae.

Like all young Fae before them, it had been a challenge to see how far up the Wall they could reach. This was proven by flying up and leaving a dagger imbedded into the cliff face tied with a strip where your name was written. If you could, you should also bring down the dagger of the Fae whose point you managed to reach and pass.
Harry had joined in just to see how far he could get and, to his mild surprise and no small measure of pride, claimed Cedric Diggory’s dagger on his attempt. The older Fae had the highest mark so far among them. However, Harry hadn’t stopped there but continued, he had wanted to see how further up he could still go. He wanted to make his dagger the hardest to get after all…

To his shock, he found another dagger many miles above Cedric’s; snatching this blade as well, he kept soaring upwards until he had to finally concede defeat when he felt his wings become too stiff and numb. As he rose, the air chilled drastically; becoming so cold that the tips of his wings frosted. Straining, Harry reared back and rammed his dagger into the cliff face then dropped, letting the warming air rushing around him as he fell strip away the ice clinging to his wings.

When he cleared the clouds that concealed the topmost peaks, he glided down to the eagerly waiting crowd.

Grinning, he showed them Cedric’s dagger. Cedric, who had been present, had congratulated him good-naturedly. Still smiling excitedly, he told them about the second knife and presented his prize.

To his astonishment, the name on the tag was that of his father’s, James Potter. He couldn’t stop grinning stupidly all day. When he returned home and showed the small blade to Arthur; he had been told he had beaten even his father’s record. Which had been so far uncontested for centuries. Arthur had been both proud and a little horrified. Since, Harry had been decades younger than his father when he had pulled this stunt and the Weasley patriarch had a very good idea just what point his foster son had to have reached to acquire James’ dagger.

Unfortunately, thanks to the careless mouth of Ron; Molly had found out the same night and Harry wagered she counted this as one of her metaphorical heart attacks. After a scathing diatribe about recklessness, he had been forbidden to go near any part of the Wall (along with all of his siblings) for as long as Molly remembered—and, as the Weasley matriarch had a long memory; it was likely to be several years before she lifted the ban. Fred and George had pranked Ron mercilessly for the rest of the Summer because of his slip of tongue.

Harry quickly wiped off the broad grin he could feel on his face from the recollection as they neared the Wall of the South.

He had to lock his jaw too once he saw the number of Fae waiting patiently; spread out so far that many of them were among the great trees. He knew that every single Fae fourteen springs and older was in attendance. Despite the huge crowd; the silence was deafening.

Alighting with the Weasleys, he looked around carefully.

While the throng was tightly packed; there was a single broad aisle carved into the center of the gathering, beginning just before the first line of trees and ending at the slightly craggy face of the Wall.

Harry now could see why Molly had insisted everyone be attired properly; all of the Fae present wore their finest robes or gowns. Even Harry had donned his best Apprentice High Mage robes; a new set gifted to him by his mentor and made of even better quality than his old garb. Secretly, Harry had found the outfit far too extravagant.

It was a very grand spectacle, more impressive than the earlier sight of thousands of Fae flying through the air. This ceremony was made even more ethereal by the King and Queen clad in the full stunning regalia of their stations.

Harry had met and interacted with each Fae Monarch often while he studied in the Palace but he had
never seen both look so severe and grave. They looked absolutely nothing like what he could remember; if he could not sense and recognize the familiar Magical Signatures of the pair, he would have assumed they were strangers. They fit so well together as a couple that it was hard to believe that the current King and Queen were siblings. The last Fae Monarchs had perished trying to first negotiate then fight the Humans. They had never faltered in their efforts to protect their people and paid the ultimate price.

History dictated that the original Fae King and Queen fell together in the most brutal battle between Humans and Fae. However, in their death, they secured a bastion for the surviving Fae. This granted the exhausted remnants of the Fae a single century of uneasy peace. When it looked like the war would have to be taken up again; the King of Hell had appeared and made his offer.

In memory of their first King and Queen, the newly crowned monarchs had forsaken their true names and taken the names of the former rulers: Oberon and Titania. With this, they had also accepted the burden of the magical oaths to guide, protect and rule their people. In exchange, they were given the Fae Kingdom’s loyalty, obedience and veneration.

Harry only knew they were siblings because of Hermione. But, even she didn’t know their original names, no one did; she informed him that the names were forever lost because of the Ancient High Fae Magic enacted. By taking up the names of the First King and Queen of the Fae; aside from honoring their predecessors, the siblings could call upon the memories of the old King and Queen. To the new rulers, the loss of their true names was a small price to pay for the vast well of knowledge and wisdom they gained. The selfless act had also greatly increased Harry’s own respect for the pair; he wasn’t sure he would be so willing to give up his identity so thoroughly…

Eyes drifting as he mused, Harry spotted Albus Dumbledore. He found himself blinking rapidly in shock when he realized the eccentric High Mage was suitably dressed for once; the atrocious dyes he favored replaced by the correct colors of his position: gold and ivory.

He looks so much better! Harry thought with an inward grin before sobering. This ceremony’s significance and importance was only exacerbated by his mentor’s adherence to tradition. Normally, High Mage Dumbledore wore whatever color combination he wanted; no matter how eye-blinding. He blinked again when the Ancient Fae noticed him in turn and beckoned.

Seeing the signal of his mentor, he clasped and squeezed Molly’s hand briefly, nodded wordlessly to Arthur and the rest of the Weasleys before stepping away. He wove in and out of the throng to reach the High Mage’s side.

High Mage Dumbledore offered him a gentle smile but, yet again, no words were spoken. He shifted and Harry slotted himself into the position his mentor clearly wanted him to take. The other Mages were in several loose circles behind Dumbledore and Harry.

The Ancient Fae stood to the right side of the Fae Monarchs who were facing the vast crowd; across from him, Harry saw the Lore Mistress and her apprentice, Hermione, glide out of the throng and assume their own place on the left with the members of the Fae Court.

Hermione looked very lovely in her own silver and sapphire robes; Harry mentally made a note to himself to tell her this when he spoke to her next. A swift glance back to his family, specifically, to Ron had him fighting hard to keep the grin off his face. The youngest Weasley son was ogling Hermione blatantly, his cheeks flaring beet-red. It took Molly elbowing him hard to make him realize his social blunder. Ron immediately covered his mouth to muffle his yelp of pain and dropped his gaze to his feet. The rest of his family succeeded in keeping their mirth (mostly) suppressed and concealed. Harry suspected that poor Ron was going to be in for quite the ribbing when this
ceremony was over.

The last of the Fae came and found places among the trees. Not a single sound was made by the massive audience and the only noise on the rocky escarpment was the gentle whistling of an icy breeze that cavorted around the site. Even the nocturnal insects were hushed. Harry glanced up to see that the broad argent circle of the moon was gliding steadily across the black sea of stars.

When the moon seemed to hang overhead, Oberon straightened and his deep baritone rumbled.

“We are all Gathered here, on this night, to remember what was lost, what was gained and what must be given in turn.”

Titania spoke next; her bell-like voice chimed where his thundered. “We have come together, on this night, to honor a great debt due.”

The pair parted, the King striding to stand beside the High Mage Dumbledore and the Queen gliding to stand by the Lore Mistress.

Harry found his eyes drawn to the Wall, to the very spot the pair of rulers had been covering only moments before.

There was no sound; even as, before his disbelieving gaze, a large black line sliced into the rock. This slit parted steadily, smoothly; the pinnacle of the line shaping into an arch while the gap broadened out as it reached the rocky ground. Shortly, a grand passageway was carved into the once seamless cliff-face of the Wall.

Perhaps, what made this even more eerie and surreal was that even as the rock moved; there was no grinding of stone. It was utterly soundless. Staring into this gap, Harry felt a shudder race down his spine.

It was pure darkness inside this newly revealed cave.

He shuddered again, shivering hard even in his thick robes as magic, incredibly powerful, rolled out of the cave’s opening. Overwhelming and encompassing. So icy cold that Harry knew that if he breathed out through his mouth; his breath would mist heavily. Determinedly, he raised his own magic; refusing to fall to his knees as this foreign power commanded. Glancing to his mentor, he saw how rigid the High Mage had become. Even the King and Queen were so still, he thought they might have been statues. He could see that there was a slight tremble to their forms. However, like him, they did not drop to their knees.

Moving his gaze, he found the Lore Mistress and Hermione among the Fae Court.

Both were kneeling, along with all the other members. A slight turn of his head and a fleeting glance over his shoulder revealed that the other Mages had also fallen to the ground. Harry blinked again; he hadn’t heard a single noise when they had all moved!

Returning his gaze to the Lore Mistress and Hermione, he saw how deathly pale the pair was; their eyes lowered subserviently to the ground and arms hanging limply by their sides. A quick sweep of his gaze about him showed the very same expression and posture among the other Fae, Court member and Mage alike.

He heard a barely perceivable rustle and Harry looked back up to see the crowd had dropped immediately to their knees as well the instance the overwhelming magic touched them. He didn’t need to look closely; he was sure he would find that every single Fae would mirror the Lore Mistress, Hermione, the Fae Court and Mages. He refused to see the Weasleys in such a position.
Harry bit his bottom lip; locking away the words he wanted to shout. He wanted to tell them to get up; this wasn’t the King of Hell himself! Surely, the Devil would not bother to come personally. The Lore Mistress had told him that the King of Hell had not been seen since the forging of the Devil’s Deal millennia ago. Unless... a sense of dread rose in Harry. Was this a sign he was coming?

His swiftly flickering eyes met familiar blue eyes that lacked their cheerful twinkle. The High Mage offered him an understanding look before shaking his head slightly. Comprehending, Harry gritted his teeth and nodded curtly as the rising dread was washed away by relief. This, apparently, was normal.

Movement from the sky drew him out of his dark thoughts and Harry saw a pair of Fae land. Clad in the dress uniform of the Fae Guard, he recognized Amelia Bones and Kingsley Shacklebolt. Between them, held upright until he had found his footing was a middle-aged Human.

At his first sight of the creature, Harry found himself staring hard at the Human.

Neither tall or short, slightly pudgy and pale; the Human was unremarkable. His features were not very defined; small dark brown eyes, thin lips, a slightly large nose, barely noticeable cheekbones because of the beard covering his mouth and a square jaw, thick eyebrows and a mop of mousey brown hair.

He had been washed meticulously; the hair combed into a neat style, the beard expertly trimmed and was garbed in unadorned white robes of softest and finest silk. He wore a pair of golden sandals; showing big, fat and hairy feet.

What caught his eye, though, was a circlet of gold and rubies that sat atop his head. The stunning ornament effortlessly overshadowing the Human’s very plain appearance.

Harry knew that the diadem was a token worn by each Tithe; made by the greatest Fae craftsmen. The Fae spent seven years digging into the land and rocks of Great Haven to find the most perfect rubies to adorn each new circlet. The King of Hell was very fond of rubies and enjoyed a gift of the gems immensely.

*It probably helped appease him if this is the kind of Tithe we always send to him... are all Humans so...* Harry frowned, and gave a little but sharp shake of his head. Those thoughts were cruel; this was the first Human he had ever seen. It was exceedingly unfair and narrow-minded of him to be so harsh a judge of the creature. Appearance wasn’t the sum of an individual or an object after all.

Harry continued to inspect the offering and, in the end, found himself unimpressed in the slightest. He desperately hoped that the Human wasn’t going to be rejected...

Silently, the guards guided the Human forward.

Harry realized as he watched them approach that the Human was under thrall.

He wasn’t surprised; he imagined the man would have fought or fled if he realized what fate awaited him. Instead, the Human walked docilely and stopped when directed.

The ringing sound of a footfall nearly made Harry release a cry of surprise. Only training and discipline as a pupil under the High Mage had him catch himself. The loud clap was that of a hoof striking stone.

Whipping his head around, Harry watched in awe as a magnificent winged stallion appeared out of the pitch blackness of the cave. It was terrifying how the beautiful creature had simply appeared; a single luminously white leg stepping out of the mouth of the cave before the rest of the steed came...
Of all the creatures Harry expected to see, a pegasus was never one he would have thought the King of Hell would use. The pegasus glided elegantly past him and he realized it bore no saddle.

Moving forward at a relaxed but purposeful canter, the pegasus fixed his black eyes on the enchanted Human. When the steed was close to the Tithe, it knelt; one great feathered wing unfurling and presenting its back.

The Fae Guard once more guided the Human; positioning him securely atop the huge steed and having the thick hands grip the flowing snowy mane. Then, they stepped back when the Human was firmly ensconced and dropped to their knees and bowed their heads like all of the other Fae.

The pegasus rose so fluidly the man didn’t even sway in the slightest; wings shifting with a soft, shuffling noise. The obsidian eyes swept the crowd with startling intelligence before the steed turned gracefully; gaze fixing on the King and Queen.

Oberon nodded once. “The Tithe is met.”

The pegasus lowered itself on one foreleg in an elegant bow; hardly jostling its burden.

“Until the passing of another seven years.” Titania finished.

The rulers dipped their heads lowly in unison.

The steed straightened and trotted easily back the way it had come.

Stepping into the Hell’s Mouth without the slightest falter and disappearing into the blackness like a beautiful mirage.

The portal was already sealing itself even as the tip of its very long tail vanished into the abyss.

As the gap merged back into a line; a horrible scream of absolute terror and despair rang out.

But, the most bloodcurdling part of the cry was that intermingled with this howl was the feral, inhuman shriek of triumph.
The Aftermath

**Pounding heart leaping** up his throat, Harry swallowed dryly around the thick lump; barely catching himself from reacting outwardly to the unexpected and terrifying outcry. He locked his suddenly shaky legs into place; he would not let himself fall.

From the corner of his eye, he saw how Hermione crumpled; curling up on the rocky ground and covering her mouth as she shook visibly. Even the Lore Mistress sagged, her own weathered face somehow becoming even more ghastly white and taut. All around him, he could see many of the crowd collapse; very few of the Fae remained kneeling. Besides himself, only the Fae Monarchs and the High Mage were still on their feet; stoic and rigid. However, there was the faintest quiver in Titania’s willowy form.

The sounds of wracking sobs, harsh panting and strident whispers steadily increased in a growing clamor. The crowd seemed to come alive, as though awakening from a nightmare. It certainly felt like one to Harry.

Oberon and Titania waited patiently in silence; allowing their subjects to recover. Harry suspected this likely happened every time the ceremony took place. He was only too grateful that it was over and done with.

Until the next seven years come.

When a wavering calm fell, Oberon drew in a deep breath and declared sonorously. “The Tithe has been given; we have our peace. Come the dawn, we shall celebrate.” He regarded the throng. “Rejoice in what we have received. As we have before and shall continue to reap until none of us remains or the Devil’s Dead is broken.” He turned slightly, offering his hand to his Queen; she rested her fine-boned hand in his in a fluid gesture and the pair swept down the aisle; nodding to their subjects as they passed.

Once they reached the border of the forest, they unfurled their wings and leapt up into the night sky. Shortly, the Fae Guard rose and joined them, encircling the Fae monarchs in a half-moon formation.

Harry stared after them until the troupe was merely glittering points in the heavens, the crowd stirred and Fae began to depart quickly. The Lore Mistress helped Hermione to her feet and all but dragged her into the sky with her. It was clear that she wished to be as far from the Wall as possible in the shortest amount of time. Hermione was all too eager to obey. Harry looked over to where the Weasleys had stood and saw that they were already gone. He suspected Molly had likely herded them away; she had always been overprotective and very quick to act.

Strangely, the High Mage remained where he was; observing the Fae practically fleeing back towards Great Haven.

“Is it always like that?” Harry asked quietly. “The entire ceremony and… that scream?” His voice quivered and he shivered harshly as the chilling echo of the terrible cry reverberated in his mind.

There were several long heartbeats of profound silence. “Yes,” Dumbledore intoned with surprising flatness. "Always."

Harry flicked a glance towards his mentor and found the face still stony.

“I don’t understand; the Human was under the most powerful Enchantment charm I’ve ever
sensed…” he trailed off. “You were the one to cast the spell, I would recognize your Magical Signature anywhere; it shouldn’t have worn off so swiftly.”

Dumbledore’s grave visage cracked; a very tiny, lopsided smile lifted one corner of his mouth. “As astute as ever, my dear boy. You are correct; however, you did not take into account the effect of entering the Hell’s Mouth. When our magics first come in contact with the natural magical miasma that coats all of Hell, they are undone. The sudden shift between Realms unravels even the most powerful of our spells in moments. We do not know why this is so… but I have speculated that the King of Hell controls all of his demesne so tightly that only the magics he personally allows will ever work. I wish it was not so; it would have offered the Human some comfort if he had remained unaware until the very end.”

“So, you die once you enter that cave?” Harry pressed.

Dumbledore looked over to stare at the once more seamless wall of rock. “The King of Hell demands a life. It is unsurprising if he takes it once it enters the Hell’s Mouth; it is his right,” he paused and shrugged slowly. “However, we will never know the answer. He has never deigned to tell us what he does with the Tithes. And I pray that the King of Hell finds no reason to visit our people again; any such visit will be dire.”

Harry nodded, realizing belatedly that they were one of the very last who still stood by the Wall. “I’ll see you at the festival?”

“Yes,” his mentor flashed him the familiar warm smile he knew and Harry saw a muted twinkle reignite in the Ancient Fae’s blue eyes. “No lessons or work at all for the next few days. We both need it to recover.”

Harry inhaled deeply and nodded briskly. He quickly opened his wings; flapping them to ease the tension in his body.

“Ask for the Dreamless tonight before you sleep, Harry,” Dumbledore instructed suddenly. “You should not let your dreams be haunted by this. I know Molly; she’ll shove it down your throat so you are best served to simply take it when she offers. It will be most beneficial.”

Harry snorted and grinned. “Yes, I don’t doubt she would. I just hope she doesn’t overdose Ron and me later. Good night, High Mage Dumbledore. See you tomorrow!”

With the words still lingering behind him, he threw himself into the clear skies.

Letting the wind and his whim guide him, Harry circled Great Haven and the teeming forest around the city; the howl of the wind like an old friend shouting joyously in his ears. His mind was kept thankfully blank throughout this long flight; lost in the swift beating of his wings. It was a couple of hours later when he finally decided to return home; feeling a stab of guilt when he slipped into the toasty kitchen to find Molly still up and clearly waiting for him.

Silently, she rose and walked forward with purpose. She didn’t reprimand him at all for ignoring the curfew. Instead, she pulled the small Fae into a tight embrace. Harry stiffened at first then seem to sag; letting the last of his own still tangled emotions untwist inside him and calm completely. Afterwards, once she knew he had accepted and received all the comfort and support she could provide; she ushered him up into the bedroom he shared with Ron. Harry noticed Ron was already in his bed and fast asleep, from the lack of snores; he had likely been doused with the Dreamless. The peace on the redhead’s lax features finally eased the still lingering tiny knot in his chest.

Molly was thoughtful enough to turn around when he changed into his sleep wear; helping him hang
his formal robes properly so they didn’t wrinkle when he finished and getting the task done in half the time.

And, like she had done countless times when Harry had been a little Sprite; she guided him into bed before offering a tiny vial filled with a clear liquid. He didn’t protest but accepted the little bottle and drank the entire concoction in a single swallow; grimacing at the taste.

Molly sent him an amused smile and a soft chuckle; tucking him snugly under the covers and carding her fingers repeatedly through his untamable mane of black hair until the darkness pulled him under.

His last recollection of the long night was the murmur of “Good night, Harry.” and the brush of warm lips against his forehead.

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Seasons turned and the memory of that Samhain night faded from Harry’s foremost thoughts; buried under many, much happier moments as life moved onwards.

And, with it; the inevitable, irrevocable, indubitable march of years.

To a Fae, the passing of one year is not even the blink of an eye.

The end of seven years is less than a single breath.
Elemental Magics

Five large, brilliantly glowing orbs, like miniature suns, ringed Harry; hovering level with his chest. Rippling Blue for the Element of Water.

Solid Green for the Element of Earth.

Swirling White for the Element of Air.

Roiling Red for the Element of Fire.

Pulsating Black speckled with Gold and Silver like the starry sky on a moonless night for the Element of Void.

Arms outstretched on either side of him and palms up towards the said orbs, the small Fae’s face scrunched up in clear effort; his emerald eyes narrowed as his brows furrowed faintly. The perfectly round spheres flared and began to thrum steadily, matching the pulse of his own heart. Slowly, so very slowly, they began to rotate; orbiting him in slightly uneven paths. If there had been any witnesses the sight would have been mesmerizing as each orb trailed lines of its element in its wake; forming curving streaks of myriad colors and shapes. Harry squinted and saw this, glowered in annoyance and willed the spheres to straighten in their weaving loops.

Once again, they obeyed but with even more reluctance. Beads of sweat bloomed on his forehead and slid down over his features as he struggled. When he was satisfied, Harry readied himself for the next part. He guided Water to Earth and wordlessly commanded them to merge; inhaling sharply as the Elements resisted him. Gradually, the spheres combined into a single marble of Solid Green interspersed with flowing rivulets of crystalline, rippling Blue.

Staring at his creation with pride for several minutes, he also checked to make sure there were no imperfections. When he was assured there were none; Harry switched his focus to Fire and Air; these two were effortless to meld, the orb forged was a stunning and intricately delicate-looking sphere crafted out of fine blazing chains of Fire where the flames were guided and contained to create the mesh-like design by glimmering white funnels of Air. Studying this, Harry could tell it was as perfectly fused as his first attempt with Earth and Water.

He let himself inspect and admire his handiwork for several minutes before once again moving on.

Taking a deep breath, Harry let it out slowly, counting the steady beats of his heart and began to separate first the Earth and Water then the Fire and Air. This took nearly as much time as uniting the Elements. When five orbs hovered before him again; Harry stared at all of them intently; watching as they floated close, the starry sky-hued sphere of Void becoming the center of the five, each sphere taking up a point. Carefully, Harry let half of each element slide into the Void; creating a rainbow of colors and textures. While not as effortless as his merging of Fire and Air; the interweaving of each Element individually to the Void orb was still far easier than what he knew he needed to do next. He held the joined spheres for a measured amount of time; far longer than the first two attempts before slowly separating them.

When he finished freeing the four Elements from the Void orb successfully, Harry took a brief break and rolled his stiff shoulders, wiping away the small waterfall of sweat dampening his forehead, face and neck. Cleaning his hand off his slightly dirty and soaked robes, the raven-haired Fae peered at the patiently waiting sphere.
Gesturing, Harry summoned the Void orb and unraveled the Element; he rewove the strands into several layers; casting the most powerful protective Void spells he knew so far.

*Better safe than sorry,* he told himself firmly. He tested his wards and nodded once in satisfaction as they held.

Pointing at the remaining Elements, Harry decided on working with the ‘less dangerous’ pair first. Sliding Earth and Air together, Harry began to interweave the two naturally opposing forces.

And, of course, they resisted aggressively.

Air shrieked in refusal as Earth rumbled in denial. Gritting his teeth, Harry imposed his will and watched closely. Seconds crawled by with no change… until, with a petulant whine and long-suffering grumble, the Elements merged. The sphere looked much like the sphere of Fire and Air but instead of chains of twisting fire, it was strings of differently shaped spinning pebbles held aloft by currents of air. Breathing heavily, Harry grinned broadly at his achievement. He didn’t take as long to merge them, and it wasn’t as hard as it used to be. He scrutinized the orb, hoping there would be no flaws.

There were none.

Harry’s grin only broadened and he filed away how he felt and thought so he could replicate the act on his next practice. Relaxing his will on the sphere, Harry intently began to separate the Elements with absolute caution. Splitting them apart too quickly or carelessly could be as highly explosive as merging them incorrectly. Earth and Air would never join without some Void to interconnect them and if there was too much Void or too little, the result could be catastrophic.

This warning firmly in mind, Harry took more time with this than the combination as he also wanted to do the sequence correctly and perfectly.

It was only when the Earth and Air spheres hovered before him again in their original forms did Harry relax. He banished them, closely following his mentor’s instructions in this act. Residual Elemental Magic was deadly in its own right. In fact, Elemental Magics were downright deadly. It was why so very few Fae touched any Element but Earth. It was exceedingly rare for a Fae to have an Elemental affinity that was not Earth. Moreso, if the Fae had two or more affinities. High Mage Albus Dumbledore had been a magical prodigy with the Elemental Affinities of Air and Water, aside from the natural Elemental Affinity of Earth that all Fae shared.

Then, Harry had come along with not three but four Elemental Affinities. And of the four elements he could master, two of them were undisputedly the most powerful and volatile. Harry recalled how High Mage Dumbledore then Hermione had speculated that he inherited the Elemental affinities of Air and Fire from his father and mother. As James Potter had an unparalleled Elemental Affinity of Air; it explained why he was such a superb flier—and the consummate prankster. Lily Potter, on the other hand, possessed the rarest Elemental Affinity possible for a Fae: Fire. Her mastery of the Element was legendary and was said to be the reason her temper was so utterly terrifying that no one dared raise her ire. The fourth Elemental Affinity he had, as far as Hermione thought, was likely his own unique Element.

Harry snorted as he mulled over how right his close friend was. An Elemental Affinity for Void was extraordinary. It was an Element far removed from even the Ancient Fae as it was a realm and power outside of their natural demesne. While all Fae could touch and utilize the Void to a certain extent, the ability to manipulate it solely was impossible without the Elemental Affinity. There was only one other Fae who had the Elemental Affinity aside from himself… Shaking his head slightly, Harry
refocused on the last, hardest part of his practice for the day. Now was not the time to become distracted or negligent.

Peering at the calmly floating orbs of Fire and Water, Harry was not fooled by the placidity. He had no affinity with Water whatsoever. Which was rather sad, as it was one of his mentor’s Elemental Affinities. While he could, with considerable struggle, wrangle Fire under his control (if just barely); coaxing Water to cooperate with him was like trying to understand the minds of the Fae females.

Meaning, nigh close to impossible.

Unfortunately, Harry knew he needed to learn this. If he couldn’t even merge and unravel Elements at their most basic and pure forms; the Ancient Fae Magical Craft of Elemental Combination would be beyond his reach and that was one of his greatest passions when he started learning Elemental Magics under the High Mage Albus Dumbledore. Not so significant to him was that if he could not perform Elemental Combinations, he would never attain the rank of High Mage.

Raking a hand through his messy, sweat-damp hair, Harry returned his mind to the matter at hand.

Checking to make sure his wards were still up and sound, the aspiring Fae High Mage cautiously and precisely began to push the orbs together.

Resistance was instant and especially vicious.

The sphere of Fire twisted madly and the sphere of Water churned violently. Seeing the inevitable rejection of the opposing Elements, Harry hastily added Void; measuring then sending the sable-speckled gold and silver tendrils out to command and soothe. Once he had succeeded in this, he began to control and entice. A new wave of perspiration burst from his forehead and cascaded down his face and neck, drenching the front of his robes. He didn’t look away, emerald eyes narrowed from concentration and exertion.

The merge did not begin. Harry found it incredibly hard to both demand and request simultaneously but, unfortunately, that was what was needed to interweave Fire and Water. He juggled the dual and contrasting desires precariously for several long,grueling seconds when he seemed to find a compromise and, finally, the orbs melded.

Harry stared, refusing to ease his will as a lone orb shaped itself.

It truly was a breathtaking sight.

Nowhere in nature could this be replicated without magic.

A sphere of crystalline streams interspersed with coils of flame. The shape was that of an intricate lattice that was close to his earlier efforts with Earth and Air but entirely its own unique design.

Holding this sphere in shape felt nearly impossible; where Earth and Air could be shaped to form and guided; Fire never surrendered and Water needed to be constantly cajoled. Remembering his lessons, Harry silently counted; to gain mastery, he needed to keep the interwoven elements together for a certain amount of time before releasing them. Each attempt lasting longer and longer.

To build focus and skill, according to the High Mage.

To torture yourself, according to Ron.

Harry’s mouth twitched and he quickly banished the memory of his best friend and foster brother. He didn’t need any distractions right now!
When he reached the final number, Harry began the meticulous task of untangling the knots. Sadly, this was more difficult and dangerous as to do so too fast could cause a magical blast that was twice as powerful as if the Elements had rejected each other initially.

Harry knew there was a very detailed treatise on the reasons for this but he was a little too preoccupied to recall the facts...

His breaths strained as the act of splitting the Elements slowed to a sluggish pace. He knew he was so drenched by sweat, he would definitely need a bath or at least a Cleansing charm afterwards.

Briefly, a thought flitted across his mind; another reason this was also so exhausting was the time it took to complete the task. It was like holding your muscles for hours in a certain position while carrying a heavy weight… although, it was all in your mind and soul.

When he felt the first string of Fire in the tightly bound orb finally pull free, Harry nearly cheered aloud. He refrained; telling himself he’d celebrate after he had succeeded in completing the task.

He watched closely until he saw the first strand of Water; his breathing eased noticeably. This meant he was on the right track. The orb was unraveling at a good rate, gracefully fluttering coils of Water and Fire waving about as they parted; the sight was quite stunning and dangerously distracting but Harry remained riveted on his goal.

“Great Haven, that’s so beautiful!” A sudden voice practically beside him exclaimed loudly and startled him.

Horrified, Harry felt then saw his careful grip suddenly flail, waver and vanish. Swearing, he threw up both hands and reinforced his Void Ward as he wound it around the formerly calm orbs.

He watched in dread as the now wildly swirling spheres seemed to merge back together shortly, the lone orb compressing into half its original size before expanding sharply into a large ball and then ripping itself apart to form the two spheres again in a devastating surge of Elemental power. The roar of a vast bonfire and the thunder of a towering tidal wave rose to a crescendo before Harry’s Void Ward muffled the deafening tumult.

“CLOSE YOUR EYES!” He hollered before doing so himself just as he felt the clash of the two Elements hit their peak. He could see the flashes of brilliant lights even behind his eyelids and his entire lithe frame shook from the forces tearing into each other.

Blinded, Harry felt the entire palace shudder lightly in the aftermath.

Oberon and Titania are going to rib me for this latest mishap for months! And, Dumbledore is going to give me a long lecture about better control and concentration then assign more ‘simple’ exercises to help me concentrate and maintain it! It’s so unfair! He inwardly whined at the injustice of it. It really wasn’t his fault this time, really!

Reaching out cautiously with his Magical Senses, Harry continued to keep the Void Ward raised and at full strength until he could detect no more Elemental magic; not even any lingering magical residue.

He doublechecked this before finally dropping the shield and wheeling around.

“Hermione!” he snapped.

“I’m sorry! I’m so sorry,” the brown-haired Fae cried, looking absolutely contrite and her hands
were uplifted placatingly. “I didn’t mean to distract you so badly…” she offered him a weak, sheepish half-smile. “At least, you didn’t blow up the wing of the Palace. Unlike the first few times, right?”

Crossing his arms, Harry rolled his eyes and huffed in exasperation. “Oh, that makes me feel so much better! I haven’t blown up anything in years,” he groused, fixing her with a mild glower. “Until now.” Peering at her, he added, still clearly irritated but with a touch of concern. “Are you alright? And, why are you even here?”

Wringing her hands, Hermione shuffled. “I’m fine. I was hoping we could meet and chat for a while; we haven’t really seen each other lately. Ron is so busy himself now that he’s found his calling and been so caught up in his training. He hasn’t visited me for so long…”

Harry stared at her, his kind heart twinging at the great distress and loneliness he could see in the features on one of his oldest and closest friends. He sighed, releasing his remaining annoyance towards her with his breath. Gifting her with a forgiving smile, he strode over and pulled her into a one-armed hug and kissed her temple affectionately before withdrawing swiftly; mindful of his sweaty and dirty state.

“Sure, we can sit and just talk. You’re right, we haven’t seen each other for several months outside of our lessons and duties. Let me clean up first, both the room and I need it.”

He swept his critical gaze around the Workroom. His Void Ward was definitely getting stronger; the wards on the Workroom hadn’t been touched. Although, there was still a large blackened crater filled with murky water in the middle of the Spell Circle.

Hermione edged closer to peer down at the new pond. “You’ve really come far. Fire and Water merging are the hardest Elements to combine.”

“Moreso for me, too,” Harry nodded forlornly. “I think Water hates me.”

“It does not!” Hermione scoffed. “You just had a few bad experiences with the Element. Especially, cold water. I blame the twins for that!”

Harry hummed agreeably. Yes, Fred and George hadn’t helped him at all. It was surprising to discover that the Weasley twins had an Elemental Affinity for Water and not Air like so many had expected. Molly had been beyond relieved.

Raising his hands, Harry first used Water to clean the deep pit until the gray hue of the stone was clearly seen. Afterwards, he easily heated the Water of the little pool and gathered up the vapor and the black particles of the soot and dirt with Air; sending the black mist and dust out of the Workroom via one of the many large windows and into the gardens and grounds of the palace. Carefully, he reshaped the stone with Earth, filling out the hole and polishing it until there was nothing but an unmarked, smooth stone floor. Lastly, he used Earth and Void to rewrite the protective runes for the restored Spell Circle.

With another several graceful gestures, Harry restored the Workroom to its neat and orderly state; ready for the next Mage who may want to make use of the chamber. Satisfied, he glanced down at himself and grimaced at the sight of his filthy robes. With a nearly negligent flick of his wrist, he cast first a Cleansing Charm and then a Refreshening Charm over himself; mixing Water and Air for the little cantrips.

Finished, he turned to his friend.
Hermione had been watching silently when he met her gaze; he could see the quiet admiration and awe in her intelligent brown eyes.

““It’s really incredible watching you work Elemental Magics, you know,” she said needlessly. “I’ve seen Memories of our Ancestors, being the Apprentice to the Lore Mistress, and you cast so much more smoothly than even some of our most powerful Mages of old!”

Harry only smiled lopsidedly; feeling the familiar burn of a blush heating his cheeks. “Thanks, Hermione, but I still have a very long way to go.” He never handled praise well, the more lavish, the more flustered he became. Secretly, he knew that his friends and teachers constantly complimented him because they enjoyed seeing him become so embarrassed, aside from showing their true feelings of pride and admiration over his talents. Harry had tried his best to take it into stride so they’d ease off but, so far, he had failed miserably.

To distract her and himself, he stretched out a hand and clasped her wrist; winking playfully. “Now, let’s get going; I don’t want to stick around here. I know I’m going to be in for a long lecture about what happened earlier even if I fixed everything so I’d prefer to pass on that right now. Plus, knowing my mentor; he’s going to give me ‘extra exercises’ as punishment to help practice my concentration. The King and Queen will probably have something to say too!”

Hermione giggled. “Oh, I don’t think you need to worry about that for a while,” she assured him.

Harry raised an eyebrow at her dubiously. “Why?”

“It’s why I’m free myself,” Hermione informed him, her cheerful expression dimming slightly. “The King, the Queen, the Fae Council, the High Mage, the Mages and the Lore Mistress are in session.”

Harry frowned faintly. “They rarely have full sessions; in fact, the only time they’ve had a full—” he broke off, bright emerald eyes widening.

Hermione nodded slowly, pained. “It’s been seven years.”

“The Goblet of Fire!” Harry breathed out. “They’re meeting to see what family is chosen this time.”

His friend jerked her head in a half-nod. “Yes. The Lore Mistress forbade me from attending the Reckoning. She said that I would not be in attendance until at least my first half-century.”

Harry gave a noise of mild derision. “Why wait so long? I’m surprised I didn’t get to attend either or was even told about it at all.”

“In their eyes, we’re both still children,” Hermione pointed out.

“A valid point, I suppose,” Harry conceded begrudgingly.

He walked towards the door, Hermione falling into step beside him as the pair of them exited and meandered towards the kitchen. He wasn’t really complaining either; while the memory of the Samhain night seven years ago rose easily from the depths of his mind, he had no wish to remember the ceremony.

He would be witnessing the ritual again soon enough.

Laden with a generous basket of all their favorite foods—it certainly paid to be on very good terms with the servants and cooks, Harry mused—Hermione and he found a slightly shaded spot
underneath a massive oak in one of the many gardens of the Palace. A merrily babbling brook nearby only made the spot more idyllic and relaxing. No other Fae seemed to be about so they enjoyed the peace and solitude. They spread out the picnic blanket and sat down beside each other, laying out their little feast.

“How’s Ron? Have you been able to see him at all?” Hermione nibbled on her sandwich. “I saw him three weeks ago, with his mentor; they were headed to the Training Grounds. I was looking out the window of the library when I spotted him. He looked tired and thinner!”

“Coping,” Harry grinned, taking a measured bite of his own sandwich. Seasons spent attending formal Fae Court banquets had ingrained manners Harry both appreciated and detested. Ron and the twins never failed to mock him over them too.

“Oh, that bad already?” Hermione looked gleefully unsympathetic.

“Yes.” Harry said, smirking.

Ron had discovered he was very talented in Offensive and Defensive Earth Elemental Magic; making him a prime candidate for the Fae Guard. Arthur had easily gotten him an apprenticeship with the most renowned Fae Guard Captain in Great Haven. Ron couldn’t stop boasting how he was the Fae’s first ever pupil.

It was only when Ron begun training under this Fae did they find out why he never took on students. To say the least, he was extremely… eccentric on a level that was radically different from High Mage Albus Dumbledore. Alastor Moody not only lived up to his fearsome reputation; he far exceeded it. Ron, who normally didn’t write, was sending him a letter once every three days. He was frankly impressed his friend had found the time to pen such long missives…

Reading them carefully, Harry knew that Ron, despite all his loud complaints, was happy that he had found his niche. He also knew that the real and greatest reason his best friend was valiantly enduring the apprenticeship and determinedly pursuing a position in the Fae Guard. They were tasked with protecting the Fae Monarchs and, especially, the Lore Mistress and her apprentice.

Harry knew Ron was dearly hoping to be assigned to protect a certain Lore Mistress-in-training once he finished his own tutelage. This could take a few good decades to a couple of centuries, the black-haired Fae estimated. Not a very long time among the Fae, and Ron was being amazingly patient and very determined in attaining his goal.

However, with how oblivious Hermione was when it came to Ron and his feelings; Harry suspected that Ron would have to wait longer than a few centuries before Hermione even noticed him in the way he wanted. Unless, he changed his approach to courting her. Ginny had once pointed out shrewdly that if Ron was going for subtle and slow; he’d be unmated for millennia, not centuries.

“I miss this,” said Hermione abruptly, a little wistful; drawing Harry away from his musings. he shifted to meet her soft gaze. “I know we have many duties and obligations because we chose these paths. We must work hard to be worthy of them. But that doesn’t change the fact it feels like we’re taking up more than we can handle sometimes.”

“Ask for a break,” Harry suggested. “The High Mage says there’s no rush; we’re young so we’re impatient to be on par with our elders already. But, if it becomes too much; we can step back and slow down. They won’t hold it against us. I’ve heard about your own accomplishments, ‘Mione. The Lore Mistress can’t stop telling us how well you’ve learned the First Memories already when it would take at least a decade for most. You’ve done it in five. I know you’ve been teaching the new Sprites for the last three years as well as even those of our Spring.”
Hermione flushed in pleasure. “The First Memories are so wonderful! To see the origins of the Fae and what heights of Culture and Magic we achieved in the old days…”

“Yes, I do like how you Tell it,” Harry leaned forward and added in a conspiratorial whisper. “I think you do a far better job than the Lore Mistress Bagshot.”

“Harry!” Hermione gasped and swatted him. “I do not! I still have so much trouble with the Memory Magic!”

“Sure,” Harry snorted disbelievingly. “And I can’t cast sole Element Spells.”

“You are impossible!” she retorted but her eyes were sparkling and there was a bright smile on her lips. “I know it’s only been several years but, yes, everything happens so fast.”

“You mean it’s shocking to realize the Tithe is due again.”

Hermione’s wide smile dropped away. “Yes.”

Harry idly let his eyes wander over the gardens; summer was departing and, looking closely, he could see that autumn had already begun creeping in. The once verdant green leaves showed hints of encroaching browns, reds and yellows.

“I wonder what poor family will have the task this time?” Hermione murmured.

“Whoever they are, may all of the Fae Magics bless them,” Harry answered quietly but with conviction.

“I wish we could help somehow,” she confessed.

“We’re too young,” Harry shook his head. “I asked the High Mage if I could, years ago, right after seeing the ceremony. He told me that Fae younger than a century, even at times two centuries, are forbade from taking part in the Reckoning. We’re still growing into ourselves and our powers; to enter the Aboveground could have adverse effects on us and we may end up hindering the others instead of helping them.”

“I see.” Hermione looked very disappointed and dejected.

Harry reached over and interlaced their fingers, squeezing her hand gently, reassuringly. “It will be alright.”

She returned the gesture, beaming as she met his eyes. “Yes, it will. So, what have you been up to? I’ve heard so much gossip about you!”

Harry groaned. “Why am I not surprised. Fine, but first you tell me about what you’ve been up to lately. Then, we’ll swap the crazy rumors we’ve heard about each other.”

“Deal!” Hermione grinned impishly. “Afterwards, I’ll let you know what Ron has been writing to me about.”

“Fair trade, I’ll do the same.” Harry’s mouth matched her grin with a smirk of his own.

The rest of the afternoon flew by as the pair of close friends caught up.

“I can explain!” Harry started immediately upon stepping into the chambers of the High Mage and
“I imagine you can,” his mentor chuckled good-naturedly. “You haven’t been so careless in years, my boy.”

Harry grinned sheepishly and launched into the retelling of the accident in the Workroom; he didn’t embellish too much but he did add some details to stretch out the tale. The High Mage listened patiently, occasionally chuckling quietly at some points and was free with his lavish compliments when he discovered his pupil’s successes.

“So… in short, your loss of control was the result of you being distracted by the arrival of Apprentice Lore Mistress, Hermione,” Dumbledore concluded.

“Yes.” Harry nodded gravely, hands clasped in front of him where he now sat on the sofa facing his mentor in the luxurious sitting room of his apartment. They had moved the conversation to the array of large, wonderfully comfy couches and armchairs scattered about the chamber.

The Ancient Fae rubbed his bearded chin in thought. “While Hermione should have taken some consideration to what exactly you would be doing in a Workroom; the fact she so easily derailed your concentration is problematic. Additionally, she was able to enter the Workroom without your knowledge or awareness also informs me you failed to set up certain basic Wards. A fundamental error.”

Inwardly, Harry groaned; knowing exactly what his mentor would say next.

“This is a clear sign you still lack the foresight and discipline needed.” Predictably, he was right. “I want you to return to the fundamentals this coming month.”

Harry didn’t conceal his loud moan. “All the fundamentals?” he knew his tone was nearly whining.

Dumbledore smiled. “All.” He intoned in a voice that told the young Fae he was resolute. “With special focus on the basics of meditation before you proceed to the advanced meditation techniques I taught you. Also, I wish you to end with meditation under high pressure. Lastly, do memorize the proper steps before even beginning Elemental Combinations inside a Workroom. You forgot a crucial step and Hermione might have gotten hurt, aside from yourself.”

Oh, marvelous! Harry thought with no little disgust and dismay. Self-inflicted torture as Ron so aptly calls it.

The High Mage easily read the look on his apprentice’s face. “It will do you a world of good, Harry.”

“Yes, yes… I understand, High Mage,” Harry sighed, resigned before perking up. “Can’t I just do it for two weeks instead of a whole month? That’s twenty-eight days!”

Dumbledore shook his head firmly. “No, Harry.” The familiar edge in his voice returning. “I will not risk you because you have a poor foundation for your mind and your soul. Don’t worry, my boy; your Magical talent and advancement will not suffer in the slightest. You’ve reached levels of Elemental power and control Fae centuries older than you have never achieved!”

Harry heaved another deep sigh. “Yes, High Mage.”

He studied his mentor but the Ancient Fae was inscrutable, however, his instincts still stirred slightly. Something was amiss.
“Before I start on this month-long training regime, may I visit the Weasleys? I haven’t seen them in over two weeks,” the raven-haired Fae found himself asking suddenly. He might not see Ron at home but he did miss the other Weasleys too. He really could use a break after all and this seemed like the perfect time to ask.

Harry would have missed the slight widening of Albus Dumbledore’s eyes if he wasn’t staring at the High Mage so intently.

“No, I think it is best you start your regime tomorrow,” his mentor said slowly. “This is a punishment after all, Harry. As much as I applaud your achievements; the mishap this afternoon should have been avoided. I wish your sworn oath you will complete this task set before you.”

The raven-haired Fae pursed his lips in discontent, the pit of his stomach twisted abruptly. It was well within his mentor’s rights to demand this of him. He was the apprentice of the High Mage and he had the obligation to obey such commands, especially when it pertained to his Magical training. On a certain level, the High Mage really should have Harry revisit the basics to fortify his foundations. His lapse had been an elementary mistake and one he should never have committed in the first place. If it was ignored, it may result in a deadlier error occurring in the future. But he wondered why the High Mage had refused to let him visit the Weasleys… He had never denied Harry’s requests to see his foster family before.

Yes, something was wrong.

Unfortunately, he could not go to them until he completed his mentor’s order. He doubted Dumbledore would simply accept his word.

“Yes, High Mage,” He muttered finally, feeling resentment slice down his spine as the Magical Oath took hold.

“Good, off to bed,” Dumbledore said gently. “You have to start bright and early tomorrow.”

Obediently, Harry rose and inclined his head. “Goodnight, High Mage.”

“Sleep well, Harry.” Dumbledore’s voice floated after him just as the door to his bedroom closed.

He would hurry to complete this training regime before the end of the month and he’d do it properly too! Harry vowed to himself as he readied for bed. He wouldn’t allow himself to be in such a position again.

More importantly, he needed to see the Weasleys as soon as he could.
It was three long weeks of tedious and grueling training before Harry could tell his Magic felt it had satisfied all of the Magical Oath’s obligations. As soon as he felt this settle in his chest, he had wasted no time in slipping out of the palace and flying over to the Weasley treehouse.

He had used the time very well, indeed.

Begrudgingly, he had to admit, he learned a great deal with this return to the fundamentals of Fae Magics. He had grown exponentially in his mastery over focus and concentration as well as casting more complex spells of each Element and when combining the opposing Elements together. He was now very confident he wouldn’t lose control easily. Interspersed with this, Harry trained himself in certain spells he needed to get out of the palace undetected.

He had observed how edgy the Fae had become in the last week. The tranquility of Great Haven had vanished; it was very well concealed but Harry had been keeping a careful eye on everything. He wondered now how he could have missed this air of fear and anxiety seven years ago.

He had discovered that Hermione had been kept very busy as well. Strangely, she had voiced no concern over this when they had a brief meeting in the library. Harry wasn’t too surprised she had missed the emotions rife in the city. His best friend was rather obtuse when it came to feelings of any kind. Instinct and emotion had been more Harry’s specialty. Ron had been called insensitive on too many occasions to count so Harry expected his best friend and foster brother would have missed the signs too. Hermione and Ron would be a very interesting couple, indeed. If they ever became one; Harry wasn’t making any wages. He had no desire to lose.

Deciding he shouldn’t trouble Hermione with his own gnawing fear and worry, Harry devoted all of his free time to sharpening his skills and research. After all, that was exactly what his mentor wanted from him.

It was mid-afternoon when Harry crept stealthily out of the palace; he kept one part of his Magical Senses trained on his mentor’s Magical Signature. Harry just knew that if Dumbledore found him idle; he would assign some errand.

Once he was deep in the gardens, he made a show of taking a nap underneath his favorite holly tree. When the Fae Guard who patrolled this part of the grounds passed by him; Harry straightened and quickly cast his first spell.

He had never been more grateful that Air was one of his Elemental Affinities.

Air was the Element of Speed and Illusion. It was one of the reasons his father was unmatched in the sky and had been such a brilliant trickster. Air could weave the most intricate deceptions. He put his own talent to use now, crafting an illusion of himself dozing. He knew that he wouldn’t be disturbed for at least two hours by the guard. More than enough time for a quick visit to assure himself that the Weasleys were fine and he was worrying over nothing.

He added a small cantrip that would alert him if the illusion was touched. As physical contact with his creation would dispel the illusion instantly. Harry hadn’t quite mastered the Earth and Air spell for a solid illusion yet. He was very close, though, thanks to his intensive training but he didn’t trust himself to hold such an image for the two hours.

Checking over his illusion and finding it so lifelike, Harry almost touched it to see if it was actually
solid but managed to stop himself. He didn’t want to remake it. Afterwards, Harry spun Air and Fire around his body; this was the signature spell of his father. James Potter could hide himself so thoroughly that no one would realize he was there unless he wished them to know. It was a very unique and exceedingly difficult spell to cast. Unlike the solely Air Elemental Spell of Disillusion. The Combined Spell of Air and Fire made it very resilient to detection and the spell itself was so flawless no one could find anyone under the spell unless they wanted to be found. Harry had learned the enchantment when he was hardly more than a sprite and, while he wasn’t quite the trickster at heart as his father had been, he had put it to very good use.

Just like now.

Harry sped home; heartbeat rising sharply as he neared the familiar great tree. 


The silence was eerie and Harry reached out with his Magical Senses.

No Weasley had been in the treehouse for a little less than three weeks.

Harry brushed up against the new unfamiliar, additional spells he could also feel; instantly recognizing who had laid them and what was their purpose.

Bill had been the one to cast the spells. Out of all the Weasleys, his Defensive Earth Elemental Magic was the most potent. While any Fae could enter a home in Great Haven, it was considered the height of rudeness to do so without invitation or when the host was not present. The protective wards around the home had been reinforced. However, what was more disturbing to him was the second batch of enchantments. They were Household charms to keep the residence clean and fresh, laid out by Molly.

The Weasleys had clearly left for a long trip.

Why? And why hadn’t they told him they were leaving?

A frown slowly overtook his face, and his eyes narrowed in contemplation.

No one had been to the treehouse nearly the same number of days he had been confined to the palace; it wasn’t a coincidence.

Abruptly, Harry’s heart stuttered.

There was only one reason a Fae family would leave Great Haven.

The Reckoning.

The Weasleys’ name must have been chosen by the Goblet of Fire.

“No …” Harry whispered in horrified realization.

High Mage Albus Dumbledore had willfully kept the knowledge of this from him.

Why?!

With a roar of fury, Harry hurled himself into the air; racing back towards the palace. He commanded the winds around him to aid and increase his mad flight so he darted across the horizon so swiftly it was nearly dizzying even for him. Harry hardly registered this discomfort; his rage so great it was like a red tint had fallen over his eyes.
The Elements around him roiled, poised and eager to answer his call. Harry silently thanked his newly gained control and restraint; he suspected if he hadn’t trained so rigorously these last few weeks; he may have leveled the palace the instance he passed over the gardens. From there, he raced to the apartments of the High Mage and burst inside with a furious scream of his mentor’s name.

The High Mage didn’t even twitch despite the potent magic suffusing the world around him. Instead, he calmly set down his tea cup at the violent arrival of his pupil and rose from where he had been sitting; enjoying his afternoon tea from the looks of it. He met the glowing gaze of Harry Potter without shame or hesitation.

“Arthur and Molly Weasley specifically dictated that neither you or Hermione Granger were to be informed of The Reckoning,” Dumbledore proclaimed with all the poise and power of his station. Harry bared his teeth, his fury doused slightly by the spike of betrayal he felt at this revelation. “Why?!”

“Because this did not involve either of you.”

His anger spiking again, Harry opened his mouth but before he could speak, the High Mage lifted a palm to forestall him.

“The Reckoning is a deeply personal matter. It is why every single Family chosen has only sought aid from those who are closest to them or decide to keep the affair within the Family.”

“The Weasleys are my family!” Harry snapped.

“No, they are not.” Surprisingly, Dumbledore disputed his claim and with a great deal of firmness. “They raised you and loved you as their own, yes. While I believe that Molly would have done so even if she had not been personally requested by your mother; facts are irrefutable. You are not a Weasley; you are a Potter. The very last of this Ancient line.”

Harry reared back slightly but forged onwards obstinately. “But I’m as much a Weasley as I am a Potter!”

“You are one, I will admit, and I know that all of the Weasleys see you as such,” the High Mage conceded and soothed. “But, the Goblet of Fire does not count you as a Weasley. And, even if it had, you are too young to take part in the Reckoning.”

The churning fire of wrath and betrayal lodged in his chest still smoldered. “I should have been told!” he insisted bitterly.

Dumbledore gestured patiently for Harry to take a seat; the younger Fae obeyed very reluctantly. “You should have; I questioned Arthur and Molly in their decision but they were adamant and so their wishes took precedence. After your rather explosive reaction, I now understand their decision.”

Harry scowled viciously, arms crossing over his chest. “What’s that supposed to mean?!”

Dumbledore merely smiled slightly and sat; taking up his teacup again and took a sip before continuing. “You reacted precisely how Molly predicted. She said you would fly into a rage, then demand you be allowed to help and, true to your nature, would attempt to provide all the aid you could even if you were specifically ordered not to. Arthur and Molly know you very well indeed, Harry.”

The young Fae glared fiercely down at the unoffending coffee table in front of him. Yes, he would have employed all of his Magical talent and cunning to help them. Whether they had wanted such
help or not. He owed the Weasleys so much; the very idea of standing by idle as they undertook the
deadliest quest any of the Fae could face left him seething.

“Secondly, I am happy to see how well you used the last three weeks. I do not think Oberon or
Titania would be happy if the palace was damaged, especially now. They have so many concerns
occupying them already.”

Harry’s face flushed in mortification. “…” he gritted his teeth and persisted. “You should have told
me after they left then!”

“And caused you to fly into a fury and worry yourself sick while waiting for them to return? It serves
no good for anyone,” the High Mage pointed out mildly. “Sit down, Harry. Have some tea, it will
help you calm down.”

Huffing, Harry stalked over to his favorite chair and reluctantly plopped himself into it; a perfectly
prepared teacup floating over to him as he sank into the familiar, comfortable cushions. He snatched
the porcelain container out of the air, the liquid inside sloshing dangerously from his sharp movement
and he willed himself to calm; he didn’t want to burn himself. Blowing lightly to cool the drink, he
took a careful sip and relished the delicious warmth of his favorite brew. The High Mage kept his
own silence as the pair drank. Harry let his anger simmer and slowly ebb away; Dumbledore was
right. It served no purpose.

“Does Hermione not have the slightest clue?” He finally ventured.

“Thankfully, she is entirely ignorant. While we do believe she has some suspicions; dear Bathilda
has managed to keep her distracted with teaching her the first of the High Memories.”

“Clever,” Harry gave a little chuckle. “Hermione has been looking forward to learning those for the
last year now. She’ll be so caught up learning them; she’ll miss everything happening around her.”

“Yes, Bathilda has become quite adept with handling her apprentice. I, on the other hand, would
likely never be as skilled,” Dumbledore demurred, his blue eyes twinkling.

Harry smirked. “You’re getting better, High Mage. It did take me a few weeks to figure it out.”

“Yes, but you already knew something was amiss from nearly the beginning. I doubt your request to
visit the Weasleys was as random as you made it sound when you asked me,” Dumbledore sighed
deeply. “You inherited far too many of your parents’ gifts; Lily was nearly impossible to deceive as
well.”

Harry’s smirk broadened into a full grin. He loved hearing how much like his mother he was. He
loved his father dearly, yes, but ever since he had heard what happened to them in the Longbottom
Reckoning; he had believed himself to be more of his mother’s son then his father’s.

“No, it wasn’t a sudden urge,” Harry admitted. “I had a bad feeling while I was talking with
Hermione that day and decided to act on it. Who went Aboveground and who joined them?”

Dumbledore stared down into his teacup for a long silence. Harry steeled himself; he knew he wasn’t
going to like what he would hear next.

“The Weasleys were offered aid from many Families. Most notably, the Tonks, the Shacklebolts, the
McKinnons, the Diggorys, the Prewetts and the Corners. However, after speaking with the other
Families who volunteered, they decided to do it entirely by themselves.”

A deadly chill raced down Harry spine. “Who went?” He asked again, but, already had a very good
idea who had gone.

“Arthur, Molly, William, Charles, Percy, Fred and George Weasley.”

Harry’s eyes slid shut momentarily and he drew a long, steadying breath. “That’s nearly the whole family!” he turned to glare at his mentor.

“Yes, there were many who vehemently protested their final roster, I included.”

Looking pensive, Dumbledore held out his teacup; the nearby pot levitating up and refilling the mug.

“But, Arthur and Molly pointed out that their sons were all very talented. Even the Weasley twins, for all their mischievous nature, were very skilled and shortly past their third century. Arthur and Molly did not make the decision lightly when they decided to take all but one of their sons, Harry. They tested themselves extensively on how well they could work with their sons then with the other Fae who had volunteered. Unfortunately, the results of these tests showed revealed that the Weasleys worked together far better than with any of the others.”

“Even good old Percy?” Harry had to ask, mouth twisting into a lopsided smile.

The third eldest son was so different from any of his siblings and parents. Ron and the twins had joked that if he didn’t look like a Weasley; they’d accuse him of being a Changeling.

“Percy has come well into his own,” the High Mage said, his own mirth clear in his features. Percy Weasley was a familiar face in the palace as he served the King.

“How are Ron and Ginny? Where are they now?” Harry drained his cup and set it down; waving his hand negatively towards another pot that rose slightly in question.

“As well as can be expected. Young Ronald is kept occupied by his mentor—” Harry had to snort at this; feeling a wave of sympathy. He dared not imagine what Moody would concoct to keep Ron ‘busy’ “—and he has taken up temporary residence with him. Ginevra is with the Lovegoods. It was decided they should not be left in the Weasley Treehouse by themselves.”

Harry nodded in silent agreement. “Luna and her father would be good at keeping Ginny distracted too. I should go see them; let them both know I know about The Reckoning. I assume they know I wasn’t told?”

“Yes, they were present,” Dumbledore confirmed. “They were quite vocal over the decisions made as well. However, they did agree you were not to be told. I believe Ronald and Ginevra didn’t want you to worry needlessly.”

“I’m not surprised,” Harry grumbled. “I want to be there for them, at least. Since now I know.”

Dumbledore nodded slowly. “While Alastor has kept Ronald focused on his studies; he has allowed Ronald to see his sister whenever he feels the need to and he visits her regularly from what I have been told; she goes to him frequently as well.”

“I really should visit them, then. Or would you let me invite them over? Even for just one night? I think it would help them greatly.”

The High Mage stroked his long auburn beard in deep thought before inclining his head. “Yes, I think your presence will do them a great deal of good. I know you were closest to the youngest Weasleys and I am sure they have missed your company. I will make arrangements later this evening and either by tomorrow evening or the night after, I believe Ronald and Ginevra will come for the
visit. However, I request you do not tell Apprentice Lore Mistress Hermione until the Weasleys have decided she should be informed.”

Very grudgingly, Harry nodded; he could see the logic but his heart twinged at how Hermione would feel when she was finally enlightened. Hopefully, his brilliant friend would understand why she was kept ignorant. Yes, she’d be very angry but Harry knew she’d forgive them, eventually. He was looking forward to seeing Ron grovel for her forgiveness; it might help them with realizing how they felt for each other.

Feeling the last of his stiffness in his slim frame ease, Harry slouched into the backrest. Wordlessly, he straightened and leaned forward take up a pastry from the large dish in front of him. It was a treacle tart; his favorite. He bit into it hungrily.

His mentor was munching enthusiastically on a lemon tart, he noticed.

Harry waited until the both of them had finished their treats before asking, “Where did the Goblet of Fire come from? Did you create it?”

“No,” Dumbledore looked grave. “It is an artifact crafted out of Fire; hence its name. There is no Fae who can manipulate Fire to the extent needed to make such a powerful magical device.”

“The King of Hell made it,” Harry realized suddenly, shivering.

“Yes,” the High Mage said quietly. “He forged the Goblet of Fire right before our eyes when our King and Queen agreed to the terms he had set. He said that to make the Devil’s Deal a burden shared by every single Fae; all the surviving Fae Families were required to drop their names into the Goblet of Fire and, once every seven years, a name would be chosen to provide the Tithe. He named the choosing of a Family as ‘The Reckoning’.”

“The King of Hell is rather dramatic and very controlling, isn’t he?” Harry quipped.

Dumbledore chuckled. “Indeed, he is. He is also extremely confident and self-assured,” the High Mage agreed readily. “However, I suppose he has earned his arrogance; his power is undeniable and unstoppable.”

Harry hummed and fell silent for a few moments. “How did the Fae Families put their names into the Goblet? Did they write on a piece of parchment and drop it into the Goblet?”

“No,” Dumbledore’s face twisted into a deep grimace. “Blood Magic.”

Harry shuddered. Blood Magic was a very deadly Magical Art. The Fae closely monitored the use of it; in most cases, Blood Magic was heavily restricted and forbidden to be used unless there were very good reasons. It was incredibly powerful and exceedingly dangerous; Fae who had attempted to utilize Blood Magic without careful supervision and profound knowledge were driven insane or killed by the taint and wild power it contained.

Blood carried the essence of its owner, both the good and bad traits; these easily transferred to the caster if they were not extremely careful. Harry knew that it was best to use your own blood but that involved a multitude of different but no less fatal dangers.

Any Fae caught dabbling in Blood Magics without the approval of the Fae Monarchs and the Mages was executed immediately. Knowledge and research of Blood Magic was very carefully chronicled and locked away. Harry knew that there was some among the Fae Healers who were especially trained to use Blood Magic as its potency and potential was unrivaled when it came to Healing; Blood Magic could heal injuries and illnesses that Water Magics could not mend. However, he
firmly told himself he wasn’t even touching that magical art until he was well over eight hundred years—maybe, even a millennium to be safe.

Dumbledore watched him with a knowing glint in his eyes. “Yes, it is best you do not explore Blood Magic until you are much older, Harry. Your very young age diminishes the potency of your blood. And, also hinders you from properly utilizing this branch of Magics.”

“Can you have an Affinity for Blood Magic?”

“Yes and no,” Dumbledore explained carefully. “It is misleading to claim there is such a thing as an ‘affinity’ for Blood Magic. From what we have learned about this type of Magic, the potency of one’s blood varies depending on each creature; Fae, Human or Animal. And in each Race; the power in the blood is so diversified. No blood is identical.”

“I know that the power can also vary among the Races.”

“Yes. Natural animal blood cannot match the potency of Human blood while Magical Creature and Fae blood outstrips Human blood. Blood given freely is far more powerful then taken forcibly; it is why Animal blood does not match Human Blood as a normal Animal cannot willingly give its blood as the creature will instinctively refuse to allow itself to be injured. Magical Creatures, on the other hand, have enough intelligence to acknowledge the sacrifice. Humans may have the capacity for compassion and empathy, however, perhaps it is only restricted to their own kind…”

Harry held his tongue as he watched his mentor become melancholy; lost in his own memories of their bloody past.

Shaking his head, Dumbledore fixed his keen gaze on his pupil. “Do you have any more questions, Harry?”

“Just how exactly was Blood Magic used in providing the Goblet of Fire with the names?”

“So very curious and you always ask very good, very hard questions,” Dumbledore murmured, there was still sadness in his warm blue eyes; alongside the pride and approval.

Harry ducked his head, flushing.

“Each familial Patriarch or Matriarch of the Fae stepped forward and placed exactly seven drops of their blood into the Goblet of Fire. The Goblet of Fire would acknowledge the blood offering by spelling the name of the Family in flames after each Fae finished.” He paused briefly before continuing briskly; answering the next question he knew his apprentice would ask him. “When the name of the Family is called forth for The Reckoning; the Goblet of Fire releases a single large medallion-shaped ruby with the Dark Mark, the King of Hell’s personal coat of arms, on one side and the name of the Family carved into the other side. This is witnessed by the King, the Queen, the Fae Council, the Mages, myself and the Lore Mistress.”

“Do you get a warning when it’s about to give this gem?” Harry cocked his head, idly wondering if there had been an incident where the ruby medallion may have been released and no Fae had been present.

Dumbledore laughed softly. “Your father asked the Lore Mistress that very same question; she was rather vexed with his irreverence as he was already detailing possible, increasingly ludicrous scenarios occurring to the ruby medallion if this was ever the case.”

Harry laughed as well. “Yes, that definitely sounds like my father; he couldn’t take anything seriously.”
“No, not until your mother,” Dumbledore agreed readily. “She tempered him while he withstood her, mostly.” He amended with wry humor. “It was no secret it was your mother who was in charge from the very beginning.”

“Well, if everyone keeps saying it; it has to be true, then,” Harry concluded with a smirk.

“Quite. Now, as to why we have never missed the appearance of the ruby medallion it is very simple; the item is released on the same day, at exactly the same moment as it had since the very first Reckoning.”

“This just highlights how much of a perfectionist the King of Hell is,” Harry noted wryly. “Aside from being so confident and self-assured to the point of arrogance and so controlling he has to set absolutely everything in order and to his liking.”

“As perceptive as ever, Harry; you are correct in your observations. Please also remember he is exceedingly charming. He will entice you into trusting him before stripping you bare of all he wants from you. Should you ever meet him, at least, you are far better prepared than many other Fae. However, I pray you would never need to see him.”

“Has he ever come to Great Haven?”

Dumbledore shook his head, looking incredibly relieved. “We have not seen him since the forging of the Devil’s Deal. We do fear that when he appears again; he will demand changes be made to the Devil’s Deal. It is well within his rights to demand and apply any changes he may desire. It was a clause he specifically included.”

“Yes, I can just see him adding that into the clauses,” Harry grumbled, exhaling an annoyed breath.

The King of Hell was quite the character. Harry had come to a healthy respect and held great admiration for his power and cunning but he was too much of a conceited, amoral creature that Harry found himself contemptuous as well.

“Now, that is enough lessons for today,” his mentor announced. “Let me see to getting Ronald and Ginevra to come for a long-overdue visit. I suggest you freshen up and ready yourself for dinner. I know you still have a few assignments left over to finish; you wouldn’t want to have to send your friends away early because you were unable to complete them.”

“Am I still under punishment? Harry pouted.

“Your magic may be satisfied but mine feels you are still lacking,” Dumbledore pointed out and Harry reached out to brush against the bond he had with his mentor; wincing when he realized the Ancient Fae was right.

“Okay, can you have Ron and Ginny visit tomorrow then? Maybe two more days so I can really get all of my duties and tasks out of the way?” he haggled.

“That would be a better plan; I shall see if Ronald’s schedule will allow him to visit you as well. If not, I am certain Ginevra would enjoy your company and Ronald may join you another time.”

“That’s just perfect! Thank you, High Mage!” Harry beamed, jumping to his feet and racing to his bedroom.

“You’re welcome, Harry.”

Slipping inside, he gathered up his basket of toiletries and the necessary change of clothes, he buried
his anxiety and fear under happier thoughts. He was going to see Ron and Ginny! Everything would be fine; Lore Mistress Bagshot and even Hermione had told him that while ‘The Reckoning’ was an extremely dangerous quest; the Weasleys were more than capable. Harry told himself firmly to believe in the Weasleys. They’d pull through.

As he stepped out of the quarters of his mentor, he suddenly realized he hadn’t asked Dumbledore how many days were still left before the portal had to be sealed. He doubted that the High Mage would allow him to be anywhere near the site. It was somewhere on the palace grounds, that much Harry knew but the wards that concealed the glade were too complex even for him to locate, much less unravel. Plus, Harry suspected that if he so much as touched the protections and enchantments; his mentor and all the other Mages would be on him in moments.

_They’ll be fine! I know they will be!_ Harry assured himself repeatedly as he navigated through the brightly lit corridors of the palace and arriving at one of the smaller underground bath chambers. He calmed even more when he saw that no one was already inside. While he had been raised alongside Ron and his siblings, and the Weasley bath chamber was tiny compared to any of the numerous caverns found in the palace, he had never really bathed with any one and he had never been comfortable with being nude in the presence of others.

Stripping and stepping into the steaming hot waters, Harry let the mantra fill his mind as he completed his ablutions before relaxing into the wonderful heat. And letting this long soak chase away his lingering dark thoughts.

It was all going to work out in the end.

It simply had to.
“You have absolutely no concentration today, Harry,” Dumbledore observed.

However, there was no real reprimand in his voice. He regarded his apprentice with a knowing, sympathetic stare.

“I’m very sorry, High Mage,” Harry apologized, fidgeting as he glanced towards a nearby window.

“I know you are very concerned at this point. But, dwelling will not help; you have slowly been winding yourself up this entire week…” He trailed off to give the black-haired Fae a proud smile. “I am also impressed that despite this you have gone beyond even my expectations with your Magical training. I’ve never seen anyone advance so far, so fast and so skillfully. Well done, Harry!”

“Thank you…” his apprentice mumbled absently; causing the Ancient Fae to raise an eyebrow in mild surprise and merriment. The young Fae was indeed very distracted. Usually, Harry would flush darkly and modestly brush off any praise over his Magical talent and feats. Now, there was barely even a hint of pink on the pale cheeks.

Deciding that any further lectures and lessons would simply be wasted, Dumbledore rose from his chair. “Would you like to see Ronald and Ginevra again? The visit with them earlier this week was immensely helpful for all three of you.”

Harry practically shot off his stool. “Yes please!”

“Go,” Dumbledore urged, his smile softening as he watched the young Fae dart off. He knew Harry would have no trouble finding the Weasley siblings; he suspected that Moody would have the pair together today to keep a better eye on them. He also would have ensured that Ronald and Ginevra would be nowhere near the palace, thus, nowhere near the site of the portal leading to Aboveground. He decided to send Harry to them to keep him out of the way as well.

His lighthearted mood vanished as soon as he felt the brilliant Magical Signature of his pupil become distant; the young Fae was out of the palace wards already. Dumbledore shook his head faintly, his apprentice’s habits of flying too swiftly and likely too recklessly was simply so much like his father’s for even Dumbledore’s peace of mind. Sadly, no one had managed to curb Harry; he doubted anyone could.

Gliding over to a nearby window, he gazed out; keen blue eyes easily finding the most protected glade within the vast gardens of the palace. It was concealed to all but Dumbledore, the Mages, the Lore Mistress and the King and Queen of the Fae. Harry and the other apprentice Mages would never find the site unless he performed the Rite upon them. And he would not; not until they were a century old. Older still, for Harry, if the Ancient Fae could postpone it, he would do so without the slightest hesitation.

Dumbledore was especially protective of his apprentice; Harry was too gifted, too kind and too headstrong. These were assuredly the greatest traits he had received from his mother and father and the very same qualities that everyone had treasured (and lamented) in James and Lily. One aspect of Harry’s nature that silently drove him to worry and distraction was the younger Fae’s penchant for not only finding trouble but getting into it! As protected as the Fae were within Great Haven, there were still some dangers; somehow young Harry would come across them. The only balm he had was the little Fae his own uncanny brand of luck with getting out of sticky situations… but, like always, this very same favor with fortune landed him into such misadventures to begin with.
Sighing softly, Dumbledore peered into the thick foliage and found what he was seeking.

Cradled deep in the gardens and as far as possible from the sprawling abode of the Fae monarchs, was the clearing where the King of Hell had created a permanent Gate that would open to Aboveground. The Fae could have crafted their own path but the Devil took no chances. Or if Harry’s shrewd observation was to be believed, wanted everything under his control. Dumbledore had to agree with his pupil.

The Devil had insisted that the Fae would not be able to properly connect the worlds. And, given how often they would need to reopen the pathway and keep it open; it was best the bridge be built by him. They had not argued; it was easier to simply accept his demands. The Gate was a magnificent, unique creation; Dumbledore expected no less from the King of Hell. After crafting and anchoring the wide portal to the chosen site, he had taught the Fae Mages, Dumbledore and the Fae Monarchs how to properly open and seal the Gate.

It was all an effortless task for the Devil.

But when the Fae attempted to copy him; the sheer amount of Elemental Magic needed had included all the Mages, Dumbledore and even the King and Queen. They had barely opened it and the Sealing had proved to be even more taxing.

The King of Hell had smirked mockingly as he regarded the exhausted Fae and suggested that they should birth some strong new little Sprites to help as quickly as possible; he also advised that they open the Gate only once to lessen the strain and hold it for as long as was possible. The task would not get easier over time, he warned.

Thankfully, now that they were beyond the reach of Humans for millennia; the Fae had recovered and the Sprites born in Great Haven were numerous and had grown up strong and free. Soon, there were more than enough Fae to share the burden.

The Weasleys were cutting it very close; the Gate would need to be sealed at dusk today. And, unlike Lily Potter, he did not believe the Weasleys held the power or the will to reforge the path once it was barred.

Abruptly, he decided to begin his vigil very early today. Normally, the High Mage was not called until the last hour before dusk; the other mages were powerful enough to assist should the portal be jeopardized and it were really the Fae Healers who were needed the most.

Dumbledore knew that the finest Healers of the Fae were already at the site. Just as they had held diligent watch over the portal since its opening. Like the Fae always did when the Reckoning was being undertaken.

The terror and worry of possible failure hung heavily in the air; it had never been this severe before. Even when the Longbottoms and their companions had not yet returned; the Fae had believed they would still arrive. It was only when the Rite of Sealing had to be enacted was this faith finally crushed. The Weasleys, sadly, did not have the same confidence of the Fae as the Longbottom band had carried. He knew that already deliberation about which Fae would be chosen had been well underway among the Fae Court and the King and Queen. The choices were equally unpleasant, even more so than in the Longbottom debacle.

After all, at least one of the choices in the Longbottom Reckoning had been a fully matured Fae.

Now…
Shaking himself out of such grim and dire musings, Dumbledore swiftly exited the Workroom. He would join his fellow Fae at the site now instead of at dusk. To him, the portal to Aboveground was a far more pleasant venue than the session taking place inside the Council Chamber of the palace.

Harry rocketed through the air, soaring low, his tunic nearly brushing the tops of the high trees in Great Haven.

He had easily located the Magical Signatures of the two remaining Weasleys; Ron’s Magical Signature was the solid feeling of steadfast Earth. Harry had discovered nearly all the Fae had this manifestation in their Magical Signatures. Generally, all Fae would feel the same if you sought them out via their Magical Signature alone as the essence would be predominantly Earth. Some of the Fae Mages couldn’t differentiate their people in this manner. Because of this, most of the Fae Mages Harry knew preferred to sense the Magical Presence instead. While a Fae Mage’s Magical Presence could be easily found, the Magical Presence of a normal Fae was far trickier but, once mastered, could tell you instantly who the Fae was and where they were if they were within the range of your Magical Senses.

Harry liked to switch between sensing the Magical Presence and the Magical Signature; it was a good way to hone his Magical Senses and he loved the feeling of both sensations; so different but still alike from each other. Because of this, he had no trouble finding any Fae by either their Magical Presence or Magical Signature.

The common earthy Magical Signature wasn’t a surprise to him; given their people’s natural Elemental Affinity for Earth. But he could easily separate Ron’s essence from others by the flicker of Air he had, like a wispy highlight. Harry had always found it hard to verbalize what exactly he sensed; it seemed to have aspects of all the five physical senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

Ginny, on the other hand, had a smoky undertone attached to her Earth. A faint smile curved his lips as Harry remembered what he had thought when he’d first sensed the smoky facet; he had assumed she might have an Elemental Affinity for Fire and it had delighted him immensely because the Elemental Affinity was so rare. So far, only Charlie and he had the Elemental Affinity of Fire among the young Fae (although, Charlie wasn’t exactly young at eight centuries). Even among the oldest Fae, there were only six others who were gifted with the Fire Elemental Affinity.

He had honestly believed Ginny might have inherited the talent from the Prewetts like Charlie. Molly had informed him about her Family’s gift for the Element of Fire when she discovered his own talent. Charlie’s level of Elemental Affinity had been nowhere close to his own and the older Weasley had said that his own Magical Signature hadn’t even begun to hint at his Fire Elemental Affinity potential until he was well over thirty springs and training rigorously.

Harry figured that if he was picking it up from Ginny this early; she would be far more powerful than her older brother. His own Elemental Affinities had been sensed by Dumbledore the instant he had reached his eleventh Spring; it had caused a huge shock among the Fae as he had been the youngest Fae to come into his Elemental Affinities. It hadn’t helped that he had been tested and proved to have three Elements aside from the natural Earth Elemental Affinity of the Fae when most only had one or two; where the Earth Elemental Affinity was matched by a second Element. His parents had been unusual too. His father had possessed the Elemental Affinities of Air and Earth while his mother had Elemental affinities of Fire and Earth. Dumbledore himself was renowned among the Fae for his Elemental Affinities of Water, Air and Earth. Harry had found himself especially fascinated by the Fae that had singular Elemental Affinities; especially the very few of them that weren’t of the Earth Element.
According to a long, detailed (but thankfully, interesting) history lesson from Hermione; it was common among the Ancient Fae to possess different singular Elemental Affinities. Sadly, when the Humans began to hunt their people; the Fae whose Elements they valued the most were hunted extensively and practically wiped out. Fae with the Elemental Affinity of Fire were especially prized for the great power they could give their captors so these were the ones who were sought out first. Fae with the Elemental Affinity of Water were also very eagerly pursued. Thankfully, since they were natural Healers, most survived these hunts. Fae with the Elemental Affinity of Air were few now because they were the most active in the long War; slipping into Human territories and bringing back vital information or leading the Humans astray. Many of the Fae of the Air had died because of those heroic, daring acts. The Fae of the Earth had endured the onslaught best because the Humans hadn’t specifically targeted them and because of the natural high fortitude of the Earth Element granted to the Fae.

As Ron had boasted, they were just too bullheaded to lie down and die. Harry couldn’t agree more.

Deciding to focus on Ginny’s Magical Signature instead of Ron’s, Harry swerved and darted through the trees; grinning as he flashed by other Fae who called out in startlement and admonishment when they realized who it was.

Sadly, Dumbledore had dashed his hopes when he eagerly brought the matter to him. He explained that a Magical Signature did not accurately reveal the extent of an Elemental Affinity. It was a Magical Presence that did. The Magical Signature only took on the essence of an Elemental Affinity when it was being trained. Likely, the ‘smoky’ aspect of Ginny’s Magical Signature was a hint of her fiery personality.

Harry couldn’t argue there; he also wisely didn’t tell Ginny about this fact. He definitely didn’t tell Ron either; given his best friend’s loose tongue; Ginny wouldn’t appreciate any inconsiderate comments about this from him.

Ginny had recently turned twenty springs and her Elemental Affinity had manifested. No, her Elemental Affinity wasn’t Fire as Harry and Charlie had still been hoping for but Air. Molly had been very disappointed herself because she had hoped her only daughter would take after her and be a Healer; the best healers had Water Elemental Affinities after all.

Only Fred, George and Percy possessed a Water Elemental Affinity out of all her seven children, and all three were extremely accomplished with the Element. Strangely, their Elemental specialty leaned towards the more Offensive side of the Element as opposed to the Defensive side; unlike their mother. Harry had discovered his specialty within his own Elements had been perfectly balanced, to the further awe of the Fae. Dumbledore had been incredibly delighted; informing him that his parents had been exactly the same too.

It was a good thing Ginny wasn’t cut out to be a healer, he decided. Harry wondered how she would care for a patient; sniggering loudly to himself as he imagined her own brand of bedside manner when he arrived at the main balcony of the Lovegood Treehouse.

He landed soundlessly on the wide ledge, easily finding his foster siblings. He heard them first, actually; they were arguing loudly with each other. Off to the side, sitting against the wall of her home and watching them with her trademark dreamy smile was Luna Lovegood. The petite Fae’s translucent wings of lightest gold looking even more fragile than normal. Harry had always admired them greatly; they were as unique as his own and nearly as rare.

An especially sharp remark from Ginny dragged Harry back to the pair he had been seeking. Well, it is the best way for them to relax… he contemplated seriously if he wanted to get involved in this latest quarrel. It was looking like the best course of action would be to stand aside and watch.
Unfortunately, Luna noticed his arrival and waved. “Good morning, Harry,” she called softly.

Instantly, Ron and Ginny wheeled to face him.

Harry inwardly cringed and braced himself.

“HARRY!!” The brother and sister hollered in unison before pointing at each other.

“Talk some reason into my moron of a little sister and tell her going to the Gate is stupid and she needs to stay here!”

“You tell my idiot for a brother that going alone to try to sneak into the site is stupid! He needs me to help him!”

Harry blinked once, looked first at Ron then at Ginny, opened his mouth and stated calmly, “You’re both stupid.”

“Harry!”

“I agree with Harry,” Luna piped up; utterly unrepentant and not even the slightest bit intimidated by Ginny’s impressive glare or Ron’s dark scowl.

“It’s a very foolish idea to try to go to the site of the Gate,” Harry continued firmly. “What exactly was your plan, Ron, when you reach the site? Enter the portal and go Aboveground?”

Face reddening further, Ron shouted. “YES!”

“Not without me, you’re not!” Ginny snapped.

“Like Hell you’re coming! You’ll just get in the way!”

“That would be suicidal on so many levels,” Harry cut in quietly, but with enough conviction to silence the belligerent pair. “You won’t be of help at all; in fact, if you attempt to use the Gate any time now. You’re more likely to get your Family trapped Aboveground. Not to mention, get yourselves severely injured or, worse, even killed.”

“What do you mean?” Ron barked, still looking hostile and unconvinced.

“I haven’t spent the last month just learning my usual Magics, especially since I found out about what happened to our family.” Harry revealed. “I spoke extensively with the Lore Mistress and did a lot of research in the library.”

Ron paled instantly. “Hermione?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Give me some credit, Ron. I met with her when Hermione was very busy or elsewhere. I promised you I won’t tell her or let her find out about all of this until afterwards. Even if I still think we should have told her.”

His best friend relaxed as Ginny walked over and hugged Harry tightly before pulling him over to sit, cross-legged, on the balcony’s broad platform with Luna. Ron sat down in front of the trio; making a little circle as their knees nearly touched each other.

“Why is it so dangerous to use the Gate now?” the older Weasley demanded.
Harry sighed, pursing his lips and explained succinctly, “Specific clauses stated in the Devil’s Deal made with the King of Hell.”

Seriously, the more Harry found out about the details of this deal with the Devil, the more he respected, admired and loathed the creature. “Seven is the highest number the Gate will allow entry, and only eight will be allowed to return without consequences.”

“Eh? Why seven in but eight out?!” Ron looked utterly confused.

“You need to count the Human, Ron,” Luna answered for Harry. “Oh… right.”

Even Ginny looked sheepish for not having realized this as well.

Harry sent the blond Fae a smile of approval. “Since the maximum number entered; only they can return. The Gate has already marked their Magical Presences; it won't allow anyone else through.”

“We can’t do anything at all?!” Ginny exploded, her voice high with helpless frustration and repressed tears.

Harry instantly pulled her into a one-armed hug; letting her sag into his side for comfort. “Believe in them; they’re sure to be home soon. For all you know, they decided to listen to Fred and George this once when it comes to timing. Make it as dramatic as possible or they could be pulling some grand prank.”

Ron and Ginny snorted while Luna giggled quietly.

“I doubt it. Mom and Percy are around; she’ll insist they come home as soon as possible!” Ron quipped. “Percy would want to be back with his precious paperwork too.”

“She and Percy might get overruled. Bill, Charlie and Dad can easily be convinced by the twins,” Ginny grinned impishly. "Or Greg and Forge just did their own thing like always."

“There’s that,” Ron conceded. “Want to bet on which it is?”

“You’re on! I say they’re back within the last hour.”

“Okay, any time before that and I win!”

“Fine!”

The siblings sealed the wager with a strong handshake.

Harry watched, amused, at their antics. “So, who gets what when they win the bet?”

Ron perked up. “You need to feed me seven of my favorite foods and I decide when, where and how much of it I want!”

“Why is it always food for you?” Ginny snorted loudly and rolled her eyes. Harry and Luna only laughed over the predictability of Ron’s desires. “Fine. Now, for what I want,” she grinned evilly, making Ron pale and swallow nervously. Harry and Luna exchanged glances; Harry’s own mouth curving into an eager smirk. This was going to be good.

“If I win: you tell Hermione exactly how you feel for her. In front of me and Harry—” Luna coughed “—And Luna, of course.”
Ron gaped, somehow getting even whiter. “W-W-WHUT?!?!”

“You tell Hermione how much you’re in love with her; in front of me, Harry and Luna.” Ginny repeated with clear relish. “Just be glad I’m not asking you to do this in front of an entire audience. I can easily arrange a crowd if you want.”

“Y-you can’t make that kind of a demand!” Ron spluttered in indignation and mortification; his entire face turning crimson. “You’re supposed to want something for yourself!”

“Oh, trust me. This is for myself.” Ginny tossed her head, red hair catching fire in the mid-morning sun. “I can’t stand watching you pine away for her and if I have to endure this for millennia at the rate you’re crawling I’ll go absolutely mad! Yes, this is definitely for my sanity; not yours.”

Harry burst out laughing hard at this point; Ginny falling against him as she also couldn’t keep a straight face and joined him in guffawing uncontrollably while her brother goggled. Luna was giggling loudly now; one slim hand covering her mouth.

“Okay, I look forward to the conclusion of this bet!” Harry said breathlessly.

“Same here.” Ginny agreed, still sniggering.

“I hate you both!” Ron moaned in deepest despair.

“There, there,” Luna patted him on the shoulder. “Look on the bright side; you’ll finally know what she really feels about you if you lose this wager.”

“That’s the ‘bright side’?!” Ron said in a very strangled voice that sent Harry and Ginny into a new fit of laughter.

Luna bobbed her head. "If she has no feelings; you can begin working on gaining her affections. If she does like you, you can start courting her properly. Even if you're both young, it's never too early to start a relationship. I know the longer a courtship lasts; the deeper the bond mating will be in the end."

Ron looked like he wasn't sure how to feel; he seemed to be simultaneously eager, hopeful and absolutely terrified and appeared nearly constipated from the slew of conflicting emotions.

“Well, let’s take our minds off this,” Harry suggested, taking pity on his best friend.

“'Yes, please!’” Ron begged, wringing his hands.

“So, what have you been doing lately? I’ve been studying Elemental Magics like always and learning History on the side,” Harry started. Inwardly, he smirked. *With a few little extra readings, too. Hermione would be so proud of me... or not, if she knew exactly what I've been researching and reading about!*

“Same old, same old for me mostly but there was this one time…” Ron launched instantly into a (likely very embellished) recounting of his latest training excursion with Alastor Moody. It was still a great tale overall.

The four friends chatted incessantly; exchanging stories and even what they learned from their studies. It was clear that all of them were doing their best to keep their worried thoughts at bay. At one point, Luna had suggested they go inside her house for a very late lunch; they hadn’t realized it was already early afternoon. It was a somewhat daunting sign of how deeply Ron was worried that his stomach hadn’t protested the missed meal.
The task of getting the food ready was a crazy affair as the kitchen was as quirky as its owners. Ron didn’t help in the slightest as he kept trying to get free tastes by insisting he had to make sure they were doing it right and Luna had some unusual ingredient suggestions. It was Harry and Ginny who really prepared the meal and managed to make a delicious dish in spite of their two unhelpful friends. Soon, they had full plates and brimming glasses of chilled pumpkin juice. They carried these into the huge cozy den of the equally large home and settled themselves down in the comfortable, mattress-covered pit filled with assorted cushions. Harry found himself smiling as he set a star-shaped pillow on his lap; the Lovegood Treehouse really had a unique charm of its own. Different from the Weasley Treehouse but no less homely.

They silently agreed to leave the curtains down and let the glow-orbs fill the room with a gentle, soothing radiance. In this soft light, they ate slowly and chatted some more. When their plates were empty and their bellies were full; they continued to talk, easily finding countless topics to exchange until sleep came.

It wasn’t too hard for Ron, Ginny and Harry. They had slept very little throughout the last week. The night before had been the worst yet; Harry had been worrying ceaselessly and his dreams were plagued by nightmares. He knew, from the shadows under the hazel eyes of Ron and Ginny, they had suffered the same. With the familiar presences of each other; the trio found much needed rest.

This peace came to an end.

Harry sluggishly slipped out of his slumber when a quiet voice urged him to wake. His emerald eyes slowly fluttered open and he winced.

There was a surprisingly brilliant glow at a nearby window where the curtain had been raised.

His mind snapped to alertness. His eyes locking onto the leafy canopy he could see outside.

The sky was still light and that surprised him immensely.

Like his foster siblings, Harry had refused to even glance towards the windows of the den. His last recollection was that it had been late afternoon.

But, for it to be this bright… it was morning.

"Of the next day."

An inarticulate cry of horror tore from him and Harry lurched upright, trying to jump to his feet. His only thought was to get to the palace.

He was caught by a pair of strong arms.

Head whipping around, eyes wide, he gazed up into the familiar face of Amelia Bones. Behind her were Kingsley Shacklebolt and Alastor Moody.

“What happened?!?” He demanded urgently, shifting so he was holding her arms now.

“Please come with us,” Amelia said gently but firmly; Harry could find no answers on the smooth, unreadable visage of the Fae Guard. Beside him, Alastor had moved and was assisting a groggy Ron and Kingsley was lifting a still drowsy Ginny.

Harry’s eyes narrowed and he swept out his Magical Senses.
A very powerful Sleep spell had been cast on them; he caught sight of the dissipating strands of Air.

By Dumbledore.

Fury rose inside of him but, unlike before, he quelled the urge to lash out impulsively. The Fae in front of him were not to blame. And Dumbledore must have had a very good reason for Enchanting them.

He would get his answers first this time—*before* he reacted.

Straightening as Amelia released him, he looked around to find Luna’s father, Xenophilius Lovegood, standing by the door; his usual, warm smile nowhere to be seen. Peering at the older Fae, Harry knew that he had no clue as to what had transpired. Focusing on Luna, he found his good friend’s face was entirely inscrutable. A feeling of foreboding rose inside him.

Harry opened his mouth again, he could see Ron and Ginny were only a moment slower than him.

“You’ll get all of your answers at the palace! Now, *move*! We haven’t got all day!!” Moody barked out harshly and the trio shut their jaws so quickly they winced at the crack as their teeth came together sharply. Ron even snapped into a ramrod straight stance of a Fae Guard trainee and nearly saluted but managed to stop himself before racing out of the den.

“Nicely trained, that one,” Amelia noted with fleeting humor.

Moody flashed a half-smile, half-grimace. “He’s gettin’ there; got some promise.”

Kingsley clearly repressed the urge to roll his eyes and swiftly but gently guided a subdued Ginny out after her brother. Harry nodded quickly to Luna and her father in silent thanks and farewell before following briskly. Amelia and Moody took up the rear.

Harry launched himself into the air as soon as he cleared the threshold of the Lovegood Treehouse.

He effortlessly caught up to Kingsley, Ginny and Ron.

From the brightness of the sky and sun sailing high across the horizon; it was late morning.

For the first time since he could ever remember, Harry felt no joy in the feeling of the rushing wind against his wings and the thrill of flight. His worries and fears were impossible to dismiss; too heavy a stone inside his belly. His mouth was painfully dry, his heart racing with slowly growing dread and he was cold in spite of the sun’s warm rays falling over him.

It was the day of Samhain.
What Must Be Given

The small troupe of Fae arrived at the Palace shortly, Amelia taking point and guiding them to a wide balcony Harry was very familiar with. It was the entranceway that led to the grand council chamber.

The ambient Magic around the palace was immense; great Elemental magics had been cast very recently; Harry suspected that this was the magical residue of closing the Gate to Aboveground. All the Elements were present; the strongest among them was the element of Water. He swallowed thickly; his throat dried and heart aching at the only reason this would be so. There were many words inside his head but he could not speak them; he didn’t want to send his foster siblings into a panic. They were already far too tense as it was. Alighting atop the broad marble platform, Harry waited for Amelia to land and again to step forward to direct them. The First Captain of the Fae Guard landed swiftly and strode purposefully for the archway.

Harry had started forward when he was grabbed suddenly. A pair of hands latching onto him on either side nearly jerking him back. Harry looked first to the left to find Ginny, ghastly white, clinging to him tightly. He didn’t really need to look to his right to know Ron was gripping him with equal, bruising force. A glance showed him that his best friend was even more pallid than his little sister.

Catching each of their hands in his, he squeezed them reassuringly. Moody and Kingsley watched the exchange wordlessly and with patience. Even the eccentric Fae made no move or demanded for them to hurry. When the pair finally gathered themselves, Harry stepped forward again, leading the pair. At the threshold, he could see Amelia waiting as well. She met his gaze, understanding and regard in her own stare, and nodded curtly. She stepped aside to let them pass.

The trio walked inside.

King Oberon, Queen Titania, the Lore Mistress Bathilda Bagshot, the High Mage Albus Dumbledore and the First Healer Poppy Pomfrey all sat patiently waiting around the massive table that dominated the space. Harry searched the ring of faces and inwardly cursed at how well they concealed their emotions.

He took some comfort that Hermione wasn’t present.

“Take a seat, young ones,” Titania called in her dulcet soprano. “We have much to tell, and little time.”

They hastily obeyed; sitting as close to the elder Fae as possible.

There was a trio of mugs filled with sweet-smelling tea awaiting them as they as they sat. Harry noticed that the three Fae Guard who had escorted them took up stations outside the threshold and the large double doors that led further into the palace were shut and sealed tightly with magic.

Ron leaned forward; half-rising from his chair. “What happened?!” he demanded, clearly, his wits and endurance were at an end. Harry was slightly chagrined at his outburst. Ginny looked like she wasn’t sure if she wanted to join him or hit him for his blatant lack of respect.

Thankfully, the Ancient Fae took this all in stride; however, Harry noticed Moody give a single slight shake of his head and spearing the redhead with a disapproving glower. Ron was going to be in for an acerbic lecture after this he was sure.
“Your entire family returned within the hour of the sealing of the Gate,” the Lore Mistress proclaimed calmly.

Ron dropped back into the chair with a noise of great relief, echoed by his little sister. Harry wasn’t so quickly assured. They would not have been called to an audience with the Fae Monarchs, the High Mage, the Lore Mistress and the First Healer if it was merely to be told this.

Harry moved his gaze from face to face; his own visage set into a grim expression.

“While they have been severely injured by the quest; most of them will recover fully… in time.” First Healer Pomfrey spoke up now.

“Most?!” Ginny gasped.

“Some of them have received permanent if not debilitating wounds,” she explained with gentle solemnity. Ginny reached for Ron’s hand at this. Ron met her halfway and they gave each other comforting squeezes and kept their hands twined as they stared at the Fae around them. Ron’s lips parted, Ginny also appeared to be readying a few questions of her own.

“We have discovered the answers to several mysteries that had remained unsolved for the last twenty-one years.” The Lore Mistress intoned, silencing the pair of red-haired siblings again.


“Yes,” she answered simply.

“That’s the only reason I’m here, isn’t it?” Harry pointed out shrewdly; his earlier anger igniting.

“Indeed,” Oberon nodded curtly. “Otherwise, you would not be present at all for this audience.”

Harry scowled but did not retort. He was more interested in finding out what they had to tell.

“We have learned why the Longbottoms nearly failed in their quest and why the Weasleys have also come to such tragedy.”

Ron and Ginny jerked as one, leaping up from their chairs and voices loud in their alarm and worry before they were silenced again by a harsh “Sit down and be silent!” from Oberon.

Harry sighed quietly.

The Fae King was hardly patient or kind; this was why delicate matters like this were normally left to Titania. For Oberon’s presence to be required; the news would not be in any way good or trivial. This revelation did nothing to ease Harry’s own tightly controlled concern and fear.

“Keep your tongues still until we have called you to speak!” he snapped.

Chastised, Ron and Ginny ducked their heads and huddled back into their chairs.

“My King, gently,” Titania soothed; she flashed a calming smile towards the pair. “They are very distressed as to be expected. I know you are as well but we must handle this with sympathy and understanding.”

“Their family is nearly entirely intact! They have fared better than most!” The Fae King growled impatiently. “It is the other matter that concerns me more; it is the most important issue here!”

“It would be best we conclude with the explanations of what occurred so we may broach the true
reason for this audience then, my King?” the High Mage suggested wisely.

Oberon grunted and nodded brusquely. “Lore Mistress.”

The Ancient Fae straightened, interlacing her fingers together and resting her joined hands on top of the massive table; her piercing eyes fixed on the trio of young Fae. “Twenty-one years ago, Peter Pettigrew betrayed the Longbottoms and their companions. In the course of their quest, he was captured by a powerful Human who convinced him that in exchange for his life; he would deliver the other Fae into this Human’s hands. He agreed and assisted in setting up a trap that would bind the others to this Human. They were nearly successful; James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Frank Longbottom and Alice Longbottom, however, refused to let the quest end in failure and fought to the very last. Lily Potter, who was the least injured, was charged with returning with the Human to serve as the Tithe. They all remained behind to ensure she accomplished her mission.”

Harry inhaled sharply. The traitor had been Peter Pettigrew? He remembered that Peter was supposed to be a very close friend of his parents; especially his father! He had thought the traitor would have been someone else… and, despite knowing the traitor had been one of the group, he still couldn’t believe a Fae would betray their own people.

“It is not entirely unheard of.” As though reading his mind, the Lore Mistress proclaimed. “Betrayal is extremely rare among our people but it has happened in the past. Sadly, any betrayal had always dealt a heavy blow. Especially any treachery involving the quest of The Reckoning can be our undoing.”

As it nearly was! Harry mused, hatred began to pool inside his belly.

“Peter Pettigrew’s crimes did not end then,” She continued. “We can only be thankful that they did not know of the exact timing and when or where the Gate opens in Aboveground before. This was what saved the Goldsteins’ Reckoning seven years ago. The Human, and Pettigrew who became his servant, chose to bide their time and plan carefully for the Reckoning afterwards as they gathered information by closely observing the Goldsteins’ Reckoning.” She switched her gaze between Ron and Ginny. “It is a testimony to your family’s expertise and skills that such a vicious snare even failed.” She suddenly smiled, a vindictive curve of her mouth.

“Your family not only thwarted and stopped the plot of the Human and Pettigrew but they killed Pettigrew for his crimes and had brought back the Human to serve as the Tithe.” she finished.

Harry smirked, a surge of great pride and vengeful delight filling him. This would be one ceremony where he would have no qualms giving the Human to the King of Hell.

Beside him, he could see that Ginny and Ron mirrored his own dark satisfaction.

The Fae monarchs, the Lore Mistress, the High Mage and the First Healer also looked exceedingly pleased but only momentarily and this reawakened the alarm and a deep sense of foreboding inside of Harry. While this was wondrous news; he knew that this story was not yet concluded.

“And, this is where the real matter must be addressed,” Oberon broke in grimly.

Confusion etched itself into the faces of his foster siblings, Harry knew he was also regarding the Fae King with equal bewilderment and increasing consternation.

“They returned with the Human,” the Fae King declared flatly, “unfortunately, the Human was severely injured in the confrontation. First Healer Pomfrey and the other Fae healers performed to the best of their abilities in order to return him to full health… but, he expired as of dawn today.”
The silence was deafening. Shock and disbelief replaced all the joy and pleasure the three young Fae had felt.

Harry closed his eyes, drawing in a breath, and slowly the revelation sank into him.

The Fae did not have an offering for the Devil's Tithe.

The words of the Lore Mistress that night over seven years ago whispered in his mind.

“What happens if we can’t get a Human for the Tithe?”

“Then, a life must still be offered. The King of Hell will accept the life of a Human… or a Fae.”

“Who will be chosen?” Harry found his voice first, surprised at how steady he sounded. “You can’t ask the Weasleys to—”

“Hold your tongue, young Mage, or I will have you removed from the chamber!” Oberon ordered in a cold tone Harry had never heard the Fae King use with him. Looking towards the stony face, Harry could see the fatigue and the pain this was causing him but he was King for a reason and he would not falter even when dealing with such a dreadful decision.

“Hush, Harry,” Titania reprimanded him as well; her own pain and exhaustion clear in the fine lines of her lovely face. “This matter does not concern you.” She moved her bright gaze to the two redheads. “The Reckoning was unfulfilled; the price must be paid and this falls upon you.”

Desperately, Harry looked over to Dumbledore. The High Mage met his beseeching gaze and shook his head firmly; deep remorse in his blue eyes.

“We would not speak with either of you if we had any other option.” Oberon admitted quietly. “However, none of your family is conscious but for yourselves. With the severity of their injuries, none of them will awaken within the time we have left.” He drew a deep breath and nodded curtly to Pomfrey.

The First Healer drew herself up and leaned forward. “Your father is fighting valiantly against a poison flowing in his veins; while he is out of danger, it was a terrible poison made from iron. It would take him weeks for this to be purged from his body before he will awaken at all. Your mother sleeps very deeply as she used her very life-force to keep the others of your family alive. She will not wake until what she used has been restored to her and again this will take weeks. Percy Weasley lies comatose; all his discernable injuries have been tended and healed but we do not know yet when he will wake and how well he will be once he returns to consciousness. William and Charles Weasley have suffered extensive burns and deep wounds all over their bodies; William Weasley will bear the scars on his face for the rest of his life and his brother, Charles Weasley, nearly tore both of his wings entirely off. They are being healed but this will be slow and very painful; he may not fly as well as he once did. Fred Weasley is also within another Healing trance; we hope to repair his hearing even though we cannot restore the ear he lost. He would hardly need more than four days before we can take him out of the Healing trance and he should awaken a day afterwards. His twin, George Weasley, came out the least scathed of your family but must sleep to recover fully and rid himself of the ill effects of Aboveground. He would likely waken by tomorrow night.”

“How could they drop all of this on the laps of his foster siblings?!
The Weasleys had lost so much already; Arthur may still die because of the poison, Percy may never wake from his coma, Bill was forever maimed, Charlie’s injuries had not only been nearly fatal but were very painful and slow in healing and Fred had lost an ear permanently; even his hearing may not be recovered. Molly’s own wounds may never heal entirely as well; spiritual wounds were the worst kind of injury as they were carved into the soul itself. The fact she had pulled from her own life-force only proved how dire the situation must have been. Harry knew the price she would pay for using her own life-force would haunt her in the centuries to come.

Worst of all, he knew; the suffering of the family wasn’t over.

With the Human they had brought back with them dead; one of the Weasleys would have to serve as the Tithe.

And, it couldn’t be any of those who went Aboveground. The King of Hell would likely take umbrage if the Tithe was not pristine. Harry knew that the Humans given to the Devil were healed fully and carefully prepared before the ceremony; any and all imperfections were removed to the best of the Fae’s Elemental Magics.

Then, the Tithe was bathed thoroughly, dressed simply but very finely.

The memory of the ruby circlet flashed in his mind.

There really were only two choices.

Ron or Ginny.

Harry knew who would volunteer; it just depended who recovered first.

“I’ll be the Tithe,” Ron announced shakily.

“No!” Ginny shouted, leaping to her feet and sending her chair to the stone floor in a thunderous crash. “It should be me!”

Ron shook his head vigorously; his pallid features hardening and he stood to face his little sister boldly. “I’m older, Gin. It’s my responsibility; I’ll be the Tithe.”

“By one measly Spring!” Gin was quick to retort hotly. “We’re practically the same age!”

Before the argument could escalate, Oberon and Titania rose. The High Mage, the Lore Mistress and First Healer joining the Fae monarchs silently. Harry also climbed to his feet.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley, is this your final decision?” Oberon questioned formally.

“Yes!” Ron reiterated, the determination barely hiding his fear.

“No, take me instead!” Ginny cried furiously. “Why bother asking both of us if my idiot brother gets to decide?!”

“Your brother offered first and we have accepted, Ginevra Molly Weasley.” Titania told the seething girl. “The Tithe has been decided. So mote it be.”

Harry deeply resented the position Oberon and the other Elder Fae had forced on Ron and Ginny. All he could do was offer the meager comfort of his presence.

At least, for now.
“You will come to the palace after the First Evening Bell,” the Lore Mistress told Ron gently.

Ron nodded stiffly. “Understood,” he whispered.

Without another word, the Fae Monarchs and the rest of their entourage swept from the room. The High Mage lingered last; watching the trio with an unreadable expression before he finally also slipped out. Harry reached out with his Magical Senses and knew that the Fae Guards had also moved away to give them privacy.

Once the door clicked shut, Ginny flung herself at Ron and wept brokenly.

Ron staggered but righted himself and held her close; burying his face in her long red hair. Harry knew that is best friend was crying noiselessly himself. The pair of siblings clutched each other desperately as they let their flayed emotions finally run free.

A silent spectator, Harry could only watch them console each other. His hands balled into shaking fists; short nails cutting into flesh and drawing little trickles of blood.

He wished he could offer himself but Harry knew that the Fae monarchs would never accept him. Their clear dismissal of his opinion and vote in the issue was all the proof he needed to know that they would never condone him becoming the Tithe. He wasn’t surprised; he had quizzed the Lore Mistress on the exact details of the Reckoning and the Devil’s Deal. He knew more of this matter than even Hermione.

Now, he would use this knowledge to his advantage.

He won’t let this final tragedy happen to his family.

“I hope you don’t mind, Gin,” Ron said suddenly, his voice hoarse. “I know you won our bet since you got the time right but I don’t think I can keep my side of the wager. I really don’t think ‘Mione needs to know how I feel, especially…” he choked off and once again pressed his face into his sister’s sweet-smelling hair.

“Y-yes…” Ginny agreed through her tears. “Not a good idea at all.”

“Great Haven!” Ron moaned with renewed desolation and horrified realization. “How are we going to tell this to ‘Mione?! Do we even tell her?!”

“We have to,” Harry told him quietly, finally coming close to wrap his arms around both of them. “We owe it to her. I knew we shouldn’t have held off so long. She can’t find out all of this tonight; it will be too much for her.”

“She’ll kill Ron and then I’ll have to be the Tithe,” Ginny joked weakly.

“She actually might if we don’t tell her!” Ron shuddered, looking even more terrified of the prospect than his impending death.

“Yes, I’ll—” Harry froze.

The massive spike of Elemental Magic from a very familiar and rapidly nearing Magical Signature was all the warning he needed.

Releasing his arms from around the Weasley siblings, he wheeled and faced the double doors just as they were thrown open with shocking force. They slammed into the walls on either side with a thunderous crash and rebounded but were caught easily by the figure looming at the threshold.
“RONALD BILIUS WEASLEY, HOW DARE YOU?!”

Hermione Granger stood before them, her brown, black-edged wings flared out aggressively. Her hands were holding the doors so tightly that Harry could have sworn he heard the thick wood splintering under her crushing grip. Her face was no less fearsome; set into the most intimidating scowl Harry, Ron and Ginny had ever seen before.

Propelled by a rare surge of self-preservation, Harry (and Ginny) backpedaled away from the petrified red-haired Fae as Hermione stalked into the council chamber and practically charged him. She threw herself into him and Ron caught her, once again staggering back several steps.

She embraced him fiercely before abruptly pulling back, shoved him off of her and punched him. Hard.

“OW!” Ron flew back and slammed onto the floor; clutching his cheek as he stared up at her in shock. “You hit me!”

“That was a very good right hook,” Ginny observed from beside the green-eyed Fae.

Harry could only nod wordlessly, wide-eyed; he had seen the aura of Fae magic-empowered strength behind that blow. Ron was going to have a very large bruise shortly.

“And you deserved it! How could you not tell me what happened to your family?!” Hermione screamed. “And to find out only now?! AND LIKE THIS?! I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU KEPT THIS FROM ME, RONALD! WHY IN GREAT HAVEN DID YOU THINK IT WAS A GOOD IDEA NOT TO TELL ME?! YOU—”

Harry cringed at the high octaves his normally soft-spoken friend was reaching. He sidled a little further away from the pair. Hermione was doing a very impressive imitation of the Weasley Matriarch.

“Strategic retreat for now?” Ginny whispered, looking unnerved and visibly curling into herself at the rising pitch of Hermione’s voice. Harry knew that she was very close to plugging her ears; he wasn’t too far behind himself.

“It will be fine; she just needs to let it out,” Harry murmured back.

“It okay, as long as she does it to Ron and not me,” she muttered. “But, Great Haven, my ears are really starting to hurt.”

“Same here.”

Ron stood, gingerly rubbing the blooming bruise before he bravely stepped close to the screeching Fae and tried to soothe his close friend (and secret love) as best he could. Harry and Ginny, by wordless agreement and solidarity, endured the shrill tirade.

Eventually, Hermione’s rage and screaming petered out and, as Harry expected, she burst into tears. Ron looked even more panicked when the weeping began but, with silent encouragement and guidance from Harry and Ginny, he simply held her through her bout of heavy sobbing.

When the last of the cries ebbed away, Hermione whispered. “Is it all true? About the Reckoning… and the Tithe?”

Wordlessly, the three nodded.
Hermione closed her eyes and clutched the red-haired tighter. “Oh, Ron…”

At the pure heartbreak in her voice, and the equally lost expressions on the Weasley siblings, Harry came to his decision and began to plan.
**What Is Given**

**Hermione, Ron, Ginny** and Harry had remained very close together for the rest of the day, clinging to each other and savoring the hours even as they sped by too fast.

They talked quietly among themselves in half-hearted conversation; finally, when they had exhausted what few light topics they had; they decided to pass by the infirmary and see the other Weasleys. It was not a pleasant visit and none of the wounded had stirred in the slightest even when Ginny and Ron spoke to and touched each of them.

Thankfully, Luna had joined them by mid-afternoon; her calm, soothing presence kept Ginny and Hermione distracted and marginally soothed. But, this precarious calm reached the breaking point when the First Evening Bell rang out like a death toll. Signaling that it was time for Ron to leave came. At the first resounding peal, the five young Fae had frozen; staring at each other in wide-eyed surprise and shock that quickly shifted to horror and denial.

Hermione and Ginny had to be restrained and pacified by powerful Water and Air Magics when they broke down into hysterics and threw themselves onto Ron as the redhead turned to leave and begin his preparations. They had stubbornly refused to release him until Fae Healers and the Fae Guard had arrived. Harry and Luna had simply stood by and watched; unsure how or who to aid, and knowing any action was ultimately no help at all.

Harry slipped away after Ron while the Fae Healers were fussing over the Hermione and Ginny. Luna sent him a look to him, a knowing glint in her eyes before she focused on assisting the Fae Healers with her friends. He wasn’t surprised she had her suspicions; the little blond Fae was far too perceptive. From her eloquent glance, however, Harry knew she would not interfere.

He knew that the Devil’s Deal demanded a Tithe every seven years and the Family chosen by the Goblet of Fire would have to provide the Tithe. The Weasleys had fulfilled the Pact; according to the Goblet of Fire and the Gate. However, as the Human had died, the final step in the completion of the clauses within the Devil’s Deal was not met. Unless… he paused, his mind mulling over a little passage he recalled reading last week.

Ultimately, the King of Hell expected to receive his Tithe and the offering was to be given to his chosen herald.

That was the key.

Harry knew that the Ancient Fae were trying to find a way to allow Ginny and Hermione not to witness this particular ceremony. Even the Lore Mistress had wished to spare her Apprentice the ensuing pain and trauma of this Samhain night. He had overheard the Healers speaking with her as he passed them. He already knew that they would not find any loopholes. Only the Fae who were very ill or unconscious because of very severe injuries could be absent.

Another clause in that accursed Devil’s Deal. Harry was sick of how much the King of Hell loved to flaunt his power and control over everyone. The mandatory attendance of all the Fae in this ceremony only drove this irritating trait of the Devil further home.

It was a small mercy, at least, that the other Weasleys were still unconscious and would not be present. Harry could only imagine how they would have reacted and felt if they had to watch Ron be given or… what he planned to do.
Either way, this ceremony would not be forgotten easily by the Fae.

He just hoped that Ginny, Hermione, Ron and the rest of the Weasleys didn’t grieve too long.

Ron would be absolutely furious with him, he grinned broadly at the thought.

Stepping out onto the nearest balcony he could locate, Harry rose swiftly into the twilight sky.

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It was astonishingly very easy to set up his ambitious little sabotage.

Harry suspected this was his Father’s side of his talents and was infinitely smug. And, to think, everyone had believed he was no trickster. He also felt a flare of vindictive pleasure when he realized that his newly acquired focus and skills because of his grueling training the last month had made his spellwork flawless.

*I don’t think this was what High Mage Dumbledore imagined I would use it for, he mused. Good; he and the Queen will be my biggest obstacles in succeeding in this crazy venture. Thankfully, they were the ones who taught me the most when it came to Fae Magics and I know them the most out of the other Mages so I’ve anticipated what they would do. It should be more than enough for what I need to do.*

With his plans and preparations long completed, Harry discovered he still had a little time left before the ceremony began. He spent the last half-hour at the Weasley Treehouse, wandering slowly around the empty home; reminiscing with a soft smile on his face. He had grown up here, surrounded by so much laughter and joy. He had never wanted or lacked any sort of care and familial love while he had been raised by the Weasleys.

He owed them not only for his wonderful childhood but for the retribution of his vengeance. Thanks to them, Pettigrew had received the justice he could not give the vile traitor himself. Even the Human responsible for the death of his parents had suffered greatly; Harry knew the creature’s injuries had to have been very severe for even the formidable Fae Healing Magics to fail in saving him.

Tonight, Harry would even the debts between the Weasleys and himself.

A sudden blast of icy wind raced through the leafy canopy overhead, the leaves crackling loudly like disturbed insects. Harry lifted his head, ears and Magical Senses alert. He peered out of the nearest window into the assorted spaces between the thick leaves and boughs to see thousands of dark shapes rise into the black sky. Amidst the silky whispering of the cold breeze was the rustle of countless flapping wings. The full moon glided ponderously over the horizon, watching this long, glittering procession.

Midnight was fast approaching.

He knew that preparations were done; Ron would be all set.

The black-haired Fae gazed down at the flowing white robes and golden sandals he had pilfered from the palace and now wore. Gesturing, he swept his hand down over the soft silk and glamoured them to look like his formal Apprentice High Mage attire.

Harry was equally ready.

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This night of Samhain carried the frosty bite of winter.

Suppressing his shivers, Harry stood stoically beside his mentor. It may as well have been out of a memory, he thought fleetingly. Nearly all of the ceremony was a perfect mirror of the first one he had attended seven years before. It felt like a lifetime ago even if the passing of seven years mattered so very little to a Fae in the river of time. There were little, stark differences, however; the faces of the Fae Monarchs, of the Lore Mistress, and the High Mage were exceptionally tight. Harry was heartened to know they deeply regretted what must happen tonight.

He wondered if they’d regret it more if—when—he succeeded in what he planned. He hoped they would not blame themselves; he had chosen this course after all.

The other Fae were also so very still; there was a solemnity in this ceremony that bordered on sacred unlike the ceremony of seven years ago.

After all, for the first time since the forging of the Devil’s Deal, a Fae would be given in the place of a Human.

He glanced towards Hermione and Ginny. Hermione stood by the Lore Mistress Bagshot, Ginny beside her. Both young Fae were unnaturally rigid and ashen. Although, while he could discern the steady tremors from the slight forms, the pair remained poised and strong. He silently applauded the fortitude they were showing. There were no more Water or Air Magics at work here; Hermione and Ginny were here under their own will.

Speaking of Magics… he traced the spell weavings he had cast earlier.

He suppressed the satisfied smirk as the Elements immediately coiled to obey at his mental touch.

Yes. Everything was in place.

The moon came to hover right overhead and Oberon began. “We are all Gathered here, on this night, to remember what was lost, what was gained and what must be given in turn.”

And, like before, Titania continued. “We have come together, on this night, to honor a great debt due.”

The pair parted, the King striding to stand beside the High Mage and the Queen gliding to stand by the Lore Mistress. She positioned herself close to Ginny; both as support and as restraint, Harry surmised.

Soundlessly, the obsidian portal of The Hell’s Mouth opened, a grand arch of deepest black. Unveiling itself in the very same eerie, surreal noiseless manner it had formed before and from within this lightless cave the overwhelming miasma surged out again. All around him, he knew that every Fae but himself, the High Mage and the Fae Monarchs dropped to their knees.

Harry gritted his teeth at the first touch of this foreign power; was the magic somehow stronger?! Obstinately, he pressed the soles of his sandaled feet into the rocky ground even as he felt his knees quiver. He would not show any form of subservience. Especially now.

It was nearly time for him to begin.

He gazed towards the North.

There, first as glowing specks that slowly morphed into forms were the Fae Guard and this year’s
Soon, Ron and his escorts, Alastor Moody and Amelia Bones, arrived. The trio of Fae landed, with only the slightest rustle of silk and wind, right in front of the first line of trees.

Ronald Weasley stood straight and tall; poised, looking rather handsome and very striking in the snow-white robes and gold sandals of the Tithe. For the first instance Harry could remember, the uncombed mop of ginger hair was neat and styled. It fit him well. Atop his head, glittering like newly spilled blood, was the ruby and gold circlet.

He was unmistakably pale but, like Ginny and Hermione, he was under no Water or Air Magics. He marched up towards the Wall, his steps slow but resolute, and came to a stop near the opening. The Fae Guard had waited by the tree line; clearly, Ron had requested to do this on his own.

Just as Harry had hoped.

Now, if only his best friend and foster brother continued to remain predictable.

The sound of a hoof striking stone was like a thunderclap to Harry and he barely kept from spinning around. Instead, he turned to watch the familiar pegasus smoothly slip out of the black cave like a gleaming slash of purest white.

Cantering purposely towards the waiting Weasley, the great steed came to a halt before the red-haired Fae. The head of the stallion cocking to the side in a show of evident surprise and mild confusion as the pegasus regarded Ron before giving what Harry could have sworn was a careless shrug.

The pegasus gracefully knelt; offering his back.

As Harry anticipated; Ron hesitated, swallowing dryly as some of his bravado fled. Swiftly, Harry stepped forward and stood beside him. Offering a reassuring smile and, with his own intent clear in his mind, held out his hand.

Ron blinked before relaxing and grinned weakly, looking eternally grateful.

He reached out.

A swell of triumph rose in Harry as his fingers closed around the familiar hand and held Ron as though to help him mount.

But, at the last instance, when his best friend was unbalanced, caught between lifting his leg to swing the limb over the wide back; Harry yanked forcibly and threw him hard to the side. Using his Magic-empowered strength to send the redhead Fae towards Dumbledore. His other hand darted out and plucked the glittering diadem from his head as Ron sailed past to collide into his mentor and sent them both sprawling. Harry dropped the heavy ornament onto his own head and allowed the intricate glamour over his clothes to fade away to reveal what he was truly wearing.

At the same moment, he whispered the trigger word to activate his enchantments. Around him and the still kneeling pegasus, a barrier sprang up; shielding them from the rest of the Fae.

The only path left open within this cage of pure Elemental Magics led directly to the Hell’s Mouth.

Quickly, Harry grabbed a handful of the white mane and mounted. “The Tithe is met!” He roared, the summoned Air Magics making his voice resonate. “Until the passing of another seven years!”
At his words, the pegasus rose fluidly and bowed to the stunned Fae Monarchs before trotting for the cave’s entrance. At the first footfall, the King and Queen, the High Mage, the Fae Guard, the Mages, the Fae Court and, lastly, his friends came out of their shock and surged forward like a tidal wave.

Only to be stopped short by his Magics.

Ron, Hermione and Ginny were pounding desperately on the shimmering wall; screaming.

The King and Queen, along with the High Mage and the Mages, were desperately attempting to unravel his wards. Harry knew they would succeed with time but they would not have enough of it. He had made sure.

Giving his three closest friends a wide grin, and mouthing the heartfelt words of ‘Thank you, and I love you!’, he then focused on the portal and urged the pegasus forward; ignoring the frantic cries.

“Harry!!”

“Harry, What are you doing?!”

“Don’t do this!! HARRY!!”

“HARRY, STOP!!”

“NO!!”

The voices soared into a tumultuous crescendo behind him as he entered the cave without a backward glance.

Darkness filled his vision instantly and the pandemonium went abruptly silent. He drew in a deep breath to steel himself for what was to come.

He believed he knew what would happen now.

He would die.

He wondered fleetingly if it would be painful.

Harry vowed he would not scream.
Wherein the story finally earns its Mature Rating. The 'Non-Consensual Touching' and 'Forced Orgasm' Tags apply in the latter part of the chapter and likely throughout some parts of the story.

There was only darkness all around him. Most alarming of all, Harry realized that all of his senses had vanished entirely the moment he had passed into the cave.

He could see nothing; just pitch blackness, deep, fathomless, absolute. There were no scents, he wasn’t sure if he was still even breathing. There were no sounds, even the hoof falls of his steed were noiseless and he could no longer feel the fine silken mane of his mount or the press of the feathered wings folded over his thighs. He couldn’t even tell if he was still astride the pegasus at all.

Harry didn’t dare reach out with his Magical Senses.

He had no idea how much time passed and he began to wonder if this was the fate of the Tithe; to be lost forever in this nothingness. He was seriously debating if he should risk finally making use of his Magical Senses when, abruptly, he felt a sharp shift within him; a violent twisting sensation that told him he still had a stomach at least.

Light, sound, smell and feeling exploded all around him.

He had exited the cave.

Dazed, Harry turned and looked over his shoulders, to witness the black line of the closing portal swiftly dwindling into the stone of the craggy cliff. He blinked owlishly and looked around, seeing an entirely different world from what he had left behind before instinctively glancing down at his steed.

And screamed.

Gone was the breathtakingly beautiful pegasus.

In its place was a skeletal creature only remotely resembling a stallion. Sharp bones dug into his thighs, and rear, where he clung to the beast. The long luminous mane had vanished; his hands were resting on the dark brown, leathery skin of its bony neck.

At his shocked outcry, the creature reared back, screeched in return, and threw itself off the rocky ledge they had been standing on. Harry, intending to let go and leap off its back, hung on instead as he felt them plummet.

If this is the first thing that a Human sees when they come out of the trance that easily explains the screaming! He thought shakily. He clutched desperately onto the long sinuous neck; legs hugging the ribs he could feel underneath him as the familiar gut-wrenching sensation of freefall overcame him.
He didn’t know how far they plunged when, with a thunderous snap of stretching leather, its wings unfurled, spread out wide—he fleetingly recalled the bats he saw at night in Great Haven—and they leveled out smoothly from the steep drop.

Raising his head from where he had ducked down instinctively, Harry took in where exactly he was.

Unlike in Great Haven, where the opening was on the ground; this Gate was evidently very high up the cliffs of a towering mountain and was enveloped by gray, roiling clouds. Even now, though they had fallen very far, Harry could only see an opaque wall of ashen vapor. The creature shrieked again, louder and the earlier triumph in its cry was now edged in a kind of crazed joy. Harry squeezed his eyes shut as his ears rang. It arched sharply and the massive wings flapped; catching the harsh, icy wind and soaring through the air with incredible speed. The small Fae surmised this fearsome beast could easily keep up with even him.

Harry shivered in the biting gale howling around them as they descended again; dropping like a thrown stone, passing the swirling, thick wall of clouds until the creature kicked the air and straightened out as they finally broke out of the misty wall.

When they did, Harry stared at the world laid out before him.

His breath hitched; shock, wonder and horror tangling together in his chest.

The realm of Hell was flat; sprawling out until the horizon was swallowed by an impregnable barrier of thick mist that draped across the horizon. The entire land was an immense metropolis. There was no single hint of green. It was a tapestry of obsidian buildings perfectly arranged into rings; each district separated by a high black wall of the same stone that glowed weakly in the wan light.

Harry counted the strips.

Nine.

He knew what they were called; he had been reading all he could find about the Devil and his domain ever since he had witnessed his first ceremony of the Giving of the Tithe. He broadened his readings even more the moment he had discovered the Weasleys had undertaken the Reckoning.

The Nine Circles of Hell.

Great Haven would have filled less than a single corner of the smallest circle in this vast ebony city. Harry had never felt so small. He could hardly imagine how many denizens lived here…

And all of them served the Devil.

Or, belonged to him.

Harry had no illusions about his fate; not anymore. He couldn’t afford to be taken by surprise again. Nothing had gone how he expected so far since he set foot into the Hell’s Mouth; he should have guessed things would never be so simple when it came to the Devil and his Deals.

The perfect symmetry of this megalopolis was so very much in character for the King of Hell too. He lived to control and dominate; it was only natural his realm reflected these traits exactly.

His mount flew low as they crossed the first and widest ring of the city, wings beating steadily and nearly noiseless now; unerring in its path. Harry wasn’t surprised; the beast had traveled this very same flight countless times before. Instead, he peered down at the wide streets. Creatures of every shape and form milled around on the roads, attired in a wide array of styles and fabrics; they moved
in ordered lines, with clear purpose.

None of them looked up as he passed over them. Not a single head twitched upwards even as the shadow of the beast draped over them briefly. It was downright unnerving.

Strangely, as they neared the center of the city, the world grew even colder. So much so that Harry only belatedly realized he was shaking violently when they finally entered the seventh Circle. It felt like the deepest winter had come and settled perpetually over the city. Raising his head, Harry gazed forward and found his eyes fixing on a grand citadel of obsidian that rose high in the skyline.

He had noticed it earlier but hadn’t realized just how huge the structure was until he could compare it with the other edifices. The obelisk loomed over the entire capital, its long shadow stretching from the center to the farthest edge of the perfect circle.

And, the creature was taking him straight towards it.

Swallowing, Harry braced himself as they arrived at the base of the citadel. There was a massive courtyard encircling the tower but the creature didn’t land as he thought it would. Instead, the beast rose sharply, wings beating furiously and legs kicking outwards powerfully. Harry grit his teeth, pressing his face and body into the leathery skin underneath him to keep from sliding off; the scent of leather and the slightest stench of decay filling his nostrils. The glimmering wall of the tower flashed by them as they ascended swiftly. He clenched his eyes shut against the chilling winds whipping past his face.

He was so numb he barely felt the steed alight with surprising delicacy; hooves clapping sharply against stone.

“Well,” a sultry voice cooed. “What do we have here!”

Harry jerked his head sharply away from the neck of the beast and towards the abrupt sound; eyes snapping open, and stared.

A female stood before him and his mount; she was incredibly, darkly beautiful. Tall, extremely voluptuous and clad in strips of crimson silks so transparent that left nothing to the imagination. Harry hastily averted his eyes and fixed his gaze on her stunning face.

She glided forward with a grace that could easily match the Fae Queen; if not for the exaggerated sway of those wide, curvy hips. Harry found his eyes wandering to the riveting movement before he regained control of himself and returned his stare to her gleeful visage.

“This is the Tithe?” she purred. “My, my, my have the Fae outdone themselves this year! Our Lord will be most pleased. So very pleased!”

Swallowing to moisten his parched throat, Harry opened his mouth to speak but was forestalled when another voice, cultured and undeniably masculine, rang out.

“Indeed, Our Lord would assuredly be. However, He will not be so delighted if we do not hurry, Lust; we do not keep Him waiting.”

Harry bit his bottom lip as the creature knelt and he knew he was expected to dismount. He couldn’t find himself capable of moving just yet. Both his body and his mind were still reeling.

Lust did not wait for him; she closed the short gap, reached out and grasped his arm in an unyielding grip. However, Harry noticed that the hold was very careful even with the silk sleeve of his robes in the way. The long, sharp nails that tipped each of her slender fingers didn’t so much as press into his
skin. He would have no marks from her touch.

“Oh yes!” she cried excitedly, pulling Harry off the steed and steadying the small Fae with both hands as he stumbled. She stared at him intently and without shame; clearly assessing him. Nodding in evident satisfaction, she spun him around and pushed him forward in front of her. “Come along, let’s go, little Tithe! We will not keep Our Lord waiting! Oh, no!”

Mildly disoriented by the rough twirl, Harry caught a glimpse of a tall male; features as strikingly handsome as the female had been beautiful standing poised and relaxed by a huge arch that clearly led into the citadel. He glanced at the tiny Fae briefly, sharp silver eyes sweeping over him in matching appraisal. There was a touch of approval before he turned in a swirl of ebony robes and strode inside.

Harry found himself made to match the brisk pace; nearly jogging down dark winding corridors to keep in step with his escort.

They moved quickly; taking turns and passing through so many entryways Harry was thoroughly lost by the time they slowed to a more sedate pace. All Harry knew was they were very deep inside the tower and had climbed several flights of stairs along the way.

They finally stopped before a pair of broad double doors so high Harry had to crane his head to see the top of the doorframe. Like everything else in the tower, it was made of some darkly glowing black, silver-veined stone and adorned with extravagant and complex designs. Harry, panting heavily by this point, had no voice to speak and just focused on catching his breath when his companions stopped right before the doors.

He gasped when Lust began fixing his somewhat disheveled appearance. Her hands straightening his white robes and setting the circlet of rubies properly back atop his head. There was the strangest sensation of foreign Magic from her; Harry felt the few beads of sweat on his face and neck vanish. the ivory robes he wore rippled in an unseen breeze and his toes twitched as an invisible hand swiped over the leather of the golden sandals he wore. He knew that if he looked down, his robes would be spotless and the golden sandals would be gleaming.

She paused over his wings, murmuring about them almost feverishly; Harry was beyond relieved she didn’t attempt to touch them. He didn’t bother to listen to her ramblings; she had been babbling about how her Lord would be so pleased about him the entire march to this point.

Reluctantly enduring this intrusive grooming, Harry stared mutely at the sealed doors; trying to gather his wits and courage along with his breath. The male had been silent throughout the long walk, not once looking at Harry. Now, as she worked, he watched the pair of them intently; a crooked smirk on his mouth, before nodding curtly when she finally stepped back.

Whirling, he reached out with both hands and touched the doors.

It was only the faintest press of his palms but the massive doors easily swung open without a noise. Harry blinked and squinted as a wash of brilliant light blinded him briefly. When the spots cleared from his vision, he barely kept himself from gaping.

It was a majestic Hall, one that easily put the Fae’s own large, luxurious throne room to shame; brightly lit by dozens of golden glow-orbs that were hanging all around the vast chamber. Thick black pillars supported a high ceiling that was partially shrouded in cavorting shadows. But, most alarming to Harry’s scrambling mind, was that the grand hall was full. Countless forms lay on the floor, faces and bodies pressed to the stone in complete genuflection and subservience.
Harry felt a surge of bile and dread at this show of submission. And he had thought the sight of the Fae kneeling had been horrible…

Only the middle of the great chamber was entirely clear. An aisle was cut into the middle of the eerily silent and still throng; giving him a clear view of the massive divan-like throne at the end of the hall, and the black-clad figure lounging on it.

A now familiar push from the palms on his shoulders sent Harry trotting forward involuntarily. Inwardly, he was struggling to gain some measure of calm and composure as he took in the spectacle around him. He hadn’t entirely recovered from his arrival in Hell, witnessing the vastly different world he was now in and the exhausting trek through the tower. His nerves were steadily flaying and he could feel reawakened panic nipping at his heels; he had expected to be long dead now. Not… Not to be presented to the King of Hell and his entire court!

*I chose this!* Harry reminded himself viciously, willing himself to take slow, measured breaths. *Now, I need to deal with it like I should! I can’t lose my nerve or wits now! The Devil’s Deal hasn’t been completed yet.*

The hush and motionlessness of the bodies around him was downright disturbing and Harry willed himself to ignore it; he was only somewhat successful. No one moved at all but the trio as they approached the end of the Hall.

The walk to the divan was long; already, Harry could feel the ache in his legs from the arduous journey but he persevered. When they finally came to a stop, Harry straightened and was about to raise his head but let out a low cry of shock and pain as a foot suddenly pushed into the back of his knees and sent him to the floor. Instinctively, stubbornly, Harry tried to rise but a hand fell and gripped the nape of his neck; shoving him down and even bent him forward so his nose brushed the icy stone floor. His palms slammed into the stone with a loud clap.

On either side of him, Harry felt his escorts also kneel and likely assume the same position.

“The Fae Tithe, My Lord!” Lust cried rapturously.

A deep chuckle came from above him; rich, smooth and husky. The evident mirth sent an ice-cold knife slicing down his spine.

“*Fae Tithe, indeed, my dear Lust,*” the baritone voice purred, sounding like the sweetest music. “Now, let me see him properly.”

Lust was only too eager to obey and Harry hissed in renewed pain as he was yanked up into a backwards arch, still on his knees; pale neck bared and made to face the King of Hell. His hands flew up to claw at the lone hand around his throat but his movement was halted as he saw what was before him.

His first look of the King of Hell stilled the breath in his chest.

The only memories of the Devil the Lore Mistress had been willing to Share was that of a very tall figure clad in deepest black and only the briefest glimpses of large elegant, alabaster hands.

The creature before him was bared for all to see.

Beauty among the Fae was commonplace but the Devil’s features and form were beyond breathtaking. Even the most beautiful of their people could not match him; the captivating loveliness of Lust and the entrancing handsomeness of male with her instantly paled next to that of the Devil’s
appearance. Helplessly, Harry could only stare back mutely.

There was no blemish or defect and even the Devil’s eyes; a luminous, sinister crimson shade only accentuated his already flawless form.

Those keen eyes roved over him very slowly. His lips curled upwards.

“Lovely,” he murmured, gesturing towards them; a hand beckoning with elegant indolence. “Bring him to me.”

With another, even more forceful yank, Harry was pulled to his feet and practically dragged up the low steps to the throne. Lust was grinning maniacally as she presented the tiny Fae to her Lord.

The King of Hell leaned forward slightly, gaze still traveling over him. Harry finally recovered some of his courage and will and glowered back at the intense stare. But, the Devil was too focused on his inspection to take any real note of his glare.

“Turn him.”

Lust wheeled him around so sharply Harry felt a slight wave of dizziness but he fought it down; his back was now to the Devil. Harry didn’t like this position in the slightest. Far less than earlier when he was made to kneel and just now when he was presented like some ornament to be admired.

A startled protest escaped him when he felt the unmistakable sensation of a hand trailing over first one wing then the other; tracing first the shape then the pattern. The touch was originally light but grew firm and questing. The pressure sending bolts of unwanted pleasure racing along his nerves.

With a growl, he empowered his body with Magic and tore out of the grip. Stepping away from the hand, he spun around to glare ferociously at the King of Hell. Lust looked rather surprised and somewhat impressed he had escaped her hold.

“Oh,” the Devil smirked. “So, Fae wings are especially sensitive if touched in a certain manner; I had always wondered if it was true.” He paused and the smirk darkened; becoming predatory. “How delightful.”

Harry felt his glare deepen into a scowl; along with the heat of a rising blush. “Yes, so stop touching them or any part of me!” He snapped.

Lust advanced, her face contorted with fury, ready to punish him for his insolence; those claw-like hands reaching for him but a dismissive wave from the Devil stilled her instantly. Another silent, negligent gesture and she stepped away, bowing deeply. Harry risked a glance over his shoulder, watching as she descended the low steps, dropped to her knees beside her companion and resumed the same position as everyone else. He hastily returned his gaze to the Devil. Who had been watching him intensely.

“So, you have some fire after all,” the King of Hell mused, his smirk never wavering. “Yes, I am very pleased with this year’s Tithe; I think you are the best one so far.”

“Good to know,” Harry muttered, raising his chin and crossing his arms as he braced himself.

Silence stretched out between them and Harry felt his jaw cramp from the stiffness of his muscles. “Well?” he bit out.

An elegant eyebrow rose. “Well what?”

Drawing a deep breath and squaring his shoulders, Harry said quietly, determinedly. “Aren’t you
“going to kill me now?”

The Devil blinked once. “Do you want me to?” he drawled.

“What kind of a question is that?!” Harry exploded, what little patience and calm he clung to vanishing completely. This was getting ridiculous! The King of Hell had clearly accepted the life Harry was offering to him! Why wasn’t he dead yet? Didn’t he have to die in order to fulfill the Devil’s Deal of the Fae? “And, why not?! You have to kill me!”

The Devil leaned back into the throne and steepled his fingers together. “I have to kill you?”

“Do you answer every question with a question?” Harry growled in frustration.

“Are you always this impudent and brash?”

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’,” Harry groused, reaching up to rake a hand over his face and into his black hair; nearly sending the circlet flying. He hastily righted the piece of jewelry, the Devil watching him with lazy amusement. “You need to kill me to fulfil the terms in the Devil’s Deal you have with my people.”

“Hmn, I do?”

Harry scowled. “I’m not playing your game anymore. Just get on with it! I’m only interested in ensuring my people won’t be bothered by you for another seven years! You accepted me as your Tithe so kill me and complete the final clause in the accursed Deal already!”

The King of Hell laughed richly, hands falling to rest on the arms of his throne as he gracefully relaxed into his divan like a lounging hunting cat. “Such fire! I don’t think I’ve met someone so foolishly defiant before, especially of me when they have knowledge of who exactly I am. I know you are perfectly aware of what I am and what I am capable of yet you defy me so easily… I can see why you were chosen.”

“I wasn’t chosen!” Harry shot back. “I made the choice to be the Tithe!”

The Devil froze, surprise briefly flickering over his striking features before he was smirking again and the red eyes smoldered. “Did you now?”

“Yes,” Harry declared without the slightest hesitation.

“So you took the place of a Fae family that failed; how courageous and noble. Aren’t you quite the priceless gem, My Little Emerald?”

“They didn’t fail!” Harry snarled, hands fisting as he advanced a step. “The Human Tithe didn’t survive but it wasn’t the fault of my family!” he frowned. “And I’m not your anything!”

“You are mine,” the King of Hell reiterated quietly, the smirk shifting to a blank look. Harry was oblivious to the brewing storm. “You said so yourself; you gave yourself to me.”

“No,” Harry shook his head vehemently. “I gave you my life so you can end it as stated in the Devil’s Deal my people made with you. You decide how I die but nothing else; I am my own person. I will live however I choose until you decide to finally kill me!”

One moment Harry was shouting and glaring insolently at the King of Hell; the next instant one alabaster hand was tightly wrapped around his neck and he was wrenched close to the seated figure. The strength in that elegant limb was unmatched; even Lust’s vice-like grip felt weak next to this
punishing hold. Harry fought anyway, clawing desperately but his small hands did nothing to lessen the unforgiving grip.

The chokehold constricted slowly until Harry felt his vision dim from lack of air and his frantic struggles flagged and stopped, arms dropping to his sides as his legs gave out and he once more fell forward onto his knees. The Devil shifted smoothly as Harry tumbled, parting his long legs and fitting the nearly unconscious Fae between his muscled thighs. Harry felt his chin come to rest atop the King of Hell’s pelvis, despite this, he continued to glare up defiantly into the gleaming red eyes watching him avidly.

The Devil held his wavering stare; his smirk broadening into a hungry grin. Harry knew he was teetering on the edge of consciousness but refused to fall. He was nearly at the end of his will and awareness when the King of Hell slowly began to loosen his hold. When Harry was mostly coherent, he saw him bend forward and he felt the brush of warm, smooth lips against one shell-like ear.

“The Devil’s Deal your people have with me binds you to me entirely, My Little Emerald. The sacrifice isn’t a life as you foolishly assumed but a soul. The instance you chose to become my Tithe and I accepted your offering; I came to own not only your life and death but your very soul. What value is a mere life to me after all? Such a temporal existence has little significance to an immortal entity such as I. Souls, on the other hand, are very useful.”

Harry yelped in discomfort and complaint when the Devil began nipping and suckling along the lobe of his ear playfully; shortly, the soft noises turned pleasured as the sensations continued. Harry was struggling against the slowly growing enjoyment he was feeling when he felt himself abruptly, effortlessly lifted up and suddenly found himself straddling the lap of the King of Hell. He gaped momentarily in disbelief; realizing belatedly that one hand was kept wound about his slender throat, and the free arm was now slipping around his waist and pulling him close; pressing them flush together. Harry erupted into renewed struggling and shouts; the small fists beating against the Devil’s chest but he could see it merely increased his amusement and satisfaction.

Harry felt fresh terror surge up inside him at the Devil’s words and actions. He hadn’t realized how severely he had misinterpreted the clauses of the Devil’s Deal. Worse still, he had some idea what the King of Hell was doing and he certainly didn’t like it. This kind of intimate contact was strictly between lovers or bonded mates and Harry had barely explored this side of himself. He was quickly becoming overwhelmed by both his reactions and emotions. The heat of the King of Hell’s firm and powerful body wasn’t helping him retain control of himself either; he definitely did not enjoy how well their forms fit together.

The Devil finally released his pale throat but Harry had barely drawn a deep breath, or even willed himself to move, when the large hand had slid up and tangled long fingers in his unruly mane of black hair, deftly keeping the ruby diadem in place. Harry winced as the balled fist tugged painfully and tilted his head back. The Fae inhaled sharply and protested loudly when the Devil leaned forward and nuzzled along the white column of his exposed neck; he went rigid as warm lips and a moist tongue caressed and suckled on the rapid pulse at his throat. “Your soul, especially, is absolutely exquisite and now belongs to me,” he pointed out with a vicious bite; raking his teeth over the abused flesh.

Harry cried out sharply; it was harsh, just short of drawing blood. “Stop!” he howled, twisting and flailing. His wings beat rapidly; stirring up a small gale that sent their robes and hair fluttering and he began to pull in all of the Elements he could feel around him.
The Devil paused, burying his nose into Harry’s quivering throat. The little Fae shuddered when he felt a smirk brand itself into his skin and he let out a moan of despair and denial when the Elements he was so desperately gathering dispersed abruptly as another, far greater will forced them to scatter and calm.

“Such power. You are full of surprises, my Little Emerald,” the voice husked delightedly into his ear; the sharp teeth now focused entirely on licking, sucking and biting along the entire curve. Harry shuddered as unwanted pleasure traveled from his head to his toes. He never knew his ears could be so sensitive!

He relaxed slightly when the mouth finally released the captive flesh and the hand in his hair unclenched and glided away. The Devil raised his head and Harry could tell he was watching his wings as they flapped and fluttered restlessly.

Harry stiffened instantly as the free hand began caressing one of his shifting wings; the surges of pleasure this spawned was nearly too enjoyable and far more intense than even the sensations of having his ear ravished.

“I said don’t touch those!” He tried to pull away desperately; using all of his Fae strength and instinctively attempting to enforce this with magic from the Elements but realized that there were now no Elements to draw on.

“What did you do?!” Harry cried, half in fury and half in fear; hands shoving and scrabbling at the broad chest he was pressed against. He strained to escape the exploring hand but found himself with nowhere to move and, with a whine of misery and steadily rising euphoria, submitted to the incessant, steady and skilled stroking.

“I control this realm entirely; every single denizen and part of Hell answers solely to me, even you,” the Devil murmured almost kindly. “Especially you, My Little Emerald. I am simply proving this irrefutable fact to you so we will have no future misunderstandings. I own you; all of you. I can do whatever I want with you…”

Harry buried his face into the crook of one wide shoulder, muffling the uncontrollable noises he was making, as the sensations peaked and the world flared white.

“…Give you pleasure,” the voice whispered.

The hand at his wings suddenly gripped one of them cruelly and wrenched; sending a lance of blazing agony chasing the ecstasy as the appendage was crushed and twisted in the brutal hold. Arching, Harry shrieked at the contrasting sensations before collapsing bonelessly on top of the Devil; tears blinding his wavering vision.

“Or pain.”

The hand released him and now gentle fingers traced the mangled wing. Harry sighed in relief as the searing pain slowly ebbed and faded away under the familiar soothing wash of Healing Magic.

“Remember this lesson well, My Little Emerald.” Dimly, Harry felt a hand tip his face up by the chin and a warm mouth kissed and licked lightly over his features; taking his tears. “If you don’t,” the voice deepened to a menacing growl. “I will teach you until you learn.”

His head was guided back and tucked once more into the curve of the broad shoulder and neck. Then, the hand returned to his uninjured wing; stroking lightly and igniting a pleasant thrum of sensation that was lulling him towards sleep. The arm wrapped around his waist tugged and arranged
him so he was sprawled out comfortably on the warm, hard chest. The overpowering scent of spices, musk and a heady, indecipherable scent filled his nose. The call of slumber was becoming impossible to resist.

However, a small part of Harry still refused to let sleep claim him; he was not safe, in fact, he was in the greatest danger…

“So stubborn,” the velvet baritone crooned. “I will break you yet.”

Harry muttered an incoherent but vehement denial as the darkness finally won and dragged him under.
The Fate of the Tithe

Chapter Notes

To clear the air (as I've received a couple of reviews which have asked me about this), while there is 'Non-Consensual Touching', and 'Forced Orgasm' Tags; there will be **NO Rape or Forced Sexual Intercourse between Tomi/Voldemort and Harry.**

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Harry jerked upright** with a sharp cry of horror; his fitful slumber riddled by nightmares that were already fading as he fully awoke.

Looking around frantically, he found himself in an unfamiliar but unmistakably extravagant bedchamber. He was lying on a gigantic canopyed bed that easily dwarfed him and was incredibly comfortable. The sheets were dark crimson and black; golden thread woven into the silk made the covers glint in the wan light of the sole glow-orb he could barely see seeping through the curtains drawn closed around the massive bed.

*At least, Harry consoled himself. I'm alone.*

Lifting the thick quilt, he peeked underneath and sighed in relief. He was still clad in the white robes of the Tithe; they were also dry and clean. He hastily shied away from the memory of their dampness and why they had been wet to begin with… he had more important things to think about!

Throwing off the covers and pulling aside the curtains, Harry slid to sit by the edge of the bed. He shivered violently as the harsh chill that permeated Hell flooded into him; chasing away the warmth that had been cocooning him moments before. Carefully, he moved his wings; breathing in slowly as he felt only a pang of mild ache. Looking over his shoulder, Harry peered along his wings and saw no hint of the terrible injury the Devil had inflicted on him. Encouraged, he began to flap them rapidly. There were a few lances of sharper pain that ebbed away quickly but he found himself hovering above the floor without any effort.

*Good, I can still fly,* Harry nodded to himself in satisfaction before dropping down to the carpet and spotting the golden sandals by the night table. Briskly, he pulled them on. He decided it was best he explore wherever it was he had ended up. He knew he wouldn’t be alone for long.

The bedchamber was grand and dominated by the canopyed bed; there were little else in the room and he instantly noticed three doors. One led into a bathroom; Harry gawked at the extravagant pool of steaming water he found inside the bathing chamber. Checking the other door, he found a walk-in closet and blinked as he took in the sheer volume of elegant clothing and accessories in the room-sized wardrobe.

*Clearly, this is not my room,* Harry realized with puzzlement. *So why am I here?*

He doubted he’d find anything of use in the two rooms so he headed to the last archway at one end of the bedchamber. As he expected, it led out of the bedroom. Stepping out, he found more rooms that were no less grandiose; decadent in its luxuries and comforts.
Frowning, Harry continued to investigate the quarters. There was a wide sitting area with an array of large couches and armchairs. Along one wall, Harry noticed a wide archway. He strode over and peered out by the threshold; seeing that this opened onto a massive balcony that stretched along the wall of the Citadel, likely running the length of the suite and granted a breathtaking panorama of the megalopolis. Exiting the doorway and coming to the railing, Harry let his eyes rove across the horizon; he was too high to see the details of the capital but the view was still riveting.

When he had his fill, Harry attempted to leap up on the balustrade, he had no trouble and walked along the wide obsidian stone railing. On a hunch, Harry tried stepping off the edge but found that there was an invisible but very solid barrier set right before the end of the banister. Moving from one end to the other, he wasn’t surprised to see this ward covered the entire veranda. Mouth twisting into a lopsided smile, he shrugged; unsurprised by this discovery.

It would have been too easy if he could simply fly away.

Harry re-entered the chambers; he realized he was shivering lightly but not as badly as he had been when he first arrived. He wondered if there were some Warming charms cast within the suite; his Magical Senses couldn’t tell. It took little searching for him to find the doorway out of the collection of rooms; a small antechamber that had a set of stone doors in one wall. But it was sealed and nothing he did would make it budge. Harry had given up after countless failed attempts; refocusing on familiarizing himself with the ostentatious lodgings instead.

Circling the sitting chamber, Harry found a new archway and stepped through; here he found another large room where there was a massive sunken pit of countless thick and plush cushions that reminded Harry of the dens in the treehouses back in Great Haven but on a scale that left him breathless. The entire Weasley family, himself, Hermione, Luna and Neville, could sprawl out on the wide mattress-covered bowl and not touch each other if they wanted!

He paused at the edge of this gigantic pit; pressing his palm to his heart as a wave of homesickness rose in his chest.

When he had chosen to take Ron’s place, Harry never imagined this would be the outcome. He missed his home and, especially, his family and friends. He still had no regrets, he wouldn’t have changed what had happened. However, a thrill of dread trickled down his spine and settled in his stomach as he came to grips with what exactly had happened and what might yet befall him. He hadn’t been afraid of dying… but, it looked like death wasn’t his fate.

*We should have realized*, Harry mulled over his confrontation with the Devil. *Trust the King of Hell to rig even the fate of the Tithe. A soul, and not a life…*

He could applaud the Devil’s cunning. A life was transient, even for the Fae, so they would assume the King of Hell hadn’t really gotten much out of his Deal since he would only receive one measly life every seven years. Who would have known they had been giving him souls instead?

A soul was eternal and, as he had said, priceless. Souls held much power; Harry had only heard of the Magical Art of Soul Magic once. When his mentor had very briefly and very reluctantly explained to him that the Magical Craft was even more obscure, far deadlier and impossibly more powerful than even Blood Magic. He had been suitably stunned; he had always thought that Blood Magic was the most dangerous magic there was. Soul Magic was a field of Magical Arts the Fae had absolutely refused to explore; Harry knew that any sign of practicing Soul Magic among the Fae was punished brutally; first with an interrogation to discover all and any research into the matter than swift execution. Most shocking of all to Harry was that any and all research was very thoroughly gathered and destroyed; it was so unlike his people to reject knowledge he had found it impossible to believe they did not keep any record.
When he asked why it was like this; Dumbledore had merely told him that there were simply certain things best left undiscovered and untouched.

He didn’t even want to contemplate what the King of Hell knew of this forbidden Magical Art.

Most of all, the King of Hell had already been gifted two hundred ninety-nine souls with more to come. Harry shuddered at what kind of power he had already gained from those poor souls.

Silently, he vowed to himself he would ensure that the Devil gained as little as possible from his soul. Somehow, Harry would find a way without jeopardizing the Devil’s Deal of the Fae. The Devil did not need even more power.

Muttering lowly to himself, Harry exited the den and found another doorway and froze at the threshold and ogled. Beyond this, lay the hugest library he had ever seen. It likely took up nearly three-fourths of the entire floor and was definitely the best (and Harry’s personal favorite) section of the extravagant quarters.

Idly, he wondered why a library was even here…

Harry found himself browsing the expansive archive; his fingers itched to pluck some of the tomes when he read the titles. However, the black-haired Fae wouldn’t be surprised if there were heavy wards over these books and scrolls; he doubted the Devil would willingly share anything; much less the kind of knowledge these tomes and rolled parchments clearly held. It took some effort to drag himself away but Harry reminded himself of his task. He could always come back later.

He had finished memorizing the layout of the rooms when he wondered if these would be his chambers… they seemed far too lavish—and that library!

Even the Fae Monarchs didn’t live in such sheer decadence. Then, there was also the matter of those clothes. Harry had only glanced over them and knew that none of them would fit him. Idly, he mused if this was how all of Hell’s denizens lived; it was certainly nothing like the simple lives his people enjoyed. He wasn’t complaining but it was still jarring to find himself in such luxury.

A sudden, alarming thought rose in his mind; was he expected to share these chambers? While he was used to sharing with Ron; the idea of sharing with a Devil or any other stranger was highly discomforting. Maybe he was supposed to stay with the archivist who cared for and oversaw the library?

He hoped that wasn’t the case here. Dealing with one Devil was more than enough for him, having to live with another one… he’d prefer a cell.

Pushing away the disturbing thoughts, Harry did another careful circuit of the entire suite; when he found nothing else of note, he decided he would lounge in the ‘den’. Away from the temptations of that wondrous library too.

He did need to plan.

Slipping off the golden sandals, Harry walked unsteadily along until he had reached the middle of the pit, he gathered a small horde of plush cushions around him and settled down onto the mattress with a murmur of appreciation.

He couldn’t help but grin as he found himself cradled in the thick and warm silk and pillows.

To be honest with himself, Harry really didn’t know what exactly he could do in his situation. How do you fight the King of Hell? Especially in Hell itself where the Devil had absolute control and
power over *everything*.

The books he had read hadn’t prepared him for this; the tomes certainly hadn’t told him about that very important fact. Or, maybe, he should have predicted that the King of Hell would ensure that Hell itself answered to him? He had been right that the Devil was fixated on control and dominance if what had transpired in the vast hall was any clue.

*Wish I wasn’t right too!* Harry grimaced. *The viciousness and cruelty shouldn’t have surprised me like it did…*

Reaching up, he probed his throat gingerly; there was just the slightest sting where his fingertips pressed into his flesh and, he wondered, if he stared into a mirror; would he see bruises and how badly would they look? From the soreness, he would have some marks. Perhaps, he should have checked in the bathroom when he went earlier.

“Well, the first order of business would be knowledge. I need knowledge,” Harry muttered aloud to himself.

There was a library here, he needed to gain access… because, he knew he needed a lot to even out the playing field if he wanted to fight the Devil somehow.

Harry lost himself in thinking up idea after idea only to disregard them. His instincts weren’t much help; right now, his mind and intuition were screaming that he was far out of his element.

*Great Haven! Do I know it!* he acknowledged with a frustrated moan but determinedly continued plotting.

Harry was debating if he should take a nap to clear his head when he felt the faintest ripple brush along his Magical Senses.

He was being watched and the presence had been there for some time.

Harry clutched the square pillow he had been holding to his chest like a shield and sat up; looking towards where he knew the concealed watcher stood. “I know you’re there.”

“Very good senses, My Little Emerald. I expected no less from you.”

Heart nearly beating out of his chest, Harry stared as the intimidating form of the King of Hell coalesced before his gaze; stalking towards him from the archway leading back into the sitting room. His gait was nothing like the Fae; he moved like a predator, all deadly elegance and perfect motion. The little Fae had a hard time assuring himself he *wasn’t* prey.

“Harry,” he proclaimed evenly, recklessly. “I’d rather you use my name than that ridiculous pet name.”

“And there is that fire I wondered if I had managed to extinguish earlier,” he laughed softly, striding onto the pit fluidly without the slightest wobble as the thick mattress dipped deeply from his weight. He sank elegantly down amidst the cushions beside Harry; crimson eyes never once leaving him.

Harry hastily started to scoot away.

He had barely shifted when a hand clamped around his thin wrist and pulled him over to once more straddle the Devil’s powerful thighs. Harry made a few attempts to move but after a low command of “*Be still.*” he settled stiffly atop the Devil, hands tucking the pillow between their chests to make as much of a gap as possible.
“Stop manhandling me!” he spat resentfully.

“I rather enjoy putting you where I want you, Harry,” the Devil purred lasciviously.

Harry shuddered and wondered if he should just have let the King of Hell keep using the stupid pet name; the sound of his real name on the Devil’s lips was positively sinful.

“Hmn,” he grinned. “You may have a point.” He bent forward; Harry tried leaning back but a hand at the small of his back shoving him into the broad chest thwarted him. ‘Calling you ‘Harry’ does sound better then ‘My Little Emerald’.”

Harry did not squeak when powerful arms wrapped around him and pulled him into a vise-like embrace; the Devil pressing close and nuzzling his throat, breathing deeply before he mouthed along the column of his neck. He was clearly delighting in the tremors and struggles he was causing but Harry couldn’t stop from trying to escape.


“I’d prefer if you just didn’t call me anything at all or bother with me,” he muttered, biting back the noise that rose in his throat, his skin tingled warmly from the renewed contact and talented ministrations. “What happened to the other Tithes? If you own their souls? What did you do with two hundred ninety-nine souls?”

Maybe if I made him talk he’d stop doing this, Harry thought with a hint of desperation. Besides, he must love the sound of his own voice, right?!

The Devil’s low chuckle vibrated along his throat before he raised his head to peer at Harry. “So full of questions as always. You are far too curious and are certainly impetuous enough to ask even the hardest, most dangerous questions, aren’t you?”

“Just wondering what my fate will be,” Harry quipped boldly; he met the gleaming red eyes with his usual defiance. “I’ll end up like them someday, I imagine. But I’ll make sure you won’t get as much satisfaction out of it.”

The Devil laughed outright at this and Harry felt a frown crease his features. He opened his mouth to ask another question but ended up squealing in shock as they suddenly switched positions. One moment he was astride the King of Hell and the next, he was now on his back; pinned down by the heavy, much larger body on top of him. The square cushion Harry had used as a makeshift barrier was tossed negligently aside. Harry flushed darkly at the intimacy before he began trying to scramble out from underneath him.

The Devil watched him lazily, effortlessly preventing him from fleeing. When Harry had exhausted himself and simply sprawled out limply, he draped himself over the little Fae like a satisfied feline; arms resting on either side of his head so he wasn’t crushing Harry. Their faces were uncomfortably close and Harry turned his head away, glowering. The Devil had trapped his arms and legs between his own much longer legs; hands locked to his hips by the King of Hell’s knees.

“Get off already!” he growled, still panting slightly.

“No. I am quite comfortable; do you not want your answers?”

“You can tell me all I want to know from the other end of the pit! It’s more than huge enough for us to both sit comfortably and as far apart as possible!”

“Oh, but I enjoy being close to you too much to give it up.”
Harry clenched his jaw harshly and easily ignored the ache this caused. “Talk then!”

“The Fate of each Tithe varies,” the Devil started smoothly, his warm breath ghosting over the side of his face. “Depending on the kind of Tithe I receive. The ones who I find tedious or uninteresting, I make use of immediately while the very few that catch my eye…” he leaned forward and guided the tip of his nose along Harry’s cheek before pressing it into the back of Harry’s ear, “I keep for myself for a while.”

“I take it I fall under the latter category,” Harry spat, eyes falling half shut as the increasingly familiar and skillful tongue traced over his ear.

“Oh yes.” The mouth moved to his throat; Harry knew he’d have new bruises as he felt the prick of sharp teeth and the wet, smooth tongue. The nipping and sucking now was more passionate and somehow even more enjoyable; Harry clamped his teeth hard on his bottom lip to seal away the noises he was making; his entire face burned hotly. “But you’re nothing like all of my other Tithes. Normally, dear Lust and Pride have to carry them to me. They’re usually so terrified they’re little more than gibbering lumps. I very rarely keep a Tithe at all. Most of them bore me even before they speak, such pathetic creatures but I suppose I shouldn’t have expected too much from Humans”—the pure derision in the velvet baritone was chilling—“after all. However, a soul is still a soul. The power they grant me once I consume them is still of much use.”

Harry turned and stared up into the darkened ceiling and forced his mouth to move. “You said you still kept a few for a short time; I take it you consume them afterwards?”

“Hmn…”

Harry inhaled sharply as the Devil shifted position again; his legs were forced apart and the King of Hell’s lower body settled over him again. His wrists didn’t remain free long and were grabbed by a large hand, raised and held over his head. Harry kicked out then tried bracing his feet on the mattress beneath him and push off but the Devil was immoveable. The little Fae groaned softly when their groins pressed and grinded into each other and sparked a jolt of intense pleasure; a quiet murmur of approval from the King of Hell had him regain his senses and he stilled. His legs went limp but his breaths were slightly harsh.

Lifting himself slightly, the Devil gazed down at Harry with evident amusement.

“Even if the odds are entirely against you; you still continue to fight me. You have some fear; I can feel it and I can see it in your soul but you refuse to let your fear rule you.”

Harry bared his teeth. “When I came here, I expected to die,” he lifted his chin rebelliously. “Now that I know I gave my soul to you to be consumed; I won’t give you anything more. I won’t ever be submissive! You better just consume my soul already, I won’t play whatever sick games you’re after. I also hope you get indigestion!”

There was a stretch of ringing silence.

Harry braced himself, wondering if he had finally sealed his fate.

Slowly, the King of Hell tilted his head to the side; a bemused expression crossing his features. “…yes,” he concluded slowly. “Courageous to the point of impudence, so very noble, fearful but resolute. Such an unusual Tithe you are; even confronted with your gruesome demise, you continue to defy me so brazenly.” His face split into a new grin that was downright terrifying; ravenous and beyond pleased. “I will savor you, Harry.”
Harry swallowed, throat painfully dry at the dark, possessive hunger etched into that strikingly handsome face. The Devil bent and slowly began to plant warm and wet kisses along his neck and the underside of his taut jaw.

Harry went rigid momentarily at this newest assault before he started tugging harshly at the lone hand binding his wrists but the fingers were unyielding and he halted when he felt pain flare from the bruises forming. The Devil seemed to relish his attempts and his fruitless struggles were proving nothing but providing the entity with more entertainment.

Choose your battles, the ones you have a chance of winning! Harry thought frantically. Even if the possibility of winning in any such conflicts with the King of Hell was likely less than zero. He needed to turn this situation around somehow… Sadly, Ron was more of the strategist between the two of them. Harry had been more talented at improvising.

Giving a stifled noise of helpless anger and increasing distress, Harry squeezed his eyes shut as the other hand began to explore him mercilessly; trailing over the rise and dip of his body with single-minded purpose. The Devil was seeking out the places on him that would make him arch in pleasure. Harry found some relief that the Devil was keeping away from his wings this time at least. But, those long fingers and wide palm were far too talented at discovering all the ways to make him shudder and mewl.

“I… know what you’re doing!” Harry cried suddenly, his voice strained and breaths labored; there was the beginnings of a plan in his muddled mind.

“I certainly hope so; surely, you are not so innocent.”

Feeling his already flushed face burn more, Harry glared up into amused red eyes. “You’re trying to show me how much you control and dominate my body. You don’t really want me physically; when it comes to you, it’s all just about control and dominance.”

The hand slid over to cup his hip, the thumb twirling in a lazy pattern. “You think I don’t find you desirable?”

“No,” Harry said easily, earnest. “I’ve seen far lovelier Fae than myself and many of the Devils who serve you are even more stunning than even our King and Queen who are the most beautiful of my people. After all, aren’t Devils known for their alluring appearance?”

“While I admit that it is pathetically effortless for me to control and dominate your body,” the King of Hell raked his hand over Harry’s most sensitive spots to drive his point home; grinning victoriously when Harry writhed wildly and cried out in pleasure. “And, that I am doing it to show my ownership of you; it is not a chore to me. You are quite an exquisite little Fae after all. In fact, I am surprised your people even allowed you to be the Tithe.”

Harry quickly averted his eyes. “…”

Instantly, he felt the Devil lean downwards, his nose brushing his cheek. “There is a story behind this.”

“One that I’m not telling you!” Harry growled.

“I will find out in time; you will discover keeping secrets from me is futile.”

“Keep telling yourself that,” Harry muttered and frowned. “These rooms are a little over the top for a temporary resident, don’t you think?”
“These are my private chambers; I want you close to me.”

“I’d rather have a cell.”

“I know,” the Devil smirked. “That is why I have decided you shall reside here instead.”

To keep me uncomfortable and unbalanced, Harry thought bitterly. Was everything involving the Devil a damned powerplay?

Of course, it was. Why did he even bother asking?

There was another small interlude of silence that Harry could have called as almost comfortable as the Devil had finally ceased molesting him; except he really wished the King of Hell would just get off of him entirely already.

Knowing he would likely regret pointing this out, Harry cleared his throat. “Are you bored of me yet?”

The Devil laughed. “Hardly, I’ve never been quite as delighted and amused in a very long time. But, I have some questions myself.”

“Great,” Harry mumbled then suggested hopefully. “If you want to talk with me, I’m a better conversationalist when I’m not so uncomfortable; you can accomplish this by getting off me.”

The Devil peered at him before, smirking darkly, ran his hands intently over the little Fae and drawing out a few more clearly unwilling sounds of bliss and squirming. When he was sated with his touches, he lifted himself off the smaller body. Harry merely lay where he was, feeling boneless from underneath the latest assault; he willed his breathing to even out and his heated and aroused body to calm.

The Devil watched him closely with his trademark smirk firmly in place. “True, and I would prefer you coherent so you can answer me properly,” he conceded easily.

Harry stared as he withdrew and gestured; summoning nearly all the cushions and pillows around the room to shape a comfortable pile where he lounged with as much grace and elegance as if he was on his throne.

Harry instantly scrambled up once he had recovered and crawled to the farthest part of the pit he could go. The Devil observed him, the amused look on his face unchanging.

“So,” Harry said slowly, loudly. “What do you want to know?”

“From your words, the Human taken from Aboveground died. I am assuming this was after the portal was sealed.”

“Yes,” Harry confirmed.

The Devil hummed pensively. “I have to admit, I am impressed your people have managed to give me Humans for so long; I expected a Fae to be offered long before you. And, from the implications, it was a very great accident which resulted in your presence here.”

Harry’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

The Devil shrugged carelessly. “I’m sure you know how difficult it has become since your people began going Aboveground to acquire the Human for my Tithe…” he trailed off, instantly noting the
faintly blank look Harry was giving him. He stared at the little Fae intensely. “You… do not have
any true insight, do you? You do not have the Memories yet?”

“…No,” Harry confessed with unconcealed reluctance. “But, yes, I know it can be very hard. We’ve
had a number of Reckonings that have claimed the lives of the Fae sent Aboveground.”

“The Lore Mistress hasn’t been teaching you as well as she should…” The King of Hell raised an
eyebrow. “Unless you’ve been sleeping in her classes?”

Harry flushed, feeling sheepish. “Not as much as I used to!” he defended himself. His blush
deepened as he realized what he had just admitted. “I mean! How in Great Haven do you even know
that?!?”

Looking even more amused now, he asked. “How many springs old are you exactly?”

“…” Harry fidgeted. “Twenty-one.”

To his amazement, the Devil reared back in mild shock. “What?”

“What?!” Harry snapped back, his blush so bright he wondered if he was developing a fever.

“You’re…” he grimaced, “a Sprite.”

“I am not!” Harry protested indignantly. “Twenty-one is—”

“—hardly older than a newborn,” the Devil cut in flatly. “Especially among the Fae; you have been
told nearly nothing about your people’s true history. I know that the Lorekeepers of your people
would not expose you to the true horrors the Fae endured millennia ago. As I recall, they will not
allow you to truly understand the magnitude of what happened to the Fae until well into your first
century.”

The King of Hell was regarding him thoughtfully. “With your control and Magical talent, I had
expected you to be well into your third century at least. Although, your lack of sexual experience is
now all too clear.”

“EXCUSE ME?!”

The King of Hell sat up then abruptly gestured, Harry yelped in shock as he felt himself pulled
across the wide pit to the Devil by an invisible force and dropped onto a firm, muscled lap that was
becoming far too familiar. To his renewed embarrassment, Harry felt himself gathered up into a tight
embrace; the hands once more lazily traveling over his body. He blinked again when he realized that
while the movements were still possessive there was a distinct lack of passion now.

“Hmm, I’ve never had such a young Fae in my custody…”

“It isn’t stopping you from being too handsy with me!”

“Of course not. You are mine, Harry.”

He shivered as he heard undeniable pleasure and delight in the velvet baritone.

“If I want to touch you, I will and in whatever manner I wish. I enjoy touching you very much,
actually. Given your age, this merely means I will have to alter my approach with you; I will have to
educate you now.” The Devil buried his face in Harry’s unruly hair, inhaled deeply and hummed. “I
am looking forward to these lessons with great anticipation. Do try not to fall asleep on me… I will
have to *punish* you if you do."

“*You are so perverted!*”

The Devil merely laughed richly and his hug tightened.

Huffing, Harry strained backwards, crossed his arms and glared up at the leering visage. He was highly tempted to throw a punch. “Are you done with your questions?”

“Hardly, this information has only added more to my curiosity. Your extremely young age coupled with your evident power has left me puzzled as to *why* the Fae even allowed you to be my Tithe. I have no idea what your Elders were thinking when they condoned this exchange.”

“The other Fae who was picked is as old as I am,” Harry pointed out. “So, either way, you would have gotten a ‘Sprite’.”

The Devil fixed him with a contemplative look. “Yes,” he stared down at Harry. “However, I doubt he would be anything like you…” He trailed off and Harry pursed his lips in consternation at the inscrutable look that passed across the incredibly handsome face. The full lips quirked and he continued abruptly, knowingly. “Yes, I see that he isn’t.”

Harry felt an onrush of confusion. How could he know about Ron?

The Devil wasn’t finished. “You are truly nothing like the other Fae I’ve dealt with. They were pathetic, hardly better than the Humans who hounded them when I chose to offer my assistance.”

“My people were desperate and you took advantage of it!” Harry hissed viciously.

He smirked unrepentantly. “Of course, I did. Were you not so desperate yourself when you discovered your precious Weasleys had failed? I see those memories so clearly in your mind; they are branded on your very soul. Such devotion to your ‘family’.”

Harry choked on his next breath, beyond horrified to hear the name from the Devil’s lips. Another part of him was reeling and nearly about to fly into a panic; the King of Hell could read his mind and see into his soul?!

“Oh yes, *Harry*,” he crooned. “I can easily find out all I want to know about you and all of those you cherish.” He reached down and cupped Harry by the chin so their eyes remained locked with each other. “They are so far beneath you, these Weasleys of yours, yet you offered yourself in their place. The Fae have certainly paid my Tithe far too generously this year.”

Harry felt his brows knit deeply.

The Devil leaned down and smoothened the furrow with light kisses. “You have no idea of your value... you do not realize your true worth. I can imagine your mentor and the Fae Monarchs are dearly lamenting your loss. Your people are so few already; to lose another one of your kind especially...”

“My kind?” Harry echoed in bewilderment. “I’m a Fae like all of my people.”

“You are, but you are certainly no normal Fae.”

Huffing, he crossed his arms and glared up at the smirking visage. “So, what is this about ‘my kind’?”
“The Fae were varied and diverse,” the Devil reclined comfortably, his gaze never drifting away from Harry. “As you know, all Fae now are naturally inclined to the Earth Element. Before, the Fae were so diverse in their Elemental Affinity; no one Element had majority.”

“I know about this,” Harry interrupted quietly. “But, I don’t see how this affects me.”

“Very well,” he pulled Harry close and reached out to run his fingers and palm over one of Harry’s wings; tracing the shape and pattern with clear intent. “This is the most obvious sign as to why you are so exquisite.”

Squeaking at the startling surge of pleasure, Harry jerked the wing out of the way and fixed him with a ferocious glare. “What do you mean? Every Fae has wings; you also need to stop touching mine! I don’t like it.”

The Devil’s mouth twitched into a new smirk before he continued. “But not the shape of your wings; how many Fae have the exact same shape as yours? Or even the color and patterns?”

Harry fell silent.

“I imagine I could even name the Family. The Families who have wings like yours are known not only as the First Fae, but as Royal.”

Harry stilled, eyes wide in disbelief.

“Ah, good, you recognize the term.” The Devil nodded in approval. “Royal Fae were the most sought after of the Fae by the Humans. They hunted these Fae down with unrelenting obsession; after all, the powers these Fae possessed were incredible and unique. Royal Fae were the only ones who could touch the Ancient High Magics of your people… the true powers possessed by the Fae.”

He stroked Harry’s hair then caressed his cheek; crimson eyes dark with a possessive gleam. “You carry the legacy of your Royal line like a lodestar, Harry. You are already so magnificent.” He pulled the small Fae against his chest, bent down and began to kiss and nuzzle his face and neck lightly. “And, you are mine. All mine.”

Harry merely sat there, reeling at this revelation. “Well,” he said slowly. “If I’m so treasured; how many Tithes can you skip for me?”

The King of Hell drew back and laughed deeply; staring at Harry with keen surprise and great mirth. “My, you are quite quick at making bargains,” he grinned viciously. “However, I do not see why I should bother with making any Deals with you. You offered yourself without considering your real worth. It is your loss and my gain.”

“It isn’t like I don’t have things to offer you,” Harry said slyly.

The Devil looked distinctly unimpressed. “What could you possibly offer me that I cannot take from you?”

“Control and dominance,” Harry answered promptly; instantly aware of how the King of Hell straightened and stared at him penetratingly. “I said I will be unwilling. And you prefer to be in absolute control and be given total submission; you won’t ever have me in all ways you want unless I let you. The only thing you really, truly control is when you consume my soul. You don’t own it no matter how much you’ve tried to convince me otherwise.”

“And,” the Devil drawled, his baritone sharpening to a lethal edge, “how do you prove this theory that I do not already own you?”
Harry was ready. “Because,” he retorted steadily, “I can still tell you ‘no’. I can still refuse you whether this is mentally or verbally and it clearly doesn’t affect the Devil’s Deal. So far, you’ve only taken what you wanted from me; I’ve never willingly given it to you. You might control and dominate my body but it’s not true control because I fight you to the end and I don’t really want it although my body submits. Even if you seduce me, ultimately, it isn’t true surrender because there will be a part of me, no matter how small, that will deny you and that is what I can offer you. Real ownership. What you truly want from me.”

There was a tangible silence as the King of Hell gazed impassively at the equally stoic little Fae.

Slowly, a cruel grin split his full lips. “Oh, you are an absolutely cunning little Sprite, Harry. Well played.”

“I’ve learned some tips about making Deals from you, Voldemort,” Harry countered evenly, taking a gamble.

He had discovered the true name of the Devil when he had been researching madly to be prepared for the ceremony. It was dangerous to utter the name of the King of Hell unless you knew exactly why you would speak his name. One who called the Devil by his name must have no twisted intent for power; only a pure desire inside your heart would keep you safe from the enthrallment of uttering his name. Most of all, being able to speak the King of Hell’s name aloud without consequence proved that Harry was still free in his own right.

Perhaps, he hadn’t misinterpreted the clauses as poorly as he had thought; Harry suppressed a smug smirk of his own.

Voldemort went rigid, red eyes darkening before brightening into a hellish glow. “Impressive. You’ve done your homework very well, Harry; your teachers would be so proud.” His smirk returned. “I take it this was one of the few sessions, you didn’t take a nap?”

Harry couldn’t fight the renewed blush this invoked and glowered. “They don’t exactly tell us about you. In fact, I know even the older Fae are kept in the dark about you.”

“How flattering to know you researched me personally and so extensively, Harry,” Voldemort purred, trailing his hands along the little Fae’s sides. “I quite like the attention.”

Harry gritted his teeth. “I, on the other hand, don’t like the kind of attention you’re paying me.”

Voldemort chuckled and, in a rare act of mercy, stilled his movements; even though he refused to relinquish his hold on Harry’s hips.

Silence returned as they once more stared at each other.

Harry, who had never really been patient, shifted then froze when he realized exactly where he was sitting. It was clear the Devil certainly approved of his earlier movement from the hum of satisfaction and a certain reaction from his body. Harry stifled his own noise of mortification and slight enjoyment at the sensation.

Seeing the languid pleasure and mirth clearly on the stunning features, Harry averted his eyes, coughed and blurted out. “Are we done?”

He could feel the heat of the Devil’s eyes on him before Voldemort spoke. “For now.” He felt a large hand grip his jaw and turn him to meet Voldemort’s smoldering gaze again. The King of Hell leaned forward so their noses were nearly touching. “I believe that it is best you remain in my chambers; I do not deem you fit yet to allow you out among my Devils.” Voldemort’s smirk was
especially vicious. “You would be devoured out there, Harry.”

“…I’ll take your word for it,” Harry muttered, shuddering at the possibilities. He had read on Devils; he wasn’t sure what was true or not but he had no desire to find out. “But, I would like to be let out of here eventually.”

“That can be arranged; depending on circumstances.”

“I don’t suppose I could have my own room instead of being in here?”

“No.”

Was worth a try, Harry sighed inwardly in resignation.

“You will need to remain here if you wish to access my library. I do know you lingered there the longest when you were exploring my rooms earlier.”

Harry rolled his eyes, barely catching the snort he wanted to make. Yes, Voldemort would have been watching all this time!

“I could use the public archives?” he suggested half-heartedly.

“There are no public archives,” Voldemort chuckled, clearly entertained by the very notion. “No Devil or any other Hell’s Denizen would ever let their collections be made public. Far too many other creatures might take advantage of this generosity and steal the books or artifacts for themselves. And the knowledge that could be gained can pose problems for the owner.”

“Of course.” Harry shook his head; finding himself unsurprised by this revelation too.

He figured he would just sleep in the den; there was more than enough space for him. He would raid the closets; there had to be extra linens somewhere in the closets.

“I will set out some books for you that you will read and I shall question you on them,” Voldemort declared, pulling Harry out of his thoughts and he fixed the Devil with a look of astonishment.

“What?”

“I did say I will educate you, Harry;” he smiled faintly. “You would make an interesting project to distract me. I haven’t had one for millennia and, so far, you have proven to be quite entertaining.”

Harry recalled what Voldemort had said earlier and flushed so deeply; he felt the heat radiate from his neck. “I… I…er—” he stuttered.

Voldemort blinked lazily before he grinned widely as he realized the reason for Harry’s reaction. “Ah, yes. Those particular lessons will have to wait; I don’t find much pleasure in teaching children sexual matters.” He pressed close and latched onto Harry’s neck and suckled, humming thoughtfully before purring. “Yet.”

Harry’s flush was partially from anger and indignation now. “I’m not a child!” he started then broke off into a squeal when the large hands began to drift purposely over him again. “You said you’d stop!”

Laughing, Voldemort withdrew and eyed the flustered little Fae. “To me, you are hardly more than an infant,” he explained.

“If it encourages you to stop all the unwanted touching and stuff, I’ll take it!” Harry growled
furiously. Returning the look, he asked warily, “What will these lessons cost me?”

An enigmatic smile curled at the corners of Voldemort’s lips. “Merely that you listen and do all that I tell you before subjecting me to your endless questions and that you pay close attention to what I teach you,” he paused, then added mischievously. “Strictly, no naps.”

It sounded too good to be true but Harry felt a sudden wave of indecipherable feeling race along his nerves. His intuition was telling him to take the offer; this was a side of the Devil he would never have imagined existed. Playful but not entirely malicious; there was a hint of kindness buried under all of this evident self-gratification. Harry wondered if it was some fluke or if there was more to this than what he was seeing.

Aloud, Harry said firmly, “Deal.”

“And done,” Voldemort finished smoothly.

The Devil gently pushed him off of his lap and Harry found himself sitting once more on the mattress. Rising with his natural grace, Voldemort glided away; Harry watched him depart, mesmerized. He came to the threshold of the archway leading out of the room and stopped.

“Perhaps, you may be able to change your fate,” Voldemort mused, his words drifting to the little Fae. He looked over his shoulder and inclined his head towards him. “Do not disappoint me, Harry.”

Without another word, he slipped out of the den as noiselessly as a shadow.

Harry flopped back into the thick mattress of the gigantic pit, expelling a loud deep breath.

Great Haven. What had he just gotten himself into?! He had practically initiated a Devil’s Deal between himself and Voldemort! It was deadly, beyond reckless, utterly spontaneous.

… just like his outrageous plan to take Ron’s place as the Devil’s Tithe.

A grin slowly spread over his face and he snorted. This was just the sort of impulsive act that normally landed him in so much trouble back in Great Haven. Harry hoped fervently his luck would pull him through once again.

The euphoric surge of success ebbed and a frown crept onto his face suddenly, banishing the grin as his thoughts shifted; his instincts were whispering incessantly inside of him but he couldn’t quite understand what they were telling him. The Devil—Voldemort—was very bewildering and completely unpredictable. He had been very different from how he had portrayed himself earlier in the grand hall.

In his throne room, Voldemort had been all powerful, controlling, dominant. Most of all, he had been cruel and vicious; quick to turn to violence to prove his superior position.

He was still incredibly powerful; Harry shivered, he hadn’t had to reach out with his Magical Senses to feel Voldemort’s Magical Signature, let alone feel his Magical Presence, but it hadn’t wrapped around him and willed him to submit like it had done in the grand hall.

Yes, Voldemort had been controlling but not as unforgiving with his demands that Harry give in to him without question and while he had been dominant; he had backed off in the end. Harry knew it wasn’t solely because of his words; the Devil had shown a great deal of restraint now for some reason. There had been no hint of the playfulness he had just witnessed with his façade in the throne room but here Voldemort had practically exuded a roguish, mischievous air.
The real question now was: which was the mask and which was his real face? Unless both were masks? One of the books he had read said the King of Hell was called the Master of Lies for a very good reason.

Harry groaned deeply and scrubbed a hand over his hair then his face. It was too soon for him to find his answers; he needed to interact with Voldemort more—as dangerous as this could be. His frown faded into a contemplative expression as he contemplated the ramifications of this latest ploy. If he lost this Deal; what little he had left would be taken from him. His free will and sense of self; Harry knew that Voldemort would take everything he could if Harry was careless. He honestly didn’t know how much more he still could lose but he didn’t want to risk discovering this after he had lost it.

But, ultimately there was little else he could do; the Devil loved his Deals. Harry intended to make the most of it; one way or another.

What mattered the most hadn’t changed at all.

He wanted to keep Great Haven and, in turn, his family, friends and the rest of the Fae safe.

He would succeed.

Hopefully, impossibly, he might even save himself too.

Well, I did want to find a way out of this mess and this looks like my best option; let’s just hope I haven’t dug myself deeper instead, Harry decided finally. Forget planning, this is just improvisation at its best—or worst.

Harry grinned again at the last thought before rolling around and gathering the heap of pillows to him; making himself as comfortable as possible. Once he was ensconced and warm, Harry let his eyes drift shut, allowing the still lingering fatigue to draw him back to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

One of my frequent Reviewers, rose, was very kind in letting me know that I was switching Point of View’s from Harry to Tom/Voldemort and vice versa in Chapter 11; I've corrected what paragraphs I could find but if I missed anything please let me know. Also, if I made the same mistake in this Chapter, do tell me about it. Thank you very much!
Celestials, Demons and Devils

Chapter Notes

**Special Revision :: 08 JUNE 2017.**
I have re-posted Chapters 01 - 13; all chapters have minor revisions such as corrections to grammar or spelling that I've found. More importantly, I have consolidated certain words which were muddled in my earlier writings. There are now distinct definitions, differences and applications for the following terms: *Devil's Deal, Demonic Pact* and *Magical Pact*. 

Thank you, and Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Harry awoke slowly this time.

Blinking languidly, he stared up as the shadowed ceiling high overhead came into focus without any real thought except wondering why he had woken. A part of him was telling him he had been roused because someone had been there close to him. However, when he reached out with his Magical Senses.

He found no sign, not even a hint of a Magical Presence.

Grunting softly in mild disgruntlement that he had to move as he was wonderfully snug and warm, the little Fae sat up and halted.

Someone had indeed been there with him.

*I really need to be more alert, too many people keep sneaking up on me!* he berated himself.

Right beside his heap of pillows was a broad tray with short legs; a closer look revealed that it was laden with an impressive collection of golden dishes. The food inside kept warm by matching golden covers.

At the sight of what was clearly a feast, Harry heard his stomach rumble, loudly.

Scooting over, he reached out and cautiously lifted the cover of the largest dish.

His mouth watered instantly as the aroma of a delicious tomato pasta topped with chunks of goat cheese and basil slivers filled him. With less wariness, he opened the other containers; discovering a full course of fare he normally would have enjoyed at a Fae Feast instead of a normal meal.

Beside the pasta was a large bowl of creamy mixed mushroom soup, across from this and clearly made to be paired with both the soup and the pasta was a small salver of newly baked bread rolls generously lathered with butter and herbs. Dessert was especially a treat to Harry; a three-tiered tiramisu cake was not very easy to prepare and Molly hardly had time to make this delicacy as often as he wanted. Even the chief cook of the Fae Palace would have been hard pressed to bake this, he noted admiringly, as the ingredients alone took some effort to procure. Lastly, there was a huge mug of hot, fragrant black tea.
With barely restrained hunger, Harry snatched up the largest spoon and dipped the utensil into the bowl before freezing. Wait, what was he doing? Wasn’t he being too careless and blindly trusting? What if the food was made this way so he would eat it without question. Who knew what could be added into the dishes besides what was clearly obvious!

His stomach whined pitifully in protest. Harry winced but didn’t lift the spoonful to his lips, instead he released the spoon and firmly rested his hands on his lap.

He had no clue how much time had passed but he only knew that he was starving. Still, this didn’t mean he should be reckless and entirely without caution. Taking a deep breath—this igniting another hungry gurgle from his increasingly irate belly—Harry triggered his Magical Senses and meticulously scanned each dish.

Nothing.

If he could trust what he found or, rather, didn’t find; the entire meal appeared to be safe. For good measure, he checked the golden dishes, the utensils and even the massive cup just in case. Still nothing. His Magical Senses couldn’t detect anything amiss.

An especially harsh growl from his midsection decided him.

It was unlikely I’d be poisoned, he added internally to ease the side of himself that was still weakly objecting.

The Devil certainly didn’t want him dead and Voldemort didn’t strike him as the kind to pull this sort of ploy. Keeping him hungry would also accomplish nothing and drugging him would serve little purpose as well. Although, he wondered what was the occasion for such an extravagant meal. Was this given to him under Voldemort’s orders? He didn’t see any reason… unless it was some form of manipulation?

A sharp twisting inside his gut snapped Harry out of his thoughts. Right, eat first; ponder later before I have a full revolution on my hands, he thought with amusement.

Carefully lifting a nearly overflowing spoonful of soup to his lips, Harry still retained enough decorum to blow first and sip slowly. He didn’t quite suppress the low moan of appreciation, however, as the rich liquid met his tongue. He made short work of the delicious soup, taking a few bites out of one of the two bread rolls; murmuring at the sharp tang of the herbs which contrasted wonderfully with the smooth taste of the soup. Shifting the dishes, Harry started on the pasta next; pausing to relish the light but wonderful flavor of the sauce mingling with the sharper taste of the cheese and basil. He finished the entire serving and discovered, to his mild embarrassment, that he was still more than hungry enough for the large dessert. He lingered on the huge slice of tiramisu; each layer was downright decadent.

Harry finished his little banquet by draining his large mug of the still pleasantly warm tea, wiping his mouth with the large napkin provided and letting out a positively contented sigh. He neatly returned all of the covers over the empty dishes before crawling back to his pile of pillows and collapsing face-first into the plush cushions.

I don’t think I ever want to move, he mused drowsily. I think I shouldn’t have eaten so much! I feel like Ron…

His happy thoughts abruptly vanished when there was the ghostly trickle of alien Magic that skittered along his Magical Senses. It was a very strange sensation and nearly undetectable. Nothing like how the King of Hell—or even Lust—had felt but was definitely the Magical Signature of another
individual. Harry instantly shot upright and looked towards the source.

His gaze landed on a bright glow-orb hovering nearly in his face and he jerked backwards with a noise of surprise and discomfort. Looking away immediately, Harry blinked rapidly to banish the white spots in his vision when he had involuntarily stared into the radiance. Once his eyes had recovered, he glanced around swiftly.

The tray had vanished.

But, now, next to him was a stack of books and a thick, folded quilt.

*That explains the glow-orb,* Harry thought wryly, his body poised in readiness as he continued to search the chamber for whoever had left the tomes and the light.

He could find no one; whether with his eyes or his Magical Senses.

Although, as he reached out; he could have sworn he felt a tiny sensation of apology.

Frowning slightly, Harry murmured instinctively. “It’s fine; it was my fault for looking into the glow-orb…”

The contrite feeling in the room shifted to clear amazement and Harry grinned. “Thanks for the meal! It was really good!” he called loudly.

There was a sudden stillness, even as his words rang out across the vast den then the barely perceptible astonishment morphed into a wondering gratitude that faded nearly instantly.

Harry paused, belatedly realizing exactly what he had just done. *I wonder if the suite is sentient? And might even have feelings?* he pondered.

The little Fae contemplated this bizarre situation momentarily then shrugged nonchalantly. *I’m in Hell; I’ve faced the Devil twice. This can’t be the most shocking thing I’ve done lately,* he concluded decisively. *I should be used to this sort of thing by now… Yes, I’m the right kind of crazy!*

Pushing the strange matter aside for now, Harry arranged the cushions around himself so he was as comfortable as possible. He then guided the glow-orb to hover right overhead so he had the best lighting the sphere could offer; unfurling the quilt, he bundled himself inside it. Once he was satisfied, he pulled the little tower of books to him and noticed the small note on top.

Taking up the strip of parchment carefully, Harry unrolled the missive. In elegant, spidery script were the words:

*Harry,

Read the books in this order; Ancient Annals I, Elemental Magics, The Book of Earth, The Book of Water, The Book of Air, The Book of Fire and The Book of Void. Do not skip in your readings; I will know. I will answer any questions you may have. — V.*

Folding the small letter and tucking it in between one pair of the books near the bottom, Harry reverently picked up the first massive tome; smiling in admiration and gratitude at the featherlight cantrip that had evidently been cast over the heavy book. He could also sense the powerful wards that protected the volume from handling and the passage of time. His smile, however, dropped when he opened to the first chapter and had scanned the top page.

*Of course, he would make me read History first!* Harry moaned silently. *UGH. I take it back,*
Voldemort is not considerate in the slightest! He’s a sadistic, manipulative, perverted bastard because I’m sure he knows how much I hate this subject!

Harry eyed the other books longingly; he had a very good idea what they contained. The Titles did more than simply hint about the knowledge they possessed after all. For a moment, he seriously considered sneaking a peek… his mind instantly recalling the warning in the little note.

Did he dare?

Sighing loudly, the little Fae settled down and began reading

**Ancient Annals I** turned out to be a huge surprise.

When he focused on the words, Harry discovered that the writing was far from dry or monotonous like the countless history books he had been forced to study back in the grand library of the Fae Palace in Great Haven. Most of all, he discovered that what he had assumed to be the first chapter was actually only the Preface. The section had given a very boring but succinct accounting of how the book was chaptered and a very detailed index. Harry had to admit, he liked this format immensely. He had always found it annoying that Indexes were at the end of a volume instead of in front right after the Table of Contents. It would have helped with searching quickly and less manhandling of a book as one first had to go to the end of a heavy tome, locate the Index, then the needed page only to flip backwards through most of the book just to finally reach the desired text.

Deciding Voldemort wouldn’t reprimand him for skimming this part, he took note of the important facts then started on the real first chapter and was instantly swept in.

_The world was crafted from the Five Elements; Void fusing the four elements of Fire, Air, Earth and Water into a single whole._

_Once the world was complete, the energy of the Five Elements still remained and thrived, and, from this vast well of creation; countless creatures began to take form. A rare few were even gifted with true sentience and these creatures rose to become the Races._

_The first among the Races were the Celestials…_

Harry wasn’t sure how far he had reached in the first chapter when the light of the glow-orb was abruptly blocked. Jerking his head up, he stared owlishly into the striking features of Voldemort shadowed by the burning sphere behind him. His ruby eyes gleamed.

The Devil was right beside him in the pit; aquiline nose lightly brushing his cheek. “Enjoying yourself?” he murmured huskily, warm breath caressing his skin.

Naturally, Harry reacted.

He lurched backwards, yelled—*not shrieked, thank you!*—in utter shock and, with some measure of fear, at the unexpected sight.

Then, promptly, flung the tome with all his Fae strength at the grinning, too close visage.

Voldemort burst out laughing; the book stopping in mid-flight, floated to the side and hovered perfectly still beside his head as he leered down at the little Fae who, in his frantic scramble to widen the gap between them, had merely ended up thoroughly trapped in his quilt with cushions strewn all about him.
“That is not how you treat my books, or me, Harry,” he admonished with mock severity.

Spluttering and struggling to get his wildly pounding heart under control and frayed nerves calmed, Harry sat upright and glared furiously at the smug Devil. He shoved the flare of mortification away, assuring himself wordlessly he had every right to do what he had done, and doggedly ignored the heat of the blush he could feel once again searing his cheeks.

“Great Haven, are you trying to kill me via heart attack?!?” he snarled.

“You should have been more aware of your surroundings like you were before,” Voldemort countered easily, still chuckling lightly. “Although, I am pleased to see that you have not only devoted yourself entirely to the books I wish for you to read but have also obeyed my instructions. You did not try to skip the first tome like I predicted you would be tempted to do.”

Raking a restless hand through his messy hair and hissing in pain as his fingers caught in the ruby circlet he belatedly realized he still wore, Harry growled lowly in annoyance and freed himself entirely from the quilt before folding his arms over his chest. “Can I help you, Voldemort?” he glowered up at the Devil.

The Devil’s new smirk was downright wicked and Harry felt himself shiver with sudden dread. “Yes, you can,” he purred and, before Harry could even ask, snatched the little Fae up into his arms and clutched him securely to his broad chest. Rising smoothly, Voldemort moved sinuously and was nearly at the edge of the pit before Harry began struggling.

“What are you doing?! Put me down! Can’t you just tell me first what you want from me rather than simply taking it?!?”

“I wish to go to sleep with you.”

“What?! I don’t want to go to bed yet, and definitely not with you!”

“And,” Voldemort’s baritone was again heavily laced with humor, “you wonder why I merely take action instead of speaking. Clearly, speaking with you will get me nowhere.”

“Because you have such ludicrous demands!”

The Devil strode out of the den; the chamber falling into darkness at his exit. His wide steps unfaltering and never slowing in the slightest as he traversed his extravagant quarters; the unlikely pair passing through the barely lit sitting room in swift strides—Harry silently cursed Voldemort’s long legs—and were nearly at the doorway of the large bedroom when he raised another loud protest.

“It’s too early to go to bed and I’m not sleepy yet. Can’t I read some more? I thought you liked that!”

“I commend your motivation in completing your lessons, Harry. However, I will not have you disrupt your sleeping cycle to do so. As I know, little Fae must sleep properly to grow well, correct?”

“Are you seriously giving me a bedtime?!?” Harry paused, his frown deepening to a scowl. “Are you implying I’m small?!”

“Yes. And, yes, I am more than implying you are rather short for your age.”

“You have reached a new low of evil!”

“Good, I must live up to my nefarious reputation after all.”
“My foster mother stopped giving me a bedtime years ago. And, I’m not so young I still need to go to bed early!”

“First of, it isn’t as early as you believe; you cannot distinguish how time passes here in Hell yet.”

Voldemort entered the archway and arrived at the side of the huge bed, pausing and waiting patiently as the drapes were pulled out of the way and the bed’s covers were folded back by invisible hands. Harry froze as he felt incredibly powerful Magic swirl around him; stunning his Magical Senses even if he had not stretched them out. Vaguely, the little Fae thought he felt the soothing, revitalizing cascade of Water and Air—Cleansing and Refreshening Charms?—along with the foreign magical essence he was slowly beginning to recognize as the Devil’s unique Magical Signature working around him.

Reeling from the overwhelming sensations, Harry only registered he was once again in the middle of the massive bed, the curtains drawn tight on all sides. He couldn’t move as he found himself entirely encased by both the thick covers and the Devil himself. His head had been tucked comfortably under the chiseled jaw, and he found himself breathing in spices, musk and the inimitable, intoxicating scent of Voldemort. His torso was pressed close to the familiar, wide, muscled chest and the Devil’s powerful arms were wound around his waist with the hands resting on his shoulders and the back of his head, long fingers tangling in his black locks. Harry was silently thankful he had been arranged so he was facing Voldemort and the Devil had ensured his wings were comfortable and beneath the many blankets. His legs weren’t free either; intertwined with Voldemort’s longer limbs with their bare feet touching.

He couldn’t help but relish the warmth the Devil radiated, especially in Hell’s supernatural and everlasting deep chill.

“Second, you are still recovering from moving between Realms. While you cannot perceive the effect this has on you, I do. You need your rest.”

The glow-orbs in the large room went out and plunged the bedchamber into darkness.

“Lastly, I wish to sleep now; with you. So we shall,” Voldemort finished, somehow wrapping himself around Harry more firmly.

“Of course, your wish takes precedence over everything else,” Harry muttered sourly, voice muffled in the silk of the Devil’s shirt.

“Very good. You are learning, Harry,” Voldemort hummed in pleasure. “Now, go to sleep.”

Harry huffed derisively. “You wish,” he grumbled quietly, scowling.

He dearly wanted to cross his arms but with the Devil’s body in the way. He tried finding somewhere else he could put them but finally settled on splaying his limbs loosely over Voldemort. He was certainly not going to hug the Devil; he didn’t want to give him any more ideas! Voldemort certainly didn’t need any more encouragement.

An almost comfortable hush settled over them but Harry continued to fume helplessly.

He had no desire to sleep nor was he at all drowsy. He had been in the middle of a very fascinating recounting about the Celestials; he surmised that he was probably more than halfway finished with the chapter. He had learned more about the First Race in the last few hours than when he had been taught about them by his Fae teachers.

The Celestials and their lost kingdom had never been a topic Albus Dumbledore or any of his other
Fae tutors had detailed when he was enduring the tedious History lessons. Naturally, he had been afire with curiosity about them and had been relentless with his incessant questions. After all, who wouldn’t be? The first of the ten Races; the first to come to be, to carve a grand civilization that was still unmatched by any other Race, and the first to vanish. According to Dumbledore, they had committed the same grave mistake as the Fae; they had severely underestimated the Humans. All the books about Celestials he could find in the Grand Library of the Fae Palace said the same; the Celestials had been the first Race the Humans aimed to subjugate, and from all Historical accounts, had succeeded so utterly that there was not a single Celestial left alive now.

Harry knew from careful research with Hermione that long before the Fae had fled to Great Haven, the Last Angel had already long been killed by the Humans; more than three thousand years before the Exodus. The pair of them had discovered little else, many written records of the Ancient Fae had been lost when the Humans attacked his people—the Fae had no chance to spirit away all of the books and scrolls within their numerous libraries so, by the command of the First Fae Monarchs; all that could not be saved was destroyed.

The greatest loss of Fae knowledge and culture was that many of the Fae Lorekeepers were killed before they could Share some of the unique Memories they safeguarded. There had been an entire Guild of Lorekeepers before the Humans-Fae War had started. Now, there was only Lore Mistress Bathilda Bagshot and her successor, Hermione Granger. Harry felt the familiar stab of deep sorrow and regret over what the Fae had lost. Nevertheless, he knew that while many of the Fae writings were unrecoverable, nearly all of the true history and culture of the Fae had been preserved. As long as there was at least one Lorekeeper; the Fae would never forget their past.

Yet, now, with what he had read from *Ancient Annals I*; he found himself very grateful that there was much that remained of the Fae.

Especially the fact there were *still* even Fae left.

And, it was all thanks to the Devil.

Why had Voldemort saved the Fae? Didn’t he offer the Celestials the same Devil’s Deal? If so, why did they refuse? Harry had often wondered about this very aberrant act of compassion from the Devil. However, if the Fae weren’t the first Race to be offered…

*The Celestials probably did refuse him,* he speculated. *I hope the answer is in here somewhere. It might even give me a clue as to why Voldemort offered the Devil’s Deal to the Fae in the first place.*

Harry had been searching for this answer ever since the Telling of the Devil’s Tithe. So far, he hadn’t found any possible reason the Devil would help the Fae—even Dumbledore couldn’t give him any sort of an answer. Unless, souls were really that useful to Voldemort? But, if so; wouldn’t he have an easier time getting souls if he went Aboveground himself?

Harry doubted the Devil would have any real trouble in enticing any of the other Races, especially the Humans, to bargain away their souls to gain what they desired the most.

“You think very loudly, Harry.”

The little Fae froze, making a soft noise of surprise. “…sorry,” he whispered back grudgingly. “But, it’s your own fault for eavesdropping on my thoughts.”

He felt the chest where his cheek was resting on vibrate as the Devil chuckled softly. “Harry, I cannot eavesdrop if your mind is practically shouting right now.”
“Well, I did say I wasn’t sleepy and since you forced me into bed; I’m just going to lie here and think.”

“Yes, I noticed. I advise you allow your mind to drift instead of focusing on such speculations; you will find sleep shortly.”

Silence fell over them again and Harry returned to his musings over what he had been reading.

The Celestials had come to be ten thousand years ago, formed shortly after the world was made whole and life had fully flourished. They were said to be truly immortal creatures completely untouched by time, stunningly beautiful and incredibly powerful—supposedly unrivalled in appearance and might. The unique Magic wielded by the Celestials had been a Magical Art onto itself and was called Divine Magics. Harry pondered briefly, but with deep fascination, what and how this type of Magic worked. Sadly, he knew that he would never know.

The Celestials had built a world for themselves; calling their homeland, Astrum. It was here their kingdom prospered and soared. The Celestials had always been few, the Sacred Twenty-Eight were what the Celestials called their Families, each named after the founding Archangel. No more, no less. The society and culture of the Celestials was far more complex than the Fae—steeped in so much ritual, tradition and rules that Harry found it positively stifling. The author waxed overly poetic at some points and Astrum certainly sounded very grandiose and utterly fascinating, and was definitely Harry’s favorite part out of the whole chapter. He wished he could have visited this city and immersed himself in the Celestial kingdom and what the nation had to offer; it would be undoubtedly glorious but also likely tedious and pompous too. He still would have loved to experience it all. The author had often bordered on boastful but Harry couldn’t help acquiescing a little that the sheer confidence of the Celestials was warranted to an extent if what was in this book was all true. He chuckled softly, the overall attitude and writing reminded him of a certain someone, too…

The Celestials had definitely earned their legendary reputation, however. Not only had their kingdom reached heights still unmatched by any other Race to this day but the Celestials were most remembered for being extremely, unfathomably powerful (aside from their peerless beauty, but Harry didn’t care for that particular aspect). No one had dared to cross them and the stories of those few who were bold enough to make the attempt were immortalized in their suffering at the hands of Celestial vengeance.

Abruptly, Harry recalled asking Dumbledore if the Fae had any relations with them, his mentor had merely shaken his head.

“The Celestials were very reclusive; they kept very much to themselves and hardly ventured out of their world. Even among the Ancient Fae, encountering an Angel was extremely rare and meeting even one of the Archangels was even more improbable. In fact, none of the Fae who are alive now have ever met an Angel; they were long gone before even Lore Mistress Bagshot was born and as you know she has the distinction of being the oldest of our kind still living. This isolation only made the Celestials more mystical and mysterious in the eyes of the other Races.”

“But some of the Ancient Fae did meet Celestials, right?”

“Of course, we had numerous interactions; merely not a formal relationship between kingdoms.”

“Do we have any Memories of the Celestials? Do you think Lore Mistress Bagshot would Share those with me? I’m sure there have been pleasant meetings with Celestials.”

He still remembered the shattered look on Dumbledore’s face.
“No, Harry, those Memories were forever lost to us when the Lorekeepers Guild was broken. There is so very little left of the Celestials and even we, who have the gift of preserving memories in purest form, could not even save this fragment of such a magnificent Race. All that remains of the Celestial Kingdom is found in the few books and scrolls we have.”

“Can I read those please?”

“Of course, Harry.”

Harry had indeed read all those tomes and treatises on the Celestials in the Library of the Fae Palace; there really weren’t many. But, he discovered little that his mentor hadn’t already told him.

That was why he found *Ancient Annals I* to be positively enlightening. However, he also realized that the first chapter wasn’t as detailed as the other chapters were likely to be. Recalling the number of pages noted on the Table of Contents for each chapter, the little Fae realized the section on Angels was actually woefully small compared to the histories of the other Races. He wondered briefly why it was like this; the Celestials and their Kingdom lasted over four thousand years… his mind began sprouting speculation after speculation, some of it quite inane but Harry enjoyed what the imagination of his mind conjured.

…maybe, he was getting a little sleepy.

He was grinning broadly when a low sigh interrupted him; Harry could have sworn he heard some annoyance underlining the quiet exhalation.

Harry smirked unrepentantly. “If you can’t sleep with all my ‘loud thoughts’, let me up and I’ll go back to the den so I’ll be far away and you can sleep like you want and I can do what I want too which is to get back to my reading, I’m almost done with the first chapter,” he suggested brightly, concealing his satisfaction that he was bothering the Devil, if in some tiny manner. Petty, perhaps, but he would take what little jabs he could make against Voldemort.

The arms around him tightened faintly. “I have a far better idea,” the sultry baritone whispered against the shell of his ear.

Harry felt his good mood shift immediately. “What?” he willed himself to ask, his voice wary and suspicious.

“Sleep.”

Harry did.

Harry’s return to consciousness was very pleasant; he had never woken feeling so refreshed and comfortable… until he remembered what happened.

Voldemort had ensorcelled him.

The Magic wasn’t anything like Air Magic whatsoever; he had natural resistance to such enchantments because of his Elemental Affinity and he had never heard of any Air Spell that could act so swiftly. He had been wide awake one moment then the next instant he was out like a dispelled glow-orb. Harry glanced towards the drawn curtains of the massive bed, he had no idea how long he had slept.

At least, it was dreamless? Harry wasn’t sure if he felt reassured by this. Yes, he had not been
plagued by nightmares but he had felt absolutely nothing while he had slumbered! Who knew what the Devil could have done to him? Or had done to him?

He felt only slightly better when he realized he was alone but overall Harry was positively seething.

Out of habit, he checked under the covers and was relieved to see he still wore his white robes. Somehow, the outfit looked even cleaner than he remembered; soft and sweet against his skin and the ivory silk seemed to shimmer in the feeble light of the glow-orbs in the bedchamber.

*I really should have anticipated Voldemort would make me sleep, Controlling bastard!* Harry scolded himself harshly for his blunder; absently carding his fingers through his hair and discovering this movement was again hindered by the ruby circlet wrapped around his forehead. Harry paused, his hand tracing then pushing at the diadem; it didn’t budge. Reaching up with both hands, he clasped the fine golden piece of jewelry and tugged.

The circlet still didn’t move.

A surge of minor panic swelled in him and Harry pulled harder, with rising desperation. The diadem didn’t shift in the slightest even when he used all of his might. It was as though it had been glued to his forehead.

*What in Great Haven’s name is this?* the small Fae thought frantically.

Harry threw off the covers, uncaring of the messy heap he left in his wake, and raced first to the bathroom. Peering inside and seeing no mirror, he sprinted out and went into the spacious closet next. Inside, he surmised fleetingly he should have headed here first, as the chamber served as a changing room as well.

He easily found what he needed and came close.

Staring intently at his reflection, Harry scrutinized the ruby circlet. The exquisite piece of jewelry looked exactly the same. Seven perfectly oval and precisely cut, flawless rubies of differing sizes. The centerpiece ruby was the largest of the stones and the remaining three on either side slowly dwindled in size; set in a classic but elegant style. Interwoven and shaping the delicate mesh were strands of purest gold. He trailed his fingertips over the curving metal and gleaming jewels. His Magical Senses also trailing after his physical touch.

Nothing.

Harry couldn’t decipher what kind of spells had been done to the diadem so it remained where it was, wrapped around his forehead so securely he couldn’t remove it. What was the point of doing this?

*Another question I’m probably not going to get an answer to until I see him,* Harry concluded resentfully. Dropping his arms, he glowered at his image in the mirror and wheeled around to stalk out of the room-sized closet. He deliberated returning to the bathroom and attending to his morning ablutions but found himself to be spotless, fully refreshed and felt no need. He did pause, however, considering if he wished to take a bath. He hadn’t had one since he left Great Haven and he had no clue how many hours or even days had passed.

Deciding his minor urge to take a real bath was not too significant, Harry slipped on his sandals and stalked out of the bedroom. Stepping into the sitting chamber, he found the enormous room empty. He sighed in mild relief and still lingering irritation when he realized he was alone again in the suite.

*Small favors,* he smiled crookedly before making a beeline for the den.
When he arrived, he instantly spotted the large tray laden with a new batch of dishes. His foul mood brightened slightly at the sight and his stomach hummed in anticipation. Harry hurried onto the pit, just remembering to kick off his sandals before he did. The thick mattress sank and the tray dipped sideways precariously when he neared but he righted it quickly and sat down in front of the spread. The pillows had been rearranged into a comfortable pile, the quilt draped neatly over the mound and looked very inviting. His books were close at hand, too.

_Ancient Annals I_ even lay open onto the page he vaguely remembered he had been reading before he had been unceremoniously carried off to bed.

Idly, Harry wondered if Voldemort had set this up. He hadn’t expected the Devil to even recall the exact page he had been on before he had thrown the book. Harry winced at the memory, murmuring an apology to the volume. Hermione would punch him if she ever found out he had handled a book in such an appalling manner.

Shaking his head, Harry turned back to his breakfast, quite interested to see what he would be offered today.

He wasn’t disappointed; on the largest platter were three warm, fluffy cheese pancakes for his main repast, with a generous dollop of golden butter and a small container of maple syrup. Beside this was a small plate with a generous serving of scrambled eggs and across from this dish was a bowl of mixed fruit slices. The last treat was Harry’s favorite; a very large cup of hot chocolate. He caught a whiff of mint in the rising steam of the mug.

“I’m going to end up spoiled and fat,” Harry mused to himself ruefully. He didn’t hesitate in digging into the meal, however. He had to resist moaning aloud at some points, the pancakes were even better than what Molly would make and that was saying something!

When he had finished, he wiped his mouth, returned the lids to the empty dishes and paused.

Finally, gathering himself, Harry said steadily, “Thank you for the meal, it was very good.”

His mild flare of embarrassment for talking to what appeared to be a deserted room was drowned out by that faint, elusive surge of surprise then wild gratitude and now a strange almost rapturous delight.

Shrugging, Harry decided he’d ask Voldemort if his quarters were sentient. He wouldn’t be surprised if that was the case. Satisfied, he crawled under the quilt, settled himself into his mound of cushions and resumed reading _Ancient Annals I._

The last pages of the chapter on the Celestials was as Harry had suspected; hardly any more detailed information was given and when he came to the end of the accounting, the little Fae found himself still unsatisfied. Harry discovered that the chapter ended about five thousand seven hundred ten years in the past; just a decade short of the Human-Celestial War. Unfortunately, Harry didn’t have any idea when Voldemort would appear so all the questions rattling around in his head hounded him until he willfully shoved them to the back of his mind and concentrated on the second chapter.

It hadn’t been very hard to set this curiosity aside; the Second Race was as fascinating as the first had been.

Demons.

Harry had to admit, he had initially assumed that Devils and Demons were closely connected and
even interchangeable.

He was never so wrong.

*Either Dumbledore and my other teachers have been curtailing my readings or the Fae lost a great deal more of our knowledge about Demons than I originally thought, Harry mused with exasperation. I'm leaning towards the former conclusion than the latter, though.*

Apparently, Demons were as ancient as the Celestials, having appeared alongside the Archangels and Angels ten thousand years ago. The two races had been natural enemies of each other and would fight if either creature encountered the other in any location. Normally, this spelled destruction for the Demon—and any other creature caught in the confrontation. Harry frowned at how callous the Celestials were proving. He hadn’t had a very high opinion of them from the first chapter; this tidbit of their nature merely had their standing sink even further in his eyes.

Another interesting point, while in the chapter of Celestials where the author glossed over how a Celestial was born; the author for the chapter on Demons detailed how Demons were formed. Demons were shaped out of the energies filling the world while it was being built, with so much energy running rampant, some of it was pulled together; fusing into countless forms that gained some sentience although, newborn Demons were hardly more intelligent than a clever beast.

Unlike the Celestials, Demon numbers were countless at the beginning of the world but, over time, as the swarms of young Demons clawed and struggled for survival these numbers settled to hundreds of thousands. This number was even further culled by the Celestials. A single Angel could lay waste to a Demonic swarm effortlessly and even the most powerful of Demons avoided the Celestials with uncanny fervor. Harry had fleetingly wondered if, with the extinction of the Celestials, Demons had managed to overrun most parts of Aboveground. Then, he recalled belatedly that Humans had successfully annihilated the Archangels and Angels; who was to say they hadn’t done the same to the Demons. Harry shivered at the very idea of so many Demons, no matter their number, loose in the Aboveground. Could any of the Fae bands sent out during the Reckonings have run afoul of Demons? It was a very large possibility.

Sadly, he wouldn’t ever know unless Voldemort enlightened him. The Lore Mistress had denied him, and even Hermione, when they had asked to Share the Memories of the Reckonings. She had been adamant that such knowledge would remain out of their reach until well into their first century; no exceptions. Harry had done his best to convince her otherwise, raising several very rational arguments but Lore Mistress Bagshot had been immoveable. He had even tried asking the few Fae he knew who had undertaken the Reckonings but this had proved to be a fruitless venture; they had vehemently refused to divulge what happened to them and merely told him to inquire with the Lore Mistress. Which just defeated the entire purpose of finding another source of information.

Harry expelled a noisy breath at the memory, grimacing faintly. Not one of his better ideas; his mentor had ended all his efforts by swamping him with Magical training and more (torturously boring) Ancient and Modern History lectures when he found out what Harry had been doing.

Demons were notorious for their limitless desires and cruel nature; it was one of the reasons Harry had assumed that Demons and Devils were one and the same. As it turned out, Demons and Devils were alike in only one distinct factor.

*Both Races fed upon souls.*

However, from what the chapter explained, Demons *needed* to be attached to a soul and feeding on this spiritual essence in order to survive. Worse, the more souls consumed; the stronger a demon became but the hunger never abated. If the Demon could not find a soul to feast on; it would have to
hunt constantly or it would begin to die. From what Harry knew of Devils, this wasn’t the case at all. Of course, his only comparison was Voldemort and what little he had found out about Devils in general… but he didn’t think the other Devils had the same issue.

Unless, all the touching and biting was some form of feeding? Was Voldemort actually feeding on his soul?!

Harry blanched.

Hastily, the little Fae turned his Magical Senses inward; scanning himself slowly and very thoroughly.

There was no difference; no sign his soul had been touched in any way.

Harry heaved a loud sigh of relief and went back to reading.

Demons had no solid body; the ‘true’ form of a Demon was a pitch-black mass of pure Elemental energy. This was why it was both very easy to spot a Lesser Demon but also very difficult to fend one off without the right weapons. High Demons were extremely interesting, however. Unlike their weaker counterparts, High Demons were exceedingly intelligent and wily. High Demons were especially dangerous as they could either assume any form they desired or, in most cases, possess the bodies of the beings they had consumed. Thus, allowing them to blend into any area and remain virtually undetected.

Harry felt a wave of horror and revulsion when the author—rather gleefully—detailed how Demons, Lesser and High, fed. Demons didn’t need consent; they could eat a soul of any creature by consuming its physical body. However, this merely killed their victim and part of the soul would escape—like a wasted meal.

Harry shuddered.

High Demons knew what occurred by this forceful feeding and secured Demonic Pacts with an individual to gain access to the whole soul. A Demonic Pact also allowed the High Demon to feed but not fully consume the spirit immediately.

\textit{Wow, sustainability}, the little Fae snorted with an eye roll. Who knew that Demons could be practical and apparently even have restraint.

Were Devils like this? The author didn’t make many comparisons to Demons and Devils, in fact, most of the acerbic comments were directed to the Celestials; who the author clearly abhorred.

Harry speculated that Devils most likely found souls to be a luxury more than a necessity.

There were drawings in this chapter like the first chapter and the appearance of all Lesser Demons he had seen were misshapen and gaunt forms with a perpetual expression and poise of a creature verging on starvation. According to the author, Lesser Demons cannot keep a body for very long as the form disintegrates quickly and the ensuing possession can even twist the body of their victim. High Demons were more talented at obtaining and preserving a body; however, the truly powerful High Demons were capable of mimicking the forms of the other Races perfectly. The pictures in the book of the High Demons merely showed unevenly shaped, black spheres.

Curiously, he flipped back to look at the illustrations of the Celestials then compared these to the drawings of the Demons. If he was to be truthful, Devils seemed to be a far better foil to the Celestials than the Demons. All of the Devils he met so far were gorgeous and in perfect health and, of course, powerful. He pondered how much Voldemort would measure up to a Celestial. Or would
it be the other way around?

The very thought of another creature that could match and possibly surpass the Devil himself was terrifying.

He was mulling this over when his lunch came, Harry missing the arrival as he had been so absorbed with the contents of the current chapter and his own roiling thoughts. He also wasn’t feeling very hungry at the moment.

It took his stomach nearly resorting to an all-out rebellion for him to grudgingly take a break. Harry reluctantly set aside the volume and ate his lunch. Like the last two meals, it was a veritable feast and Harry lingered over the delicious food in spite of himself. When he finished, he neatened up and spoke his thanks clearly and enthusiastically to the empty den. He was too distracted and impatient in returning to his perusal of Ancient Annals I that Harry barely registered the usual reply. But, he did note absently; it was even more exuberant and less concealed.

Maybe the room was getting less shy?

Demons didn’t have a formal society in high contrast to any of the other Races; there was no Demon King or Queen—instead, an unspoken hierarchy in the loosest of terms existed among the Demons.

It was all very simple. If two opposing Demons were of the same level, they would likely attempt to consume the other in order to add their power to their own if they ever crossed paths—this was a very frequent scenario if both Demons were after the same prey or simply were unfortunate enough to be hunting in the same area. However, if a Lesser Demon ever encountered one of their more powerful brethren; the weaker Demon would immediately flee the instance they sensed their deadlier kin. Normally, the stronger Demon would chase after the weaker Demon and devour them. Demons would choose to eat another Demon instead of any other creature if given a choice.

Fantastic, Harry thought dryly. Makes life very interesting being a Demon. It explains the mad dash to the top of the food chain.

While a High Demon would be no match against an Angel and would be even less of a nuisance to an Archangel—the most powerful of Celestials—they were still a force to be reckoned with among the other Races. What made a High Demon so dangerous was how it acted; it was nearly impossible to find a High Demon as they would work entirely from the shadows and relished in luring and tricking their prey into giving them exactly what they want.

Harry idly noted that this was probably where all the stories of Demonic Pacts and their consequences came from. It served to caution and teach those foolish enough to even consider making such a contract.

Most Demons were hardly more than animals and easily dispatched. For them to reach the power of a High Demon, any Demon must first master themselves, to never allow themselves to fall blindly to their endless hunger and gorge. It was only the truly intelligent or cunning who became High Demons.

This brought some relief to the little Fae. It’s the High Demons you really need to watch out for then, he concluded and made sure to tuck this bit of vital knowledge away in his head. Harry found all of this exceedingly fascinating and a little amusing but mostly disgusting and gruesome. He certainly appreciated the irony.

I’m larger and more powerful than you so if you come near me, I may or may not decide to eat you—correction; I will eat you, he mused to himself with a loud snort. I think I’m actually a little glad
I’m dealing with the Devil instead of a High Demon. Demons are obviously purely self-serving, reclusive and have little else on their minds but to feed. They are evidently more animalistic too so while I have a better chance at fighting one of them; I don’t think I’ll last long enough to escape as I’m probably going to drive the High Demon to the point he’d just eat my body to get rid of me!

He grinned broadly at the lovely thought before sobering.

The best part in the chapter had to be the (likely unintended) advice on how to handle a High Demon, Harry committed this to memory in case he ever needed it.

Of course, if he ever got out of this Devil’s Deal; he was going to do his very best to keep out of trouble for the next few centuries—even a couple of millennia if he could pull it off.

…yes, he could dream.

While inherently very powerful and clever, a High Demon can be overcome by its own appetite. As long as one can work the High Demon into a frenzy where it becomes careless and loses sight of its wits; thus, can be tricked or outsmarted. This is clearly extremely dangerous but the most powerful weapons a High Demon wields is its will and mind. Remove these, and there is a very good chance one can defeat the High Demon.

Nullifying a Demonic Pact severely weakens the High Demon as well, and makes it much easier to kill the creature.

The same cannot be said of a Devil’s Deal.

Harry paused.

This was the first time the author ever directly mentioned anything connected to Devils.

On a hunch, he checked the Table of Contents.

There was no chapter for Devils.

A lopsided grin curved his mouth and he snorted lowly.

He wasn’t surprised at all.

After all, why would Voldemort give Harry the tools he would need to fight him?

I need to get him to tell me about Devils, the little Fae decided. This could be a test, too. The question is what is the test. If I could find out he omitted any information about Devils and, therefore himself. Does he want me to ask him directly? Or is there another angle I am missing?

He was still pondering this and how he would deal with the situation when dinner came. Harry didn’t wait until he had a complaining belly; he ate his meal, relishing the luxury, cleaned up and said his thanks.

He needed to get back to the book; maybe the author would drop more hints about Devils somewhere.

The ancient history of Demons was bland; this was why Harry surmised the author had detailed Demonic traits instead to fill up the pages—he still found the chapter to be a thoroughly riveting read. Far better than the chapter on the Celestials.

Demons were evidently solitary by nature and thrived by themselves instead of in groups and there
were no notable Demons who had ever founded any village, town or city. Harry wondered why they were even listed as a ‘Race’ as opposed to a ‘Magical Creature’…

The chapter was nearly finished when Harry felt his Magical Senses whisper in warning.

Drawing in a slow, deep breath to fortify himself, Harry mentally marked his page, reverently closed the huge book and set it aside.

He raised his head and fixed his gaze on the archway where he caught sight of the King of Hell leaning casually against the stone frame. Voldemort was watching him avidly.

“You,” Harry said slowly, his voice hardly louder than a venomous hiss, “have a lot of explaining to do!”

“Good evening, Harry,” the Devil greeted smoothly, a self-satisfied smirk plastered onto his striking features. “I trust you spent your day well.”

“Oh, it started horribly!” Harry snapped back. He struggled over what transgression he wanted dealt with first before finally settling on the more pressing issue—the forced slumber was ultimately a minor matter in the end. Harry had no doubt Voldemort would abuse the spell whenever he wanted anyway, regardless of his complaints. “What in Great Haven did you do to the circlet, why won’t it come off?!?”

“I ensured it will remain on your person without harming you; I very much enjoy seeing you with it, thus, I took the necessary measures. If I left it as it was; you would have lost it a dozen times already by now. Do not worry, wearing the circlet will cost you no discomfort.”

Harry growled, he couldn’t refute the first reason for the enchantments nor their potency but he had a problem with Voldemort’s assumption he wouldn’t be troubled. “Too late, I’m already very distressed; I’m not very fond of wearing any jewelry.”

“Then, you will learn to grow accustomed,” Voldemort said dismissively. “Treat it like another lesson of mine, if you will.”

Crossing his arms, Harry pinned him with a very unimpressed stare. “And what lesson am I learning with this? I don’t really need another reminder you’re a controlling, dominating, self-absorbed bastard who is solely devoted to his own gratification!”

Voldemort stared at him with more amusement and even a touch of admiration. “You truly have quite the sharp tongue, Harry. How many have you cut down so viciously with words alone, I wonder.”

Harry deigned not to retort and merely glared at him.

The Devil laughed softly and entered the den fluidly; striding for the pit with an unerring, casual gait. Harry suppressed the instinctive urge to crawl backwards and held his ground, craning his head as the Devil neared him. Voldemort’s lips quirked and his ruby eyes glittered.

When he was standing beside Harry, he knelt gracefully and gathered the small Fae into his arms before settling himself into the middle of the heap of cushions Harry had just vacated. He murmured in approval. “You are quite skilled at making a very comfortable nest, Harry. I approve.”

Harry gritted his teeth and barely refrained from thrashing in his arms. Pick your battles, he reminded himself. Maybe if I showed this doesn’t bother me; he’ll get bored and finally stop doing it.
There was a short period of silence as Voldemort shifted and rearranged himself until he was satisfied before perching Harry on his lap so the tiny Fae was meeting his ruby gaze.

“Shall we begin, then. Ask me your questions; I know you are bursting with them.”

Harry nodded curtly, and started briskly; he had many questions and he wanted to ask all he could before the Devil decided he had answered enough of them.

“How did the Celestials come to be exactly? The author didn’t explain at all; just wrote some vague lines of a Celestial is ‘formed’ before he rambled on and on about the glory of the Celestial Kingdom.”

“Your first question is where do little Angels come from?” Voldemort clarified with evident humor.

Harry felt himself blush when he realized that, yes, that was exactly what he was asking. However, he plowed forward mulishly. “Yes, pretty much. Oh, and what is the difference between Archangels and Angels? I know the Archangels were much more powerful than Angels but was that all?”

The Devil chuckled. “Why the curiosity about Celestial reproduction?”

“Are you seriously going to answer my questions with more questions?!” Harry groaned in exasperation. “I thought you were done with that already!”

Voldemort only laughed again. “It is simply that your inquisitiveness is so unusual that I cannot help but ask my own questions. And, of all the questions I expected you would begin with; that was certainly not one of them.”

“I’ll answer your questions but you answer mine afterwards. Fair enough?” Harry offered, letting out a long-suffering sigh.

“Very well. You first.”

“Of course, me first,” Harry grumbled and explained quickly. “I’m tired not knowing exactly what the origin of Celestials is and I believe you are the best source if this book didn’t have it. I just really want to know; I know that Demons were formed out of the Elements and they’re perpetually hungry. From the first chapter, Celestials are exactly alike but don’t have the same need. Why is that?”

The little Fae clamped his mouth shut when Voldemort raised a hand. “One question at a time, and one Race at a time, Harry,” the Devil chided him but there was clear approval on his face and his silky baritone. “As I have said before, you ask very good questions. And I agree with your reason; I detest incomplete information myself. So, it’s all mere curiosity on your part?”

Harry nodded rigorously and stared at him expectantly. “That’s really just it; now my answers please?”

“I see; you have turned out to be quite the scholar, Harry…” Voldemort flashed a little smile before he became distant; clearly lost in his thoughts. “The twenty-eight Archangels were formed directly out of the Five Elements saturating the world the moment after it was completed. Which is why, among the Celestials, these were the strongest of their kind. The rest of the Celestials were born in Astrum; from flowers.”

Harry instantly perked up. “Just like my people!” he exclaimed.

Voldemort refocused on him and nodded. “Yes, a Cherub is formed in a very similar manner as a Sprite is. However, there are distinct differences.”
Harry tilted his head slightly, emerald eyes bright and fixed entirely on the Devil as Voldemort continued. “Celestials do not have parents. Whereas Mated Fae create a special seed through Magic and plant this seed in a carefully prepared and secured garden. Once planted, the pair pour their Magics into the seed continuously to make it grow. Unlike a Sprite, a Cherub is nurtured by the Magic of Astrum itself and the flowers where they come from are gigantic Lotuses floating in a lake instead of a seed sown and nurtured. Many Angels have come from the same Lotus over the millennia. It is why there are no more new Cherubs. Astrum was destroyed along with the Celestials.”

Silently, Harry mulled this over in his head. “Celestials have no parents? Who raises them?”

“Raising a Cherub was a work by the entire Celestial Kingdom. Secondly, Sprites are born in exactly seven months of devoted nurturing by their parents. For new Cherubs, it took years then decades and, eventually, centuries before they were born. The time is never fixed how many years exactly, it varied per batch.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “It can take that long for a new Angel to be born?! Wait, why did it start out first as years then became decades and then centuries?”

“Yes, at least years. It started out as eight years at first for a few centuries. Then, shortly into the second millennia since the world formed, that was about eight thousand years ago; the time became decades for no reason—the exact number varied. The last Cherubs that were born, about three centuries before the Celestial Human War started, took more than four centuries to be born. It was also discovered that new Cherubs were slightly weaker than their predecessors. The Celestials did try several methods to fix this problem; they even tried to see if they could pour their Magic into the flowers like the Fae did. Unfortunately, the Lotuses rejected the offered Magics.”

“Did they know why it was like this?”

Voldemort hummed. “No definite answer or solution was ever found and it certainly was a huge concern to the Celestials.”

“Your thoughts?” Harry inquired.

The Devil smirked. “What thoughts?”

Harry sent him a look. “You obviously have a good idea or even probably knew why it was happening to the Celestials,” he pointed out shrewdly.

“Such confidence in me, Harry,” Voldemort purred, but he could see the pleasure in the Devil’s eyes. He suspected Voldemort was even preening under Harry’s obvious regard.

The little Fae shrugged. “Call it a hunch.”

“Ah, yes, you do have incredibly sharp instincts,” the Devil conceded. “I surmised the reason for the gradual decrease of Cherub birth and the dropping power levels of these new Angels is because the Magic present in Astrum was slowly being depleted and was not being replenished well enough to match all of the needs of the Celestials’ swiftly expanding Kingdom. Most of this Magic was being used in keeping Astrum whole and to sustain the extravagant lifestyle the Celestials were accustomed to. There simply wasn’t enough Magic to form new Angels; the Lotuses compensated as best they could by taking the barest Magic needed to create the Cherub.”

Harry frowned. “They never realized this? What about Aboveground; did they try to raise Cherubs there? I mean, its technically where the Celestials came from.”
“Oh, they tried bringing a few Lotuses to Aboveground, yes,” Voldemort affirmed with dark humor. “Unfortunately, the Elemental energies at the forging of the world were no longer present. The world had long consumed the Magic that had birthed the Archangels. Those Lotuses they left in Aboveground died within hours; they did not even have a chance to return the flowers to Astrum.”

Harry winced, feeling a surge of compassion for the unborn Cherubs.

Voldemort stared at him pensively before murmuring, “It is not so cruel a fate to die, Harry.”

“Why is it not cruel? They didn’t even get a chance to live!” Harry barked sharply.

“They would have been looked down upon by the older Celestials if they had survived. Since it would be likely the Cherubs would have been permanently affected by the journey to Aboveground and the subsequent return to Astrum. The Celestials were extremely critical of anything that did not fit into their perfect view of the world. If those Cherubs had lived and showed any notable differences; the Celestials would have destroyed them themselves.”

Harry stared. “You’re joking,” he breathed in disbelief.

Voldemort’s smile was twisted, with a bitter edge. “Oh no, Harry, I am completely serious. The Celestials were low in numbers not only because so few of them were born but because they culled their ranks of the ‘unworthy’.”

Harry’s look of shock slowly shifted to disgust and horror. “Why? Why harm others, especially your own?!”

The Devil shrugged lightly. “Many reasons, I could give them all to you, Harry, but you would still not understand. After all, you are not a Celestial and, as a Fae, this act is considered anathema to your people.”

The little Fae went quiet, brooding. “This should have been in the book,” he said suddenly, glancing over to Ancient Annals I. “Why didn’t the author just write all of this down? It’s a very important historical fact!”

Voldemort grinned, ruby eyes gleaming. “Do you honestly believe a Celestial would admit to such a detail. That their magnificent Race was suffering from such a flaw? To risk the possibility of someone finding this out? And, do you honestly believe they would confess to destroying their own if they were ‘imperfect’?”

Harry paused and pursed his lips. “No, you’re right; they would never leave any sort of record of this,” he gnawed on his bottom lip. “So, what is the difference between an Archangel and an Angel?”

“Archangels were the ones formed out of the Elements at the Forging of the world; there are only twenty-eight Archangels and, as the book stated, were the founders of the Houses. Angels are those who came after, all of whom were born in Astrum.”

“Were the power differences between the Archangels and Angels really so broad?”

“Yes, there was no comparison between what an Archangel could achieve and what an Angel was capable of.”

Harry now fixed Voldemort with a searching stare. “Are there really no more Celestials left at all? I know there wouldn’t be any newborn with Astrum destroyed—and how can you be so sure Astrum is really gone?—but maybe a couple got away? It’s really hard to believe that they were completely
“wiped out by the Humans…”

“There are no Celestials left whatsoever, Harry,” Voldemort reiterated with a strangely eerie calm. “And Astrum no longer exists as well; I have irrefutable proof.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“The Humans did a very thorough job.”

“But, given how strong Angels and, especially, the Archangels, had been wouldn’t some of them managed to survive?” Harry insisted, silently accepting the obliteration of Astrum—the tone of Voldemort’s voice left no doubts in his mind that the Celestials’ world was no more. Nonetheless, a large part of him wasn’t quite ready to concede the annihilation of the Celestials. “How did the Humans even accomplish this feat?”

“With sheer tenacity, Human innovation and… the right kind of help.”

Harry inhaled sharply and went rigid; emerald eyes wide first in realization then in horrified disbelief. “What did you do?!”

“Harry, Harry, Harry; you are so very quick to accuse me.” It was unnerving how very good Voldemort was in playing the innocent. “Am I wrong?”

There were several beats of heavy, profound silence.

“No,” The Devil had never looked so sinister or darkly elated. “You are absolutely right.”

Harry reared back, stopped only by the arms that were wound around his waist and the bent knees of the Devil’s long legs. He glared at the handsome face, shivering at the sheer malevolence in his stunning features. “Why did you save my people but left the Celestials to be destroyed? Why did you even help the Humans in destroying them?! How could you?!”

The Devil chuckled as Harry started his tirade and his face split into a broad, feral grin at the little Fae’s last, furious words. “‘Helped’ the humans?” he echoed, before throwing back his head and breaking out into peals of ringing, mocking laughter.

Harry felt his blood chill to ice and his breath catch in his throat; watching the Devil become lost in his dark merriment. He desperately wanted to escape, run as far as possible from Voldemort but found himself incapable of even moving in the slightest. The Devil’s grip on him was too tight.

Finally, Voldemort quieted then tilted his head forward and met Harry’s wide-eyed gaze; the ruby eyes were blazing. “I did not ‘help’ the Humans, Harry; they assisted me,” the Devil corrected him with vindictive glee. “And, ‘save’ the Celestials? Truly?” The Devil’s mouth shifted into a vicious sneer and his beautiful face twisted into a look of absolute scorn. “They deserved no salvation. After all, they were so powerful and perfect; what need have they for help? Especially from an inferior being?”

Harry swallowed shallowly at the sheer derision in the baritone—this wasn’t merely disgust or contempt over the hubris of a Race. The little Fae instinctively knew that this was personal.

The King of Hell, Voldemort, utterly loathed the Celestials.

And, he was the true power behind their genocide; with the Humans as his unwitting instruments.
At least, I have the answer to one of my biggest questions, a small voice piped up in Harry’s mind. I know how the Celestials were destroyed by the Humans. Unfortunately, I just got even more questions now. Why did Voldemort want the Celestials obliterated? What did they do to him to make him hate them so much?

The stories he had read of how deadly and vicious the Devil was paled against the reality facing him now. Harry knew he was barely scratching the surface of the level of cruelty, rage and tenacious drive to hurt Voldemort possessed. He had seen only the faintest hint of this ruthless nature in the throne room.

Staring at the now silent, still form of the Devil, the little Fae abruptly knew he was treading over very dangerous ground. The fire in those red eyes was intense; more the color of freshly spilled blood then the ruby glow he would normally see. Whatever Voldemort was remembering; it was a subject Harry wasn’t at all prepared to broach yet. He needed more answers before he delved deeper into this.

The little Fae felt the stirrings of real unease, not quite fear but it was very close.

Quelling this feeling and trusting his intuition, Harry asked softly, “Why was the first chapter so vague compared to the second chapter? I’m nearly finished with the second chapter but I’ve learned a great deal more about Demons compared to the chapter about Celestials. The author seemed more forthcoming about Demons than Celestials.”

Voldemort blinked languidly before the glittering red orbs dimmed but, at the same instance, sharpened and he regarded him pensively. The Devil was entirely inscrutable now but from the knowing flash that crossed his eyes, Voldemort had comprehended what Harry had done.

And wordlessly approved.

When the hush hadn’t broken and his meager patience ended, Harry pressed. “You said you’d answer my questions.”

“…I suppose, I did,” The Devil conceded with a touch of familiar wry humor and an evident lightening of his black mood. Harry had to work to conceal his own relief as the oppressive heaviness in the den vanished. “You must have been a treat and a trial to your teachers with your endless questions.”

The little Fae stared at him impassively. “Flattery and mockery will get you nowhere in distracting me; Answers please.”

There was a flash of perfectly white and very sharp teeth as Voldemort grinned. “Touché. I’m sure I will find something that will work eventually.” His large hands trailed over Harry’s body pointedly.

Harry flushed and he squirmed. “You said those kinds of lessons won’t come until much, much later!”

Voldemort laughed richly and relaxed completely into the mound of pillows arrayed around the pair, gazing up at him. Harry felt one of the large hands travel up his back—mercifully keeping away from his wings—and began carding through his hair soothingly, almost affectionately. “Yes, you are a wonderful little treasure, My Harry. As to your question, the first author was merely less than forthcoming regarding the Celestials then the others will be. All the remaining chapters will be more informative, I assure you.”

“Others?”
“Ancient Annals I” was not written by a single author. It is a collaboration; the authors came from each of the Races detailed in the book. The perspective is from their point of view and is largely objective in most cases. Some of the authors, however, still have their biases as I am sure you’ve already discerned from the author who wrote the chapter about the Celestials and even the author who wrote about Demons.”

Harry gave a short laugh. “I’m surprised a Demon was even bothered to write about its kind.”

“Oh, there are many ways to persuade someone. Even Demons have their price and I had to speak with a High Demon. A Lesser Demon would not have the capacity to perform this task.”

Harry wondered if Voldemort had just admitted he had made a Devil’s Deal with a High Demon... or would that be a Demonic Pact? …Ugh, nevermind, his head ached slightly trying to wrap around the very concept and imagining the Devil and a High Demon meeting and chatting—especially about writing a book of all things! It was probably a Devil’s Deal, Harry concluded finally, as Voldemort would be the one initiating, anyway. And the Devil’s Deal likely involved how many souls for the chapter.

Internally batting aside the silly, random thought, he queried with no small measure of curiosity, “It was you who had this book commissioned?”

“Yes, for my personal library”—Harry felt his lips twitch upwards when his keen ears detected the unmistakable pride and joy of a consummate bibliophile—“this set is the only one of its kind. There are likely other volumes that compile perspectives from various authors about Ancient Historical events but I am certain my collection would be the most accurate.”

If he wasn’t who he was, I would love to introduce him to Hermione. They would have been instant friends! Harry mused fleetingly, feeling a sharp pang at the thought of his bibliophilic best friend. He snorted loudly when what Voldemort had said registered in his mind. “Only you would be able to ‘persuade’ all the authors to write about their Races and be truthful, huh?”

“You will find I can be very persuasive when I need to be, Harry.” (1)

“…Right. I don’t need a demonstration, thank you.”

Honestly, Harry was more curious about how in Great Haven had Voldemort had convinced a Celestial to write for him. But, his inner voice was very vehemently railing at him to save the question for another, better time. Asking the Devil any more questions about the Celestials was clearly walking the fine line of catastrophe. He had danced on the edge enough for one night.

“How many volumes is it? I mean, clearly this is the first book. When can I read the next volumes? Why didn’t you include them?”

“There are only two volumes. The second volume will continue the style of writing—perspectives of each author about their respective Races and showing the course of historical events from all perspectives until five thousand years. As I believe, it is generally accepted that historical events from ten thousand to five thousand years ago is considered Ancient History. Any books after the dates will fall under Modern History.”

“Oh, I do not know…” Voldemort smirked. “I know a few other individuals who may claim such a distinction.”
Harry perked up. “Any of them here?”

“Good question, Harry,” Voldemort praised, his baritone nearly a purr. “Some of them are indeed residents of Hell.”

“Who?!” Harry asked in delight. Hopefully, unlike the Fae, they’ll be willing to talk to me!

“I will introduce you once I have deemed you are ready to meet with them…” the Devil leaned forward and began to nuzzle and kiss him along the throat, moving the small Fae so he could easily reach where he wanted to touch. “If you can convince me to even let you out my chambers, let alone the Citadel.”

“What about you ask them to come here instead?” Harry suggested, shivering from the far too pleasurable sensation of the talented mouth now working over his neck. The large hands were far from idle, traveling his body in lazy movements.

“That will still need convincing…”

“It’s a long time in coming, I think,” Harry deflected, wriggling away and stared at the Devil. “I’m sure I have a lot of books I have to go through first.”

Voldemort hummed before nodding. “True enough. We can negotiate the particulars another time…”

Harry rolled his eyes over the clear disappointment in his voice. Voldemort smirked down at him shamelessly.

“Why didn’t you give me the second volume?”

“Because the second volume covers the Celestial-Human War and the entire turbulent millennium. I am not entirely sure you are ready to read that yet. I have no desire to subject you to what happened as the volume will censor nothing.”

Harry pouted. “I’d like to read that; why do all of you never let me read the interesting books?!”

Voldemort raised an eyebrow. “Perhaps in a few years, or I will simply tell you parts of it. We will see.”

Harry sighed heavily, the familiar feeling of resignation and exasperation rising in his chest. “I’ll take what I can get. At least, you’re not talking in centuries.”

“The books you will not touch for at least two centuries would be my collection on Modern History as that will cover the Human-Fae War. There is a reason the Fae named the Age the ‘Time of Void’. I believe I will keep those books from you until you’re into your first century.”

“My first century?!” Harry whined. “You’re just as bad as my mentor and my other tutors!”

He felt a flare of impatience and his ears perked up in interest—oh, he knew what Voldemort meant. The ‘Time of Void’ was considered the darkest period of the Fae History—when it was widely believed they would meet the same fate as the Celestials at the hands of the Humans. From the sounds of it, the second set was what he needed to read to finally find out what happened to the Fae in Aboveground.

“In this case, I agree with your teachers.”

Thwarted again! He sulked.
Voldemort caressed his hair, the motion soothing and pleasant—Harry had to banish the thought that it felt wonderful and familiar. “Do not fret, Harry. With all that I have to teach you; you will never notice the passing of time.”

“Everyone says that,” Harry grumbled petulantly.

Voldemort chuckled and pulled the little Fae close so he was once more plastered over the Devil like some favored pet... Harry had to remind himself to ignore this and how delightful this position felt. He needed to save his strength and wits for more important confrontations. Besides, if it made Voldemort more amenable to him that was a small victory in itself.

“Your next question? I know you’re still full of them.”

“You haven’t answered one of my earlier questions.”

“Hmn, which one?”

“Celestials and Demons come from the same source; the Elemental Energies generated from the forging of the world. So why are the Demons perpetually hungry and the Celestials are not?”

“Do you have any idea why?”

Harry shrugged. “Not a clue.”

“While the Celestials and the Demons are formed out the Elements, there was one distinct difference. Celestials were formed from all Five Elements in equal parts. The Demons have a natural imbalance of Elements. For some reason, Demons do not have a great deal of the Void Element within their forms especially compared to the other Four Elements.”

Harry sat upright with a cry of “So that’s why!”

Voldemort watched him with lazy amusement and admiration, hands sliding down to rest at his hips. “Figured it out, I see.”

Harry nodded vigorously. “Void is what holds the other Four Elements together! Without it, a body will disintegrate!” his jubilant grin vanished an instance afterwards. “Oh, Great Haven.”

“Yes...?” the Devil prompted, his smirk all-knowing.

Harry looked down at him and said slowly. “The greatest source of the Void Element is the soul.”

Voldemort nodded elegantly. “Now, you understand why Demons must feed on souls. They need the Void of those souls in order to correct the imbalance and, unfortunately, this Void energy runs out trying to keep the Four Elements inside the Demon fused so they must replenish this. Thus, why Demons are always ‘hungry’ and why they have no natural form.”

Harry felt sick.

He also couldn’t quite extinguish the surge of sympathy he suddenly felt for Demons; it was a very bleak and cruel existence. A Demon would never have real peace, merely intervals of fleeting harmony and always at the high price of a soul’s suffering and loss.

Warm knuckles brushing along his cheek in a soothing gesture drew him out of his brooding and Harry’s pained emerald eyes found Voldemort’s bemused ruby orbs.

The Devil was staring up at him intently, puzzled and almost reverent. “You have an incredibly
gentle, kind and empathic nature, Harry,” he murmured huskily. “Even such horrible creatures as Demons can raise sympathy from you.”

“It isn’t their fault that Demons are the way they are,” Harry pointed out quietly but poignantly, “And, no matter what they do’ they’ll live in torment until they are destroyed or consumed by one of their own.”

Voldemort hummed pensively. “Would it lessen your empathy if I told you that most of these Demons, especially High Demons, relish devouring souls and have no regrets or hesitation in doing so? I am acquainted with many Lesser Demons and High Demons who also enjoy ‘playing’ with their ‘food’ and that Demons prefer to inflict agony upon the souls they catch because it raises the ‘flavor’, if you will. Lastly, Demons are very greedy creatures; they will always aim to gain more souls than they need.”

Shuddering, Harry grimaced. “I don’t think I needed to know that.” He had to admit it worked to some extent, though. His earlier sympathy for Demons had dropped several notches.

“I believe you did.” Voldemort’s new smile was blade-sharp. “I don’t want you to be offering mercy to any Demon should you ever encounter one. After all,” he pulled Harry back down on top of his chest then flipped them over so he was now pinning the tiny Fae underneath him, gazing down at him with glowing red eyes, “your soul already belongs to me.”

“And, we’re at the crux of the matter,” Harry noted wryly. “You just don’t want to share.”


His hands came to rest on either side of Harry’s head before the Devil leaned down and slowly began to pepper lingering kisses along his clavicles; tracing a path to his neck and circling his throat in a lazy pattern. The press of the large, heavy body on top of him was almost to the point of uncomfortable but Harry silently endured all of this; the weight and the ministrations. This was one battle he forfeited to the Devil.

Finally, Voldemort calmed and rolled them over again so Harry once more found himself splayed out on top of him. His head tucked underneath Voldemort’s jaw and the Devil’s long elegant fingers began rubbing up along the back of his neck, caressing along the nape before carding through his hair then reversing and retracing its path.

The hush that fell over them was equally relaxing and Harry felt a small wave of drowsiness wash over him at the pleasant silence and the even more pleasant stroking. He had no idea how long he had been awake but he hadn’t napped so he wasn’t too surprised to be tired. Luckily, his gaze was in line with one of the windows of the den but a swift glance outside only revealed the unchanging cloud-shrouded sky; he never noticed how time passed as the glow-orb kept the den well-lit. Harry also wagered that Voldemort wasn’t likely to come to him early and, if his memory served, he had long finished his dinner before the Devil had even joined him.

However, sleepy or not, he still had some questions he wanted to ask.

“When did the Devil Race form?” he mumbled finally.

The little Fae wished he could see Voldemort’s face when he asked this. The dark amusement in the Devil’s words was slightly unnerving. “That’s a strange question to ask me.”

“I now know you existed when the Celestials were destroyed but you’re the First Devil aside from being The Devil. But were you there even before this, how old are you exactly?”
“To return your earlier words, Harry. Flattery and mockery will get you nowhere.”

Harry huffed and continued determinedly. “I couldn’t find the answer, and there was no mention of Devils in the chapter on Celestials. All the other races were mentioned in passing even if the author was less than complimentary at some parts,” he pointed out. “The chapter on Demons had only a single brief note about the Devil’s Deal. That it’s harder to break than a Demonic Pact.”

“You haven’t finished the entire book, Harry. You may find the answer in another chapter.”

“There is no chapter about Devils.”

“Pity,” Voldemort hummed, entirely nonchalant and dismissive. “However, you still have nine chapters left to read.”

“Alright,” Harry murmured slyly; smirking to himself, “I’ll stop asking for now but you have to give me your word that you would answer all of my questions about Devils if I don’t find what I’m looking after I finish reading *Ancient Annals I*.”

There was a brief interlude of silence then Voldemort broke out laughing richly. “Oh, my cunning little Sprite. A good attempt, Harry. But, I refuse.”

“I knew it! There is nothing about Devils in the book!” Harry declared triumphantly.

“Incorrect; there are a few references.”

Harry snorted loudly. “Which are probably not going to be very helpful. Did you tell the authors to omit all but the most useless bits of information about Devils in their chapters?”

“Perhaps, I did or, perhaps, they felt such knowledge was unnecessary.”

“More of you don’t want any information about Devils available for someone to find,” he huffed, pursing his mouth. “Even if the books are from your private collection.”

Voldemort bent and traced his warm lips against the shell of the little Fae’s ear. “And can you guess why this is so?”

“I can give you some reasons but I want something in return,” Harry countered, trembling lightly from the pleasant tingles that were ignited from the contact of Voldemort’s mouth and tongue on his lobe.

“Such a fast learner,” was the silky croon. “Very well, for each correct reason you give me I will grant one answer to any question you pose with regards to Devils. However, if you are incorrect; you lose one answer and if you have no answer to lose. You grant me a boon.”

“What’s a ‘boon’?” Harry clarified quickly.

“A small favor.”

“Define ‘small’ favor,” the little Fae retorted. “I will make no agreements until that is made perfectly clear.”

Voldemort chuckled softly. “You have caught on how to play my games so well, Harry. Very well, you will obey one simple command from me without question.”

“No deal,” Harry refused immediately. “That’s still too broad for me to accept; I don’t agree to this form of boon but I offer an alternative.”
“I am listening.”

“I have three reasons why the book has no real information about Devils. Tell me the three things you want me to do for you. If I deem them not too difficult; I’ll do any or all of them if my reasons prove to be wrong.”

“I have my own clause to this little arrangement.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“If only one or two of your reasons are wrong; I get to decide which of the three commands you will fulfill and in what order.”

“Alright, that’s fair. So, what do you want me to do?”

“I want you to…” Harry braced himself—willfully ignoring the wild imaginings his mind was conjuring, “kiss me.”

Harry froze in stunned disbelief before he blushed brilliantly. “K- KISS YOU?!” he spluttered, wondering if he had misheard.

“Yes, kiss me. Willingly kiss me. Three times; on the mouth.”

“Bu—” Harry choked off; he felt feverish from the sheer heat he could feel radiating on his cheeks. Of all the possible orders he had expected, this was so unpredicted he was still reeling.

“Surely, you are not so repulsed, Harry. I know you enjoy my touch, even unwillingly.”

“…”

Voldemort sighed. “You act as if you have—” Harry went rigid at the abrupt silence.

“Harry…” the baritone was a dark, honeyed purr. “Have you never kissed someone before?”

I’m going to die from sheer embarrassment, Harry told himself. Please let me die from embarrassment!

“So, this would be your first kiss?” Somehow, the baritone became huskier, thrumming with sheer pleasure.

Harry reminded himself sternly to breathe. He inhaled weakly.

“It is.” The voice had dipped into a sensual growl of dark pleasure and such primal satisfaction that Harry wondered if he was going to faint.

“I will be generous, Harry,” Voldemort whispered, there was a new hunger threading the Devil’s tone that was both thrilling and chilling. “Give me your three reasons and if any or all are wrong; I have your First Kiss as my boon.”

“…j-just one kiss?” Harry stuttered weakly, recovering enough to ask.

“Just one kiss; it is your First after all.”

Am I seriously going to barter my First Kiss for three answers about Devils? Why does Voldemort feels my First Kiss is worth that much?! Is there some magic involved here? Great Haven, what have I gotten myself into now?! Harry pondered this shortly before he inwardly shook himself, and
steeled himself. It was only a kiss, in the end. The price was more than worth it!

He nodded resolutely. “Deal.”

“And done. Give me your reasons why there are is little to no written information about Devils.”

Harry drew in a deep breath to clear the lingering shock and fog from his mind. Another slow, full breath gathered his thoughts. “You have no desire to have any written information about Devils, specifically in Ancient Annals I, because it would be true as you would not allow any falsehood to be in a book you own and, especially, one you had personally commissioned.”

There was a short stretch of silence. “Bravo, Harry; you are correct. The second reason?”

“This is connected to the first reason, you will never allow any form of information about Devils to be written and found in any book unless it benefits you instead of something that can be used against you. But, even this information would be so minimal it may as well be excluded from the text.”

The hush that descended over them was longer and heavy with anticipation. “Correct again, my oh-so-insightful little Sprite. Now, the last reason?”

Harry swallowed to moisten his suddenly parched throat. “Like the other two reasons, it’s all about control and dominance. You want absolute control over all the information and knowledge on Devils so no one will know how to fight you and they’ll never win because they don’t even know what will work against you. Thus, you will have dominance at the very beginning of any confrontation.”

The quiet that filled the den was deafening and Harry waited as patiently as he could.

A low rumble rose from beneath him and Harry tensed when he realized the Devil was purring deeply.

“Three out of three, My Harry, Voldemort proclaimed with no hint of anger or disappointment. Instead, he sounded positively elated. “Well done. You may ask your three questions about Devils and I will answer them as I promised.”

The arms around him drew him closer to the larger body, tightening around him possessively. Harry briefly wondered why the Devil was so thrilled to lose but decided he had suffered through enough migraines for one day—Voldemort was simply still too unpredictable for him.

Pushing aside those baffling thoughts, Harry let himself bask in the sweet onrush of victory.

He had won his answers, and the little Fae mulled over what he wanted to ask. Three answers out of countless questions; he needed to make them count. However, with what he knew now; he didn’t know what questions were the ones he needed answered.

In short…

“Your questions, Harry?” Voldemort prodded. “Why are you so quiet now; you had so many questions you were simply itching to ask me.”

“Yes...” Harry started slowly before inhaling deeply, “but, I’ve decided I won’t ask my questions yet.” He quieted for a moment then declared firmly, “You never set a time limit for when I have to ask my questions. Thus, I want to think carefully on what questions about Devils I really want answers to before I give them to you; I don’t want to waste this. If that is acceptable with you?”

The little Fae waited with bated breath, feeling a trickle of anxiousness traveling his nerves as a new
silence descended and deepened. He inwardly hoped Voldemort would grant this to him.

The Devil released a full, pleased laugh; his body vibrating with his mirth. “You continue to surprise and entertain me immensely. Very well, to show you my appreciation; I will allow you to keep your three questions for now.”

“Thank you,” Harry said gratefully, sinking into the arms. He yawned expansively and flushed. “Sorry, excuse me.”

“I believe we have spoken enough for today; it is long past time for bed.”

Harry felt the Devil rise smoothly and let himself be carried from the room without the slightest objection.

He was tired; the latest verbal bout with the Devil had been exhausting on far too many levels and he could feel this fatigue settle over him. Yes, his mind was still whirling with questions and his plans and schemes were tossing about in his head; tumbling over and over as he considered his next step. Nevertheless, he had gained a miniscule but vital edge in this long game he was playing with Voldemort.

Harry had already accepted that he needed knowledge in order to understand the Devil. And, in comprehending the Devil, he hoped he would come out on top of the Devil’s Deal they had forged between them. Perhaps, he may even find some way to dissolve the Devil’s Deal the Fae were bound to and finally put an end to the Reckonings while the Fae could remain in Great Haven without any price.

He would make sure he would have all his answers; especially the ones involving Voldemort, the Devils and, especially, his connection to the Celestials. His earlier, half-formed plan had a solid goal to reach now; he had taken his first steps and he was positive he was on the right track.

Harry frowned drowsily; something prickled at the back of his mind. Something concerning about the details of the Devil’s Deal when they had been talking yesterday? Or was it the day before? … what was it?

Unfortunately, his thoughts were elusive and muddled by the thickening fog of encroaching slumber.

Harry finally conceded that he was simply too tired to contemplate on anything more. He wouldn’t get all the answers today that was for sure; nor find any solutions to his plethora of problems. He had tomorrow, and maybe he still won’t get them then or even any day soon but he was sure he would get them someday. He would make sure of it. He would not allow himself to fail.

The little Fae watched Voldemort as the Devil readied them for bed; he had been as silent as Harry, as lost in his own thoughts. He mused fleetingly about what he wouldn’t give to gain a glimpse inside the mind of the Devil.

When Voldemort had arranged them both to his liking, encasing the little Fae with his body in an unyielding hold; Harry merely made himself as comfortable as possible within the Devil’s possessive embrace and let himself drift off.

This night, sleep came swiftly and without any aid.

Chapter End Notes
(1) The notorious Chamber of Secrets quote - such a classic line, and the context it can be put into is limitless!

Chapter Updates are scheduled every two weeks normally on Sundays.

Thank you very much for reading, especially all of the Feedback, the Reviews, the Kudos and the Bookmarks!

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